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Chapter 3

Cameroonian Cricket: The Interface between Local and Dominant Colonial Ideologies

Joanne Clarke

Introduction

This chapter explores how English cricket ideologies interface with local cricket in the postcolonial nation of Cameroon. The sport of cricket conjures up notions and ideologies of Britishness (or Englishness) many of which have been reproduced and maintained in many former British colonies.¹ Previous literature on such topics is dominated by insights from successful cricket-playing nations such as South Africa, India, Pakistan, Australia, and New Zealand. To date, little has been documented regarding the lesser-known cricketing nations, a gap that this chapter intends to address. Often referred to as the “imperial game” or the quintessential English game, cricket is a relatively new sport in Cameroon. I use the concept of “imagined communities”² to demonstrate how cricket has been developed largely by Anglophone Cameroonians as a way to reimagine their English heritage and sense of community. Unlike as in many ex-British colonies, cricket was not planted in Cameroon during the period of British rule (1916–60); however, as the chapter will explore, cricket has emerged in Cameroon over recent years and English ideologies remain dominant. In addition to the concept of “imagined communities,” postcolonial theory is drawn on to explore data from officials and volunteers associated with the Cameroon Cricket Federation (CCF), the sport’s national governing body.³

Cameroon’s triple colonial heritage makes it a unique nation, fused with complexities from its British, French, and German influences.⁴ With a population of over 20 million, Cameroon has more than two hundred ethnic groups and languages, including two official languages (French and English), and a policy of bilingualism. Since its reunification and independence in 1961, Cameroon has become known for its internal rifts between the eight French-speaking (Francophone) regions and the two English-speaking (Anglophone) regions.⁵ These social and cultural complexities of Cameroon are often mirrored in the sporting domain, which provides an opportunity to explore the ideologies and influences of the “quintessential English game” within a French-dominated nation.⁶

The chapter begins with a summary of literature detailing Cameroon’s cultural history, the relationship of sport to imagined communities; implications of postcolonial theory for sport; and the contemporary role of cricket in Cameroon. Following a methodological overview, I highlight Cameroon’s cricket culture by examining the infrastructure, ideologies, and culture of the CCF and how these aspects interface with colonial ideologies associated with cricket.

Cameroon History: Colonial Influence and Cultural Divide

Cameroon is a country with a triple colonial legacy, having been colonized first by Germany, and later by the French and the British after World War II. With such a unique heritage, modern-day Cameroon holds memberships in both the Commonwealth of Nations (drawing on its British colonial heritage), and the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie (a body representing countries where there is a notable affiliation with French culture). With its history marked by colonial political residue, Cameroon offers a unique case in which two different ideologies exist

when it comes to governance, institutions, and culture. Since Cameroon gained its independence in 1961, postcolonial administrative boundaries have been a major source of contestation and tension, as across postindependence Africa in general.⁷

With numerous ethnic groups, each with its own identity and affiliations, Cameroonian culture is also heavily fused with elements of French and British cultures that have survived into the postcolonial period.⁸ The cultural legacies from the original British and French territories brought with them different languages and levels of economic development, which needed to be merged.⁹ Piet Konnings and Francis Nyamnjoh argue that the Francophone-dominated government has continually attempted to deconstruct Anglophone identity by encouraging divisions within the Anglophone elite and setting up new ethno-regional identities that appear to transcend the Anglo-Franco divide.¹⁰ The political agenda has increasingly been dominated by what is known as the “Anglophone problem”, which poses a major challenge to the efforts of the postcolonial state to forge national unity and integration.¹¹ Rather than identifying as Cameroonian, people have started to classify themselves as either Anglophone or Francophone citizens.¹² Cameroon’s constitution states that the English and French languages should be given the same weight; however, many official documents are produced only in French, and some ministers deliver speeches only in French, even in English-speaking regions.¹³ Internal tensions have resulted in a backlash by Anglophones who view themselves as marginalized citizens in a Francophone-dominant society.¹⁴ Anglophones take the view that their regions are being underdeveloped and marginalized by the central government, which operates from the mainly French-speaking capital, Yaoundé. In recent times, these tensions have turned to civil and political unrest resulting in a number of deaths as police and protestors clash.¹⁵

