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VISIONS OF A BETTER WORLD: FOOTBALL IN THE CAMEROONIAN
SOCIAL IMAGINATION

by

BEATA VIDACS

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Anthropology in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. The City University of
New York

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Abstract

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Beata Vidacs

Advisor: Vincent Crapanzano

This is a study of aspects of the postcolonial Cameroonian social imagination focusing on the practice of and discourses surrounding football (soccer). Although football reflects and reproduces the country's historically conditioned social realities, imbuing it with symbolic meanings its practitioners and spectators also posit it as an ethos, and articulate moral visions of a better world where justice, equity and merit prevail. The dissertation examines Cameroonian ideas about the possibilities for efficacious action, nationalism and ethnicity, the nature of good government, and Cameroon's relationship to France, the former colonizer and ultimately to the West.

An ethnography of the daily struggles of a Third Division team to overcome the quotidian realities of life in the postcolony suggests that these efforts are driven by the game's ethos and its perceived transformative potential, and that by insisting on a proper way of doing things, football people uphold the ethos of the sport and in the very negation of the realities people face create hope.

On the level of international competitions Cameroonians challenge the government in the name of the nation expressing popular nationalist sentiments, which reject the government's, official nationalist rhetoric, but affirm Cameroon as an entity. Ethnic and nationalist identifications along with pan-Africanist ones constitute a

continuum of identities, rather than mutually exclusive categories, that may be situationally invoked.

An analysis of the commentary relating to the French in connection with football shows that Cameroonians often articulate their attitudes to the colonial past through talking about football and these discourses point to past and present constraints that this history imposes on them. At times these discourses are extended to whites in general and, taken as symbolic statements, they bespeak of a larger set of issues concerning worldwide racism and the unequal nature of the world as it is.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Title	i
Copyright	ii
Signatures	iii
Abstract	iv
Acknowledgments	vi
Table of Contents	ix
Chapter I Introduction: Of Teardrops and Footballs	1
Chapter II Background: Geography, Ethnography, Political History	37
Chapter III The Daily Life of Football	73
Chapter IV Visions of a Better Government	101
Chapter V Visions of the Nation	131
Chapter VI Visions of France/Visions of Whites	158
Chapter VII Concluding Thoughts	195
Bibliography	202

Chapter I – Introduction: Of teardrops and footballs

There is a mural in Douala, the economic capital of Cameroon. It is found in an abandoned looking open space which is closed off from a main road by a fence. Behind it a little way off is a cemetery with many tombs from the 1880s with German names, a reminder of Cameroon's first colonizers. On the opposite side of the road sits Douala's cathedral, another reminder (if one is needed) of the foreign influences on Cameroon. The mural is decidedly modern, non-traditional and yet it is also unmistakably African, one could even say Cameroonian. It is colorful, angular, full of rhythm, with various styles mixed in. Among the dancing swirls of color, elongated figures seem to jump up and down, the abstract-geometrical style mixing successfully with a figurative style, as symbolic representations of emblematic African objects appear. In the midst of all this movement and angularity, there is a football player depicted in a much more realistic, graffiti style than the rest of the mural. His foot reaches out. It has just kicked the ball away, the tension in the athlete's leg is still full. The ball itself is the traditional football, where pairs of rectangular leather strips alternate in a cross-cut pattern rather than the more "up-to-date" hexagonal patches. Tear-drops roll down the "face" of the football. This work will attempt to explain the significance of those tear-drops.

Cameroon reached the quarterfinals of the 1990 World Cup for football¹ and with this result created world history, being the first African team ever to have arrived at such a

¹ This work deals with the sport known as soccer in the United States, everywhere else in the world the game is known as football and I will use the latter term throughout this work.

high level in the competition. On the way there it beat Argentina, holder of the title, thus creating a mega-sensation in the world of football. The significance of this victory for all Cameroonians, and all Africans, and arguably for all Third World peoples as well, was enormous. Yet, despite the glory, dignity, pride and satisfaction that Cameroon's 1990 World Cup participation brought (and Cameroon has been victorious in other events as well, most notably winning the African Nations Cup four times, which the junior team also won in 1995, and most recently the gold medal in the Olympics in Sydney), those tear-drops are justified.

A common reaction to my subject matter is to think that football in particular, or sports in general, is not a subject for serious inquiry. I myself fall into this trap in as much as I have heard myself say jokingly that the good thing about my topic is that unlike many other colleagues who write about famine, war, rape, exploitation small and large, my topic is "fun!" Certainly, it is fun, and much of my fieldwork was spent among people who love football, discussing various fine points of the game, watching it, critiquing it, reflecting upon its nature and its contradictions. What could be more fun? Much of this happens in bars while drinking beer, munching peanuts or fried termites in various stadiums, or in taxis or basically anywhere where one gets to talk to people in Cameroon. In the end, of course, it has to be realized that the form both my fieldwork and the game itself take, should not blind us to what is really going on. Football is thoroughly embedded in Cameroonian social realities; football life is no more fun than the social realities of which it is part. (I should hasten to add that it is no less fun, either. Too often Western

commentators tend to see Africa in a dramatic light where life is one of doom alone with no room for either hope or lightness (Chabal 1996, Chege 1994, Kaplan 1994, Rieff 1998/99, Gordon and Wolpe 1998). And if there is lightness it is often seen as a sign of immaturity. Curiously enough these are the same terms in which nineteenth century European travelers saw Africa as well (c.f. Pratt 1992).

Of course enjoyment is an important part of the experience. Obviously, people attend matches to forget about their troubles, to relax, to think of something else than the daily grind. There is also, I would argue, intrinsic joy in seeing the game, not only because it makes one forget one's troubles, but because it is interesting to watch and is aesthetically pleasing. It is a game of strategy with constant surprises and a variety of possibilities. When done well, it is also almost humorous with feints and dribbles; it is dramatic.

Why people play it is a somewhat different matter, because at least these days football is a means to riches. Like most other spectator sports that have become big business, the real stars of football are millionaires. Thus, most young Cameroonian would-be players dream of becoming stars in Europe, or even in Latin America. Does the fact that sport is a means to an end take away from the enjoyment? I don't know the answer to this question, but I suspect, yes, to some extent. Certainly coaches, elderly fans, former players, etc. would say that they used to play for the sheer fun of it, whereas today's players only know how to make demands. Actually there is an enormous amount of sacrifice being made on all sides in order to make football happen in Cameroon, and this includes the players as well. Probably there still is fun in the game despite the means-to-an-end aspect of it. Part of this comes from the game itself, and of course from the joy of

accomplishment, of mastering the technique, of doing something well, of winning, yes, winning.

Although I am writing about football, the very fact that football as a symbolic construct can be seen to encompass all aspects of life in Cameroon, and all aspects of life encompass football means that I deal with a larger set of issues than what merely pertains to football.

I am going to use the postcolonial condition as a shorthand for contemporary life in Cameroon, but by using the term I also pre-suppose a number of factors as the context for my study and more importantly for the lives of the people about whom I am writing. This includes the fact of Cameroon having been colonized, and as a result being an “underdeveloped” country. Its current economic and political life is to a great degree both internally and externally structured by its relationship to its erstwhile colonizers and by its unequal relationship to the “developed” world in general. These parameters constitute the framework within which the country exists and through which its inhabitants see themselves and carry out their daily lives. It also means that the majority of Cameroonians are poor, and poverty also structures and limits people’s possible fields of action. The postcolonial condition also means a set of internal circumstances which though conditioned by the external have an autonomy of their own. I am trying to steer away from an overly deterministic view of the postcolonial, where all the ills that plague Cameroon are seen to derive from external factors. I am also trying to steer away from an overly pessimistic view of the internal life of Cameroon, even if Afro- pessimism seems to

be one of the reigning ideas of our days. Cameroonians themselves are often given to these pessimistic views both on the level of intellectuals' discourse inside and outside Cameroon and in everyday discourses on the streets of Cameroon.

The literature on postcolonialism is a veritable industry and I do not wish to engage in a debate with that literature. I am using the notion of the postcolonial to locate Cameroon within a particular set of economic and power relationships in the world. I am also using the term to help understand the lived experience of Cameroonians' lives.

Mbembe's discussion of the postcolonial is a scathing critique of the postcolonial condition in which the state locks itself, and the population which is forced to co-exist with it, into what he has labeled "zombification," seen as a mutual inability to get out of an impasse, and the collusion of all parties in maintaining this impasse. Mbembe of course is fully aware of the continuing effects of the colonial past on these practices (cf. Mbembe 1984, 1986, 1996), but his concern is to try to understand the nature of the postcolony and to see by what means the postcolonial state, ruler and ruled, continue to stay the way they are. According to him, there is a collusion on both sides and the process of domination-opposition becomes much more complex than a simple dichotomy between ruler and ruled, collaboration and resistance (cf. Mbembe 1992). Mbembe argues that being locked into this kind of a mutual understanding renders the post-colony impotent, and in fact prevents any change. He writes:

... the postcolonial relationship is not primarily a relationship of resistance or of collaboration but can best be characterised as illicit cohabitation, a relationship made fraught by the very fact of the *commendement* and its 'subjects' having to share the same living space. It is precisely this logic –the necessary familiarity and domesticity in the relationship– that explains why there has

not been (as might otherwise have been expected from those so dominated) the resistance or the accommodation, the disengagement or the 'refusal to be captured' (Hyden, 1980), the contradiction between overt acts and gestures in public and the covert responses made 'underground' (*sous maquis*). Instead, it has resulted in the mutual zombification of both the dominant and those who they apparently dominate. This zombification meant that each robbed the other of their vitality and has left them both impotent (*impouvoir*). (1992:4)

Mbembe has been criticized for overstating his case and not proving it in a systematic way (cf. Public Culture 1992 special issue which was devoted to reactions to Mbembe's article). Nevertheless, his approach is insightful and thought-provoking. On the one hand, I find his depiction of Cameroonians' predicaments eminently recognizable: he gives more of a sense of the lived experience of Cameroonians than almost any author I can think of. On the other hand, the notion of zombification captures the frustration of people caused by marshalling all their resources, making sacrifices, planning and plotting – that I have seen many a time in Cameroon – which then seems to come to nothing. Although Mbembe uses the phrase "each robbed the other of their vitality" in his characterization of zombification, this is not strictly speaking an apt description, because in fact this zombification (maybe neutralization would be a less suggestive but more precise term) is accompanied by feverish activity by all concerned, and zombification is only the result of this activity, not its mode.

As described in the next chapter, Cameroon has been undergoing an economic crisis since 1987. The repercussions of this crisis have been many-fold on the lives of

Cameroonians. Achille Mbembe and Janet Roitman (1995), analyzing its meaning to Cameroonians, demonstrate that in many ways it undermined Cameroonians' sense of certainty about an orderly progression of things in their lives. In attempting to give a multifaceted image of the crisis as lived experience, of "the way in which the crisis is inscribed in the everyday urban landscape" (Mbembe and Roitman, 1995:327) they describe recent examples of breakdown in Cameroon from the deterioration in the state of the roads in many neighborhoods of Yaoundé, to the disintegration of cars (I can attest to the veracity of their description, every item of clothing I owned while in Cameroon sooner or later got torn or otherwise damaged in the many taxis I took), to the breakdown in public services such as electricity and water, garbage collection, the decay in factories, the large number of abandoned buildings in a state of half-completion where weeds and criminals thrive. This generalized breakdown is also true of football. It is true for football infrastructures and for equipment. It is true for the everyday unfolding of football, the relationships between people, the organization and results of matches, all the way up to the level of the national team (see especially Chapters III for the local level competitions, and Chapters V and VI for the international level).

Mbembe and Roitman argue that the uncertainties that such a situation brings into people's lives lead to the development of what they refer to as "new forms of rationality" (1995:339). By this they mean ways in which people overcome the problem of surviving under these circumstances. Their emphasis is not so much on corruption, though obviously corruption is an integral part of these practices, but rather on a mentality where everybody has to arrange things, where "things no longer exist without their parallel. Every law enacted is submerged by an ensemble of techniques of avoidance.

circumvention and envelopment which, in the end, neutralize and invert the legislation” (1995:340).

This is not so unusual, the combination of oppressive regimes and poverty together bring about such “maneuvering”. In a popular song in Hungary² during the 70s, in which the singer claims to have finally learned the ropes after an earlier state of naivete, she sings that “I didn’t know [then] that next to the large gates there are small doors where people actually enter.” This line echoes nicely the idea that under certain conditions things are never what they seem, and in order to succeed one has to know one’s way around things.

What I am after in discussing Mbembe and Roitman’s article in such detail is to pinpoint how people perceive the possibilities for and constraints upon action. Mbembe and Roitman go on to argue

There is hardly a reality here without its double. Hence acting efficaciously requires that one carefully cultivate an extraordinary capacity to be simultaneously inside and outside, for and against, and to constantly introduce changes in the reading and usage of things, playing, in this way, with the structures and apparatuses, capturing them where possible and eluding them where necessary, and in any event, amputating them and almost always emptying them of their formal and designated functions so one can better restore them with those that correspond best to desired goals and expected gains. (ibid: 340)

² Throughout this work examples taken from Hungary will crop up. This is because I am Hungarian, and inevitably my experiences of having been brought up in a country which was /is in many ways similar to third world countries (single party, autocratic rule, censorship, a pronounced inferiority complex towards “Europe”) shapes my understanding of my Cameroonian material. In fact football has had great social and political significance in Hungary too (cf. Bali 2001; Hadas and Karády 1995; Hadas 1999; Handler 1994; Zsolt 1978).

These practices and techniques are so common as to have become routinized, although they are publicly condemned.

French anthropologist, Christian Bromberger, has argued that football is a worldview in the sense that it helps people explain their world, their experiences, and their place within the world. Positing that football is a worldview implies that it is a reflection of the reality of people's lives, but I will argue that in the Cameroonian context (and most likely elsewhere too) football is more than just a reflection of the world. As a symbolic construct football is inherently ambiguous and carries multiple meanings. Bromberger would subscribe to this notion, but I would like to go one step further and suggest that in addition to reflecting the world as it is (with all its contradictions and cleavages), football is also a way for people to envision how the world should be. For this reason it can hold out at least the illusion of a potential for transforming the very reality it reflects. In this sense then we can ask whether football is a worldview or an ethos. If we follow Geertz's (1973) distinction between the two concepts then football has a dual character: it is both a worldview and an ethos. In Geertz's formulation ethos is the ideal and worldview is the real. By this token in Bromberger's view football is a worldview (it describes/reflects how the world is), but I am suggesting that there is another dimension to football in that it also serves as an ethos (how the world should be). Despite what Geertz says about the synthesized nature of the two, I would put the stress on the contradictions between them. Of course Geertz sees worldview as people's "most comprehensive ideas of order" (1973:127) whereas Cameroon, if we follow Mbembe, is disorder!

In analyzing the meaning of the crisis for Cameroonians, Mbembe and Roitman make a case for the tension being caused by “the unbearable discrepancy that exists between publicly announced reality and that other constantly changing, unstable and uncertain, quasi-elliptic realm that is consistently pursued and always dissipates, often emerging only after a long and exhausting bargain” (1995:342). There is likewise an “unbearable discrepancy” between what I have dubbed football as ethos and football as worldview in the previous paragraph. What is most interesting in this parallel is that while Cameroonians seem quite capable of being cynical about “publicly announced reality” –as attested by satirical writing and cartoons and other forms of popular humor³– when it comes to football, however, the counterpart of “publicly announced reality” is what I have dubbed the football as ethos and this ideal is cherished, not ridiculed; it is what holds out hope to many. If people ridicule something in football it is the worldview side, the side that reflects people’s reality. A further irony is that at least in parts this ethos derives from the ideological arsenal of modern sports as they came into being in the 19th century with notions of fair play, building character etc. (Bourdieu 1978, Ranger 1983) but instead of being seen as an external imposition it is internalized.

What Bromberger’s formulation does not talk about is how football also allows people to question their world and their place in it, and in some ways it creates at least the illusion, and sometimes the reality –however momentarily– of transforming this world. It

³ Cf. Mbembe 1997 on political cartoons, or the taped and widely heard satirical pieces of Antonio in Cameroon, but also cf. on Togo C. Toulabor’s work (1981, 1991) on similar type of humor exercised about the powerful, and especially about the President of the country.

is this promise of the transformative possibilities held out by soccer that I would argue holds in great part the attention of so many people.

Having studied football in Cameroon for more than 19 months I had ample occasion to experience along with the football teams I worked with and the people I came into contact with the absurdities and the incalculability of life in Cameroon. As we shall see in the ensuing chapters these are present on all levels of the game and frustrate people's attempts to work efficiently and achieve their desires.

Under these circumstances those who participate in football can be seen and see themselves in a heroic light. They perceive of themselves as wanting to create something: something concrete, something real, a better future, a good team, that everyone will remember and which will be the talk of the town. Coaches very often claim that they do not train football players, but "Men," in the "old fashioned" defiant and pathos-filled sense of Kipling's "If." If they knew the poem they would subscribe to its basic tenets, no matter how anachronistic these virtues seem to us in the West. As an ideal, at least on the level of desires and will, in Cameroon football represents an antithesis of the zombification, inertia, and impasse of the postcolonial condition, described so vividly by Mbembe and others. In practice the general state of Cameroon constantly frustrates this desire, and one could subscribe to Mbembe's thesis and recognize in football the zombification he talks about, mirroring the general state of affairs of the country.

Naturally, Cameroonians are not uniform in relation to their take on football, and as a first approximation we need to distinguish between three broad categories. Football

people or the practitioners of football (players, coaches at minimum, former players, referees and other officials); the bulk of the population of ordinary people; and the power wielders, those Mbembe termed the *commendement*. None of these categories are hermetically sealed. Clearly they can and do overlap greatly. (For example a low ranking police officer in certain respects is part of the power structure of Cameroon, but in other respects is part of the powerless, and of course he can also be part of football circles. Intellectuals also can straddle all three categories, as Eyoh (1996) has cogently pointed out talking about Africa in general. Intellectuals are by definition of their level of education assimilated to the modernity represented by the state and are potentially if not actually part of the power structure of the modern state.) By ordinary people I mean approximately what Jean-Francois Bayart means by "little people." The core meaning is their relative lack of access to power, although due to links of patronage based on ethnic ties or on some other form of voluntary association, in some instances even the powerless have (or think they have) access to power. Football people are also a not too clearly defined category, since other than people actively engaged in the actual practice of the sport a very large segment of the male population⁴ of Cameroon can claim some connection with football other than that of being a "mere" supporter. Football people often refer to themselves as "*les sportifs*" and juxtapose this term to that of "*les profanes*". But the two categories are elastic, their inclusiveness varying situationally. Nonetheless we need to keep in mind that along with other identities, which category a person belongs to is going to influence both his/her (though it is mostly his) perceptions of, attitudes to and opinions about football.

⁴ I will deal with the question of women's position in the world of football below.

Football being a reflection of its context demonstrates many of the ills of Cameroonian society: falsification of names, ages, match results, betrayal of trust, stealing each other's players, etc. Where football differs from the rest of Cameroon is that at least on the level of the imaginary it presents an alternative, a place where unlike the impasse that Mbembe and Roitman are talking about, and Mbembe describes so vividly in his 1992 article (where he posits the notion of zombification), efficacious action is possible. Thus in some ways the world of football can be regarded as more "real" and more predictable than the "real" world. Of course under the guise of football being a break from the "real," it at the same time helps to legitimate and reproduce the very conditions from which its practitioners hope to escape.

Partly this perception of space for efficacious action and a more equitable world comes from the structure of the game. Unlike the rest of Cameroon, in football there are seemingly clear rules, whose application or interpretation may be questionable but even then they are there unequivocally stated (the 17 rules of the game of football as posited by FIFA.) Theoretically at least, there is no shadow world behind football. Naturally the state's rules are also seemingly clear and as I cited from Mbembe and Roitman above, Cameroonians find or need to find a way to subvert them, and so they do with football. But a goal is a goal is a goal. Compared to what Mbembe and Roitman describe for Cameroon there is a stark contrast in what at least on an ideal level the game represents.

Another reason why this space for efficacious action comes from the game itself is because of its overall organization. A championship is a series of away and home matches against a set number of adversaries: each match is a world of its own, each match presents a unique opportunity to prevail over the adversary of the moment. Even if a match is lost

there is always hope that the next one can be won, you can think of a solution, reinforce the team by recruiting a new player, have a new strategy, have better luck, or have a different referee who will not be so blatantly against you, or who will actually favor you. The structured nature of both a match and of a championship, the repetitiveness, despite the infinite variety of the actual game itself, lends an air of certainty and calculability, which is otherwise lacking in Cameroonians' lives. If it is Wednesday during the championship season you know that you will be in the stadium, you know that there will be a match, you know that there are certain people you will find there, and you can also know what their reactions are going to be. Rituals of repetition in a world where there are no certainties are extremely comforting.

Although football is often the embodiment of both local ethnic and local national identity, at the same time it is perceived as a way to transcend local identity and to change people's reality, both on an individual and collective level, in both concrete and symbolic ways. Local identity (being poor and downtrodden is an identity for many) is often defined in terms of local constraints, and football is seen as a way of changing these constraints, a way of revising history (personal, ethnic and national). This process is full of internal contradictions and countervailing tendencies, but football as an ideal, –a representative of the potential of Cameroonians, a space where they can be better than others, where a different set of (better) values apply– is used rather self-consciously by Cameroonians themselves. The fairy-tale like fact that a small, poor, downtrodden African country can beat the “great countries” of the world at their own game gives a lot of satisfaction to people in Cameroon (cf. Monga 1990) and in Africa, giving people a recognition that is otherwise lacking.

Christian Bromberger, who has undoubtedly produced the most nuanced anthropological study of football to date, stresses that beyond crystallizing identities football represents something fundamental to the people who watch it and finds this fundamental in part in the meritocracy inherent in football.

Football fascinates us not just because of its ability to mobilise or its emotive rhetoric but because, like caricatural melodrama, it lays bare the major symbolic axes of our societies. Its deep structure (the laws of the genre rather than the rules of the game) represents the uncertain fate of man in the world of today. 284

This presents a more sophisticated re-formulation of the idea, which is quite common in the sport sociology literature, that sports are attractive to people because they “present the human drama.” The question is, does football present the same drama to Cameroonians as to the people of Marseilles, Turin and Naples studied by Bromberger and his colleagues?

In Bromberger’s work on football, the association between modernity and football takes on great significance. Following Ehrenberg he sees in football the symbolic representation of the fundamental values of modern society which he identifies with democracy. According to Bromberger, football celebrates merit, symbolizes such values as team work, solidarity, division of labour and collective planning “in the image of [the] industrial world which originally produced it” (1994:285). Although it allows for performance and competition among equals, however, due to the intervention of chance events, it also represents “the uncertain fate of man in the world today” (1994:284).

Bromberger is talking about European societies, and the world that is represented/reflected in “his” football is the world of post-industrial Europe. Thus his conclusion in another article (1995b:311): “In the light of football’s complex and contradictory properties, one is perhaps justified in seeing this sport, which is neither pure spectacle, nor an established ritual, as symbolic of an epoch in which the classificatory landmarks of collective life have become confused.”

Cameroon is not quite the same as Europe. This rather obvious fact begs the question of whether Cameroonians see the same thing in football as Europeans, and to a great extent the answer is bound to be no. That said, Cameroon is not as removed from Europe as one might think.

I find Bromberger’s stress on the connection between what he calls democratic societies and the evolution of football somewhat curious. Cameroon is anything but democratic. Of course Bromberger makes a contrast with the Aztec game of *tlatchli*, arguing that in the Aztec case the fixed nature of social statuses precluded any competition in the modern sense of the word, that winning or losing did not matter as it does in modern sports. It is clear from his counter-example that what he really wishes to contrast is “pre-modern” and modern, rather than “democratic” and non-democratic. (Naturally the modern is also supposed to be democratic, but whether it is truly the case is another matter).