Sport and Imagined Communities

Sport can play an important role in defining an individual’s identity, with many people defining themselves on the basis of sporting interests that can influence their wider social networks and sense of community.¹⁶ One of the most influential contemporary notions of “community” in sport is Benedict Anderson’s idea of “imagined communities.”¹⁷ Anderson engages with the ideas of nation and nationhood and explains that “a nation is an imagined political community—and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign.”¹⁸ He characterizes such communities as imagined since “the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.”¹⁹ With modern communications, Anderson suggests that it has become possible to view a nation and its identity as a social construct, suggesting that all communities are imagined. Applying Anderson’s notion to a sporting context, individuals are able to collectively construct a sense of identity and/or shared set of ideologies to form an imagined sporting community. Taking the case of Cameroon and the aforementioned deep-rooted cultural divide between Anglophones and Francophones (which also pervades sporting structures), it is unsurprising that a sport such as cricket, with its inherent English traditions, may offer a place for Anglophones to imagine a sense of community as an expression of common identity within their marginalized segment of Cameroonian society.

Using a Postcolonial Lens to Explore Imagined Communities: The Story of Cameroonian Cricket

Examining literature on cricket, previous studies have critically explored the interconnected issues of culture and identity and globalization.²⁰ Building on these issues, Subhas Chakraborty

claims that it is natural that cricket, one of the lasting legacies of the British Empire, should be the subject of scrutiny by academics.²¹ Anshuman Prasad recognizes the need to investigate the complex and deeply fraught dynamics of colonialism and the ongoing significance of how the colonial encounter has affected local people.²² Postcolonial theory has developed from the works of political critics such as Edward Said and Homi Bhabha, who in various ways have sought to uncover the agency and resistance of people subjugated by colonialism.²³ Of particular concern to postcolonial studies is the attempt to recover the local, indigenous understandings in order to disrupt entrenched systems of knowledge of contemporary voices of the colonially marginalized.²⁴ As the next section explains, modern-day Cameroon is deeply affected by ongoing cultural disputes among Francophones, who comprise approximately 80 percent of the population. Compared to other cricket-playing ex-colonies, Cameroon is a unique postcolonial nation. Cricket was not transplanted by the British during their colonial rule, but rather was introduced in the early part of the twenty-first century by a group of Anglophone Cameroonians as a way to celebrate their heritage by connecting to English (and wider Commonwealth) ideologies.

Marginalized Anglophones and the Growth of Cricket in Cameroon

If sport is to be seen as a direct reflection of the society from which it evolves, then sport in Cameroon should be positioned within the postcolonial rhetoric of the ongoing Anglophone-Francophone dispute.²⁵ The provision and infrastructure for sport in Cameroon is led by the government, which is widely known to be dominated by Francophones.²⁶ The headquarters for all Cameroonian sporting bodies are based in the predominantly Francophone capital city, Yaoundé. Not only are the physical structures positioned within a Francophone region, the government-controlled information and documents relating to sport (e.g., the Ministry of Sport and Physical Education website) tend to be written in French, with a few selected documents in English, despite English being an official language. The National Olympic Committee of Cameroon propagates the need for sport, organized through various Sports Federations, the largest being the Cameroon Football Federation. A score of other federations exist, including the Cameroon Cricket Federation, which is the focus for this chapter.

Cricket was first introduced by a group of Anglophone Cameroonians as part of a project organized and funded by the Cameroon Commonwealth Students and Youth Development Organization in the early 2000s. The project, called the Cameroon Cricket Outreach Program (CCOP), had the objective of using cricket to promote Commonwealth values and ideals, bringing cricket to Cameroon at the grassroots level, and ultimately using cricket to attain other youth empowerment and development goals.²⁷ By virtue of its affiliation with the Commonwealth and associated objectives, the founding advocates for cricket in Cameroon drew heavily on the game's British influence. As cricket began to grow in popularity, moves were made to create a national body to control and manage the game. In 2005, the CCF was recognized as the sole governing body of the sport in Cameroon, and subsequently became an affiliate of the International Cricket Conference (ICC) in 2007.²⁸ The small governing body divides its efforts between developing the national team and growing general participation in the game. The national team did not make its debut until 2011, when it played in the 2011 ICC Africa Twenty20 Division Three tournament in Ghana against Lesotho, Rwanda, Gambia, Mali, Morocco, and Seychelles.²⁹ From a development perspective, the CCF's efforts focus on school-based initiatives and charity work, combining cricket coaching with health messages on topics

such as HIV/AIDS awareness, a project funded and driven by a British charity, Cricket without Boundaries.³⁰

Methodology

Twenty-one participants took part in the study and were recruited via purposeful and snowball sampling to explore the dominant ideologies associated with Cameroonian cricket. For the purposes of the study, I define ideology as being the attitudes of participants toward the culture, values, beliefs, and assumptions associated with cricket in Cameroon. The fieldwork took place in the two mainstays of Cameroon cricket: Yaoundé, home to the CCF offices (a Francophone region), and the Southwest city of Buea (an Anglophone region), a development region for the CCF. Initial contact with participants was made through a gatekeeper who also served as a research assistant to the project.³¹ Christian (a pseudonym) identifies as a senior volunteer within CCF and was well known within cricket and sporting circles in Cameroon, which enabled him to contact participants and inquire about interest in the study. Subsequently, semi-structured interviews were organized at locations convenient to the volunteers and staff; these included at the side of grass pitches used for cricket training, in marketplaces, in schools, and at the CCF offices. Interviews were offered in either English or French. Christian acted as interpreter as and when required. As an Anglophone male from the Southwest region, Christian had studied at the undergraduate level in both French and English. He was well versed in Cameroonian French culture, as he is married to a Francophone and works in Yaoundé. Of the twenty-one participants, seven chose to be interviewed in French and fourteen in English. Nineteen of the interviewees were male and two were female. Semistructured interviews lasted between 35 and 90 minutes and were audio recorded with written permission granted by participants. Field notes were kept by the researcher documenting specific events and informal conversations of interest to the study. Interviews were transcribed verbatim and along with fieldwork diaries were analyzed using QSR Nvivo 11, a qualitative software analysis program. Template analysis, a version of thematic analysis, was used to identify an initial template of codes before reanalyzing the data to develop a final code book and explore the key themes.³² The findings are organized and discussed below.

Cricket Development and the Reimagination of the British Empire

Within the British Empire, cricket was an important national symbol of “Englishness,” and it was widely believed that cricket helped inculcate many of the qualities fundamental to gentility that the British perceived as being essential to building strong character.³³ It was long held within the British colonies that cricket could strengthen imperial ties.³⁴ In particular, C. L. R. James notes that the game of cricket embodies the values and morals of “Englishness” and in so doing draws on the game’s missionary role within the colonial period and the struggle between colonizer and colonized.³⁵

Following a series of semistructured interviews with staff and volunteers from the CCF, Jeremy, an Anglophone volunteer, reflected warmly on this sense of affiliation: “[Cricket] is another way to make Cameroon learn our darling English language, which we struggle to do, and we are part of the Commonwealth.”³⁶ Jeremy’s comments echo those of many interviewees who referred to cricket and its close connections with England, Britain, and/or the Commonwealth. Researcher field notes summarize informal conversations with the founder of CCF, Patrick, a black Anglophone Cameroonian from the English-speaking Northwest region. Patrick talked about how he set up cricket in Cameroon in the early 2000s while he was a university student in

Yaoundé and recalled how he leaned on a handful of Anglophone acquaintances who were involved as sports administrators or Physical Education teachers to assist his mission and passion for cricket.

Sharing his love of cricket in his formal interview, Patrick stated:

I used to hear from the BBC “cricket,” “Zimbabwe,” “South Africa,” and “International Test Cricket” and things like that, and I just got marveled with things like that and as I grew up it kept revibrating in my mind. . . . I had not known Cricket before, to be sincere with you. I just knew that cricket was an Englishman’s sport. Cricket is associated to the Commonwealth. They used to call it the gentleman’s game, and as I told you early, the sport of cricket in Cameroon is linked to the history of the Commonwealth, and so we wanted a sporting discipline that could best expand on the Commonwealth values and we felt cricket was ideal.³⁷

Patrick’s awareness of cricket stemmed from listening to the BBC, a broadcasting corporation famous for its role in forging a sense of national identity through the promotion of the British monarchy and empire.³⁸ Reflecting Cameroon’s divided culture and well-documented Francophone values and infrastructure, the introduction of and passion for cricket offers an alternative British ideology, led by Anglophone Cameroonians, as a way to reimagine community and celebrate elements of their British heritage amidst the everyday dominant French culture.³⁹ This ideology was consistent in a number of Anglophone testimonies. Franck, for instance, recalled his first involvement with cricket: “Patrick called me back and said, ‘Where are you, where are you, I need you back, I need you back, we need Anglophones.’ He spoke to me and he really begged. Because it would be hard for the Francophones to understand the terminology [of cricket].”⁴⁰ For many like Franck, the apparent jargon and technicalities of the game were something that only Anglophones could understand. For example, Benjamin, a volunteer coach and secondary schoolteacher, recognized that Anglophones are fewer in number but had an upper hand in regard to the new game being introduced to Cameroon: “You know Cameroon is a bilingual country, with more Francophones than Anglophones. So number wise they are more than us. But the advantage that we have over them is that cricket is purely English.”⁴¹