The modernity question is one which deserves a little detour. To quote Robert Thornton:

Because of their different relations to power, Modernism and postmodernism have quite different meanings and values in the Third World. Despite the fragmentation of

modernism in the West, the aporias of reason, the politics of pastiche, the crisis of authenticity and the pervasive presence of simulacra, the Third World appears to be embracing modernism and modernisation as never before. ... For the most part, this appears to be true of African élites as well [as of Asian élites which he discusses first], who are not only still modernising but seem to be set to continue their commitment to modernisation well into the future. The postmodern anxieties of the postindustrial West seem irrelevant to them. (1996: 137)

I would only add to this that the embracing of modernity is not limited to élites, but rather represents a hope of a better future to most people, even if this wish to join the modern crowd is often expressed in a consumerism of wanting to have a hold on the external emblematic features of modernity (cf. Bayart 1996, Gandoulou 1989, Mbembe 1992). That it also goes deeper than that can be seen in the comment that I heard from a woman, of not much education, living in a small village, who –rejecting someone’s appellation of a man as being important for having been to Paris– exclaimed “What is Paris? You have to work there just as much as you have to work here, if you work hard in the village, you have everything.” She added as an afterthought, “all we lack is development: we need electricity, a paved road, and drinking water.” Thus when modernity means the hope of the fulfillment of such basic needs, rejecting modernity is impossible. Though on the level of infrastructure Africa is behind Europe, it cannot be argued that Africans are not modern. What they do is to straddle the modern (and even the postmodern) and the traditional, sometimes subverting the one with the other (Cf. DeBoek 1996, who shows the ability of both traditional chiefs and the “modern” Mobutu government to mutually subvert each other). This modernity is represented by Europe (and North America) and the attitude of Africans to Europeans or whites is highly

ambiguous. For example, Cameroonians are aware of their colonial past and neo-colonial present and see many of the ills of the post-colonial period to be emanating from their continuing (unequal) relationship to Europe. Thus the attitude is part distrust verging on hate. It is also part admiration and a wish to emulate in order to obtain the emblematic values of Europe. Coupled with this is a wish to be recognized by the larger world as actors in their own right and on an equal footing.

Bromberger argues that the meritocracy evident in football (that is to say its modernity which he identifies with democracy) can be derailed by the intervention of chance events (he limits this mostly to what happens on the pitch, while in Cameroon the way things can go wrong has a much wider scope, see Chapter III), so that the better team does not always win. In his view this is what gives tension to the game because it both symbolizes and humanizes the vagaries of life. This is no doubt true in Cameroon as well, but there is another dimension to the question. The ideal of the level playing field is very seductive. Both in the sense of a space where it is possible to do something, to have achievements that are real as opposed to Mbembe's simulacra, and also in the more conventional sense of the better team winning, regardless of external realities, i.e. the relative socio-economic and political strength, the symbolic (and real) capital of the participants. Thus football can be seen as providing an opportunity to invert the actual power relationships reigning in the world. This is a moralizing concept in both of its senses. In the first sense it is a negation of the post-colonial condition – instead of despair and inability to act, it affirms the possibility and efficacy of action. In the second sense it is also a moralising concept where virtue (superior ability) is and will be rewarded, and the

revenge of the underdog becomes possible, thus providing an opportunity for justice to be done, not just in sport, or football, but in the larger context of the world. The meaning of the level playing field is fraught with contradictions, which is precisely what, I would argue, provides the greatest tension and sense of excitement of the game. The main contradiction is of course that by positing the “level playing field” in the second sense it is claimed (consciously or unconsciously) that the game is outside the framework of the everyday, real relations of power. At the same time the significance and meaning of the game, or of a particular match, or competition, derives precisely from the fact that it is reinserted into this larger framework and gains its significance and meaning from the outside world.

Thus one of my aims is to examine what football means to its practitioners. This includes contradictory processes through which people create models for themselves and their society which have the (mostly imagined) potential to transform people’s reality, while at the same time they recreate the model of their society which seems to doom them to failure. For those who are actively involved in the sport it structures their lives and their aspirations and they see much of what goes on around them through its prism. I would like to convey the tremendous importance that is attributed to the sport, which – apart from its political and identity constructing dimensions– pre-occupies the practitioners.

One of the characteristics of football is that it lays bare the fundamental cleavages in a society through the crystallization of identities. I use the plural advisedly because one

of the points I will make is that depending on the context, different identities may come to the fore. However, my approach to the question of identity differs from most Africanist approaches in that I have chosen deliberately to talk about nationalism and ethnicity in conjunction with each other and not as separate issues. This follows from a combination of theoretical and practical considerations. In practical terms this approach is dictated in a great measure by my subject matter, football, which allows us to examine the same phenomenon on various levels of inclusiveness. I will show that this enables us to see questions of identity formation and identification from the local, through the regional, national, continental to the global, as part of a continuum. This is mostly due to the segmentary nature of sports competitions: on different levels of the competition the identities being mobilized by the sport can be more or less inclusive, ranging from village to ethnic group to region to nation to continent. Economic conditions (rich - poor), race (black - white), and historical circumstances (colonized - colonizer) and current or past political relationships also give rise to intense identifications. I will argue that these identities are not necessarily exclusive, but rather vary contextually, and more than one of them can be at play at a given moment. (For example when members of an ethnic group are blamed for the loss of the national team, or the converse case when members of an ethnic group feel that they have taken a more substantial part of a victory than others). It is also clear that these identifications at different levels often do not seem to be contradictory to those people who think them.⁵ At first sight there should be nothing

⁵ As Chinua Achebe puts it: "Poor me, you might think, what kind of life can result from the interplay of such an array of forces [referring to the many, contradictory roots of his identity]? Is the poor fellow stretched by competing claims on a painful rack of rival antagonistic identities? I regret I cannot report any intolerable stress or excitement.

surprising about this approach since the flexibility and multiplicity of identities has been on the anthropological (and postmodern) agenda for a long time (Berman 1998, Eriksen 1993, Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983, Lentz 1995, Verdery 1996, Vincent 1974).

Although I examine this question through football, the point I am trying to make has relevance beyond sports sociological concerns, where in fact studying the role of football (and other team sports) in the crystallization of identities has become a minor industry. One has a sense of *déjà vu* after reading a dozen of these studies, where sport will either unite or divide people in particular ways, where the sentiments deployed and mobilized follow well-regulated grooves. While I too show how football, depending on the level of competition, can lead to the crystallization of different sets of identifications, my main purpose is different. I am arguing for a recognition that an awareness of national belonging and the existence of nationalist sentiment (of which football happens to be a very good example) is just as much part of the Cameroonian landscape of ideas as in the case of other nations. This goes against the grain of the literature in which Africans tend to be seen as “ethnics,” and Westerners (especially Europeans) as “nationalists” (cf. Chabal 1996 on how this is part of the “othering” of Africans). African nationalism is mostly considered in the context of the anti-colonial struggle, and what has been happening since is framed in ethnic terms, and very often there is only fleeting reference made to the fact that there is some kind of “nationalist” notion in the minds of Africans.

Perhaps it is my Igbo inheritance which comes to my aid by upholding so insistently the notion of plurality. Where something stands, something else will stand beside it ... Igbo culture teaches the necessity to cope with the impossible and to enjoy it if you can. Which is one other reason perhaps why I can be so excited and so frustrated about being a Nigerian. (quoted in Ranger and Vaughan 1993:20). At times, of course, identities can become not just contradictory, but calcified into exclusive antagonisms, as in the case of

Very often this reference is made, not surprisingly, in connection with football (Fardon 1996, Bayart 1993).

In the concrete case of football both given the structure of national competitions (encompassing the whole country) and the nature of international or especially world competitions, such as the World Cup (pitting countries, races, continents, and even economic conditions [First World vs. Third World] against each other) and given radio and television coverage, the sport can serve very much the same functions in helping citizens imagine the nation as Benedict Anderson has argued for the novel, or print capitalism. But here it is not only the nation but the world, the global system, that is being imagined at the same time.

I will concentrate on three areas where such crystallization of identities takes place: first, the local level (i.e. that of Cameroon) where I will discuss the interplay of ethnicity and nationalism; second, the tension between the nationalist ideology of the state and what I term popular nationalism (patriotism); and third, manifestations of this popular nationalism on the global level. Cameroon in the "national order of things" (Malkki 1995), which can at times also shade into a broad juxtaposition of black and white.

With regard to the local level my main argument is that the majority of Cameroonians take Cameroon as an entity for granted and their many complaints about their existence and place in the world are filtered through this taken-for-granted unit called Cameroon. This view runs counter to much of what has been written about identity in Africa, and while clearly this is not the only identity in the repertoire of Cameroonians, I do claim that given the right circumstances it is one that cannot be ignored. I do not deny

Yugoslavia, or Rwanda, and many other places.

the salience of sub-national sentiments, which indeed are present, but argue that there is a fluidity to identities which will allow ethnic, regional or even pan-African identities to come into play depending on the context.

As is well known, the creation of “national unity” was among the major tasks that African governments (and the leaders of other, post-colonial “new nations”) set for themselves. Many authors have argued that nationalism, as an ideology of the African state, has become discredited. While I agree with this view, I will argue that due to its popular appeal, football (or sports in general) is more capable of evoking national sentiments than other, more direct forms of government exhortation. Football on the international level acts as a concrete embodiment of the nation, and along with other symbols of nationhood (flag, anthem, slogans, mottoes) can create intense feelings of loyalty in people. (This is not unique to Africa, cf. Archetti 1994a, 1994b, 1996, Finn 2000, Holt, Mangan and Lanfranchi 1996, Mangan 1996, etc.).

I suggest that a distinction needs to be drawn between the nationalist ideology of the state, which to a great extent has been discredited (see above about publicly announced realities) but that this does not mean that nationalist sentiments are not present in Cameroon. Through examples mostly taken from discourses surrounding Cameroon’s participation in various World Cups I explore how these nationalist sentiments, which I will call popular nationalism, get played out on the level of Cameroon. I argue that in the case of nationalism too there is a nationalist ethos that cries out for recognition and is in juxtaposition to the Cameroonian government’s ideology of nationalism, at the same time this ethos makes it possible for Cameroonians to criticize the government in the name of the nation. This is a somewhat similar idea to what Neil Lazarus (1994) (following Abdel-

Malek 1981 and Fanon) has called *nationalitarianism*, and what Dickson Eyoh (1998a) has referred to as *an unofficial discourse of nationalism*. My main difference from these authors is that they argue that these notions only hold sway over the “revolutionary vanguard” (Lazarus) or African intellectuals (Eyoh). I argue that these notions are far more widespread and can be found among ordinary Cameroonians.

Keeping in mind the disjuncture caused by the rift between nationalism as a state ideology and nationalist ideas as present among ordinary Cameroonians, I examine the nature of the popular nationalist discourse they give rise to. Accepting Chatterjee’s (1993, 1996) criticism of Western conceptualizations of nationalism I argue that there are two issues to be kept in mind. One is that given the global system of nation-states the nation is the only game in town and Cameroonians do not question this. I argue that the significance of the World Cup and other international competitions for Cameroonians is precisely to demonstrate to the world that they are on an equal footing with everyone else, in effect the same as everyone else, and precisely because of the specific characteristics of sports competitions, this claim can be made more legitimately than in other realms. Still agreeing with Chatterjee I argue that it is at this very moment of achieving sameness (visible if momentary equality or even (possibly) superiority to Westerners) that it becomes important to Cameroonians to demonstrate their difference, their unique identity as Cameroonians.

There is another way in which national identity is relevant to this study and that is the question of how Cameroonians see their place in the world. How they see the historical determinants of their lives and what kind of vision they have of their place in the global system. Football again lends itself rather readily to formulations of a system of

ideas on the subject. A special and highly significant instance of this is Cameroonians' perceptions of their relationship to France and I will analyze these through an examination of the discourses that the role of the French head coach, Henri Michel, in the 1994 World Cup gave rise to, and the response of Cameroonians to France's performance in the 1998 World Cup. Both of these events allowing people to re-examine their historical relationship to France and reaffirm anti-(neo)-colonial sentiments.

A third, broader issue is raised in my discussion of Cameroonians' perceptions of their relationship to whites or Europeans. This arises in my examining the anti-white discourse the 1998 World Cup gave rise to. It comes up again in Cameroonian conceptualizations of football as art when practiced by Cameroonians, and science when practiced by Europeans. This is also the battle of creativity vs. efficacy. I relate these discourses to Cameroonians' colonial experience where they were told time and again that Europeans' way of doing things was more efficient than that of Cameroonians'. I argue that in positing creativity/beauty as a positive value and denigrating the efficient way Europeans play as dull and joyless, Cameroonians are finding a way to redress the evident imbalance in the world beyond football. Calling attention to the fact that in some instances Cameroonians themselves question their own (or their fellow Cameroonians') emphasis on beauty as opposed to efficiency serves to remind us that Cameroonian society is not uniform and they too see things from a variety of viewpoints. Those who hold art in high esteem are in fact holding out notions which are similar to the essentialized notions of material/outside (Western) spiritual/inner (Eastern) domains Chatterjee talks about in the case of Indian nationalism. (Although these are essentialized notions used to create binary oppositions with great frequency, it is also clear that some of this is contested terrain).

Another layer of the same problem is that this discourse is in fact part of a larger global one. Its elements are part of the journalistic clichés the world over, one important strand of which is that Africans are celebrated in the Western media and among Western fans for their “pure,” “uncorrupted” vision of the game, often in racist terms. At the same time the same commentators also tend to claim that Europeans of an earlier era used to play this more creative type of soccer, and mourn its demise in Europe, and rejoice over its continued existence in Africa. It is a “noble savage” kind of discourse. But while elements of the same discourse are used by football people all over the world, what Cameroonians seem to do is to turn its racist terms upside down and make what in some respects can be seen as a shortcoming into a virtue.

No matter how we look at it, I was a curiosity first and foremost, closely watched, and never allowed to forget that I was white. Being a woman must also have influenced my work in ways I cannot even imagine. Football in Cameroon is a male sport. This is true even if there is a women’s version of the national championship and the Challenge Cup, and there are a handful of female referees and even a few female coaches. Women’s football does not command much respect, although “hard core” football buffs (the true *sportif*) will watch female football if there is nothing else on offer. But the highest praise a female player can receive is that “she plays like a boy.” Women support football, but in a limited way, their support being mostly evident in their presence at the stadium or in front of TV screens in bars when the national team plays, or when there are village level championships, which function somewhat differently from official football. Interestingly, in 1994 when the Indomitable Lions did not do very well at all in the World Cup, and

CRTV, the Cameroon Radio and Television company, opened the airwaves for the public to express its frustration. a surprisingly large number of women contributed, and many of them expressed some of the strongest statements and opinions. This is why, if someone were to count the number of contributions that I quote from women and compare them to those quoted from men it would seem that women are almost equally concerned with football as men. This is not so, but the strength of these women's statements, and the depth of their passion often make their remarks more "quotable" than those of men. The only explanation I can give for this is that since it is unusual for women to be involved in football, if a woman does feel the urge to contribute, her determination and conviction to have her point heard has to be much stronger than that of a man.

Though my presence (both as a woman and a white one at that) may have been surprising, people usually explained it with the phrase "she loves football." This was the explanation they attached to the persistent presence of any woman at the stadium.

Many of my contacts came about in a snowball kind of way – I met one person, through him I met others, through them I met yet others. Some people understood the importance of my work to be to tell the world how Cameroonians suffer. Many others thought that my work would help improve the lot of Cameroonian football by concrete suggestions. I cannot possibly fulfill all these expectations; at best I can hope that the end result is going to be recognizable if incomplete.

Others thought that I was there to recruit players, discover talent, get them a contract in "Europe." Or alternately I was seen as a possibly useful source of equipment.

procurement being a perennial problem in the lives of many a team.⁶ I navigated these demands as best I could. Clearly I had no way of fulfilling the first expectation, though probably there were many people who didn't believe me when I said so. The second problem was even greater since in the eyes of everyone, despite being a "poor graduate student," I was objectively (if only comparatively) rich. I did what I could by way of helping, but my efforts were to a large extent insignificant and mostly limited to my close associates⁷.

In the early 1980s I did fieldwork in a small Eastern Hungarian village on strategies of choosing godparents. One of the most shocking experiences I had early on in my fieldwork then was when one morning at about 7 o'clock, or maybe earlier, I was awakened by a knock on my door. It was my hostess. They were preparing to harvest maize that morning with a group of relatives, friends, and neighbors and she wanted to get something from a closet in my room. I had already gone with them the previous day, and had other plans for the day. Groggy from sleep, I went to open the door in my nightgown. Besides the familiar figure of my hostess, there were three or four other black-clad women as yet unknown to me. One among them, looking positively demented (as I later found out she was in fact mentally retarded, but I did not know that at the time), jumped on me, as my hostess was marching past resolutely, and kissed me on both cheeks. This done and

⁶ It is often remarked that football could become so popular in the world exactly because it requires so little equipment and on some level this is true; however, even the minimum that is necessary for serious play is beyond the means of most Cameroonian teams, or stretches them to their limits. (See Chapter III.)

⁷ The price of a pair of not very good quality football boots ranges between \$30 and \$50 in the U.S., a team needs at least fifteen pairs in order to play, and of course football boots get worn out rather fast. A set of jerseys costs around \$600 in the US.

my hostess having retrieved whatever she had wanted to get, they all retreated, leaving me completely floored. I spent the next couple of hours getting over the shock, the shock of having been inspected, intruded upon and my privacy invaded at a moment when I was nowhere near prepared for it. Eventually, I concluded that the need to retrieve the item was a mere excuse and the need to wake me and get into the room was dictated by sheer curiosity on the part of the visitors, the wish to look at the exotic guest in her lair. The fact that I was in my nightgown only made it more interesting.

The experience was somewhat akin to what Elenore Smith Bowen (Laura Bohannan) describes in *Return to Laughter* when she is mobbed by the market-women at the beginning of her fieldwork (Bowen 1964:18-22). I had already read the book at the time, though I don't remember making an explicit connection, but conscientious fieldworker that I was, in addition to being shocked by the experience I was in turn equally shocked at being shocked. Eventually I came to the conclusion that part of the shock was that I was completely unprepared for being the object of curiosity and speculation, for being seen as some kind of an "Other". I assumed far more commonality with the villagers than they were willing to grant me. I stayed with a middle-aged, childless couple, and questions as to where I went, what I had done, whom I spoke to, when was I going to get home were constantly showered on me. My own parents had never subjected me to such inquisition and I felt the control to be irksome. Even though I was doing fieldwork in what was purportedly my own culture in fact the dividing lines were surprisingly sharp. One of the main lessons I came away with was that despite the relative homogeneity of Hungary it was illusory on my part to have thought that I was doing research in my own culture. I kept expecting it, but I kept finding that it was not so. Obviously, class and

urban vs. rural differences loomed large.

I also supposed that had the same experience happened to me in an "African village," I would have expected it, and thus been able to cope with it better. In turn when I was doing fieldwork in Cameroon I was in a different situation, yet there were similarities. Apart from a few trips to the countryside, I spent the overwhelming majority of my time in Yaoundé, the capital of Cameroon, "hanging out" in a variety of circles, most of which related directly to football. (I followed the work of several football teams, attended the matches of an old boys' team (commonly known as 2-0), attended international, first, second and third division matches, casting half an eye on women's football as well as on a village championship. There were weeks when apart from training sessions and friendly matches I easily saw five or six official matches. In this I was conforming to what the most avid insiders of Cameroonian football do. No match is ever the same, there is always something new to see. In addition, as long as it lasted I belonged to a loose circle of friends in the neighborhood where I lived on a street corner where people gathered every night at a news-vendor's stand. I also had friends in academia and attended the women's circle of my host's village.

The football circles were mostly overlapping each other, and after a while I was known to most people who would be there even if I could not identify all of them. People knew my business, or certainly thought they did. One of my constant problems was that players assumed that I was going to be able to help them get a contract in Europe in a professional club, and I suspect that they thought that my refusal was somehow lack of goodwill on my part. It was difficult to convey the notion that academics have little power and influence in the world of sports. I can only imagine how many people knew me

and of me on the streets of Yaoundé; certainly I was familiar to the football players who trained, played or just simply hung out in the Omnisports area (as the neighborhood around the main stadium of Yaoundé is known), those spectators who congregated around any of the third division teams, the administration and leadership of all these teams, people who worked at the Federation, people who sat in the section of the stadium where I usually sat with my friend and principal informant, the coach. Still others knew me from my “hanging out” at the newspaper vendors’, as did university students where I typed up my tape recordings, the community of Anglophones with whom I attended the Etoug Ebe Baptist church, taxi-drivers, barmen, cigarette-vendors, waiters, newspaper-vendors, people in my neighborhood and so on and so forth.

Getting a taxi at certain times of the day in Yaoundé was a next-to impossible task, especially to a neighborhood like the one where I was living, which was quite far away and where the road was very bad in places. As a friend remarked wryly once as we were waiting for my taxi, “underdevelopment is bad.” When I asked why in particular, he answered, “because they refuse to take you because the road is bad, and that is due to underdevelopment.” However, quite often what happened was that after waiting quite hopelessly for a long time, some complete stranger would grab me and push me into a taxi, joining me, naturally, because she or he knew me from the neighborhood and was more adept at grabbing the chance than I was. I was greeted as “*présidente*” (the feminine version of *président*, which, other than “coach” (the English word is the one that is used in “Camfrench”) is the most common (often honorific) way to address someone who is involved in football) all over town by people whom I did not seem to know, but who obviously knew me.

Yaoundé has approximately 1 million inhabitants, thus the seemingly huge number of people who knew me is miniscule compared to the number of people who did not. In some respects I was never accepted, I never became completely enmeshed in the social life of the city. Consequently, one of my overwhelming memories of this fieldtrip, surprisingly similarly to my fieldwork in Hungary, is that of being the “Other”. But of course one is the Other in Africa and in Hungary in different ways. In both places I stood out immediately as different. In the Hungarian village because of the small size of the village everyone did actually know who I was, even if despite my repeated attempts to explain, many of them never knew quite what I was up to. In Yaoundé everyone knew that I was a foreigner, white at that, and probably most people’s immediate assumption was that I was French. But overwhelmingly I was identified as *‘la Blanche’* (whitewoman), this was a label I could not escape, and which irked me constantly, and drove home to me day in day out that I was viewed as different, that I was being noticed. It gave me a feeling that I could never just be, that I was always being seen and remarked upon. People who knew me accepted me, (although may be I flatter myself) but even they could never quite let go of my obvious difference, and used me adroitly as a foil in various debates about the state of the world, the role of blacks and whites in history, in the present and in the future. I was constantly drawn into debates, both to chart some kind of a separate place for myself, as other than *“la Blanche,”* as someone who is not personally responsible for all the misdeeds of whites in history, nor for all of the wondrous inventions of “white science,” what Cameroonians half-jokingly refer to as *“la magie des Blancs”*: as myself, someone with a genuine interest in what was going on in Cameroon. People seemed equally interested in what I had to say, in a world limited by poverty and underdevelopment I

clearly had seen things and been to places that they had only heard about or seen on TV and my stories, my opinions were news, and thus at the very least entertainment. I tried to explain in vain, I'm afraid, that not all was well in the United States, that there was poverty and injustice aplenty there too. That American colonialism, advocated by some friends in a debate as possibly better than what they had known, would be no better than what they were familiar with, etc. I also overstepped some boundaries, my sheer presence at the stadium, on and near the football pitch being already surprising. As noted above there are very few women in Cameroonian football and the sport remains an essentially male domain where women are only admitted grudgingly and have to prove that they love football and know it. As part of the life of *les sportifs* I entered bars where women should only enter rarely and in the company of men, drank beer very cautiously with men because while they would urge me to drink they would be the first to be shocked were I to get drunk. (This actually would have been the same in Hungary where also it was almost impossible to refuse a drink, but female drunkenness is frowned upon).

I fear that I will disappoint most of my informants in that other than recording and interpreting what their life is about, which I hope to be able to do faithfully, I am unlikely to come up with practical solutions to their problems. In their view that is what is needed, but I know what they don't seem to know – that not many people lend an ear to a social scientist, and I am not even likely to be able to come up with a solution.

I worked closely with a third division team, participating rather fully in its life, attending practically all training sessions during a six month period, going as far as (using my feminine skills) cooking meals for the team prior to matches. Participation in the life of one "old boys" team. Contacts in this led to my entry into the life of a village

championship, hampered, however, by the fact that I could not speak the language of the village. My research was conducted in French and English, the two official languages of Cameroon. Football brings together people from many ethnic groups and the language used (in the French speaking part of the country) is French. This of course also meant that I could be excluded when people switched to their own language, which did happen from time to time. Had I been able to speak one of the 200-odd Cameroonian languages, I would have done a very different fieldwork, since I would have been automatically identified with the group whose language I spoke, and I too would have inescapably identified with the group. (As things stood I was identified to a greater or lesser degree with the various people I worked with, thus the team I worked with was seen as "my team"). As a result of working in football and in Yaoundé and in a number of different contexts enumerated above, I came into contact with a variety of people from different ethnic groups, and formed close ties with some of them, and some enduring friendships.