Indeed, for Benjamin and other Anglophones, cricket is seen as a metaphor for reimagining “Englishness” and a celebration of their British colonial ties, within the broader backdrop of a divided Cameroon in which many Anglophones feel marginalized. Since its recognition as a National Sports Organization by the Cameroon government in 2005, the CCF has increased its capacity by involving more volunteers in the running of the organization. Of the participants interviewed, eight identified as Francophone and thirteen as Anglophone, a balance that goes against the general demographics of Cameroon whereby Anglophones make up of less than 20 percent of the country’s population.⁴²

Participants were especially vocal about the ongoing Anglophone-Francophone divide. Lionel sums up the type of feeling of many Anglophone participants: “Cameroon is a bicultural country where we speak French and English. We have a bicultural nature, and if you look at it critically, the French is dominating and the French is causing a lot of harm and pressure on the English language.”⁴³

Many Anglophones drew on Cameroon’s colonial past to articulate the modern-day cultural divide. As Benjamin said, “We have the notion that British people colonized us and

abandoned us to the French.” For Benjamin and others, Cameroon’s colonial past evidently still shapes their attitudes today. Romeo, in particular, offered a very insightful example from an Anglophone perspective:

There is a notion that a British man is respectful, is full of integrity as compared to somebody from France. We have some patriarchal ideas about the French which I may not want to say. We in Cameroon, we easily consider the French not be very straightforward, you understand what I am saying? We easily consider the French as if they are crooked, we easily consider them as if they are dupes and so on and so forth. They just are good for nothing. So . . . cricket is English; these are some of the notions that go with this. I don’t know how I best put it for you to understand.⁴⁴

While such judgments are based on personal experiences of the British and French, they support findings from Francis Nyamnjoh and Ben Page that such articulations from Cameroonians are made through a rhetoric of national characteristics in a difficult postcolonial context: “The French, as a result of their high-profile presence, are seen as particularly exploitative, while the British and Germans by dint of their virtual absence are seen as less aggressive.”⁴⁵

However, in contrast to Thomas Fletcher, who suggests that some ex-colonial cricket-playing nations engaged in the anticolonial struggle *against* England, I suggest that Cameroonian cricket offers Anglophones a stronghold to reimagine the relationship with Britain by safeguarding elements of British/English values and ideologies. In accordance with this, my research suggests that the internal hierarchy at CCF favors Anglophones, many of whom have been involved since the federation’s inception:

All of the senior administrative positions within the CCF (i.e. national coach, president, secretary-general, assistant to the secretary-general, and national technical adviser) are occupied by Anglophones. Having met these individuals previously, I would describe them as middle-class Cameroonians by virtue of their management-related full-time jobs within government ministries, their educational background, the way they dress, and their bilingual ability. Eric, the cricket development officer, is the only Francophone that I have met on the CCF board, and he appears to be the main point of contact for the volunteer coaches, who also tend to be Francophones.⁴⁶

Central to the internal power hierarchy is the notion that Anglophones understand the game of cricket (and its English/British values) more so than Francophones do, and therefore have formed “insider” and “outsider” groups. If “outsiders” want to be accepted, they must conform to a normative code of “Englishness”—that is, speak the English language. This was apparent in a number of Francophones’ responses. For example, Junior, a Francophone male, reflected on how involvement in the CCF improved Francophones’ ability to be truly bilingual: “Through cricket we have learnt a lot, English terminologies... Eric is getting better and better every day because of his involvement in cricket.”⁴⁷ While Junior’s comments echo those of many Francophones, there were other Francophones, including Fabrice, who saw the Anglophone-led infrastructure as marginalizing: “I see a situation of favoritism. I would say . . . well, in front of the Anglo-Saxons, I have the feeling of being marginalized; because at this level, if there is, for example, certain advantages or something which can proceed from there . . .

well, the fact that I am strictly Francophone, this aspect already keeps me away from certain things.”⁴⁸