In the course of establishing these friendships and doing my fieldwork, I had occasion to hear people's opinions about tribalism, and heard their complaints and grievances against others in a more varied and "multivocal" way than I would have had I been closely involved only with one ethnic group. Hearing these grievances, and being the outsider in a multiple kind of way, I could see how they were right, how those expressing them had some just cause against the others. Yet hearing the other side I could also see their justice, their resentment, coming to the uneasy and ambivalent conclusion that everybody is right and everybody is wrong. I might add that I also heard people explain the justice of the cause of some other tribe or grouping than their own, thus although "tribalist" discourse is alive and well in Cameroon, there are instances where people are

able to see the others' point of view. This fact of multiple personal identifications on my part has led to the interesting constellation that, unlike anthropologists who work in a more traditional rural setting, I do not have "a" tribe. In other words, my setting, my unit of analysis is Cameroon – not Anglophone Cameroon or Francophone Cameroon, not Bamileke-land, not the Bassa, not the Douala, but the whole of Cameroon. So what was my unit of analysis? As should be obvious it is a shifting one. I am trying to talk about Cameroonians in general, their attitudes to football, their opinions about life, the importance attached by them to football and the intertwining of football and politics. Yet, my knowledge is grounded in these personal contacts, interviews, observations, half caught conversations.

Other sources of my information come from radio and newspaper coverage. The call-in radio program put in place to garner support for the national team during the 1994 World Cup when things didn't go as well for the Indomitable Lions as people would have wished became a forum for the expression of people's bitterness and proved to be a gold mine. Cameroon has witnessed the proliferation of newspapers since the beginning of the 1990s and I rely on these sources too.

As Christian Bromberger (1994:282) has put it: "...when one attempts to trace football's latent functions one finds multivalent, fluent and contradictory processes which defy any single or reductive interpretation." There are innumerable ways in which football can be discussed. What follows is going to be just a few slices of the cake, the totality is so vast, so intricate and has so many layers that any one analysis can only approximate it at best. Football has many meanings to any one individual, and the meaning also varies from individual to individual. At the same time certain meanings crystallize in particular

ways so that in some instances I can talk about the consensus of Cameroonians, with the proviso that there are always dissenting voices and I will try to call attention to these.

Mapping these variations, which are often contextual, is one of the tasks I have set for myself, and should be evident throughout this work.

Chapter II – Background: geography, ethnography, political history

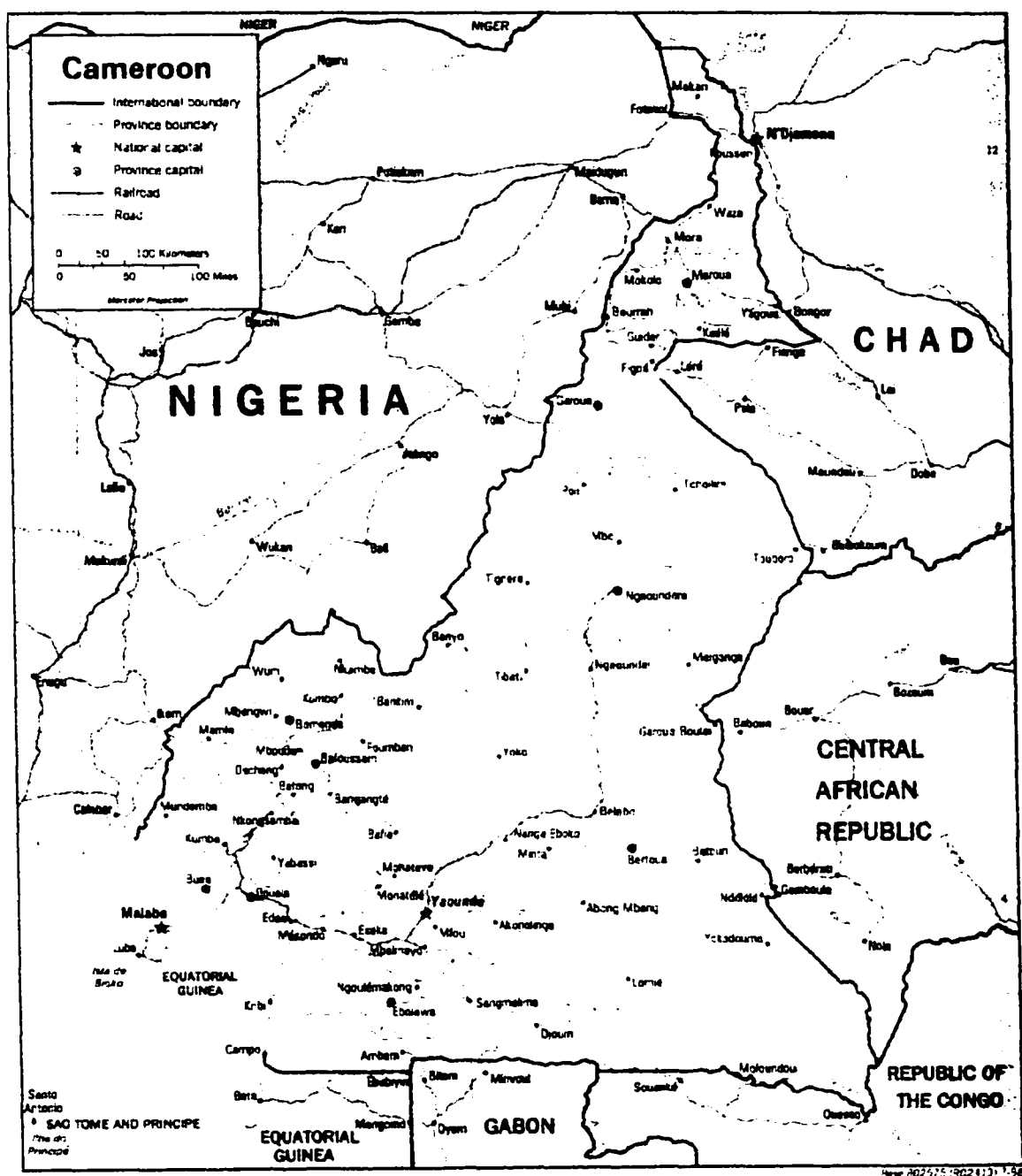
Cameroon is situated in either Central or West Africa. This statement already indicates the historically determined ambiguities that surround such definitions. The origin of this particular ambiguity is to be found in the country's divergent colonial history. Although the coastal Duala had long-standing relations with the British, Cameroon was first colonized by the Germans in 1884 who concluded treaties with some Douala chiefs and thus gained a foothold in the area. Following Germany's defeat in World War I, the *Kamerun* colony was divided between Britain and France as a League of Nations Mandate, the larger Eastern part under French control while the smaller Western part was administered by Britain as part of Nigeria. On the eve of decolonization the two territories of British Cameroon voted in a plebiscite to decide whether they wished to belong to Cameroon or Nigeria. The Southern part of the area voted to be "reunified" and join in a federation with the entity known as *La République du Cameroun*. Its inhabitants have retained a separate identity signaled by the term Anglophone. Thus the ambiguity of the statement of the geographical positioning of Cameroon can be resolved if we realize that Anglophones think of their country as being part of West Africa while Francophones think of it as being part of Central Africa. The significance of this difference is that West Africa, at least in the minds of those who think of Cameroon as properly belonging to that region, signifies English-language use, whereas belonging to Central Africa signifies French-language use.

Cameroon is often described by Cameroonians as “Africa in miniature.”¹ This is a stock phrase learnt in school and I was presented with it on countless occasions. What the term signals is that the country encompasses great geographical, ecological and cultural variety. From the point of view of ecology it ranges from the rainforest region in the South to semi-arid and even arid areas in the North, through savanna. In terms of topography, Cameroon spreads from the Atlantic Ocean to Lake Chad, and boasts of the highest peak of Western and Central Africa (Mount Cameroon) which is an active volcano. High plateaus and hills in the Western half of the country provide dramatic vistas and fertile lands on steep slopes. The population and its traditional economic occupations are equally varied. Fisherfolk in the south, hunting-gathering Pygmies in the rain forest, slash-and-burn agriculture, and Bororo cattle-herders who present a variety of “textbook” ecological adaptations within the confines of the country. The colonial period left its stamp on the economic activities of Cameroon’s peoples. In addition to small-scale agriculture (which produces the main export crops of the country in bananas, cocoa and coffee) there are large-scale estates of coffee, cotton, rubber, tea, and palm products, especially in the west and north. Political systems comprise almost all known forms of political organization from bands through acephalous kin-ordered societies to highly hierarchical kingdoms, which intermingle with the structures of the modern state. Islam and Christianity, in addition to traditional religions are also present and structure the social relations of modern Cameroon.

¹ Interestingly, the same metaphor was used by the 19th century Hungarian geographer János Csaplovics (1822) when he characterized his country as “Hungary is Europe in miniature.” I thank Mihály Sárkány for calling my attention to this.

Cameroon's triple colonial history (Germans (1884-1916), French and English (1916-1960/61)) divides and unites its peoples in complex ways. The reader should keep in mind these multiple divisions and crosscutting experiences. In the following account, I will be referring to Cameroon's regions by the names of its ten provinces (which came into being in 1983, superceding what were six provinces). At present the country has ten provinces (Extreme (or in some translations Far) North, Adamawa, North, North-west, South-west, Littoral, West, Center, South, East). The first three constitute what sometimes is referred to as the Grand North (*Grand Nord*) and this is the Muslim area, although there are Muslims to be found in other regions as well in part because of recent migrations, in part because Islam has exerted its influence on various chiefdoms in earlier times too.

The North-west and South-west provinces are the areas which had been under British control after the end of the German colonial period, and as a result their population is English-speaking. This area sometimes is referred to as Southern Cameroon, because it was the Southern part of the British controlled territory. The same area is sometimes referred to in the literature as Western Cameroon, especially between 1961 and 1972, when the former British and French parts of the country were re-united in a federated state, the constituents of which were referred to as Western and Eastern Cameroon, respectively. Due to these historical complications, the territory comprising the West Province is in fact to the East of the North- and South-west provinces. The North-west province and the West Province together comprise most of what is known as the Cameroon Grassfields which is a cultural area where similar hierarchized kingdoms have

Map of Cameroon²² Courtesy of The General Libraries, The University of Texas at Austin.

been arbitrarily divided by English and French language use. To facilitate the task of the reader and because the names of the provinces do not correspond to self-evident geographical categories I attach a map of Cameroon.

Cameroon's ever increasing population stands at about 14 or 15 million today. during my fieldwork in 1994/1995, journalists spoke of 11 million "breathing as one" in their support of the national team. In 1998, when a similar reference spoke of 13 million, a man listening to the broadcast on the street, exclaimed: "so, we are 13 million now!" In 1976 the population was officially stated to be 7,663,246 while in 1987 it was 10,493,655. According to a 1993 publication of the Ministry of Planning and Territorial Management (*Ministère du plan et de l'Aménagement du Territoire*) which provides figures by province, in 1987 a little more than forty percent (4,206,575) of the population lived in the three Northern provinces (the former *Grand Nord*) while about 20 percent (2,075,390) resided in the two "Anglophone" provinces. There is a rough correspondence between ethnic belonging and province, but these numbers can only serve as approximate guidelines to ethnic distribution in Cameroon.

Apart from the fact that statistical figures are often incorrect and easily open to manipulation (for example Anglophones will claim that they comprise 25 instead of 20 percent of the overall population,) we have to keep in mind that considerable population movement has characterized Cameroon since colonial days and before, and settlers and traders as well as civil servants originating from different regions can be found almost everywhere. To mention just the most obvious examples, due to land-shortage at home many Bamileke (West Province) have fanned out to different regions of the country where they may have been established for several generations (Joseph 1977). The same is true of

the two major cities of Cameroon, Yaoundé and Douala, whose inhabitants boost considerably the population size of their respective provinces, Center and Littoral, comprising some 3 million people. However, these cities have an ethnically mixed population. According to the same publication, the rate of urbanization in Cameroon rose from 28.5 percent to 37.8 between 1976 and 1987. According to the most recent figures, it reached 44% by 2000.³ This is important to know because football is essentially an urban phenomenon. It is also important to recognize that a far greater number of people than indicated by these figures are likely to have been exposed to city-life as people move back and forth between urban and rural areas with great regularity both on a temporary and permanent or semi-permanent basis (cf. de Jong and Harts-Broekhuis 1997).

As can be gathered from the foregoing, like most African countries, Cameroon is multiethnic. It has become a truism of anthropology that “tribes” and “ethnic groups” are very much the result of manipulation, and the pre-colonial flux in “tribal” terms was in many ways influenced by colonial rule, tending to freeze otherwise fluid relationships between groups, bringing into existence groups that had not existed before and at times privileging certain ones among them (cf. Berman 1998, Eriksen 1993, Lentz 1995, Lonsdale 1996, Ranger 1993, for Cameroon cf. Geschiere 1996, Eyoh 1998b). The subsequent juggling for power within the newly created post-colonial states has led to different constellations of the reorganization of ethnic loyalties. What is clear is that the

³ 2000 World Population Data Sheet of the Population Reference Bureau. By comparison the Central African region has a 32% rate, while North America a 75% rate, and Central America a 67% rate.

changing nature and fluidity of ethnic categories has not stopped, and newer and newer re-definitions of various groups continue.

Cameroon is no different. It is generally claimed that the country has upwards of 200 ethnic groups, although it is not very clear how many of these speak separate languages and how valid this division really is.⁴ Here I will only concentrate on some of the main groups that are important from the point of view of my discussion of the political realities of the country and of football. In general, as mentioned above one of the main cleavages in Cameroon is between Anglophone and Francophone. There are also significant differences between Muslim North and Christian South, although these categories often hide more differences than they highlight. The categories of Anglophone and Francophone are not quite comparable, even if both denote colonial heritage in language use. The term Anglophone is used in Cameroon for a variety of peoples who have undergone one particular form of colonization. But obeying the rules of minority/majority relations, while Anglophones are highly conscious of their identity as English-speakers (the connotations of which will become clearer as we go along), Francophones seldom employ French language use (also the result of colonization) as a rallying point or point of self-reference. To a great degree –and despite the official policy of French-English bilingualism– because French is the majority language, its speakers remain unmarked, their majority status being signaled by this very lack.

⁴ Estimates of the number of ethnic groups in Cameroon vary, 200, 230, 240 are common figures, practically every source giving a slightly different number. The Summer Institute of Linguistics (Grimes 1996) lists 286 languages for Cameroon (“279 living languages, 3 are second languages without mother tongue speakers, and 4 are extinct”).

Anglophones

Anglophones originate from the North-west and South-west provinces Cameroon, which are the areas of the Southern part of the former British Cameroon. An important feature of the division according to language is that a whole plethora of groups get lumped together under the heading of Anglophone and the internal identity of these groups is rarely questioned. While Francophones do not question the internal composition of the group known as Anglophone because they “don’t care,” and being in the majority do not know much about their Anglophone compatriots. The Anglophones, because they see themselves as being disenfranchised and marginalized, do not do so either (cf. Wolf. H-G. 1997). Actually there are some cracks in Anglophone unity along the fault lines of the two provinces which they inhabit, reflecting differences in economic and political history and cultural makeup and because the Biya government has done everything in its power to drive a wedge between the two provinces (cf. Nyamnjoh and Rowlands 1998; Eyoh 1998a. Eyoh 1998b; Takougang and Krieger 1998; Collectif Changer le Cameroun 1994). The other factor is that the Northern part of the Anglophone area is culturally part of the Cameroon Grassfields with its fairly distinct set of cultural characteristics, encompassing the Francophone Bamileke, yet there are many ways in which the Bamileke and the Anglophone groups are being distanced from each other. In the eyes of non-involved Cameroonians, one common insult to be hurled at these groups is to call them “Anglo-Bami”. Anglophones, together with many other Cameroonians, dislike and resent the Bamileke while the Francophone Bamileke do not see much of a commonality with Anglophones at all.

Francophones

“The Muslim North”

Another important cleavage in Cameroon is between the Muslim North and the Christian South. The Northern areas of Cameroon were over-run by the *Fulani* (pl. *Fulbe*) in the early part of the 19th century, as part of the Islamic jihad led by *Uthman dan Fodio* from Nigeria. In the general upheaval of those times the Fulbe managed to conquer the area and to establish semi-independent *lamidates* which owed allegiance to Yola, and ultimately the Sokoto Caliphate, both in present-day Nigeria (Azarya 1976, Fardon 1988, Mohammadou 1988). The autochthonous population of the area was either conquered and became incorporated into the *lamidates* as more or less slaves or escaped to mountainous areas and were thus able to keep their independence. During and even after the colonial period these peoples have been forced to abandon their strongholds and have been slowly incorporated into these *lamidates*, which more often than not meant their conversion to Islam. Thus colonial domination had the effect of extending the power of the Fulbe over groups that up until then had managed to remain independent (Bayart 1985:26). The non-converted, non-Fulbe population is referred to as Kirdi, which means pagan, clearly a stigmatizing label, which at the same time encompasses a wide variety of culturally distinct groups (Joseph 1977; Burnham 1972, 1994; Schultz 1984). Through the rise to power of Ahmadou Ahidjo, the first president of the country who was from the North, the region achieved great political significance in the first two decades after independence which also contributed to the process of fulbeization. Following the end of Ahidjo's rule the pressures for the Islamization of the Kirdi population have decreased (cf. Gausset 1999; Schilder 1993, 1994, 1997; Schultz 1984; van Santeen 1998). In addition, due to their

demographic weight (as mentioned above a little more than 40 percent of the population of Cameroon resides in the North) they are an important bloc of the Cameroonian political landscape. Throughout the French colonial period the North was ruled through indirect rule, as there was a well-developed hierarchy in place, headed by the Fulani aristocracy (Azarya 1978, Shimada 1984).⁵

Bamileke

Another important group is that of the Bamileke who occupy the Western Province of Cameroon and form a culturally contiguous group with the Anglophones of the Grassfields. Like many other ethnic groups in Africa the Bamileke have been constructed as an entity as a result of colonization (cf. Geschiere 1996 for a discussion of the constructed nature of the Bamileke as a group, also Hurault 1962; Tardits 1962, 1980; Warnier 1984). The term Bamileke unites a large number of groups who live in highly hierarchized societies. However, these are fairly independent units which do not constitute a centralized whole, all the more so as there are linguistic differences between them. It is also important to recall as I mentioned above that since the beginning of the colonial period the Bamileke have been migrating to other parts of the country, seeking to escape land shortages at home and to settle as cultivators and traders all over Cameroon. They are considered to be the most economically dynamic group in Cameroon, and are

⁵ Interestingly, in current Cameroonian parlance the Northerners are often dubbed Hausa (the dominant and culturally similar population of Northern Nigeria), which is a misnomer. Another noteworthy factor is that the flowing, embroidered robes of the Fulbe aristocracy are becoming one of the "national" costumes of Cameroon, in as much as people of all ethnic backgrounds, if they can afford them, are likely to wear them, especially on festive occasions. In fact, less richly embroidered versions, using less material, can be seen on poorer people as well, on ordinary occasions. Thus, these robes which used to be exclusive markers of Fulani/Northern/Muslim status, no longer can serve as such.

widely thought to be dominating the economy. This is resented by many and they are often constructed as the enemy within the ethno-political landscape of the nation. This has repercussions in football as well. With the economic crisis of the late 1980s and early 1990s Cameroonian football witnessed a remarkable rise in the number of Bamileke teams in the First Division, and as the Bamileke were being marginalized in the political domain, they began to derive increasing satisfaction from this prominence in the domain of football. They are especially locked into a contestative debate with the Beti of the Southern region (Center and South Provinces) (cf. Collectif Changer le Cameroun 1992; Geschiere 1996; Jua 1993).

“Beti”

The Beti as a group are of even more recent origin, consisting of ethnic groups which until recently were seen as separate entities (Bulu, Ewondo, Eton, Etoudi, etc.) and the term Beti was a linguistic term describing the interrelated languages of these various groups. Some of their representatives are among the autochthonous inhabitants of Yaoundé, the capital of Cameroon. Their emergence under the collective name Beti dates to the 1982 rise to power of Paul Biya, who is a Bulu. Before colonialism these societies of the southern forest region of Cameroon were small, autonomous, acephalous societies, with very little sense of commonality (Laburthe-Tolra, 1981, 1986). In recent years, the Biya regime has increasingly tried to put more and more administrative power into Beti hands (to counter what is seen as Bamileke economic dominance) and in the ethnic charges and countercharges that are now rife in Cameroon, both groups accuse each other of ruining the country.

The Bamileke see the Beti as lazy and using their closeness to power to enrich themselves at the expense of the country, while the Beti accuse the Bamileke of likewise enriching themselves and selfishly promoting their own interests. Beti also point out that there are many among them who have seen no benefit from the Biya regime (cf. Anonymous 1998; Collectif Changer le Cameroun 1992; Ondoa-Etoa 1994). The relationship of the two groups has become more and more bitterly antagonistic over the past couple of years since the beginning of multipartyism in Cameroon in the early 1990s, a trend that Geschiere (1996) following Lonsdale (1992) has characterized as "political tribalism."

The Duala and the Bassa

In addition to these groups, the Duala and the Bassa need to be mentioned. The coastal Duala, though numerically insignificant, (according to Joseph's estimate they numbered "a mere 45,000" in 1977 (1977:15), were the first to be in contact with Europeans. In fact it was they who concluded the first treaties with the German colonizers (and even earlier with the British) and for a while they controlled trade and relations with whites. As gatekeepers they both benefited from close contact with Europeans and suffered the first negative consequences of colonialism as well (cf. Austen 1983, Austen and Derrick 1999, Joseph 1977). The port city of Douala, where the Duala people are concentrated, has grown to be the economic capital of Cameroon and having attracted a large number of immigrants it is no longer dominated by the Duala numerically. Douala has been and is to this day the seat of popular political discontent and the town is regarded by many as the most politically radical of Cameroonian cities. This was the case

at least until the 1990s, when the Anglophone town of Bamenda (the provincial capital of the Northwest Province) became the epicenter of popular challenges to the government. However, it is characteristic of Douala that outside of Bamenda this city was one of the most radicalized sites of the civil disobedience movement that evolved at the time (cf. Takougang and Krieger 1998).

The Bassa (and the closely related Bakoko) people in the south-western area of the country are found along the Sanaga River Valley. Displaced earlier by the Duala from the coastal region, although they had a high level of education due to the activities of the American Presbyterian Mission, they suffered some of the worst ravages of colonialism. According to Joseph, they resisted unsuccessfully the German penetration and when the Germans began constructing the *Mittelkamerun* Railway through their area, the worst excesses of forced labor affected the local population. During the First World War the area was part of a war zone for two years. After the war when the French resumed the building of the railway, their experience again was among the harshest in the territory. Eventually their economic survival was threatened by the decreasing importance of their main product, palm oil and palm nuts. No wonder then that the Bassa became the main force of the post-World War II anti-colonial struggle and the leaders of the UPC rebellion.

The first phase of German colonialism, like the first phase of all colonial conquests, was bloody, especially as there was vigorous resistance in various parts of the territory. Among others the Bulu of the southern zone resisted, as did Douala Manga Bell but so did many of the Grassfields peoples too (cf. Joseph 1977:31-38, Lobé 1977, Mbono Samba Azan 1976). The overall assessment of the German colonial period is contradictory.

Besides the essentially violent nature of conquest, the Germans are also seen both by Cameroonian and foreign scholars, and Cameroonian public opinion, to have done quite a lot in a relatively short time. In terms of infrastructure they established plantations, built roads, schools, hospitals and churches, many of which still stand today. As Cameroonians had an opportunity to experience French as well as British colonialism following the Germans, there developed a kind of comparative colonial assessment according to which the Germans were better than the French. As Victor T. LeVine (1964:37) put it: "... for many Cameroonians, the Germans shone in the distorted light of retrospection; their administration seemed that much the better for being past, and hence that much more available for disparaging comparisons with the current regime." The regime LeVine refers to is French colonialism, and he is alluding to Cameroonian complaints about French rule. However, more than 30 years after LeVine wrote these words, in 1995, thirty-five years after the official end of French rule, I still heard many comparisons favoring the Germans over the French. One of my friends, a carpenter, remarked one day that if a German comes to Cameroon even for a year he will buy proper furniture, whereas a Frenchman may spend several years in the country and still only invest in (much cheaper) bamboo furniture. He then added, "you just have to look around, the Germans built everything while they were here, but what did the French build? Nothing!" His words are borne out by Joseph, who points out that until after the Second World War the French added very little to the already existing (German-built) infrastructure of Cameroon (1977:21).