Cricket having been created and codified in England, it has been suggested by Neville Cardus: “None except the people of England or of the English-speaking countries has excelled at cricket. Other nations not obsessed by sport are able to hold their own with us at tennis, golf, football, but cricket is incomprehensible to them, a possession or mystery of a clan, a tribal rite.”⁴⁹ As Fletcher argues, the English can be seen as taking a great deal of pride from the fact that cricket is neither played, nor its nuances understood, in countries such as France.⁵⁰

The Ideologies of Cameroon Cricket

Cricket in Cameroon is viewed as a gentlemen’s game that provides an opportunity to build character, integrity, respect, patience, teamwork, and an opportunity to be a role model. Research has shown that cricket offers hope and opportunity for young Cameroonians to become a professional cricketer and in doing so to benefit from overseas travel, money, and stardom. This emerging culture and ideology is seen among Cameroon cricket coaches, administrators, and players. Benjamin suggests that the tangible benefits associated with football are also possible with cricket: “So if cricket is coming, for those who don’t know how to play football, maybe they can play cricket very well and end up making a lot of money for themselves and their families. This will also make them to become a star.”⁵¹ Similarly, Christian suggests that cricket offers a way to make a living as a professional player: “I believe that there are international cricket players who earn their living from cricket. If a child can come and become an international player, one family might have been helped. One Cameroonian must have been established to feed a family, get a wife, feed his children. By playing for the national side, or why not even in a team somewhere overseas.”⁵²

Benjamin and Christian offer examples of and insights to the imagination of cricket propagated by many coaches, administrators, and players. Although Cameroon has yet to produce a cricketer who plays overseas, for the young schoolchildren who take part in cricket leagues organized by the CCF, these imaginations are shared and suggested as tangible dreams.⁵³ In reality, data suggest that cricket is still a relatively unknown sport in Cameroon when compared to sports such as football, athletics, volleyball, basketball, and handball. To some teachers and schoolchildren, particularly in the suburbs of Buea and Yaoundé, many were surprised to learn that cricket is actually the name of a game.

Representations of cricket ideologies matter because they are used to articulate expressions of personal and organizational culture, all of which reflect a multifaceted and complex postcolonial context. Those who were aware of cricket as a sporting discipline drew a parallel with the well-documented African football ideology that sport, particularly football, is viewed by many as a “way out of Africa.”⁵⁴

A Masculine Game

In addition to the earlier discussion on culturally based marginalization, findings reveal that gender-based exclusion is also common practice. The sport of cricket has a reputation for being a mainly male-dominated institution worldwide.⁵⁵ Given that Cameroon is a patriarchal country with social practices and laws overtly discriminating against women, the sporting domain also reflects these values.⁵⁶ This is summed up by Lionel: “In Cameroon, most people feel that sports is for men. Sports is *not* for women.”⁵⁷ Of the twenty-one interviewees, only two were women, and both held voluntary roles as coaches alongside their paid full-time jobs as sports and

physical education teachers. One of the female coaches was also a cricket player and had the added responsibility of developing female participation in Cameroon. Cynthia, a female Francophone, sums up some barriers that she faces when trying to involve other women: “They don’t think or see the time to go to schools, to go and teaching sports and so on. They prefer to take care of their children and their homes.”⁵⁸

In some Cameroonian communities, cultural beliefs prohibit female participation in sport, as Franck disclosed:

There are some traditions that totally forbid the female to take part in sporting events, in the way that if they get into sporting events they are going to be fat. They build outwards, that is some beliefs, cultural beliefs, and, two, that there is nothing which sports can bring to a woman. Ok. Thirdly, there is this belief that a woman who gets into sporting activities will not be brought to bed; it will be difficult for her to conceive, to get pregnant. So for this reason, most parents or most traditional cultures, this was an obstacle for women or girls to maybe take in sporting activities. It’s only in the twenty-first century that the few girls who went into sports started making a living out of sports.⁵⁹

In addition to interviews, field notes reveal an ambiguity about the level of female participation between my personal experiences and what I was being told regarding female participation by male cricket coaches:

Listening to many of the male coaches reeling off a list of females involved (with Cameroon cricket) made me a little skeptical. Recalling my previous visits, I have never met any other females except for Cynthia, Caroline, and Nadia. While I appreciate that I am not permanently living in Cameroon and able to gain a full understanding of the daily happenings, my fieldwork and volunteering experiences are supported by the photos and blogs from Cricket without Boundaries (CWB) over the years that I read. These tend to be laden with images of male coaches and administrators; rarely have I seen a picture of a female coach or administrator.⁶⁰

Traditional cultural values in Cameroon that exclude women from playing sport are coupled with broader hegemonic norms that privilege media coverage of male sport. Traditionally sport, including cricket, has been a male-dominated domain, and women athletes still struggle to get equal media coverage. As Margaret Duncan suggests, the lack of coverage of women’s sport stems from the widely held belief that sport is just for men.⁶¹ Cricket is not merely a reflection of the national culture in Cameroon; it also draws on the dominant colonial ideology that cricket is a male sport. When discussing the reasons for the dearth of female cricketers in Cameroon, Florent, a Francophone male, said: “From most of what I know about cricket, you know, even in TV when I used to watch, it is always centered towards men.”⁶² Similarly, Paul, an Anglophone male, suggested: “The game I have watched on TV have always been males; I have not seen females. But I think we should also encourage females to play.”⁶³

Many participants got their understanding of cricket from watching it on television. British-owned media are the major outlets that televise cricket globally. In many ways, this media culture reinforces the views of Cameroonians that cricket is a male-dominated sport because the vast majority of cricket games shown on global broadcasts involve men’s teams. The

fact that sport has a large male following globally has been linked to the patriarchal ideology that divides the social world into dualistic gendered spaces, positions, and traits.⁶⁴ Within Cameroon, findings suggest that women are discouraged and even restrained from full participation in sporting activities due to the social construction of the roles of women and men.

Association with a British Cricket Organization and Notions of Race-Based Superiority

The infrastructure and culture of the CCF is further influenced by the association and partnership with the British cricket development and HIV/AIDS awareness organization Cricket without Boundaries.⁶⁵ The work of CWB is framed within the field of international development and the pursuit of using sport for nonsporting objectives such as tackling health and social issues—such organizations tend to favor buzzwords such as poverty alleviation, local empowerment, and human rights.⁶⁶ Contemporary sport-based interventions by organizations such as CWB take place within and against a history of race and colonialization that was echoed by the data from participants, which revealed assumptions of power, race, and knowledge based on their relationship with CWB, whom favor a delivery model of sending British volunteers (typically white), to Cameroon twice a year for two week projects to coach cricket and educate locals on health messages.⁶⁷

Benjamin reflects on his first encounter with cricket at his school: “Let me just say it is a coincidence that it is a white person who has come for the first time in our school to introduce cricket.”⁶⁸ Benjamin’s comment links the introduction of cricket to his school with the person who did so: a white man. In his analysis of cricket in postcolonial contexts, Ben Carrington proposes that cricket’s cultural position, which embodies the values of Englishness and its missionary role within British imperialism and colonialism, occupied a central site in many anticolonial struggles within the former empire.⁶⁹ Similarly, through his analysis of “Right To Play” international volunteers delivering sports-based interventions in Africa (in a similar manner as CWB), Simon Darnell suggests that the ideologies of sport and development and associated racial encounters serve as a way to (re)construct whiteness as a standpoint of racialized privilege.⁷⁰ Cameroonian participants shared race-based notions of superiority, suggesting this to be a typical mind-set locally. Through a construction of whiteness, participants characteristically positioned British NGO volunteers as having significant knowledge and thus positioned them as “experts” who had the ability to draw attention based on their racial identity in a postcolonial context. This is exemplified in an interview with Samuel, an Anglophone Cameroonian:

Samuel: We look at whites like the superior being. We have. We regard you people as a superior being.

Researcher: Can you explain why that is?

Samuel: Oh, all we learn is that if you want to look at the historical way, you see how the whites . . . the blacks were being controlled by the whites. So blacks have always regarded the whites as a superior being and, more to that, we have been colonized by whites, which means that you people are superior.

Researcher: Even now?