The end of the German colonial period came with World War I, when Germany lost all its colonies, including Cameroon. During the war joint French and English forces

occupied Cameroon (cf. Elango 1985). Following the war, Cameroon became a League of Nations Mandated Territory and was divided into two parts. The smaller, Western portion was administered by Britain together with Nigeria, and the larger, Eastern portion came under the rule of France. The two territories were administered separately by the two colonial powers for almost 40 years. (The British divided the territory under their administration into Southern and Northern Cameroon and this is one of the reasons why many English-speaking Europeans refer to Cameroon to this day as “the Cameroons.” The other may be a reference to the division between French and British Cameroon). This division became official in 1922, and lasted until the end of World War II, when the two areas became United Nations Trusteeship Territories until Independence. This divergent colonial history has profoundly influenced Cameroonian sensibilities, and as mentioned above, some of the most important cleavages in contemporary Cameroonian society are the consequences of this history.

It has been argued (Kirk-Greene 1980) that in some ways colonial penetration was insignificant in the everyday experience of the vast majority of Africans. The Cameroonian case, however, demonstrates that apart from the larger, well-known changes in economic orientation and the power structure of African societies associated with colonialism, on the level of everyday practices, the different colonial cultures meant significant differences in lifestyles and attitudes. Thus for example in Cameroon the difference between English-speakers and French-speakers goes well beyond language use. In the everyday practices of people’s lives there are real and imagined differences between the two populations. The differences function as ethnic rather than purely linguistic markers, especially as far as the English-speakers are concerned. In daily practices this

ranges from a different educational system, through a different legal system, to such practices as eating a different kind of bread (square loaf vs. baguette).

Political philosophy is another area where the two colonial powers left their mark on Cameroon. Milton Krieger and Joseph Takougang argue (and they would be in agreement by and large with Mazrui and Tidy's (1984) discussion of the different kinds of consequences of British and French colonization) that some of the divide between Francophones and Anglophones comes from a different conception of the role or rather the nature of the state. That is to say, Francophones (in keeping with received French notions of centralization) prefer a much more centralized state, whereas Anglophones favor decentralization. To these very real differences we should add Cameroon's post-independence political history (discussed below) where the Anglophone minority has suffered a number of political setbacks, thus compounding their sense of separateness and difference. (There are political differences, as opposed to philosophical ones, as well, since clearly decentralization would also enable Anglophones to regain some of their lost autonomy vis-à-vis their Francophone compatriots).

We also have to realize, however, that apart from divisions, this history also helped to create a sense of national consciousness among Cameroonians. The "original" German Protectorate of Kamerun served as the basis for proto-nationalist and nationalist aspirations during the French era, providing not only a comparative perspective for Cameroonians, but also, a unit to which to aspire. As Joseph argues:

The thirty years of German rule in the Cameroons, 1884 to 1914, were of fundamental significance in the emergence of Cameroun -or *Kamerun*- nationalism. The very fact that the

Cameroons were once ruled by a people other than the French was a *prima facie* argument against the permanency of French rule. This notion took concrete form in the resuscitation of the German name *Kamerun* for 'Cameroons' during the years of the nationalist struggle for independence and reunification. (Joseph 1977:20)

Another point Joseph makes is that Cameroonians who escaped from the harshness of French rule often fled to British Cameroons. Joseph remarks that some of these "were later to constitute a core of activists demanding unification of the two Cameroons as a means of freeing the French sector from French rule" (Joseph 1977:29).

The post-war period saw a rise in nationalism, as elsewhere in Africa, which culminated in the UPC (*Union des Populations Camerounaises*) rebellion, led by Reuben Um Nyobe. Although the UPC grew out of trade unionism and had Marxist overtones, it was a genuinely nationalist movement, which pushed for independence and unification (or in Cameroonian parlance re-unification) with British Cameroons at the same time. Its banning and suppression in 1956 led to an armed guerilla war. Um Nyobe died under unclear circumstances in the *maquis* (underground) in 1958, most likely betrayed by one of his close associates. His body has never been recovered. Following his death, the struggle was continued mostly by the Bamileke wing of the UPC, which was first suppressed bloodily by the French and then, following Ahmadou Ahidjo's rise to power as Cameroon's first president, by the Ahidjo government.

The memory of the UPC rebellion and its bloody suppression has left indelible marks in Cameroonian popular memory and it could be argued that the trauma of those times has acted to prevent the appearance of further armed conflict in the country (cf. Bayart 1985). At the same time both Joseph and Bayart, as well as Mbembe (1986), have

argued that because of the derailing of the UPC rebellion, all subsequent Cameroonian governments have lacked legitimacy at least in the eyes of part of the population.

Mbembe in an especially insightful analysis of folklore relating to Um Nyobe among the Bassa has shown that, at least in the eyes of the Bassa, as long as the body of Um Nyobe has not been properly buried, there is no possibility of reconciliation.

This is an important issue as I will argue that in many ways, at least with regard to the performance of the national team, victories are contested between the government and the people, and the form the contestation takes can serve to question the legitimacy of the government. It is also significant because the legitimacy of the Cameroonian government has again come into question in the 1990s, following the emergence of multi-party politics. The 1992 presidential elections were won by the incumbent Paul Biya, due to what all outside observers and many Cameroonians have considered to be electoral fraud (cf. Jua 1993, Takougang 1996, Takougang and Krieger 1998).

After World War II the French allowed greater political autonomy in Cameroon, including the creation of a large number of political parties and trade unions.

Cameroonian delegates were elected to the French Assembly for the first time (although on the basis of a very limited franchise) and a Cameroonian Territorial Assembly was also established. Ahmadou Ahidjo, a northerner, but not of aristocratic background, rose to be the Prime Minister as a compromise candidate in 1958, and he was seen by many as an insignificant character, probably to be replaced soon. Ahidjo turned out to be an astute politician who managed to unify the country by creating, as Bayart (1985) calls it, a hegemonic alliance, neutralizing the opposition of both traditional rulers and appeasing

most of the radical elements. It was under his rule that the country became independent in 1960, and the following year, after the plebiscite held in the British Trust Territory of the former Kamerun, he presided over the reunification of Southern Cameroon (the Northern part having voted to remain in Nigeria) and Cameroun, creating a Federal Republic, thus fulfilling (and co-opting) one of the cardinal demands of the nationalist movement.

As Ahidjo consolidated his power, his rule became more and more autocratic, and the UPC movement, which by now had deteriorated into a desperate guerrilla war waged mostly on Bamileke territory, was bloodily suppressed. Ahidjo also created the *Union Camerounaise*, (later *Union Nationale Camerounaise*) which then ruled the country in a one-party system. All political dissent was clamped down upon, very often in the name of national unity. The connection between the two was such that Bayart views “national unity” as a guise for political oppression. Sport was pressed into service in the creation of this national unity (cf. Mokeba 1989; Nketcha 1990/1991).

While all Cameroonians agree that Ahidjo ruled with an iron-hand and that political oppression was ever present in the country during his rule, the propaganda and slogans of the time actually resonated among the population. Thus one of the stock phrases Cameroonians are apt to use, not surprisingly in connection with football, is “*l'impossible n'est pas camerounais*” (the impossible is not Cameroonian) which is attributed to Ahidjo. This defiant phrase which clearly serves to urge people to overcome difficulties at the same time treats Cameroon the country as an unquestionable unit, where the attitude of defiance applies to each and every person without regard to ethnic origin. Everybody is Cameroonian.

Another returning slogan is Ahidjo's insistence on "*l'autosuffisance alimentaire*" (food self-sufficiency) which again acts as a defining feature of Cameroonians' identity, indicating that they are capable of providing for their most basic needs through their own labor. In fact in recent years with the increasing economic crisis, and the political disillusionment in President Biya there is something of a nostalgia for Ahidjo's times, often expressed in quoting these slogans and expounding on their wisdom.

The Ahidjo regime's economic policies were rather astute and ensured that throughout his reign Cameroon counted among the most reliable African countries where the growth of the economy was at a steady pace of 6-7 percent. As Mbembe and Roitman explain, this fact contributed to a sense of Cameroonian self-definition according to which people had a clear vision of the future where their living standards were supposed to rise and there was a sense of movement forward. Thus part of the nostalgia for Ahidjo's regime is not only nostalgia for a sense of order which is characteristic of many truly oppressive regimes, but also for this (both real and potential) prosperity experienced during his times and for this sense of progression towards a better future.

One of the major events of Ahidjo's regime was the dismantling of the federal system which created a unitary republic. This took place in 1972, and to this day is seen by Anglophones as a betrayal as it significantly weakened their autonomy and continues to be a thorn in their side. Despite being a measure to "unify" the country, this has exacerbated the division between Anglophones and Francophones and created an abiding sense of alienation in Anglophones. The Anglophone complaints range from economic underdevelopment, through the language question to political exclusion. Many authors

reject one of the most common complaints of Anglophones against the Francophones, namely the economic underdevelopment and decline of the region, on the grounds that while underdevelopment of the region is undoubtedly true, the region is not alone in this (cf. Bayart 1985; Eyoh 1998b; Kofele-Kale 1986; Takougang and Krieger 1998). Kofele-Kale states "I only wish to signal the fact that this problem cannot be explained in isolation but can be better understood when viewed within the context of inequalities *among* and *within* the [then] six regions in the country; not in manichean terms as a distinction between a developed Francophone and an underdeveloped Anglophone Cameroon" (1986:65-67). His general point about Anglophone grievances is that by looking at the totality of the country, the grievances of Anglophones become much less unique. None the less especially after 1990, these grievances have become much more pronounced and gained a voice with the political liberalization that took place following the introduction of multi-party politics (cf. Eyoh 1998a, 1998b; Konings 1996; Nyamnjoh and Rowlands 1998; Takougang and Krieger 1998).

In a surprise move, quite unique in Africa, President Ahmadou Ahidjo announced his retirement from power in 1982. In 1975 Ahidjo had restored the position of Prime Minister, a post held by Paul Biya, a Bulu, from the South Province and as constitutionally foreseen it was he who stepped into Ahidjo's shoes.

There has been quite a lot of speculation about Ahidjo's motivations in stepping down, all the more so as he quickly seemed to have changed his mind. He is supposed to have influenced the hatching of two aborted coup attempts against Biya (Bayart 1989; LeVine 1985). The first of these significantly happened at the final of the Cameroon

Challenge Cup, in June 1983, and the second, a plot by Northern military officers, on April 6, 1984. These events, apart from an extensive clamp-down on Northern elements in the higher circles of power, seem to have substantially influenced Biya's attitudes, and may have been at the root of his growing tendency to surround himself with a circle of trusted fellow-Betis (albeit in the extended sense of the term).

Biya first had to stabilize his power and to mark himself as different from his predecessor. At first he seemed to be bent on bringing reform and liberalization to Cameroon, but his rule became increasingly more autocratic in turn. His initial promises have come mostly to nothing, although individual freedoms increased somewhat and such measures, as for example allowing multiple candidates in elections, were welcome. However, in the end he did not follow through with most of his early promises and it seemed to many that the actual measures taken by him were more dictated by a need to consolidate his power against Ahidjo supporters than meant to improve the lot of Cameroonians, let alone bring greater democracy to them. Takougang and Krieger (1998) for example cite the areas of freedom of expression and association where Biya did not change the repressive nature of the state. In their estimate Biya was only a reformer on a secondary political level, but jealously maintained his absolute hold on the inner circles of power. Meanwhile, Biya had re-formed the ruling party under a new name (from UNC/CNU to RDPC/CPDM *Rassemblement Democratique du Peuple Camerounais*/Cameroon People's Democratic Movement) and propagated new slogans. He claimed that the country had moved to a new level of national unity, from the slogan of "national unity" of the Ahidjo era, to that of "national integration."

The Ahidjo regime had played a careful game of ethnic balancing in most appointments, although even that system has had its critics. Thus for example, in post-facto analysis Ndiva Kofele-Kale (1986) criticizes Ahidjo's policies of patronage of certain members of certain ethnic groups as having led to the politicization of ethnicity. "The ethnic arithmetic formula for distributing political power was in reality a sophisticated patronage system through which ethnic groups were transformed into pressure groups with the responsibility of articulating, aggregating and resolving particularist interests and demands" (Kofele-Kale 1986:77). This notion is not that different from how Bayart views the question. (At the same time Kofele-Kale dismisses the idea that Ahidjo overly favored northerners in important positions, countering that northerners were favored in recruitment to the public sector and in higher education as a result of a policy of affirmative action which was meant to redress the backwardness of the North).

The Biya regime's ethnic policies have continued the trend of co-opting certain élites from each region of Cameroon, but his rule has been increasingly marked by the passing of real power into what is seen as Beti hands. As discussed above, the term Beti as an all-encompassing term for Southerners and the autochthonous inhabitants of Yaoundé dates from the rise to power of Paul Biya (Derrick 1992, Eyoh 1998b and c; Jua 1993; Krieger 1994 (607-8); LeVine 1986; Takougang 1993:95-97, *Le Messenger* July 6, 1998, Collectif Changer le Cameroun 1994). Although Biya managed to consolidate his power, it happened both at the expense of the ethnic balance maintained by his predecessor, despite Biya's rhetoric to the contrary, and of the enlightened liberalizing policies with which he heralded his presidency.

Meanwhile from about 1987, the economic prospects of Cameroon have deteriorated due to a combination of factors. According to Takougang and Krieger, in addition to a decline in oil revenue there was a fall in export crop prices which was made even worse by a decline in agricultural production due to drought. Capital flight coupled with corruption rounds off the picture. Under the Biya regime corruption has become much worse and this began practically at the outset. The government tried to introduce austerity measures, but to no avail, and in 1988 the Cameroonian government was forced to turn to the World Bank and the IMF. The implementation of an IMF Structural Adjustment Program, like elsewhere in the Third World, only made the lot of ordinary people even more difficult.

1990 saw the rise of multi-party politics in Cameroon. Contrary to what the Biya government claimed, the move for multi-partyism rose out of popular demand and resistance, and the government only served to rubber stamp what was already happening on the ground. This was in concert with demands for "democratization" elsewhere in Africa and fitted into the larger context of the end of the Cold War, where on the one hand the citizens (not just intellectuals) emboldened by the fall of the oppressive regimes of Eastern Europe and the release of Nelson Mandela began to make demands for greater democratization at home while at the same time Western powers began to pressure African governments for greater democratization (cf. Joseph 1999).

In Cameroon, the first signals of something new emerging came out of Bamenda, the capital of the Anglophone North-west Province, where the first (and it turned out main) opposition party, the Social Democratic Front (SDF), was formed in May 1990 by

John Fru Ndi. It is often claimed by his detractors that Fru Ndi was an insignificant bookseller prior to his rise to eminence. However, he had been the leader of the executive of PWD Bamenda, the most important Anglophone football team, which has maintained the most consistent (though not entirely steady) presence in the First Division of Cameroon's National Championship. The team carries the hopes and aspirations of most Anglophones (cf. Mokeba 1989:126-131, 225). Prominence in football always carries the possibility of the social capital thus gained later being converted into political capital, and Fru Ndi's case is rather suggestive in this respect.

At first the government tried to suppress the new party and in a bloody confrontation between government forces and the populace six people were killed. The formation of the SDF served as a catalyst and several new parties were formed, among them Bello Bouba Maïgari's NUDP (UNDP National Union for Democracy and Progress). Bello Bouba was Biya's first prime minister, but he was dismissed after his alleged participation in the 1983 coup attempt. Other parties followed, and eventually Biya had to legally institutionalize multiparty politics, which he did at the end of that year (Takougang and Krieger 1998: 102-110).

Following the legitimization of multi-partyism, a whole plethora of new parties came into being. In addition to the SDF which remained the most important of them, the UPC was resuscitated, only to be divided later on. Bello Bouba's UNDP was another force to reckon with. Predictably many of the new parties were created along ethnic lines, thus the UNDP was a party of Northerners. The proliferation of parties was such that within a few months there were at least two dozen, and by mid-1995 Takougang and

Krieger report the existence of 109 parties (1998:154ff). Takougang and Krieger characterize the emerging picture as follows:

Some [parties] were ephemeral or so localized and clearly opportunistic as to count for little beyond the registry paper, others resulted from the CPDM fishing the multiparty waters to create satellites and thus complicate politics to its own benefit, still others emerged from disputes the new parties could not contain. (1998:123)

Another significant event in the radicalization of the country was the demonstrations organized by university students in Yaoundé, the so called Parliament. Its members primarily criticized university life, which under the on-going economic crisis has deteriorated like everything else in Cameroon, but the students' popular discontent "threatened to support and join democratic openings in the city" (Takougang and Krieger 1998:124). When eventually troops went in and shot at student demonstrators several students died. Augustin Kontchou Koumegni, the Minister for Communication, announced on the public media that there were no dead (*Zéro Mort/None Dead*). The phrase *Zéro Mort* became the sobriquet for Kontchou, a Bamileke, who was the target of much scorn and dislike subsequently, and in general was considered to be a liar. These events helped the radicalization of the population all over the country.

Some of the opposition parties united in April 1991 in the National Coordination of Opposition Parties and Associations (NCOPA). During the summer of 1991, in the continuing wave of demands for democratization which swept most of Francophone Africa, NCOPA, similarly to opposition forces elsewhere, demanded the holding of a Sovereign National Conference, which would have brought together opposition parties and the ruling party to discuss the political future of Cameroon and air grievances in the

tradition of the African palaver (cf. Eboussi Boulaga 1993, Robinson 1994a and b). When Paul Biya declared the Sovereign National Conference groundless ("*sans objet*") and unnecessary, the opposition parties declared a national strike, the so-called "*villes mortes*" or "ghost towns." The idea was that no selling of goods, no economic activity was to take place, except two days a week. In Takougang and Krieger's characterization:

Spontaneous street demonstrations, market and other economic boycotts became trenchant, fully organized civil disobedience which for three to six months, depending on the locale, made massive rallies and other highly visible challenges to state authority Cameroon's dominant features. They spread from provincial capitals of North West, South West, West and Littoral Provinces, ... Their grievances were old and new, including traditions and grudges dating back to precolonial, colonial and *maquisard* times, and more recent language, ethnic, and other forms of marginalization. Rural people either joined actively or were drawn into the movement, some reluctantly by threats. "Villes mortes" held firm in all parts of these four provinces for at least ten weeks, longer but with some slippage in Douala, until Christmas in Bamenda and Bafoussam. (ibid: 127-128)

Though it never spread to the entire country, the movement largely paralyzed the economy, and had it attained its goal, the opposition would have won more than just the right to constitutional debate. *Villes mortes*, apart from being the most glorious example of the emergence of civil society in Cameroon, also served to divide the population. As noted by Takougang and Krieger above, in the strongholds of the opposition the strike was maintained by force at times. Elsewhere (in six other provinces) it did not take hold, or did so only sporadically, and served to reinforce already existing cleavages or to create new ones (cf. Jua 1993; Nyamnjoh and Rowlands 1998). After the fact it is easier to see the cleavages, but Takougang and Krieger's assessment of the 1991 situation is correct:

Even in this most hostile environment [of Beti and regime-dominated Yaoundé], ..., dissenting forces were in touch and mobilizing by 1991. They linked widely separated terrains, and began a process whereby lines of class, ethnicity, and religion presumptively dividing their leaders from leaders, followers from followers, and leaders from followers, were modified by a basic literacy and common experience in opposition politics. (1998:140)

The regime, however, did not remain inactive for long. Apart from repressive measures such as refusal to deal with the opposition and large-scale media misrepresentations of the opposition's goals, it managed to divide the opposition and appease the population. This was accomplished above all by scheduling legislative elections for February 16, 1992 and inviting the opposition for individual consultations with the Prime Minister. This eventually led to the Tripartite conference in October 1991, where "members of the government, leaders of opposition parties, and "notables" (most of these were CPDM partisans)" met (Takougang and Krieger 1998: 141). The conference led to the so-called Yaoundé Declaration, which was signed by the majority of the then legalized parties (40 out of 47), but not by the SDF, which was the most significant opposition party. In the eyes of many this fact de-legitimized the entire conference, but nonetheless the Yaoundé Declaration put an end to *villes mortes*, and life returned to "normal" in Cameroon. Obviously, this weakened the position of the opposition considerably, and although people do not necessarily like Biya any better for it, a certain kind of grudging admiration for him, for the amount of power he wields, sprung up in the minds of those members of the society, who were not necessarily for him, but who were not adamantly for the opposition. Those who are clearly for the opposition hate Biya with a vengeance. On New Year's Eve 1994, as President Biya's televised New Year speech

was reverberating on the streets of Yaoundé, one of the members of the loosely organized group of friends who gathered around my street-corner newsstand exclaimed with feeling that he wished Biya were dead. Somebody else answered with great solemnity that no, he did not wish that, he rather wished that Biya were put down from power but would have to continue living and suffer the indignities of not being able to make ends meet on a government salary.

The 1992 (October 11) presidential elections took place in this climate, and amidst widely suspected electoral fraud, Paul Biya won by a narrow margin against John Fru Ndi, the chairman of SDF, who ran as the representative of a coalition of opposition parties. The elections are widely referred to in Cameroon as the "stolen elections," a disparaging reference to electoral fraud (Jua 1993, Krieger 1994, Takougang and Krieger 1998). The above mentioned cleavages became more pronounced as a result of the elections. Jua gives a detailed account of Beti fears and threats on the local Ewondo-language radio during the electoral campaign, which used the language of "ethnic cleansing," both feared and threatened by the Beti (cf. Azeyeh 1994:58-59, who after outlining his multi-ethnic origins and multiple background explains that he had always thought of himself as Cameroonian, but since 1985-1992 you have to be from "somewhere"). Apart from this exacerbation of "political tribalism," the aftermath of the elections resulted in widespread disillusionment coupled with the continuing economic crisis, a seeming consolidation of the regime and a political stalemate. For the time being the regime's hold on power was tenuous at best, but on the surface Biya managed to retain his power and had the continued support of the French government, and thus of the IMF and World Bank.

Bitterness against him was rampant during my fieldwork (1994-1995).

When discussing the post-1992 period most authors agree that the Biya government began a slow process of recovery and re-establishment of its hold over the country. The 1994 devaluation of the CFA franc deepened the economic crisis, making the economic situation of a population which felt that it was already on its knees even worse. The local elections, due in 1993, had been postponed several times. They only took place in early 1996, and in Takougang and Krieger's (1998) opinion even though they reflected the power of incumbency, they also showed a similar split to the 1992 presidential elections. The success of the CPDM was limited to the Center, South and East Provinces "and to rural areas elsewhere with salaried chiefs or government ministers heading many CPDM lists" (1998:197). Despite the CPDM's ability to control (and rig) elections, mayoral elections in urban councils showed an even split between the CPDM and the SDF with some places going to the UNDP of Bello Bouba. However, the results of the elections were revoked administratively and government appointed delegates replaced the elected ones, amid some protest (cf. Takougang and Krieger *ibid.* 197-198). Takougang and Krieger comment: "The conduct and outcome of this balloting nicely demonstrated the government's edge in making use, substantively and tactically, of its control of the political agenda and timetable. With electoral politics still manageable in the short term, conventional machine and constituency politics, as since 1992, kept the CPDM formally intact" (1998:198). Added to this manipulation of elections was the neutralization of the opposition parties through government co-optation, internal squabbles leading to splits within the more important parties (UPC, SDF, UNDP) and a further proliferation of ever smaller parties of mostly local significance. In addition to this,

Nyamnjoh and Rowlands (1998) demonstrate that the Biya regime encourages another process, that of neutralizing political parties by encouraging the “politics of the belly” through an increasing role played by elite associations in rural areas. They also confirm that by 1997 the CPDM managed to become the only party of national significance in Cameroon.

Works dealing with politics in Cameroon and Africa only mention football fleetingly (with the exception of Mbembe 1986 and Ntonfo 1994 a and b) even though politics and football are intertwined in a multiplicity of ways (Bayart 1993:248, Fardon 1996:142, Fabian 1998: 137-138, Fisiy and Goheen 1998: 398). Apart from the question of the potential for the exploitation of the sport for political purposes and the political challenges it may present, which I will discuss in Chapter V, the Cameroonian state is at the interface of the local and the global practice of football. To begin with, the state physically structures football in Cameroon in as much as at different levels of competition it is the administrative units of Cameroon which determine what units are pitted against each other, thus concretizing and crystallizing both the local and the national, making these abstract categories real. Thus, the First Division championship encompasses the entire country. In order to accede to it, the champions of each of Cameroon’s ten provinces (Second Division) compete in the *interpoules* competition for the three places that become vacant as the last three of the First Division are relegated to the Second Division. The Third Division (*la ligue*) competition is carried out on the level of the lowest administrative division of the country the *département* or district. Winners of these

championships accede to the Second Division through the so-called *interligues* competition, which brings together all the *ligues* (départements or districts) of a province.

At the same time, this structuring role of the state is also present on the international level of the game where countries and continents are pitted against each other. Cameroonian football is a local manifestation of a global phenomenon, and it is only through the state that Cameroonian football can happen on the international level. Because the state provides the funds for the participation of the national team in international competitions, and because the state stands for Cameroon, international participation is unimaginable without it. The state is also in charge of setting sports policy for the country. The performances of the Indomitable Lions recreate and fill with meaning the category known as Cameroon, and while the state claims credit for victories these claims do not go unchallenged by the population either in the case of victory or of defeat. This intertwining of the state and football both on the international level and the national and local level, as well as the symbolic nature of the sport allows for polyvalent, sometimes competing, sometimes converging meanings to be attributed to the sport and thus give us glimpses of how Cameroonians see themselves in different contexts from the local to the global.

It is one of the clichés of sports sociology and journalism that belonging to FIFA (*Federation Internationale de Football Association*), the international governing body of football, is as much a mark of being a sovereign country as belonging to the United Nations; in fact FIFA has more members than does the UN (Duke and Crolley 1996:2, Sugden and Tomlinson 1998:9). Being accepted on an equal basis (all members have an equal vote) can be seen as a confirmation of the sovereignty of a country and as conferring

legitimacy on it. Thus, participation in the world of international football (as well as in other international bodies) is also constitutive of the entity known as Cameroon.

In fact the members of FIFA are not the countries but rather the football federations of the countries. The Cameroonian football federation, Fécafoot (*Fédération Camerounaise de Football*) was created on the eve of independence in early 1959. Soon upon independence, Fécafoot was accepted into FIFA (1962). Although FIFA acts as if it was only dealing with the national federations and not governments, in actuality, as I explained above, the Cameroonian state is deeply involved in the organization of football on the local level and with Cameroon's international participations, which would not be possible without it.

As a result, the sporting federations, although ideally independent bodies, in fact are under government control. Thus in many ways they could be harnessed to the interests of the government, all the more so as their employees are civil servants.

In 1994/95 the Fécafoot was directed by a 6-member Executive Bureau (and the Central Committee (30 elected members, representative of Cameroon's ten provinces according to a quota established by the National Congress) and 3 members named by the Minister for Youth and Sports, i.e. the government)⁶. The task of the Federation is to oversee all competitions in the country and to represent Cameroon in international competitions. In addition to being a member of FIFA, the Federation also belongs to CAF (*Confédération Africaine de Football*), which oversees continental competitions.

Although, in theory FIFA only deals with the Federation of a country, in the case of a

⁶ In 1996 the organs of the Federation were renamed, but by and large their functions and composition remained unchanged.

country such as Cameroon, where the state takes an active role in the sponsoring of the national team and where football is closely intertwined with politics,⁷ this separation of powers is somewhat illusory.

The other task of the Federation is to organize and oversee the orderly progression and daily running of football in Cameroon. This includes the granting and administering of licenses, establishing and coordinating the calendar of championships, designating officials for matches (referees, commissaires and delegates [délégué] de match), homologation of matches, establishing of sanctions, and collecting fees and fines. The employees of the Federation as opposed to its officers are civil servants and at the time of my fieldwork had not been paid for almost a year.

The Ministry of Youth and Sports is the body which sets overall state policy on sports. This organ of the government has in recent years been often locked into debate with the Fécafoot over which one of them had jurisdiction over the country's most important sport, football. This has led to several confrontations over the years between the two organizations. FIFA acts as a third party to these debates.

In the Spring of 1994, just a few months before the World Cup was to begin in the United States, the Federation held an extra-ordinary congress in Douala and deposed its state appointed president, Pascal Owona Baylon. Instead, Maha Daher, a Northerner, was elected, who incidentally was also one of the cadres of the Ministry of Youth and Sports, just like his predecessor. The government stepped in and wanted to put Owona back into his functions. The ensuing wrangle was eventually resolved by FIFA, in that according to

⁷ In 1999 a similar incident took place in Hungary, FIFA intervened when the government tried to dismiss the head of the Federation.

my informants, it threatened to not allow Cameroon to participate in the World Cup. FIFA's argument was that Maha Daher was elected democratically and in due form by the Federation, and FIFA would not accept any government interference from the state as the Federations are considered by FIFA to be independent bodies and it is only with the Federation that FIFA deals. As a result, the government was forced to bow to the demands of FIFA, and Maha Daher was installed. In the context of electoral fraud on the part of the government, FIFA's intervention was a welcome event in Cameroon. It was seen by many as an instance of outside forces enabling democracy to prevail. At the same time, however, the threat of banning Cameroon was also seen as an injustice; an Anglophone intellectual, otherwise opposed to the regime, expressed the opinion that it would be unfair to Cameroon to be excluded from the World Cup.

In 1995, the whole of Cameroonian football ground to a halt when the Association of First Division Clubs organized a strike to request a portion of the monies that were due to Cameroon from FIFA for the country's participation in the World Cup. These monies were the due of every country which participated in the World Cup, allocated in accordance with their length of participation, that is to say a country which went farther than the first round was allocated a larger sum, and the largest amount went to the winners. The Presidents demanded a percentage of this money for the clubs of the First and Second Division and made some other demands as well, threatening with a strike, that is to say not to resume the championship, if their demands were not met.⁸ The resulting

⁸ Their other demand concerned the gate-takings of the championship and the Cameroon Challenge Cup. The debate was over whether it should be 50 or 60 percent of the gate-takings that went to the teams. But actually it really concerned whether it was to be 50 % of the net or of the gross takings. Gate-takings are one of the few sources of income for

stalemate brought all competitions to a halt and the government stepped in to put a Caretaker Committee in the place of the Federation. Despite this decisive action, which had its own attendant problems with FIFA over the question of its legitimacy, the championship in which the team with which I worked the most closely participated was held up for two months, with disastrous consequences for the team. The struggles of the team and the vision of its owner-founder are the subject of the next chapter.

teams and naturally the teams of such large urban centers as Yaoundé or Douala are at an advantage because there is likely to be larger number of people interested in seeing a match in those towns than in some of the smaller provincial towns where even if the entire town turns out for the match the takings may not be that great, especially as ticket prices are lower in such places. The referees ideally are also paid from the gate-takings, and often the money that comes in is not enough even to pay them. Some of this is of course due to the fact that many people manage to enter the stadium without paying. Coaches for example are ex officio exempt from paying, but actually in keeping with the general paternalistic nature of relationships in Cameroon this exemption is treated as a favor, and coaches have to sweet-talk their way into the stadium. One coach I knew repeatedly asserted that he would not pay for his ticket as he had made so many sacrifices on behalf of football. No doubt a large number of other people without the same kind of justification also manage to escape the vigilance of the ticket takers. Thus it was not surprising that in 1997 I noticed a sign at the Yaoundé stadium exhorting the public to pay, saying: "Let's support our teams and buy our tickets".

Chapter III – The Daily Life of Football

Football and its images are ubiquitous in Cameroon: walking around on the streets of Yaoundé one sees young men and boys in faded football jerseys, a little boy of perhaps 7 in a faded yellow T-shirt, with a hand-written inscription “Thomas Nkono No. 1” (Thomas Nkono being one of the two great goalkeepers of Cameroon during the 80s); bars named *Bar des Sportifs*, *Sports Bar*, *Siflet d’or*, *Bar des amis sportifs*; the many taxi cabs which carry Roger Milla’s name (the acknowledged genius and most renowned player of Cameroonian football).

Lest we think that this ubiquity is only limited to the cities, although football is an urban phenomenon, Cameroonians, like other Africans, regularly go back and forth between town and village. In July 1997, on the way to a small village in the West Province, I saw a match being played and was told that this was a match played between “children” returning to the village for the school holidays from town.¹ In the village itself there is no electricity, and very few of the amenities of modern life are in evidence, however, in one of the houses that I had occasion to visit a faded 1982 calendar from a sports journal displayed the 1982 incarnation of the Indomitable Lions, and in another house next to a framed photograph and other personal memorabilia displayed on the wall, there was a photograph of Thomas Nkono from a sports journal, and an article about the Lions’ 1982 participation in the World Cup of Spain. I was to see the framed photograph

¹ These villages are rather remote as they are off the main road along a dirt road which carries one deeper into the interior and cars rarely travel the road as far as the village I was visiting. Those who wish to go there have to make the 25 km trip on foot.

again the next day displayed in the “*funérailles*” (reburial) of the “ancestress” of the house.

Walking around in Yaoundé one would also see football being played everywhere. Football people in Yaoundé complain frequently that there are not enough football pitches, and doubtless, in light of the demand they are right. Apart from the Ahmadou Ahidjo or Omnisports Stadium, which is also “the” national stadium since this is where international matches (as well as first division matches) are played, I have attended matches or training sessions at 12 other venues and my research assistant could enumerate 25, adding that doubtless there were others he forgot.

In addition, inside the most crowded neighborhoods where there is a little space, *ad hoc* teams will suddenly appear, especially during school holidays, and take over for a match, or a mini-championship, kicking the ball rain or shine, appreciating the joy of the game. On a little side street in a residential area I once saw a group of children (6 to 10 year-olds) playing with abandon, among them -to my horror- a little girl with an eight inch kitchen knife in her right hand; clearly she had abandoned her kitchen duties, just for a minute, to join in the melee. She held the knife down, behind her back so as to keep it “safe,” but the sight was hair-raising anyway.

People stop to watch all games. Neighborhood *inter-quartier* championships will gather their own crowds, and the organizers might even be able to collect some money from the spectators. Village championships in urban areas also have a built-in audience since members of the village who will come together as much to see each other as to see

the game. Spectators of these matches too may be asked a hundred francs² to watch the game. The social occasion nature of these village championships explains why there is an almost equal number of women among the spectators, which is never the case when official teams play.

But people will stop to see training sessions too, especially if a practice match is in progress. The Stade Annexe of the Omnisports stadium of Yaoundé is constructed along a main road and it is may be two to three meters below the road level. Any given morning or afternoon, when teams play friendly matches it is common to see people standing on the road looking down onto the dirt pitch watching the game intently. Quite often a car or two also stops, its passengers, captivated by the game, getting out to watch. In the Summer of 1995 when the Football Federation was suspended by the Ministry of Youth and Sports and a Caretaker Committee took over the direction of football in Cameroon, one of its first actions was to organize a match between the *anciens gloirs* [old stars] of Douala and Yaoundé. Without any special advertising *Stade Annexe 1* drew an enormous crowd, people standing three deep, (there are no stands as this is primarily a training ground, although third division official matches are held here too, as well as matches of the forever failing junior championship). Another row of people sat atop the fence enclosing the stadium. Looking at the scene from outside the stadium I spotted a pair of crutches propped up against the fence, its owner watching the game perched up high.

² At the time of my research in 1994-95, 1 US dollar equaled about 500 CFA francs, a loaf of French bread (baguette) cost 100 francs, and a taxi ride cost 125 francs. Taxis function as public transportation in Yaoundé. There used to be a bus company but it folded early in 1995.

The football pitches of Yaoundé as well as of the rest of Cameroon are by all accounts in a terrible state. None of them have turf, which means that either the players play in dust or glide uncontrollably in the mud and I have seen a team with better boots winning the already lost match, because the hitherto leading team's players had started gliding uncontrollably. Some football grounds tilt noticeably in one direction giving a definite advantage to the team trying to score downhill. (Luckily at half time the teams change sides!)

The Ahmadou Ahidjo Stadium is one of the two stadiums in the country to boast of natural turf; the other one is the Reunification Stadium of Douala. A third stadium where international matches can be, but are rarely played, has synthetic turf in Garoua, (the capital of Adamaoua Province, hometown of Cameroon's first president) but reportedly in 1994 the turf was in an advanced state of deterioration (cf. Ntonfo 1994a:137) and the same can be said of the turf of the stadiums of Yaoundé and Douala. In a highly ironic passage Ntonfo characterizes the state of Cameroonian stadiums as follows:

Under these conditions it is not surprising that a stadium with "real turf" sometimes becomes a handicap for a number of players used to playing-grounds that the unsuspecting observer could easily mistake for a wasteland, ill-kept cattle pens, grass-less pastures for goats or for an inaccessible swamp where two goals have been erected for the occasion.

The first thing to learn on this type of terrain consists of mastering the forever uncertain trajectories of the ball. And for players who had learnt and practice the craft in such an environment, who know that you have to go left to be sure to capture a ball that seems to be going right, that a hump or a puddle – a suddenly appearing new player quickly identified – can redirect it, for players who take advantage of such partners unrecognized by the CAF and

even less by FIFA as mud, dust and other wild grasses - for such players then, to find themselves on "real turf" can present a sizeable handicap.(1994a: 133)

Ntonfo is not exaggerating. On one occasion when two second division teams were playing a Cameroon Challenge Cup match at the Ahmadou Ahidjo Stadium the grass had not been cut and had grown so high that the coach of one of the teams instructed his players to forget about any tactical advice they had been given, because it was impossible to play according to any kind of plan in such high grass.

In fact for much of the time period of my research the Yaoundé stadium was suspended by FIFA for international matches because of a plethora of problems³. From February 15th 1995 until April 9, 1995 not even local matches could be played because of work undertaken to re-build the athletic tract in preparation for an athletic competition. The FIFA suspension meant that international matches were to take place in Douala instead of Yaoundé. As one journalist wryly put it, this was thanks to the fact that the FIFA inspection team did not think of going to Douala and inspecting the stadium there (Abed Nego Messang 1995, Nguini 1996:145 also expresses the same sentiment).

In Europe or Latin America clubs have their own stadium where they receive their opponents and where they can train. In Yaoundé all teams trained wherever they could and used the Omnisports Stadium as their receiving stadium and not even the supposedly fabulously rich second division team of Olympique Mvolyé owned its own terrain (cf. Vidacs 2001). Tonnerre, one of the oldest and most prestigious teams of the country only

³ The suspension began on October 30, 1993. Charles Nguini (1996:145) recalling the report of FIFA's representative which led to the suspension, says the following: "The worn out installations, the non-functional changing rooms and toilets, the tiny, insufficient

established its headquarters in 1999, but still does not have its own pitch (See also Abed Nego Messang in *Génération* No. 22, 18-24 January 1995).

This discussion of the state of the stadiums of Cameroon partly calls attention to the fact that the infrastructures of football, despite the sport's elevated status and the country's multiple successes in the international arena, essentially reflect the general breakdown characteristic of the country. People often contrast football's reputation with the realities they see (literally) on the ground. Cameroonian commentators measure themselves against a mental template of how things are elsewhere. These bitter and often ironic statements are not limited to journalists and intellectuals, but all football people and even the general public are keenly aware of the stark difference between the amenities at their disposal and what is the usual "norm." They know of this through watching TV which apart from broadcasting the matches of the World Cup, also broadcasts the more important European competitions, especially and significantly, the matches of the national team of France. Football people also avidly read the French football paper, *France Football*, and no doubt take some of their ideas from it. Most likely the contrast between people's everyday reality of football and that of what they saw on TV explains the frequent (self-deprecating?) laughter that accompanied the little carts that were employed during the 1994 World Cup to carry injured players off the playing field in the United States. By contrast, in Cameroon even a stretcher is a luxury and in most matches an injured player either hobbles off the field by himself, or is carried off by the two medical officers .

and non-functional press cabins. And he was even indulgent."

Football in Cameroon to this day is essentially amateur. This is not necessarily in the sense of adhering to the lofty ideals of Pierre de Coubertin, but is much more so due to local realities. The ideals of amateurism were based on aristocratic principles, and were predicated on sportsmen not needing an income from sport as they had independent means (cf. Bourdieu 1978).

Indeed in Cameroon the reverse is the case. Apart from amateurism being codified in the regulations of the Federation, it is in effect enforced by the lack of means on the part of clubs and those who organize teams. Recollections of former players indicate, on the one hand, that in the past many players were "taken care of" by the president of their club, either by being given a job, or by being able to live in the president's household, or having their rent or their meals paid for on a regular basis. It is of course difficult to tell how widespread these practices were, as some of these recollections may be rosier than the reality was. On the other hand, it is also said by these same former players that they played just for the fun of it without expecting anything in return. This is a reference to monetary recompense since in-kind rewards were clearly available, and the juxtaposition these former players are making also has to do with the fact that players these days expect or at least would like to have monetary recompense. When they do not get it, which is often the case, they grumble and when the moment is opportune go on strike.

To some extent the practice of in-kind recompense for football survives today, but it is becoming rarer and increasingly players have to fend for themselves. Some players are aware of this. A young goalkeeper explained to me that he had studied catering because he realized that in order to be able to pursue a football career he needed a profession which could provide him with a secure income. Others, however, are less

lucky and clear-sighted and they eke out an existence, often having to rely on the unreliable bounty of club presidents.

Even players of the first division do not have the luxury of a guaranteed income. The few teams which are sponsored, or owned by state or parastatal companies, constitute an exception. (Most notable among these are *Cotonsport de Garoua* and *Prévoyance de Yaoundé*, both of the first division but there are others which are in the second and even the third division). However, in these cases the fortunes of the team and its players are closely related to those of the company which assists them. For example, *Fogape* was such a team. It did indeed rise to the first division in 1994, but due to the failure of the enterprise⁴ was forced to forfeit the championship less than a year later. Other than these exceptions, teams are run on a more or less voluntary basis and team presidents have great difficulty meeting their financial obligations just in paying the requisite fees (such as affiliation, license fees, fines and the like). Equipment presents a special problem. uniforms, boots and even balls (both for training purposes and matches) are too expensive for most Cameroonian teams to afford, especially on a consistent basis. Consequently uniforms can be rented for a fee, from enterprising and wealthy individuals or from better off players, as can boots, or players are urged to fend for themselves in finding boots for a match. Match balls can be borrowed as a favor from a better off team or an individual.

As the leadership of teams consists of volunteers, who more often than not maintain the team out of their own pockets, the team's ability to pay players on a regular

⁴ The question was actually far more complicated. *Fogape's* forfeiture happened in 1995 amid the general chaos of the suspension of the Fécafoot and at least according to some commentators the actual events of the forfeiture were the result of corruption by some teams of the capital, who needed the resulting reshuffling of results in order to manage to

basis is often strained. Even when the supporters of a club organize a collection to help defray the costs of an away match or to assist with the payment of bonuses or equipment the task is difficult, and such attempts rarely, if ever, yield enough. This is not a lack of goodwill for the most part, although there are plenty of accusations of certain individuals enriching themselves at the expense of the players. However, there are quite a few stories of people becoming paupers as a result of having “loved football too much.” Rather, the ongoing economic crisis in Cameroon means that people’s resources are stretched to their limits in all aspects of life, thus any disposable income is required in many directions.

In addition to the economic crisis there is another factor influencing the nature of the remuneration of players and officials. Cameroonian life, and thus football too, is pervaded by patron-client relationships. Even professional relationships outside of football are filled with rituals of respect and an air of paternalism where a clear *quid pro quo* is hidden under expressions of respect and bounty. Although patron-client relationships are often seen as associated with ethnicity, in the case of football these ties often unite people from different ethnic groups. Thus, these patron-client relationships can also be regarded as an adaptation to modern, and especially urban situations, where they increase the power of the patrons and provide –at least in theory– a modicum of security for clients, often across ethnic lines (cf. Barnes 1986, Wolf 1966).

Accordingly, coaches refer to their players as their children, players to coaches as their fathers, a newer team to a better-established team as their big brothers, etc. But these relationships go beyond rhetoric and mean among other things that players and coaches are not paid on a regular, contractual basis. Most players do not have a fixed

stay in the First Division. (Cf. Nguini. 1996:99-103).

income from playing. Some players are paid “a signature bonus” for signing with the club, but afterwards they too find that the generosity of the club subsequently dries up and their payments become just as haphazard as of the rest. At minimum players need to be given transportation (taxi) money. They usually get this, as otherwise they would not be able to go to training sessions. In principle players are always promised a bonus for matches, but whether they get it or not depends on the possibilities of the moment: it may be late or never forthcoming. Very rarely do they get money for training (and if they do get it, it is referred to as a bonus rather than as pay). When they actually get paid the payment appears not as a due but as the bounty of the giver. Commenting on this state of affairs Ntonfo (1994:77) poses the rhetorical question of whether Cameroonian football players receive alms or a salary? The same is true of coaches. They too only get paid from time to time as the pocket (and/or whim) of the President allows it. This kind of situation means that there is nothing either a player or a coach can expect as his dues. Everything is at the discretion of the President or one of his associates (who is almost invariably accused of pocketing some of the money).

The paternalistic relationships lead to ambiguities. Since dues are not fixed, players and coaches can never be sure of what form and magnitude their recompense will take and more importantly when it will materialize. Another source of ambiguity in these relationships comes from the fact that people go back and forth, rather skillfully between acting in the more contractual and the more paternalistic mode. My friends often complained bitterly about these practices, often expressing a very clear preference, at least to me, about their wish for things to be more businesslike. For example, one of my friends, a highly qualified coach, told me that he was constantly being asked to train

various teams, but he kept refusing because “it is not right” (“*c’est pas normal*”) that they should expect him to work for nothing. However, at the same time these same people at other times would act in the same paternalistic mode that in other contexts they disapprove of.

My most important informant, the coach and owner of the team I worked with most closely, told me that he started to play football out of disappointment when he –the oldest boy in his family, orphaned when he was about twelve, and obliged to stop school–, had saved money for his younger brother’s education and the latter had refused to continue with his schooling. Out of frustration, my friend went and bought a pair of Puma football shoes –he recalled the brand-name almost thirty years after the event– and started to play football seriously. He later became a policeman, finishing his training the first in his class, and yet –as he put it– they “put me to sell beer.” He was given no real responsibilities or possibilities of advancement, and as a consequence he decided to devote all his energies and intelligence to football. He performed the requirements of his job in a perfunctory manner, not looking for advancement, just doing enough not to lose his job, not to lose his pension and not to be placed outside Yaoundé, as all his connections in football were there. He was so well-known for his interest in football that when needed his immediate superior came to look for him at the stadium where he was training his team during working hours.

He had a long career in football, first as a player, then as a player-trainer and finally as a coach (a common trajectory of coaches). Among his greatest accomplishments was raising a team from the Third Division to the First in four seasons, a remarkable achievement anywhere in the world.

Most teams have an official leadership consisting of, at a minimum, a president, preferably also a vice-president, general secretary, treasurer, vice treasurer, etc. These people often try to impose their wishes regarding the selection of players. This can be for a variety of reasons—one of the most common allegations made is that it is done because of “tribalism”—but as everyone considers himself an expert in football matters, there is also plenty of room for genuine disagreement.

One measure, in the eyes of other coaches, of the greatness of a coach is the extent to which he can withstand such pressures. I heard the story of the very talented coach of a “company” team repeated with great admiration. The president of the team was a high-ranking official of the company who, incidentally, also had quite a lot of power in the Federation. Apparently, when he tried to impose his choice of a player on the coach, the latter ordered him out of the stadium saying that “Mr. President, if you want me to take your position in the company I will do so and you can be coach, but as long as I am the coach you cannot tell me what to do and you should leave the pitch.” This is shocking behavior in Cameroon where respect for superiors almost always makes such open insubordination impossible. Most coaches, however, do not have the confidence and freedom to make such reckless statements. Very often they either put up with the suggestions of the President (or other influential members) or if they find the situation truly untenable resign, or because of the tensions involved, are dismissed, or the following year choose to train another team in the hope of finding a less interfering president. In private conversations among coaches, this interference in their work is one of the most commonly cited problems.

Growing dissatisfied with being at the mercy of presidents, in 1994 the coach decided to found his own team. His idea was to build a team unlike any other in Cameroon. His motivations, like most other people's motivations, were multiple and complex. He was hoping to make the team a "*centre de formation*" where he was to prospect for players, hone their skills and raise them to a level at which he could transfer them to "Europe" (or failing that to local higher division teams) thereby ensuring his retirement, which despite being a policeman seemed to him less than assured. In fact most people in the football circles of Yaoundé harbored similar dreams, as news of the transfer fees of players in Europe reach Cameroon and as there is an evident demand for African players in Europe and also with the growing economic crisis in Cameroon, both players and coaches see "Europe" as the solution to their problems. But there was more to the coach's vision than becoming rich. Unlike the presidents he accused of tribalism, he had a vision that he would take players from no matter what tribe⁵, based solely on talent and would show "the world" that he could make a better team with players who had been rejected by others on account of their ethnic origin. This was what prompted his decision not to have a place-name attached to the name of the team. This was most unusual as almost all teams are identified by both a name and a place-name (*Canon de Yaoundé*, *Cotonsport de Garoua*, *Gruncam de Mindourou*, *Panthère de Bangante*, *Union de Douala*, etc.) and in fact officials and football people in general often assumed that there was a place-name to be added. The coach always answered with evident satisfaction that no, that was not the case!