Samuel: Yes, even now, some people still think and treat people like that.⁷¹

Eric adds to such assumptions that notions of superiority are purely based on racial grounds and do not consider ability or experience: “There is still that white-skin complex. When they see

whites, people believe that it is something grand,. . . . It is something that dates right from the colonial period. The white is still superior and it stems from back then; it is still in the minds of people even today.”⁷² Such connotations draw on the colonial cricketing culture. In particular, Jack Williams argues that the British utilized their global imperial reach and influence as a way to demonstrate their own self-worth, and inevitably became “intimately bound up with notions of white supremacy.”⁷³ The president of the Cameroon Cricket Federation, Patrick shares an awareness of how the partnership with foreign organizations and volunteers affects many Cameroonians: “Well, that mind-set is not a peculiarity [laughs] with the CCF. It happens with, it’s just the Cameroonian, the African mind-set that when you have things to do with people from the UK, white people, they think you are better off than people who don’t have these kind of opportunities.”⁷⁴

Personal Benefits from an Association with “the Whites”

There is a further subtheme to these testimonies—namely, that association with a British NGO and its white British volunteers offers the opportunity for organizational and personal benefits. For Patrick, his interest in capitalizing on wider organization benefits suggests is evidence of his being “mindful of the huge influence that the white color has within an African milieu.” He was aware “of the possibility of CWB passing through the diplomatic channels...”⁷⁵

The prospect for CWB to navigate with diplomats, specifically the British High Commission and British companies in Cameroon, appeals to the CCF president because of the potential social and economic benefits to the federation. From a personal perspective, Samuel, a volunteer coach and local schoolteacher, shared how his association with the NGO was rewarded by his head teacher: “My boss called for me one day. He gave me an envelope of money, thanking me that I’ve really, like, made him to be happy by me bringing foreigners and sensitize in his school or to come and teach cricket. So some of them were just taking pictures with him. . . . They were happy.”⁷⁶ Cameroonian volunteers and staff manipulate their associations with an international NGO for personal and organizational gain by drawing on the colonial residue and mind-set of their compatriots.

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated how the culture and ideologies of the CCF have been shaped by Cameroon’s complex colonial past. The splintering Cameroonian identity may well be a consequence of the political and cultural strategies adopted since the independence of Cameroon in 1961. Identities were formed and negotiated in complex ways during the separation of French Cameroon and British Cameroon have continued to be the source of tension in modern-day reunified Cameroon. Francophone Cameroonians dominate the nation in population, and subsequently Anglophone Cameroonians view themselves as marginalized citizens. The introduction of the English game of cricket in a Francophone-dominant society has allowed Anglophone Cameroonians a space in which to celebrate certain notions of Englishness and Britishness amidst a postcolonial and culturally divided Cameroon.

The production of such “imagined communities” has resulted in a cricket culture that instills masculinity, Britishness/Englishness, and “whiteness”/race-based superiority—some of which ideologies are often drawn on by CCF coaches and volunteers for personal gain. Cricket in Cameroon is widely seen as a sport for men, who thus occupy the majority of the roles within the federation, in management and as coaches and/or players. Middle-class Anglophone males in particular hold the most powerful and strategic positions within the organization, from which

they are able to impose power within the wider organizational culture and infrastructure. For some Cameroonians, the nature of cricket nourishes the imaginings of a home “elsewhere” and makes “homely” the alien spaces of the here and now.⁷⁷ Cameroonians, especially Anglophone Cameroonians, have developed a fondness for cricket and have played with its meanings, fusing it with indigenous ideologies alongside traditional notions of Englishness. Anglophones often feel excluded in Cameroonian society, and so through cricket they are able to draw on their British ties as a way to gain social integration, respect, power, and personal benefit.

Through an association with a British NGO, Cricket without Boundaries, the CCF has (perhaps unknowingly) instilled a growing local ideology that appears to embed the position of white British volunteers as the “experts” and Cameroonian teachers and coaches as “recipients” or “pupils.” It could be suggested that such encounters between beneficiaries and experts reproduce relations of inferiority and superiority.⁷⁸ Such indigenous ideologies may run the risk of being counterproductive and contrary to the intentions of CWB; in fact lead to broad disempowerment. The ideology associated with the new game of cricket in Cameroon may offer a contemporary example of the notion that sport remains an imperial bond of cultural encounters between the British and their former colonies.⁷⁹ A cultural affinity for the British persists in Cameroon through cricket, a sport that exists in a diminutive minority status in the country because of its Anglophone connection. However, being relatively new to Cameroon, cricket was not a part of the colonial experience, and thus is not seen as a means to “discipline” and “character” colonial subjects. Rather, it has developed as a postcolonial phenomenon orchestrated largely by Anglophone Cameroonians as a way to differentiate themselves from Francophones—a cultural appropriation to justify belonging in a country where many feel they don’t belong.

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