⁵ I use the term tribe in the place of ethnic group because that is the word (*tribu*) Cameroonians use. Cf. Ekeh 1990 on the use of the term tribe and tribalism in

The other part of his vision was a strong belief that the sport was to generate goodwill and understanding among people. In his conception the companionship and friendship generated by the sport were among its most important attributes. He mourned the fact that he did not have the resources to invite coaches and players of other teams for a drink or a meal after a match because to him it was part of what the game was about.

In fact, such things do happen. He had great respect for one of his colleagues despite the other man training a rival team, because the two of them could sit down after a match their teams played against each other and have a dispassionate discussion of what had taken place and the relative merits of their respective players regardless of whose team had won.

I began working with the team at the beginning of the championship in February 1995. I was closely involved with its work, attending practically all training sessions, test matches and championship and cup matches it took part in. My participation went so far as to be cooking for the players before matches partly because many of the players had an inadequate diet, but at least as important was to create a sense of community among them. Better endowed teams regularly spend the night before a match together sequestered in a hotel or at the president's house and eat together before a match, though not all Second Division teams can afford this, and there are even some First Division teams for which this becomes a hardship too.

The coach's ambition was to reach the Second Division, because it would have given him more exposure. He also hoped to attract more "members" who would financially support his endeavor, and it would also have enabled him to have a greater

contemporary Africa.

choice in the players he recruited, as many players refuse the Third Division, as being beneath their dignity.

The Third Division or league championship in Yaoundé is a highly competitive one and there are enough teams (16) that it takes place in two pools. The first two in each sub-pool meet in a semifinal where the first of pool A plays against the second in pool B, and vice versa (*semi-finale croisée*). The winners of the two matches meet to decide – in the so called *les barrages* – who is first and second, while the two losers play for the third and fourth place. It is only the first in the championship who gets to play in the *interligues* competition to decide which team will accede to the Second Division.

In the following I will try to give a sense of the difficulties faced by teams through the example of the team I worked with the most closely. While on the one hand what happened to the team exemplifies what Mbembe has to say about zombification, in that despite all the efforts of the team's owner-coach, despite his deployment of all his resources, all his knowledge of the ins and outs of the world of football, his marshalling all his connections, ultimately the effort was unsuccessful. However, this feverish activity is fuelled by a vision, a vision of football as a world apart, where what is impossible elsewhere in Cameroon, is at least imaginable, and it is this opening of the imaginable, or at least its illusion, is what drives people forward. It is also a vision of a better world, of clear-cut results, of unequivocal achievement, of a certain kind of meritocracy. This is the ethos aspect of football. The worldview aspect, that which reflects reality, is what makes it impossible to achieve the ideal, but the ideal seems to escape all the trials and tribulations unscathed. I will argue at the end of the chapter that this illusion is maintained to a great extent because it represents order, and holds out the hope that it is possible to

create order in the disorder, which is how people experience life in Cameroon.

Some of the practices described here are strictly speaking illegal, notwithstanding the fact that to my knowledge everyone engages in them. They are an illustration of what Mbembe has talked about, and Mbembe and Roitman spell out quite dramatically about the necessity to circumvent things – to work around the system. Certainly, there is no secret about this. However, as I write this I am wondering if I am not betraying the trust of the people I worked with in describing the details of some of the maneuvers they are forced into. Although, on more than one occasion I was enjoined to tell the world “how we suffer in Cameroon” I am not sure that they meant for me to tell “all.” In any case, I am not telling all, but even as I try to pick my words carefully, I wonder if by trying to convey some of the desperation that goes into football I am not fixing it somehow and making it stick. The point of what I am trying to do is to convey that football because of the possibilities it holds out not just for individual advancement, but as a metaphorical statement about a better world where order prevails, where the Cameroonian worldview (reality) is contradicted and has its redemptive qualities and this is what gives meaning to the lives of the people involved in it.

The team was beset by all the problems characteristic of Cameroonian football (and of life in Cameroon). The expenses of affiliation, licenses, fines were straining the limits of the coach’s budget (he had taken out a personal loan against his salary to meet the expenses). Often he could not afford to pay taxi money to the players and although he made promises of bonuses for matches gained, often he could meet these obligations only long after they were due. There was a period when the team only had one training ball, making meaningful training practically impossible. (These are plastic balls, since

practically nobody can afford proper leather balls for training purposes. This of course means that when playing an official match adjustments need to be made to control the heavier weight and different bounce of the leather ball). For the purposes of matches the leather ball had to be borrowed.⁶ The other promise the coach made was of buying the players proper football boots if they attained the *interligues*, but as time went on it was becoming clearer and clearer that this obligation too would be impossible for him to meet.

As the championship was progressing we kept losing players for a variety of reasons (injury, ill-health, inability to afford going to training sessions if the coach could not pay, finding a job, parents forbidding their child to play, loss of enthusiasm because of not being selected for a match or succession of matches). The coach countered these problems as best he could. One way he did it was by recruiting new players, sometimes to posts where he already had a player, creating competition among the players, trying to flatter and cajole players into staying or coming back, paying bonuses when he could afford them and calling upon the players' sense of honor and pride when not, trying to build a sense of community among players, but mostly by promises that if the team managed to make it to the Second Division players would be rewarded by the chance of being discovered and recruited to perhaps the first division or the national team or even to Europe. The continuing recruitment of new players was a strain on the coach's resources.

Besides paying for the license itself, there are additional expenses, such as the photograph for the license, which if a player is wanted badly enough has to be paid by the president or coach. According to the regulations, a medical examination also has to be

⁶ Every team is supposed to bring its own ball to an official match and the referees decide whose ball will be used in the match. Not bringing a ball to the match results in a fine.

made. This often (even if illegally) only means the signature of a qualified medical practitioner, nonetheless (or perhaps exactly because of the perfunctory nature of the transaction) it requires money. If a license is badly needed for a match there are ways of pre-dating it (with the complicity of a Fécafoot official) to circumvent the regulation of the federation which requires that only players who have had a license for at least two weeks can be fielded in a match, but naturally this kind of a transaction is also costly. It is also possible to play without a license in hand, if the process of acquiring it has already been put into place, but in this case the club has to pay a fee –an official one this time– and show other proof of the identity of the player.

Added to these more or less direct expenses there were also the more incidental expenses of seeking out a player, going perhaps several times to his house to find him (there are few people with telephones in Yaoundé), buying a soft drink or a meal for the player to better persuade him, etc. These expenses may seem trivial to the Western reader but in Cameroon they constitute an enormous strain. In addition, arranging for such unforeseen necessities takes time, energy and thinking. It also calls upon all the financial and personal resources of the person. To carry off such irregular if expeditious maneuvers one has to know the rules inside out (in order to bend them and get away with it) and also needs to have the personal contacts. The coach once told me that his wealth was in his human relationships (*relations humaines*).

The team arrived at the mid-way point of the championship in third place in its pool; clearly more of an effort was needed to reach the *interligues*. The coach recruited more players, we were near the cut-off point for the number of players allowed in a third division team. The break that was supposed to last a week between the two phases of the

championship was being extended continuously. This was due to the strike instigated by the Association of Presidents of First Division Clubs and then continued when in response, the government suspended the Fécafoot and put a Caretaker Committee in its stead to redress the problems of football in Cameroon. The prolonged break was both good and bad news for our team.

At first it seemed to be to our advantage, because after all the work of recruiting and fine-tuning the team the coach could start working with the players on a regular basis, as those who remained seemed to be there to stay. However, it was bad news too because it meant that special efforts were needed to continue maintaining the team's form, more taxi money, more occasional extra expense. Nonetheless, an intense period of training and molding together the team began, and things began to come together and the team started to play as a team, attracting more and more attention as time went on. They were winning all their friendly matches and as the team "turned" better, the players began to take pride in their game. The recruitment of several players to the same post paid off as players were vying to be selected for the team.

As the scandal at the Federation unfolded and led to a stalemate, the Third Division championship could not resume and our team began to feel the strain. Maintaining form and motivation while there are no matches with real stakes proved to be difficult, especially as the coach's resources began to dry up. Meanwhile most of the other teams abandoned training because they could not shoulder the costs, so there were fewer sparring partners left for us. In addition, the school holidays began which meant that a number of our players were being urged by their families to leave for the country, to go to their "village," where often they were also expected to play in local –unofficial–

championships. An additional source of drainage on our players was that with the school holidays the *inter-quartier* championship also began all over Yaoundé and many of our players could not resist the temptation of both making some money (as such teams, which have local sponsorship do pay) and impressing people in their neighborhoods. It was during this period of interminable waiting that one afternoon the coach, who tended to be rather apolitical suddenly burst out desperately saying that “if the President [of the Republic] does not do something soon about the situation I will become an *opposant*!” (this is the most common way to refer to people in opposition to the political regime).

As the championship resumed about six weeks after the appointment of the Caretaker Committee the team was playing exceedingly well and the habitués of the Omnisports area began to take notice of it. It also received reinforcement in a rather unusual way.

A young coach, an acquaintance of the coach, had built a team of children over several years. The problem of this coach was that his players were getting to be of the age and skills where they could easily be recruited by other teams unless his team were officially affiliated with a regular team participating in a Federation-organized team. In other words they could be dispersed. He wanted to keep the team together so that the players could continue developing and this was also the only way he could hope to reap some financial benefit from the transfers and recoup some of the energy and financial resources he has expended on the players. If a player has a license with an official team he

cannot be transferred to another team without the consent of his own team, and the consent usually has a price.⁷

Juniors are players under the age of 17 and by regulations of the Fécafoot all teams from the third division up are supposed to have a junior team in order to ensure the future (*la relève*). The junior teams of all divisions play a single junior championship. In practice, the junior championship never seems to come to completion. It usually is launched but is disorganized, teams forfeit their matches, especially because they have to go to all corners of the province, and even the better endowed teams cannot afford the

⁷Here I am talking about transfer fees owed for players by bigger and better teams to smaller teams. Transfer fees are owed in such cases but it is often very difficult to actually receive them, as once the transfer had been made it depends on the goodwill of the player's new team whether they pay or not. Obviously the one time the president of a team can be sure of receiving the transfer fee is prior to signing, but as is often the case in Cameroon, promises are made and not kept and there is very little recourse once there is a *fait accompli*. Why one would not ask for the money prior to signing the transfer form is an interesting question, but part of the give-and-take associated with sports and the relationships between the protagonists. Partly, sportsmen are supposed to trust each other, so when one party is promising it is unseemly to demand the bottom line, and partly there is a power imbalance between a well-established first division team and an "upstart" third division team. Thus even without the desired payment forthcoming when it should there are certain perceived benefits to allowing the transfer of a player to go ahead. On the one hand, there is reflected glory in having one's discovery (a talented player) go to a highly respected team, it adds to the "resume" of either a coach or a president to have had the good eye to spot a player, to have nurtured him, to have polished his talent. A lot of the respect a coach, or even a president, expects is due to this factor, and recounting the list of these players is part of the rituals of a coach's existence. It is also a source of disappointment, as one is bound to have claim on more players than others will remember. On the other hand, not getting the money on time (or ever) constitutes a certain kind of capital, an outstanding debt where the coach or president can in theory at least expect some kind of a return favor some time in the future. This generalized reciprocity is under threat these days. It is as if there were two sets of values at play one where generalized reciprocity is paramount, and another one where the bottom line is, people seem to be playing a double game, where sometimes they draw on the one and sometimes on the other. Strangely enough this is not just a battle between "traditional" and "modern" worldviews, though that seems to be part of it, but the ideological construction of sports

extra expense and therefore usually a few weeks after its beginning the junior championship flounders and is abandoned. The main use of having a junior team thus becomes to supplement the number of players a team can count among its effective line-up, because whilst no senior can play on a junior team, juniors can be fielded on the senior team.

As the two coaches agreed in many of their principles about coaching and football they struck a deal that the youngsters would become our juniors, and become affiliated at the Fécafoot as such. This solved the problems of both coaches, the one could keep his team together, the other could at least maintain his team for the remainder of the season as it was becoming obvious that we continued losing our players. Even though the championship resumed by this time and the team was winning most of its matches we needed the reinforcement because we had lost several key players.

One of the greatest blows was the loss of our young striker who had attracted everybody's attention during the first half of the season by his ability to score at least one goal in every match. His disappearance had many causes: his parents were adamantly opposed to his playing, he lived far away and the expense of his transportation to training sessions and matches weighed heavily on the budget of the team, causing tension among the rest of the players who received less money than he did. As he was a remarkable player, apparently he was being wooed from a variety of sides to leave the team to go play elsewhere where he would be better remunerated. He presented these offers to the coaches of the team in an effort to get more support from us. As these somewhat veiled

with its notions of fair play and brotherhood of all sportsmen also encourages the magnanimity.

demands were not met (mostly because of lack of resources), he eventually stopped coming altogether. We later heard a rumor that he had gone to play for one of the teams in the countryside. (While obviously it is not legal to play with an existing license for another team, it can be done quite easily, as unless someone who knows the player discovers it and makes a formal complaint, the deception is unlikely to be discovered).

Nonetheless, in the end –with the help of the newly acquired juniors– we ended the championship second in our pool, thus facing the more difficult task of playing against the first placed team of the other pool. This was a team well-known to us, as they trained on the same training ground as we did, and the two teams often played against each other as sparring partners.

Lately our team had won all its matches. Nonetheless the team prepared anxiously as it was the crucial match to decide whether at the *barrages* we would play for the first place, and thus have a chance to go to the *interligues* or for the third or fourth place which would put an end to the coach's dream of attaining the Second Division that year and would hamper the aspirations of the players. We lost the match. The disappointment was enormous and was followed by soul-searching and recriminations and self-recriminations. The players were of the opinion that the guardian sold the match, to which the coach's reply was simply that he would not honor him by such a supposition, he was merely incompetent. In fact, our captain reported to us that he had been approached in his neighborhood by representatives of the other team.

What weighed heavily on the coach's mind was that he had used his connections in the inner circles of Fécafoot to have a certain referee, whom he considered to be

referee of the match. As far as I know the coach did not have any direct dealings with the referee in question. However, the referee turned out not to favor our team at all, if anything he seemed to be favoring the other team. In any case, losing the match was a severe blow to all the people involved with the team. I'll never forget the bitterness, the sense of dejection, the feeling of hopelessness and despair that we all felt, and discussed masochistically for hours after the match in a bar.

It was after this match that the players began to disappear in even larger numbers. This was in fact an unofficial strike, as it was driven home to me by friends who were following the team's progress from a distance, asking me questions about what was happening, and nodding knowingly that yes, the players are disappearing. Part of the reason was the unkept promises of football boots, part of it was that the manipulations of the coach in terms of creating competition were backfiring in that he began to call back some players for the semifinal that we were to play because he considered them to have better natural talent than some of the players who were regularly present. Naturally, this created tension among the players, and no doubt contributed to the unofficial strike. They stopped coming to training sessions and it was clear that if it weren't for the juniors we would have little hope of even being able to present a team at the remaining match to decide whether we were to be third or fourth. These things are a matter of honor in the life of a coach. In the end, we did present a team, and won 4:0, a bittersweet victory under the circumstances.

The coach tried again the following year. Although the team was leading in its sub-pool a heavy penalty, involving the deduction of 6 points, was imposed on them because supposedly the captain did not have his license renewed. In light of the coach's

minute knowledge of even the finest points of the Fécafoot's regulations, this charge is so unlikely as to be absurd, but of course I was no longer there and only have the coach's report. Be that as it may, the coach and the club once again lost the opportunity to try to rise to the Second Division...

The events described above could easily be seen to fit into Mbeme and Roitman's analysis of the realities of life in Cameroon. The poverty, the economic crisis, and the "new forms of rationality" are reflected in football, as are the pressures of tribalism. Both minor and major forms of corruption not only reflect the larger reality, they also reproduce it, and thus reinforce it. Put somewhat differently, the breakdown of infrastructure could easily be one more page in their description of physical breakdown in Cameroon. The scandal at the Fécafoot could easily be seen as an example of Mbembe's zombification. The lack of proper equipment is just another instance of the economic crisis forcing Cameroonians to live under desperate circumstances. The various irregular acts the coach engaged in to make his dream come true, another example of the alternative modes of action people resort to in order to circumvent the impossible situations in which they find themselves. And the final futility of this feverish activity if nothing else is ironic. Most of all it begs the question of why people persist in the activity and brings into relief what Mbembe and Roitman have to say about the limitations of efficacious action.

At the same time, however, the notion that football is part of a "better, more equitable world" makes it very attractive to most of its practitioners and fans. The coach once told me that he loved football because "at least in football you know what the results were, no matter what happens afterwards." The "no matter what happens afterwards" is a reference to the fact that very often the result of matches, and consequently the standing

of teams in the various championships, change after the fact. Usually this is due to some supposed or real infraction on the part of a team – the actual ins and outs of these wrangles are not worth repeating here. Obviously the team from which the Federation deducts the points always claims to be unjustly penalized, and it is hard to escape the inference that there is a certain amount of self-justification going on. However, there are enough instances of the infractions being imaginary, thinly veiled (by legalistic language) but successful attempts to influence by external forces the results achieved on the football pitch to convince me that at least some of the complaints are true.⁸ What does the coach's statement mean, why is it an affirmation of football?

The coach frames what happens on the football pitch as being separate from what happens outside it, and basically claims that the result on the football pitch is more "real" than what happens in the non-football world. This is where truth is, the result was 3-2, we were first in the championship, what happened outside of the match is unreal and untrue, and, from this point of view, irrelevant. Naturally, it is very far from being irrelevant, but some of football's attraction comes from this suspension of reality, or from what could be termed as an alternative reality, where justice prevails, results are clear, either you win or you lose, or you draw, but there are eyewitnesses who saw the result. This is in stark contrast to how the changing of the results comes about, in the offices of the Federation, in the shadowy bowels of Yaoundé's Omnisports stadium. (Shadowy, not just as an

⁸ This is not uncommon in Cameroon, after all it is reported by Transparency International to be the most corrupt country in the world, although it is somewhat doubtful how these results are compiled. But it is also enough to study social realities in Cameroon to know that there are constant and recurring charges of irregularities among other things around the baccalaureate, as well as of course, the alleged electoral fraud, that has dogged the Biya government in the past couple of years.

atmospheric expression but also because for most of the duration of my fieldwork, there was no electricity at the stadium and in the offices, for reasons of non-payment of the Federation's outstanding electricity bills).

The idea that everything has a double, that things are not what they seem, is also borne out by the everyday life of football in Cameroon, from the balls which are not "real" footballs to the boots which are molded plastic or else borrowed or rented, but in any case secondhand, as are match balls and uniforms presented at matches. One could see a double, a shadow world of football, where everything seems to unfold at least for the duration of a match, as if it were real. At the same time of course everybody knows that they are not.

I was once shown by one of the officials of a championship a large envelope full of IOUs. These were the IOUs of the teams that could not afford to pay the affiliation fees for the championship. As some teams did pay and others did not, there was a stalemate because the championship could not begin until all the affiliations were paid. The IOUs were the solution, they represented payment (even if they were not really payment). They allowed the championship to begin, even if the chances of actual payment were slight. (People actually do pay if they have the means, but often they don't).

On another occasion the leadership of the 2-0 I belonged to was discussing the team's budget and the equipment needed. I was surprised by the grandiosity of the budget – members had difficulty keeping up with their membership fees as it was, and in fact there were several members who owed or whose dues had been absorbed by some of their better-off fellows. Choosing, even if mentally, the most expensive kind of ball, the best possible equipment, as if money was no object seemed unrealistic to me. When I

intervened that these things could be obtained for less, cheaper solutions were also possible, my interjection was completely ignored. I knew that actually none of these pieces of equipment were going to be obtained, the team was going to continue playing with the same set of fading jerseys, that it was impossible to obtain two brand new sets.

Thinking more about it, the idealized budget, the IOUs, the attempt at proper equipment on the pitch take on a different light. On the one hand, clearly, the “pretense” is necessary to keep up appearances, the 2-0 considered itself to be the most élite 2-0 of Yaoundé. In disagreements among members frequent references were made to the “fact” that other 2-0s look up to us, and therefore we should live up to the expectations, not quarrel, not arrive late, not engage in un-sportsmanlike conduct. Such a “grand” 2-0, “naturally”, had to have the best equipment. Likewise, giving the IOUs would disguise the fact that the clubs in question did not have the money to pay the affiliation fees, and also make the championship possible, having the right equipment on the pitch would create the impression of a team able to afford the equipment, while at the same time also fulfilling the necessary requirements of the Federation. There is, however, more going on. The pretense is necessary not just to keep up appearances, to hide poverty, but also by insisting on the proper form of things, a certain order, or the possibility of order, is preserved and projected. This is a source of hope, this order represents “normalcy” in a world where “things are not normal,” where everything is in disorder. Football is an ideal vehicle for the expression of such order, its rules and regulations, its rituals, the need to fill in forms before the match, its whole administrative structure creates a reality, a routine, a predictability which is lacking everywhere else.

Chapter IV -- Visions of the nation

In this chapter I turn away from the local struggles of Cameroonian sportsmen for survival and the imagining of a better world through football to the level of international football. As discussed in Chapter I, because of its symbolic nature football lays bare the cleavages within a society, and its polyvalent nature allows this to happen on different levels. It is, however, just as important to recognize that cleavages also delineate units of belonging. When considering Cameroon's participation in international football the nation as a unit comes to the fore, but at times football can also give rise to pan-African sentiments. This follows more or less inevitably from the structure of the game, from what I have labeled its segmentary nature. In this chapter and in the following chapters I examine the different meanings of the nation (as well as of such closely related concepts as nationalism, nationalist sentiment, nationalist ideology etc.) for Cameroonians and will show that the relationship of the notion of the nation to the ethnic group rather than being antithetical is a dialectical and dynamic one.

It needs to be kept in mind that nations like ethnic groups are constituted both internally and externally, and the significance attributed to the concept by members of the nation and the meanings with which they will fill it vary depending on whether it is the internal or the external dimension which is under scrutiny or is called into action. What is important here is that given the global theater in which the World Cup takes place, its significance, of necessity, is also global, but at one and the same time it is local too. Naturally, the two domains interact and are not sealed hermetically and in later parts of the

chapter I will outline how nationalist and ethnic sentiments can be seen to be in a dialectical relationship with each other.

Cameroon has so far participated in four World Cup –in 1982 in Spain, 1990 in Italy, 1994 in the United States and in 1998 in France– and is currently qualified for the 2002 competition which will take place in Korea and Japan. Qualifying for the World Cup is considered the world over to be a major accomplishment. African countries have fought a long battle within FIFA, the world governing body of the sport, to have a more proportionate representation at the World Cup paralleling larger, better known struggles for equal representation on the world stage (Sugden and Tomlinson 1998). I will refer to the significance of these struggles below.¹

In all but one of their World Cup appearances the Indomitable Lions were eliminated after the first round, but, as I will show in subsequent chapters these seemingly similar results resonated differently among Cameroonians on different occasions. The highpoint (until the Olympic victory of 2000) of Cameroonian football in the international arena was 1990 in Italy, when Cameroon reached the quarterfinals of the World Cup.

¹ Until 1978 Africa (together with Asia) had one place in the World Cup Finals, playoffs being staged between the African and Asian continental winners. African countries boycotted the 1966 World Cup in England to make their protest against the injustice heard. From 1982 until 1990 there were two places allocated to the African continent. The number of berths Africa has been able to capture has once again become the subject of intense negotiation over the past few years, especially since Cameroon's magnificent 1990 participation in Italy. Cameroon's good showing in that competition strengthened the argument that Africans have been putting forth for since the 1960s that the distribution of World Cup places was unfair, if not racist, and that the continent deserved more places. Issa Hayatou, the Cameroonian president of CAF and thus one of the Vice Presidents of FIFA, used his influence and the relative weight of African countries in FIFA to grant 3 places to Africa in 1994, and an unprecedented 5 in 1998.

This result was a first for any African country in the history of the competition, and the achievement was a source of enormous pride for all Cameroonians, indeed for all Africans.

When the World Cup, the sport's most important world-wide event which takes place every four years, is going on life stops in Cameroon and everybody is riveted by the competition. With the advance of mass media into quite remote areas, the simultaneous moment that Benedict Anderson is so eloquent about is particularly evident when the majority of the population of an entire country is able to watch or listen to a football match at the same time. Radio and television broadcast the matches in Cameroon, and as most people do not have access to television at home, the preferred method of watching an international match is in bars. In fact, even when people do watch a match at home, chances are that there will be neighbors, relatives, servants or friends to watch the match with them, thus the event is more public than one would expect. Even those people who have TV sets at home often prefer to watch the more important matches in public because of the camaraderie and the commentary. In 1998 one bar in Yaoundé had a handwritten sign, "Come and watch the World Cup in our bar, the commentary is better than the matches." And indeed for the price of a few beers one watches the match in the company of others and comments fly with great regularity.²

Those who cannot afford the beer may also choose to watch at video screening rooms which usually show kung-fu movies or American action movies. At the time of

² In Yaoundé the majority of these comments were in French. Thus my quotes are my translations from the French. Because French is the majority language in Cameroon, I mark especially when the comment comes from an Anglophone speaker. This may be a questionable practice, as marking always creates the marked person as the "Other" and this is of course one of the main points of criticism Anglophones level against Francophones in Cameroon.

important matches they turn them into football viewing rooms where for a minimal fee (maybe 50-100 francs or, in remote areas, even less) people can watch the match. By comparison the price of beer was between 300 and 450 FCFA when I was in Cameroon. For those who could not even afford the 100 francs, in 1994 there were giant screens set up in large cities where hundreds of people could stand together to watch a match for free, like closely packed like sardines. Cameroon's print media also rise to the occasion and fill the pages of newspapers with World Cup coverage.³

For the duration of the 1998 World Cup most offices and many stores closed early in Yaoundé. People working there had to be able to reach their homes, as it was unlikely that they would be able to find taxis to take them home during the matches. Furthermore there would have been no clients to deal with in any case, as everyone would be watching the World Cup. This was not so in 1994 when, due to the time difference between Cameroon and the United States, matches began after working hours in Cameroon. There were two or three matches a day during the first round, depending on the day of the week, so they began in the afternoon and went on late into the night. In 2000, when Cameroon was participating in the final of the Olympics in Sydney, I called a friend around 6 p.m. Cameroonian time who informed me that they were just getting ready to go to bed in order to be able to get up at 4 a.m. to watch the match broadcast live from Australia.

³ The media coverage of football in Cameroon is extensive, becoming almost exclusive during such events as the World Cup. A plethora of short-lived newspapers and magazines appear while it lasts and the more established papers also devote a great amount of their coverage to the competition. The national radio (CRTV) devoted five and a half hours daily to the 1994 World Cup, besides covering the matches and providing football related news coverage under the regular news. This is without counting the special football related programming of provincial stations!

During international competitions such as the World Cup the imagined community is rejoicing and seething literally all at once, and of course it is both real (in the immediate sense) and imagined in the Anderson's sense, because people in their immediate communities know that there are other immediate communities of the same kind experiencing what they are experiencing. They know this if for no other reason than because the day after the match the radio will broadcast man-on-the-street reactions to the match from all ten provinces of Cameroon (cf. Spitulnik 1994).

Extending Anderson's thesis on the rise of nationalism, I am arguing that football is a major force in imagining the nation. This is not only so because of imagining the nation through the communal experience of watching and rooting for the national team, but as argued before the very structure of the national championship and the Cup of Cameroon helps make the abstraction of Cameroon as an idea, as a unit, real in the minds of people.

Talking this way about football's role in imagining the nation speaks to the internal mechanics of the emergence of national sentiments. The parallel I am drawing with Anderson's formulations is with his views of the role of print capitalism in awakening national sentiments. Another facet of the internal imagining of the Cameroonian nation is mentioned briefly in Mbembe and Roitman's 1995 article. They argue that the economic crisis which has been ravaging Cameroon since the late 1980's has caused a substantial shift in people's self-perceptions. Before the "crisis" Cameroon was a relatively prosperous country with one of the best "track records" in Africa (cf. Chapter II). Mbembe and Roitman state that "... this relative prosperity had been made part and parcel of official and popular representations of national identity and Cameroonian singularity."

(1995: 328) A little later, seeking to elucidate how Cameroonians turn to explanations by the inexplicable to make sense of their current predicament, the authors imply that it is this sense of national identity that has been undermined by the "crisis".

... Cameroonian society's long-standing capacity to 'imagine' itself in a certain manner - to mentally author and, from this, institute itself - has been contradicted and seems now thrown into question. ... at the time when annual growth rates were on the order of six to seven percent, Cameroonians perceived themselves as a part of a rich nation, with infinite possibilities before them. This was to be sure, part of a deliberate effort to imagine a national identity founded on economic attributes. Today's bankruptcy places this mode of imagining the nation in check, leaving in its wake certain forms of nostalgia.
(1995:339)

Arguably football is one of the few areas where this Cameroonian sense of singularity has been able to survive, while it is also capable of inciting nostalgia, as the glory of 1990 recedes into the past (cf. Bromberger's point about football passions being strongest in communities which have lost their economic importance).

Mbembe and Roitman's analysis raises the question of whether misfortune, in the Cameroonian case, the "crisis", inevitably leads to the dissolution of the self, or more precisely of identity, or as Mbembe and Roitman put it, sense of singularity. There are many examples to the contrary; Jewish identity seems to have thrived on adversity, and one could regard Eastern European national sentiments as having been primarily driven by a sense of misfortune, imposed from outside. Naturally, there are degrees of adversity. (There may be a point of such societal breakdown where no overarching sense of unity may be possible. Turnbull's controversial study of the Ik comes to mind (1972), as well as studies of famine and warfare (Vaughan 1987, Shipton 1990). Fortunately, however,

Cameroon, despite the general drastic deterioration of the standard of living in recent years, evoked so eloquently by Mbembe and Roitman, is not at this level of overall breakdown). The point Mbembe and Roitman make is that the crisis has become so all-encompassing in Cameroon as to put into question people's basic understanding of how the world works. In the two cases I cited above (Jewish and Eastern European identities) the misfortune is seen to derive from external sources, which may help unite people against a common (external) enemy.

In the Cameroonian case the "enemy" is not so easy to identify, or rather there are multiple targets. Internal problems (government mismanagement, corruption, ethnic strife etc.) may indeed lead to a dissolution of a "nationalist" sense of self, although I will argue that it is more a question of how the nation is defined than the notion of the nation that is being questioned. At the same time it is also clear from the strong anti-French and anti-white discourses that the various World Cups have engendered that Cameroonians have also found an "external enemy" to blame, and against which to define themselves. In fact, it is likely that the 1998 World Cup's all encompassing anti-white and anti-French discourse is evidence of the strengthening of this line of rhetoric.

I will discuss these issues in much greater detail in subsequent chapters, but here I would like to concentrate on the significance of the nation as an externally constituted unit. Partha Chatterjee has argued cogently that the logical outcome of Western theorizing about nationalism is to render non-Western versions of nationalism inauthentic, by relegating the nationalist imagination of the Third World to a mere copying of the ready-made, 'modular' forms of Western nationalism. Contradicting this, he suggests that the preoccupation of third world intellectuals has rather been the opposite, to create an

identity that was at the same time modern and yet non-Western. Chatterjee juxtaposes two domains: an inner and an outer, what he also calls the material and the spiritual.

The material is the domain of the 'outside', of the economy and of statecraft, of science and technology, a domain where the West had proved its superiority, and the East had succumbed. In this domain, then, Western superiority had to be acknowledged and its accomplishments carefully studied and replicated. The spiritual, on the other hand, is an 'inner' domain bearing the 'essential' marks of cultural identity. (Chatterjee 1996: 217).

Chatterjee's bold categories of East and West, material and spiritual can be faulted for being essentialistic, although from a postcolonial rather than the usual Western perspective. People in Cameroon are clearly participating in both worlds and the separation is artificial, but nonetheless Cameroonians often argue in these essentializing terms, and construct their world in equally bold contrasts of "black" and "white", European and African, etc. Chatterjee is talking about Indian intellectuals, and certainly both African and Cameroonian intellectuals have been struggling with resolving the contradictions between their yearnings for "modernity" and the equally strong need not to be simply swallowed up by the West, where they will be seen as imitators of Western paradigms and thus as latecomers, automatically put at the bottom of the pile (cf. Eyoh 1998). To counteract this (and for other reasons), they need to assert their identity as Africans. However, there are strands of this essentialist, but nonetheless self-asserting argument among ordinary Cameroonians as well.

One of the more striking examples to be heard in football is the contested debate that is going on about football as "art" and as "science", where Cameroonians/Africans are "~~art~~ists" and Europeans "robots". What people mean by these terms and their variants is

part of a larger set of discourses (cf. Archetti 1996, 1997b, Blain, Boyle and O'Donnel 1993; Bromberger 1994, 1995; Giulianotti 1999; Hadas 1999; Leite Lopes 1997, Leite Lopes and Faguer 1994).

It is often posited by Cameroonian sportsmen and laymen, that Cameroonians (or often Africans) are born footballers (that is to say football comes naturally to them, it is an innate quality), but more than that they are artists, creative, incalculable and free. Juxtaposed to this are Europeans who instead of practicing "art" practice "science". The difference is outlined in the following terms by a former player, member of the old boys' club (2-0), who had the most elaborate set of ideas on the subject.

When we speak of Cameroonian football, we speak of African football. You see all the Africans play a bit the same way because we have the same morphology, we are ... well ... we are coordinated the same way. There is a European football, because they too ... there are things which condition them, for example nature itself and all, they will play a bit the same way, because you see the Europeans are a bit rigid, they have a way of playing and well ... they understand, they have a bit *la passion de l'école*. Well, they like to be told, well, do this, then do that.]

Another informant, one of the best-known coaches of the country, and a former star himself, said the following reflecting on the possible causes of differences in playing styles between whites and Africans (one of the supposed advantages of Europeans over Africans is that the former play a faster game):

At the age of six they can correct [corriger] me. I can adopt the habit of playing fast, at the age of six, eight, ten years ... when I reach the age of twelve [he makes a clicking sound to indicate finality] I am already used to playing fast, without carrying the ball, I am already used to touching [just touching] but in Africa there is no school. We have grown up like this, carrying the ball, in the street

you take the ball, you dribble everyone, and you are going to score. This constitutes our strength too. Because the white, he cannot do it. The white, he plays fast, perhaps we can't play as fast as he can, but we, we dribble, he cannot dribble like we can. It is this that makes the difference, the creativity because we play ... we play with our genius, with our head, we learn to dribble, to do what we will [n'importe quoi], whereas the white, he learns to play as the master coach [maître l'entraîneur] tells him ... you are going to ... you are going to play like this, from the age of six he grows up like a robot, you see, and it's different.

This is a battle of styles of playing, and what my informants assert in drawing up the dichotomy is that the pre-fabricated nature of European football diminishes the beauty and excitement of the game. Thus the tables are turned: Africans have something that Europeans are unable to attain.⁴ In this sense, Africans (who are represented in almost all other respects both by the West and by themselves as inferior, "developing" nations that have not reached the finish line yet, always defined in terms of what they are "lacking") possess something that makes them superior to Europeans and to the West, and the latter are seen as lacking something instead.

This view of things, however, is often contested. Nobody doubts the artistic superiority of African footballers and people take enormous enjoyment and pride in both

⁴ Europeans tend to agree with them. In fact, the opposition is one of the tropes of global sports journalism and indeed of the discourse of sports fans the world over. Argentinians, Brazilians and others use similar binary oppositions to describe their style of playing, or even more commonly, to describe the styles of an earlier generation of players. Hungarian sports journalism had also likened Hungarian football to "art" as opposed to the "robotized" style of Western European teams (cf. Hadas 1999). Even Western Europeans claim that earlier generations of football players played differently, and it is hard to ignore the genuineness of the nostalgia in these comments. Both sides "naturalize" the differences, while the Europeans talk about the "innate suppleness" of Africans, Cameroonians talk about the natural "rigidity" of Europeans. However, when Western

aspects of it. What they debate is its efficaciousness. Unimaginative, “scientific” play is more likely to yield results. Thus if the aim of the game is to win (and it is necessary to win) then “*beaux gestes*” are not enough, results (goals) are also necessary. Especially when what is at stake is to show the world that Africans are capable of beating Europeans. On the occasion of the Chile – Cameroon match in 1998, before the whole tenor of the match changed, one of the viewers at the bar where I was watching said the following: “the Chileans count the goals, we, we count the goal opportunities, because,” he explained “beautiful play is good, but in the end it’s the goals that count.” Yet, not everybody is of this opinion. I have often heard coaches say to each other when being congratulated for a win which had been achieved in a less than spectacular manner, “Yes, we won, but how?” The above quoted former star for example came half way through an interview with me, mostly talking about the artistic nature of football, without once mentioning results, until I asked him specifically about it.

An unemployed university graduate talked about beautiful football in the following way.

beautiful football in my opinion ... people could think that beautiful football is the result. For me beautiful football is when there is an aesthetic, when football is beautiful when there are luminous moves [actions d’éclats]. Football has its volunteers and the gifted footballers. When the latter make ingenious moves. When there also are results, that’s the best football. Football is a noble discipline.

journalists talk about African players along with a good dose of “noble savage” there is also a great deal of paternalism in these pronouncements.

The former player, whom I quoted above about the natural differences between Europeans and Africans, explained the difference in the importance of art and science in football with an interesting twist:

I am convinced that football has two main elements. ... I like to speak of the scientific element first, because it is not very very very important in football, it is somewhat important, but it is not what propels football because if it were what propelled football there would not be a winning team, because everyone knows science, everyone knows technique. However, there has to be an element that overcomes this technique, this is what we call the artistic element. And it is this that a player ought to have and it is this that coaches should insist on, they should insist on this element when they choose players.

In effect, what he is proposing here is that art (creativity) is an important part of football because by virtue of not being accessible to everyone (science can be learnt by anyone) it is superior to science. Later in the interview he said the following about the question of efficacy and art:

This art, at a given moment is disorganized, but this is good disorder, because the result is good. When you have art and you don't succeed to pass ... you see it becomes embarrassing [génant] and they say, but no! that's not it. And there it no longer is art. They don't speak of him [the player], the art that does not succeed is not art. Yes. Every time that you want, for example ... you have an idea ... or there is an immediate problem to be resolved, you find a solution that does not succeed ... they won't say that you are an artist, only when it succeeds! Yes, because at a given moment it cannot be countered, the art, but science, you see the science of football can be countered.

This debate has its roots in colonial history. Europeans were successful in colonizing Africa and the rest of the world fundamentally because of Europe's technological superiority. No wonder then that technology (science) is a permanent

attribute [epitheton ornans] of Europeans among Cameroonians.

People often bring up the “white man’s magic” in conversation. Usually they mean technology by it, and though there is a certain amount of joking indicated in the term it is also quite serious. For example, travelling in a communal taxi in Western Cameroon an old man, clearly a cultivator of little wealth and education, said to me in 1997: “The good God had given Europeans technology and to Cameroonians”—he paused for effect and concluded— “Paradise!” Technology, in this formulation, is the “God-given” realm of the European, it is not something that belongs to Cameroonians. What they have instead is Paradise, and though it is not very clear what Paradise is, it is the flip-side of technology and something that is equally good, and perhaps morally superior, to have.

That this perception of the imbalance of power between Africans and Europeans hinging on science/technology does not come from Cameroonians alone can be seen from the following quote, cited by Mbembe (1986), from the French administrators of Cameroon from the troubled last years of French colonial era. Following the death of Reuben Um Nyobe, the charismatic leader of the UPC rebellion for independence, the French were pre-occupied with ensuring their domination over the territory, and with “pacifying” the Bassa area where resistance was the strongest. Mbembe quotes the following from a 1958 document containing the directives of the French occupying force regarding their psychological plan of action :

[The task is] [t]o convince the Bassa that the UPC has definitely failed and it will inevitably be eliminated from the Cameroonian political scene, because European ‘magic’ (intellectual dynamism, technical expertise, material efficacy) unquestionably will overcome ‘Bassa sorcery’.
(Quoted in Mbembe 1986:60)

What I find most remarkable in this statement is that its terms, especially as relating to Europeans, keep coming back almost half a century later on the lips of Cameroonians. The denigration of Africans as implied by the reference to sorcery is of course an equally important component/constituent in ensuring the domination of Europeans over Africans (cf. Ebousi-Boulaga quoted in Moudimbe 1988). These tactics have been successful to the extent that they continue to influence Africans' conceptions of both themselves and of Europeans/whites. Stereotypical images of European efficiency and rationalism keep cropping up among Cameroonians in discussions of comparisons of Africans and Europeans.

Actually, here lies one of the main contradictions. Cameroonians are painfully aware of the advantages Europe has over them in terms of both material well-being and power. In Cameroonian eyes Western society is successful, certainly in the material and political sense, and they attribute this success to the "white man's way". While recognizing that the wealth of Europe (in the Cameroonian case especially of France) is to a great extent due to the exploitation of Africans, they also attribute these differences to a different kind of rationality and organization. The combination of the hegemonic power of these stereotypes and the inadequacies of their lives (underdevelopment, poverty, mismanagement of affairs small and large) leads to the paradoxical situation that almost forty years after independence, many Cameroonians continue to subscribe to these notions.

The fundamental contradiction of the colonial situation was that while introducing and imposing the Western state and notions of nationalism and laying claims

to a universalism, the colonial state insisted on maintaining the difference of the ruling group, in other words excluding the colonized. Mamdani's argument about citizen and subject also calls attention to this exclusion and so does Berman's 1998 article. I would add that of course this exclusion continues in the global inequalities of the post-colonial world. Nevertheless, decolonization, at least on an institutional level, did take place leading to what Liisa Malkki (1995) has termed a "national order of things".

This is Chatterjee's outer domain, where the colonized both during colonial times and afterwards had no choice but to choose from the 'modular' forms of nationalism offered by the West. Malkki argues that the mythico-history which the Hutu refugees in Tanzania construct for themselves "is a vision of a community of distinct 'nations' entering into relationships with one another" (1995:252). "At issue is not the denial or denaturalization of the order of nations but the attainment of a legitimate place in that order, a seat at the table" (1995:253). The implication is that the Hutu's mythico-historical imaginings are validated and legitimated by reference to this system. Without it –without imagining the nation– their continued suffering, both through memory and in the continuing presence of the refugee camps they are confined to, would have little meaning. Though obviously the very refugee situation renders Malkki's case extreme I would agree with her that the international system of nation-states makes imagining the nation in juxtaposition to other nations a compelling one.

To return to the question of the national order of things, in order to participate on an equal footing in the global world, the nation-state seems to be the only game in town. The political battle for having "a seat at the table" has been fought and independence achieved, though at a great price. At the price of having to acknowledge

the superiority of the West in the outer domain and to live with the consequences, which include both the continued economic and political domination of the West and the inadequacies and contradictions of the postcolonial state.

Participation in international sports events, such as the World Cup, encapsulates this history and the concomitant contradictions with some twists. On the one hand, being part of the quintessentially western invention of the World Cup is proof of “having arrived at the table,” of being an equal member of the modern, global world. This is why the struggle of African countries for a more proportionate representation in the World Cup Final is of significance. The first twist is that despite the niceties of institutional equality in the global arena, Cameroon, just as other Third World countries, remains unequal to the Western powers, who –not just in economic and political terms, but also in cultural ones–, continue to set the rules. The other twist is more or less unique to sports participation in that unlike in the rest of the world arena, here Cameroonians stand a real chance of being equal; sports makes it possible, not just imaginable, for them to achieve at least momentary superiority to the West. It is at this very moment of rare visible equality, of being the *same* as everybody else, that asserting *difference* becomes not just important, but possible.

It is in this context that Cameroonians support the national football team unequivocally, even when they have reason to doubt whether the victory is eventually going to benefit them. I will discuss this question further in Chapter V.

Though the few references to football in the literature both on Cameroon and on Africa all acknowledge the sport’s capacity to unite people, most authors regard the notion of the nation to be irrelevant to the concerns of the people so-united. Part of this is

clearly due to the undeniable fact that as an ideology for internal consumption the nation has lost much of its luster in Africa since the time of decolonization. (I will deal with this question in greater detail in the next chapter). Partly, however, the disregard for the nation stems from the importance attributed to ethnicity and ethnic conflict among scholars dealing with the question. In the remainder of this chapter I wish to turn our attention to some issues regarding the dynamics of ethnicity in football and the dialectical relationship of ethnicity and the nation in Cameroon as manifested through football.

The ethnic component has not disappeared in Cameroonian football, and in fact on lower levels of the competition and especially outside the official system of national championships there are many instances of ethnicity being the driving principle of football. Village championships organized by migrants bringing together fellow villagers in town are an important addition or alternative to traditional village meetings. The expressed goals are to "animate" and allow the town-born young members of the village to get acquainted with each other. Given that only descendants of members of subdivisions within the village can play on a team people scrutinize the origins of the players. I have witnessed debates about the legality of the presence of a certain player on a team, including calling for elderly witnesses. Because the witnesses then explain how the player can be considered a member of the village, such disputes also lead to revisions and relearning of traditional ways of reckoning kinship. The village championship I observed and followed over a six months period in 1995 has meanwhile stopped functioning because of controversies over the handling of money that came in at the post-cup gala. One of the organizers remarked to me that it was a pity because the championship had become like a post office for the village: everyone knew where to go to find everybody.

Very large crowds of the descendants of the village turned out for the events, and the matches constituted an informal meeting place for all.

Village championships also take place locally, when youngsters who regularly arrive “home” for the summer holidays are organized to participate in impromptu championships all over Cameroon. This is so widespread that –as I discussed in Chapter III– many “official” teams have difficulty holding on to their players during the summer holidays as youngsters disappear into the villages.

However, despite the continued importance of ethnicity in football and thus its role in maintaining ethnic distinctions and boundaries, it also undoubtedly leads to a crossing of boundaries on the level of the everyday practice of the sport. Not only does football create non-traditional standards of behavior, such as a new notion of time, or a turning upside down of patterns of respect (e.g. age vs. youth), but also and most importantly it creates linkages among people who would not otherwise be linked (cf. Clignet and Stark 1974).

In the course of a sporting career, football players come into contact with a great many people from different ethnic groups. As players they often play on multiethnic teams and even when they play on a team that is ethnic, that is to say its supporters and leadership are identified with a single ethnic group, the players themselves will come from a variety of ethnic groups. This is because despite ethnicity, teams and especially coaches who do much of the recruiting are often willing to find the best players regardless of ethnic origin (cf. Chapter III). The average football player will have played with at least three or four teams and the ethnic mix he will have been exposed to is far larger than he would be exposed to were he not playing football. Thus, for example one of the then players of the

national team, himself a Beti, in a radio interview in May 1995 recounted that he had started playing in Santos in Yaoundé (a Beti team with a Bassa coach), then he moved to a team of the Western Province (a Bamileke team) for three years and he finally moved back to the capital to play in another Beti team. His relations with the Bassa coach were such that he had sometimes paid for the some of the coach's children's education and even bought a set of training clothes for the coach.

In addition, teams, especially in the first division, but even at lower levels of the competition, often play official and unofficial matches outside their regular milieu and inevitably will make contact with coaches and players from other teams and other ethnic groups. In Yaoundé, players often recruit each other and interestingly, in many cases they will not be of the same ethnic group.

Football also creates relationships which endure beyond an active career. Much of the human structure of Cameroonian football is made up of former players, so much so that the innumerable more or less volunteer coaches, the officials of the federation, the referees, etc. for the most part have played football in their youth, and all seem to know each other as former teammates, coaches and players. This leads to a complicated set of alliances which do not necessarily conform to the rules of ethnic exclusivity.

Then there is the "2-0," which is an institution in itself, uniting former players in recreational football. These are the old boys' teams, which play on weekends. The name 2-0 originates in the practice, (dictated by having too many would-be players), of having two teams play until one of them leads by two goals, at which point the losing team will yield its place to those still waiting to play.

The 2-0 of which I was an honorary member, contained the representatives of at least six ethnic groups and the friendships into which people paired off were far from being ethnically determined. The team constituted what could be seen as a voluntary association, but instead of the ethnic homogeneity characteristic of many African urban voluntary associations it consisted of a variety of ethnic groups. Among the noticeable interethnic friendships was that between a Bamileke and a Bassa; the two were practically inseparable. If you saw one of them you could be sure that the other one was not far away. The former had been the coach of the latter. They even lived near each other and the two families helped each other out, thus the football relationship grew into a relationship reaching beyond the confines of sport. Another, for some time inseparable, pair was a Bamileke and a Duala. The former had his own young team and the latter for a while was its only supporter. Supporter here means turning up for training sessions, providing advice and financial support.

Another man on the team, a former second division player who is Bamileke, started his career in a team in Douala and played not in a Bamileke team in Yaoundé but in a Beti team of Sangmelima, a nearby town. He describes his experience with football as something that helped him establish himself in his career as a carpenter because instead of money he asked the leadership of his Sangmelima team to provide him with contacts for job orders. At present he does most of his production for a government company which sells goods to government employees on credit. His access to the store is through a Bassa member of the old boys' team, and he faced great difficulties in getting paid for his delivery when his team member was on summer leave. Incidentally, this carpenter was also instrumental in organizing the village championship mentioned above. Thus, being

ethnic and cooperating across ethnic lines are not necessarily contradictory.

Ethnicity is a fact of life in Cameroon. People are aware of it, and prompted in part by political rhetoric from their leaders, they see “*tribalisme*” as a factor that stands in the way of national unity. They also use heavy-handed ethnic stereotypes to guide them in their daily lives and in their opinions. Yet, despite this they trudge along in a sometimes precarious balance with each other. In the realm of football, along with the cross-cutting tendencies that bring people together across ethnic lines there is also the constant tension caused by the centripetal force of ethnicity. For example the members of the 2-0 mentioned above constantly bickered over what bar to go to after matches. The often unstated question related to the ethnic belonging of the bar owner (i.e. whose group should benefit from the regular and considerable patronage the weekly revels meant), and the group often switched its allegiance to satisfy contradictory pressures from the members. The underlying “ethnic resource competition” was never mentioned publicly; instead members argued about the location of the bar, the quality of the service, the friendliness of the owners of the bar, etc. The members were aware of the “dangers” of ethnicity, and in a variety of ways consciously (albeit without openly airing the problem) tried to counteract them. This brokering of ethnic peace was obviously helped by the above described inter-ethnic friendships among members of the group and the ethic of football where everyone was of equal worth by virtue of being members of the team, sometimes expressed in the statement “*nous sommes des sportives*” (we are sportsmen) to cut through some divisive debates.

Accordingly, the leadership of the team (president, vice-president, secretary, vice-secretary, treasurer, vice-treasurer, technical director, coach, head of the disciplinary committee etc.) were carefully chosen to create ethnic balance. For example, on the occasion of the 1995 elections when there was a "rebellion" among the membership in the course of which some younger members were nominated for some of these positions, the ethnic balance remained untouched. One of my friends, a much respected older member of the group who was not running for office but was one of the behind-the-scenes negotiators, proudly related to me privately afterwards how successful he had been in making sure that the different positions were evenly distributed between the different ethnic constituencies of the group.

Coaches often see the presence of ethnic considerations in football as detrimental to the goals of the game. On one occasion two coaches in the stadium were discussing the performance of a third division team which has been lingering in that "inferior" division for a long time. They observed that the team did not seem to be able to progress in its play because it was "too tribalist." One of them remarked that "I knew immediately that they were limited when I saw the list, all their players except for the goalkeeper belong to the same tribe." What he meant was that choosing their players for reasons other than talent, namely ethnic belonging, the team could not possibly field the best elements. The most likely reason why the team had to settle for a non-ethnic goalkeeper is of course that goalkeepers having the most specialized skills of all the players, the team was not able to find a suitable one and had to compromise in signing on someone of a different ethnic group. Thus in this view meritocracy, disregarding ethnic origins in choosing players is

the only way efficacious action is possible in football. Naturally meritocracy contradicts and undermines one of the basic underlying principles of ethnicity.

But there are also ways in which ethnicity can be played with or its negative effects be circumvented in football. The team I worked with in 1995 had an adversary that was an ethnic team, a team of Muslim northerners. Ethnic team here means that not only was all of the team's leadership recruited from the ranks of the Muslim community in Yaoundé; so were its players. As we saw above, a purely ethnic team can be a liability because it is not free to choose the best players. Yet, such a team can also have a plus in the commitment of the players to the team. Knowing this, the coach prepared a surprise. He had a former player who was a Northerner and recruited him for this match. The player's appearance was a complete shock to our adversaries and they were badly rattled by this "betrayal".

On another occasion the coach told me that he had a goalkeeper who belonged to one of the autochthonous ethnic sub-groups of Yaoundé. The player was "lent" to the coach by a friend of his, a fellow coach, who in fact worked with the team in 1995, but in the meantime had been recruited to coach a team of his own ethnic sub-group in the capital, the same one from which the player hailed. When the two teams met in the Third Division championship, there was a possibility that the goalkeeper might "sell" the match, under pressure from his fellow "villagers." To circumvent this, the coach took the player aside and explained to him that he was going to appoint him "captain" of the team for the match and that if he sold the match he would be known among his own people for having sold the match and lose their respect, whereas if he delivered a great match he would gain everybody's respect. This is actually the most common argument coaches have to

dissuade players from “selling” matches, and in as much as football is about gaining or losing respect it’s a persuasive one. Needless to say, the player delivered a great match.

Both of these examples point to the fact that while ethnicity is a factor in the everyday life of football, its effects are far from straightforward. While ethnicity can be a source of solidarity, it can also be manipulated, turned inside out and harnessed to unexpected ends.

The three examples above illustrate the viewpoint of sportsmen, people who are intimately involved with football. For a great number of them, at least as far as practicing the sport and achieving their goals through it, ethnicity is not an issue, except in the sense of having to overcome the complications it presents. In this sense football people do differ from some of the rest of the population for whom very often football victories are intimately tied up with identity and prove the superiority or inferiority of “us” to “them.” In the following discussion I will turn to this outsider’s view of football and try to demonstrate that rather than being antithetical to each other, nationalist and ethnic sentiments can be seen to be in a dialectical relationship where both are part of a continuum of identity choices.

On June 22, 1997, Cameroon disappointingly tied against Gabon as part of the preliminaries for gaining a berth in the upcoming African Nations Cup, which was to take place in Ouagadougou in early 1998. The Lions had done rather badly in the match. After leading by 2-0 and then 2-1, at the last minute Gabon managed to score an equalizing goal, leaving Cameroon’s qualification for the competition in doubt.

As a dispirited Cameroonian and a jubilant Gabonese team were leaving the stadium, a corpulent older man came up to me and my companion, a coach, in great

agitation. He started by saying that he was very angry. He then pointedly remarked that he was angry at the First Vice President of the FECAFOOT because the latter had prohibited a man, wearing a bishop's hat, a bishop's staff, and a white robe sporting the green-red-yellow of the Cameroonian flag, from circumambulating the stadium during half-time. In fact the "bishop" is a familiar figure at all international matches taking place at the Yaoundé stadium. In excited tones our friend exclaimed "it's the Bamileke, always the Bamileke!" (*Ce sont les Bamileke, toujours les Bamileke*). He went on to explain that had he been allowed to proceed, the bishop would have protected the national team, and that he (our speaker) had been told that the result was going to be 2-0, and would stay that way. "It's impossible that every time there is an international match the Bamileke betray us. Because the bishop would have protected us, but Colonel Tchatchou didn't let him." Colonel Joseph Tchatchou, who was at this time the First Vice President of the Federation, is Bamileke, and the man making the remarks is Beti. The Colonel was in charge of the stadium for the match in his capacity as a Federation official.

Much of the rather sparse literature on sports in Africa seems to deny that they have national integrative functions, although such functions have been amply illustrated elsewhere, especially in Europe (Hargreaves 1986, Mangan 1996, Mangan, Holt and Lanfranchi 1996). Rather the emphasis has been on the divisive aspect of sports, which brings out the "ethnic" in Africans (Monnington 1986, Stevenson 1989). Yet, I would argue that ethnicity and nationalism are not mutually exclusive categories. In analyzing ethnicity anthropologists have come to describe ethnicity as situational and flexible (Vincent 1974, R. Cohen 1978). Ronald Cohen defines ethnicity "as a series of nesting

dichotomizations of inclusiveness and exclusiveness... [where] ... the cultural identifiers used to assign persons to groupings ... expand or contract in inverse relation to the scale of inclusiveness and exclusiveness of the membership" (387. emphasis in the original).

I would argue for adding nationalism as one more of these flexible and situational identities, an alternative that can be chosen at certain times from among other identities. The various alternatives need not be consonant with each other. This makes sense also because of the segmentary nature of sports competition. When lower level teams are opposed to each other the identities that come to the fore are local identities; when higher level teams are opposed to each other the inclusiveness and scope of the identities that are evoked is going to increase to match the level of the competition and this allows for and even invites these "nested" identities.

Thus, at issue is not so much whether sport is promoting unity or divisiveness. It clearly does both. In Africa it even goes beyond nationalism in promoting more overarching, pan-African identifications. For example, after Cameroon's stellar showing in the 1990 World Cup, *Jeune Afrique* (No 1538, 20-26 1990) in a banner headline cutting diagonally across the lower right corner on its title page said "Africa among the great" referring to Cameroon's and Egypt's showing at the World Cup. A few weeks later, upon the conclusion of the competition, –which of course had been won by Argentina.– the *Jeune Afrique* (No. 1541, July 11-17, 1990) headline declared "It is Cameroon that Won!" – in handwritten block letters superimposed over the photograph of a stadium covering the entire title page.

Certainly in 1994, after Cameroon was eliminated from the competition, Cameroonians were quick to shift their allegiance to Nigeria, the only remaining African

side in the competition. Many bought the Nigerian flags being sold in Yaoundé on the night of Nigeria's match against Italy. When Nigeria lost the match a Francophone Cameroonian friend told me the next morning that he had been so upset that he almost cried.

How easily this identification is made, and how one African country is made to stand for the whole of Africa is shown by the following statement by a woman caller to the English version of the call-in radio program the day of the Nigeria-Italy match.

Well, to start off the Nigerian side showed up a good game and I am sure they defended the ... the African nation as a whole and all I can wish them that they should keep on and try to, at least fly the flag of Ni Africa. ... I hope will attend maybe even the semifinals. (July 2, 1994 emphases added)

One could object that Europeans do not automatically support the next European team when their own has lost, but shifting of loyalties in such a case is a question of power relationships, where I would argue that such switches are facilitated by Africans' perception of a commonality of fate *vis-à-vis* Europe, which is of course the product of their colonial history, of being dominated and exploited by Europe and the continuing structurally weak position that African countries share in relation to Europe and the United States today.

This line of argument follows to some extent what Lever (1983) has to say about the interplay of the unifying and divisive functions of football in Brazil.⁵ I agree with her that football is capable of both uniting and dividing people. However, while she sees this

⁵ As she puts it "Sport's paradoxical ability to reinforce societal cleavages while transcending them makes soccer. ..., the perfect means of achieving a more perfect union between multiple groups" (Lever 1983:7.) In the case of Cameroon it is impossible to share this optimism; the processes I am talking about are much more indeterminate.

as paradoxical. I regard it as an outcome of the segmentary nature of the game's organization. At the same time I include nationalist and pan-African (as well as ethnic) sentiments in the framework of coexisting and available identity choices, where the scope of inclusiveness will be triggered and to a great extent determined situationally.

To what extent it will be "determined" seems to depend on the level at which we find ourselves. That is to say, Cameroonians followed this system of increasingly widening nesting identifications throughout the 1994 World Cup to the point where in the final the majority supported Brazil against Italy on the grounds that "Brazil is a third world country, like Cameroon," and possibly because there are blacks on the Brazilian team.⁶ However, at this level of inclusiveness the identification was much less binding, and a minority felt perfectly at ease supporting Italy, whereas it is unlikely that it would have been possible to openly support Italy against Nigeria, or even more pertinently Russia against Cameroon.

Arbena (1995) objects to Lever's analysis on the grounds that watching international football, a "global game," could conceivably work to wash away not only ethnic, but also nationalist divisions as he puts it "in favour of a greater sense of transnational community, if only through a sense of shared experiences and the consequences of operating within similar institutions and regulations." (1995:225)

⁶ I have not heard the latter explicitly stated in the case of the 1994 World Cup final, but judging by the commentary and keen interest with which Cameroonians scrutinized the racial composition of foreign teams it is more than likely that this factor played a part in the ready identification of many Cameroonians with Brazil. To give an example of the kind of scrutiny I am talking about there were many jocular comments on why Saudi Arabia was considered an Asian team in the World Cup, when clearly many of their players were black. See also the analysis of the same kind of scrutiny of the ethnic/racial make-up of the French team in 1998 in Chapter VI.

Arbena's argument that football in and of itself does not uphold governments, and that the gains in popularity of regimes and leaders is only momentary, is well taken, but my point here is on a different level. In this proposed framework of nested identities, pan-Africanism today does not make nationalist or ethnic sentiment impossible tomorrow or even the next minute, as can be seen from the contribution of the woman caller quoted above. Nor does nationalist sentiment exclude ethnic sentiment (and vice versa) as evidenced by our friend's statement at the stadium.

Put somewhat differently, in all the debates about ethnicity and nationalism, little attention has been paid to nationalism in areas, especially Africa, where we are not expecting to see it. In a 1996 volume on African ethnicity, Fardon, for example, devotes only one paragraph to nationalism in his conclusion to a highly imaginative analysis of the constraints imposed on "ethnic narratives" by their respective interethnic contexts. As an aside (actually, in parentheses) he mentions that nationalism should be evident in Africa, if at all, on the level of organized sports (142).

To return to our stadium interlocutor, he is being ethnic and nationalist at the same time. His very presence at the stadium is an indication that his interest in football goes beyond the purely ethnic. Someone with a purely ethnic interest in football would go to the stadium only when his ethnic team plays. This man is in fact present at every match played at the stadium, but there are many others who only turn out for the matches played by their own team, and that often happens to be an ethnic team. Our friend's fervent need to find an explanation for the result is also proof of his nationalist sentiments. Yet the exegesis he chooses to present, apart from its magical undertones, is purely ethnic. He

singles out an individual, who, even if the story of his constraining the bishop is true (about which I have no information) was only doing his duty, presiding over the peaceful unfolding of the match. And, in addition to blaming the Colonel for the result, he jumps from him (an individual) to his ethnic group and generalizes that the entire group is always trying to sabotage Cameroonian success in all international matches. The point is that in one breath our man is being both a nationalist and an ethnic chauvinist, questioning the patriotism of groups other than his own in a way that also involves questioning who exactly constitutes the nation.

Many of the contributions to the radio program, *Bonjour l'Amérique*, bear witness to the fact that indeed football on the international level elicits from Cameroonians the same kind of nationalist fervor as we are used to elsewhere. In many of my interviews, the majority of interviewees predictably support their own ethnic teams, but at the same time they also support the national team. Often what we find is that people go to matches only when their team plays and when the national team plays. This is no different from any European fan who will support his own team (chosen on whatever basis) and the national team, and no one sees any contradiction in this. Cameroonians act in exactly the same way and we are surprised because we supposed them to be ethnic to the exclusion of all else.

What Cameroonians debate is the definition of the nation, who is a true patriot, who is betraying us. And this is where nationalism the “unifying force” becomes divisive, in denying other people’s commitment to uphold the honor of the nation (cf. B. Williams 1989). As I tried to demonstrate above, football is a two-edged sword and while it can be both ethnic and nationalist, and even when it is nationalist, it can be divisive.

Chapter V – Visions of a better government

I argued in the previous chapter that nationalist sentiments were both internally and externally constituted, and that in order to make sense of them we need to try to look at them separately. I suggested that as far as international competitions were concerned the nation was the only possible unit in which Cameroonians could think. Examining some instances of the continued saliency of ethnicity in Cameroonian football, which I nonetheless argued is in many ways less “tribalist” than much of everyday life in Cameroon, I suggested that the existence and saliency of ethnicity did not necessarily negate the existence and relevance of nationalist sentiments in Cameroon, especially when Cameroonians appear in the international arena. This chapter continues with the issues raised about the meaning of the nation to Cameroonians, but turns to questions which concern the internal constitution of the notion of Cameroon. Naturally, the division into internal and external aspects of the imagining of the nation is somewhat artificial, and people move smoothly back and forth between the two and often their awareness of the external aspect shapes their view of the internal.

In the following I propose to examine articulations of national feelings inside Cameroon by scrutinizing Cameroonian responses to the 1994 World Cup. I will do this through an analysis of audience contributions to the call-in program *Bonjour l'Amérique* and its English-language counterpart, *Hi America*, which could be heard on CRTV, the government controlled national radio. Before turning to the World Cup I will briefly explore the question of whether football has been successfully used by the Cameroonian government to gain legitimacy in the eyes of the population. Based on responses to the

government's efforts to usurp the Lions' good showing in 1990, I will argue that their effects are at most temporary and not only do Cameroonians tend to see through them but they often subvert them. These attempted co-optations of football are part of what I referred to as the "unbearable discrepancy" between the government's official discourse (ideology) and the worldview of Cameroonians, their lived experience of reality. The official rhetoric is turned against itself by the people and the attempt at appropriating the game by the government is subverted as a re-appropriation of the game by the people. In 1994 the population questioned vociferously the government's right to distance itself from the humiliating loss the national team suffered in the World Cup in the name of the people, re-appropriating football by challenging the government in the name of the nation. Here, the nation becomes the ethos, the ideal, which is subverted by the government according to many Cameroonians.

The importance of the intersection of football and the official nationalist agenda is that unlike other aspects of the latter, which can be dismissed cynically or with disdain, in the case of football some of the officially announced objectives and the desires of the population (winning, proving to the world that Cameroon is equal to or better than others) meet. The sport's genuine popular appeal and the binary oppositions it so easily calls into action make the mobilization of nationalist sentiments, when the national team plays, much more likely than in the case of almost any other undertaking.

Cameroonians' passion in refuting their government springs both from their love of the game and consequently from the affront that its subversion represents to them, and from a combination of their love of their country, which in the eyes of many is also subverted by the government. This is why when reeling from the humiliation the country

suffered people turned against the government.

One of the possible reasons why sport has been largely disregarded by anthropologists may be due to the oft heard argument that sport is an “opiate for the masses” (just as it has been claimed for religion, yet that does not stop us from studying religion). What most authors mean by this is that sport serves to direct people’s attention away from their daily problems and their causes, or that governments seem to be able to forward their agendas by taking advantage of football victories. But on closer examination football is equally capable of mobilizing popular sentiment against governments and people seem to be able to see through the smokescreen of government propaganda.

Cameroon’s unexpected success in 1990 helped the government which was struggling to fend off opposition demands for greater democracy. The general euphoria and pride that the country’s good showing at the World Cup unleashed served as a useful respite for the government, providing it with some breathing space and giving it an opportunity to try to usurp the victory, by claiming it as its own. So, for example, during the championship President Biya flew to Italy to attend the quarterfinal match and when the team returned to the country in glory the day was made a public holiday. The Lions made a victory tour in Douala and the following day in Yaoundé. They encircled the city going from the airport to quite distant neighborhoods where at certain points dance groups were to meet and greet them. The tour included the presidential palace, various educational establishments, major market places, important traffic junctions, the Radio Broadcasting house, and finally the Yaoundé Hilton in the heart of the city (cf. Nketcha

1991). All the participants, players as well as coaches, and significantly, journalists, were decorated by the head of state.

Glorious as the event was, however, it did not stem the tide of dissent and, as discussed in Chapter II, public discontent continued to escalate during the months that followed. Although the government repeatedly tried to exploit the national team's 1990 success most of the population was not taken in by these attempts. For example, as the team is called Indomitable Lions it was not surprising that for the 1992 elections Biya's propaganda machine created an election poster divided into two panels: on one side the president, on the other side a lion with the words, both in English and French, "Courage Man - President Man" (*Homme Courage - Homme Président*) overlay both images. On one of the panels it also said "My President Paul Biya." But the poster backfired. Distorting its meaning, or rather creatively rereading it by reading the images rather than the words, people often sarcastically refer to the president as "lion man" (*homme lion*). This popular deconstruction of the poster implies that people see through the government's attempts to usurp the Lions' victories, and by the very fact of using the term they are denying the President's right to identify himself with the Lions. Furthermore, since the Lions often symbolically stand for the nation, arguably the term also questions the legitimacy of Biya as president of the nation. The ironic use of the term also was an expression of the contestation that was going on with regard to whom victory belonged and who was to blame for losses. The latter theme came to the fore during the 1994 World Cup.

The 1992 "stolen elections" took place in this climate. The opposition, still active in 1993, called for a general strike to mark the first anniversary (October 11) of the elections. It

fell on the day after the Lions' qualification for the 1994 World Cup thus providing a golden opportunity for Paul Biya to declare the day a public holiday and to neutralize the commemoration. In André Ntonfo's vivid phrase this was "killing the hen of political contestation in the egg" (Ntonfo 1994a: 214).

By the time the 1994 World Cup took place in the United States people were in general less hopeful about the future and the continuing economic crisis coupled with the withheld salaries and decreases in the pay of civil servants led to a somber mood. Distrust, even hate, of the government in the wake of the political upheavals of the early 90s was still rampant. Furthermore, the 1994 devaluation of the CFA franc deepened the economic crisis, making the economic situation of a population –which felt that it was already on its knees– even worse.

As we shall see, Cameroonians' love and support for the Lions was not diminished, but the general feeling was that the team had been inadequately prepared for the upcoming competition and –in light of the government's earlier attempts to co-opt international football– many secretly or not so secretly feared that were they to do well, the government would again try to take advantage of the victory. Although, as I have shown above, people are not taken in by these attempts, they constitute a keenly felt affront driving home to people, in Mbembe and Roitman's terms, the "unbearable discrepancy" between publicly announced reality and people's lived experience of that reality. It is precisely because of this that people feared that a victory would help the government sweep things under the carpet and pretend that there were no problems in the country and therefore would have an excuse not to try to overcome those problems.

As a young goalkeeper who was also a university graduate said “when my family watches the Lions on television we no longer root for them because they will use it to their advantage, and not put anything back into the development of the sport.” He hastily added, “it’s not that we are not patriots ... just that the victory helps hide the problems.”

The young man’s insistence on being a patriot despite not rooting for the Lions is interesting in that it throws light upon a fundamental split between nation and government (between popular nationalist sentiments and official nationalism) between what the government expects from the citizens and what the citizens see to be the duties of the government.

The statement illustrates rather well the ambiguity of the Lions as a symbol. In this formulation the Lions represent both the government and the nation, and the young man is forced to turn against the government in the name of the nation. His reasons for turning against the government (as represented by the Lions) for not supporting the sport (the Lions) are peculiar to the sportsman. However, other people –as we shall see– take a wider view. They metaphorically identify the sport with the nation and blame the government for not living up to its obligation to protect the honor of the nation to the external world, and for using the sport to veil (and thereby disregard) internal problems. Thus, the Lions are a multivalent symbol which (in this instance) serves to represent two, in this context antithetical, domains: the government and the nation.

Another person, an educated Anglophone, when watching the first match Cameroon played against Sweden in the 1994 World Cup with a group of Anglophone élites in Bamenda, wandered away from the group prior to the match and –imitating Biya– muttered in French, as if to himself, but loud enough for me and presumably others to

hear, on what would happen if they won: “You see my dear compatriots with everyone pulling together we can win.” The fact that he used French –an unusual act in an Anglophone milieu– highlighted his ironic intent, but the statement also voiced a general fear on the part of many Cameroonians that a victory would only hurt the people, as it would help continue an intolerable *status quo* of pretending that all was well in the country.

In the event, people’s fear that the government could take advantage of the Lions’ performance at World Cup was unfounded. Cameroon was eliminated from the competition after the first round. The Lions drew with Sweden and were beaten by Brazil and Russia. The latter was a heavy loss (6-1) which shook everyone as it was seen as a great humiliation to Cameroon.

The match was preceded by great anticipation as there was a mathematical possibility that Cameroon could still qualify for the second round if they managed to defeat Russia by a large score. Russia had no chance of advancing, having lost all of its matches. What happened shook everyone. Russia proceeded to beat Cameroon 6-1, the most severe loss inflicted on any team in the competition. Such large scores are unusual in football, and especially unusual at such high a level of competition. The lone Cameroonian goal was scored by Roger Milla, who at 42 was referred to as the Old Lion. Interestingly enough, in later references to the match, people often unconsciously changed the score to 6-0, as if to further emphasize the humiliation of Cameroon.

In the neighborhood bar where I saw the match people watched it with increasing dismay, although in fact the mood was one of seeming hilarity, as the rather monotonous

rain of Russian goals was accompanied by premature shouts of “*but, but!*” [goal!, goal!]. This communal irony was broken only when Milla scored and the entire bar erupted in true cheer with people jumping up and down and hugging each other, dancing little dances on the side. The next day, when I went to see my newspaper vendor friend, glimpsing each other from afar both of us had rueful smiles on our faces, in acknowledgment of the embarrassment that befell Cameroon. The defeat almost defied words. Actually, it was at this point that Cameroonians truly started to pour out their hearts on the call-in radio program, their overwhelming sentiment expressed repeatedly by one phrase, was “*ça fait mal*” [“it hurts”].

It was after the match against Brazil that *Bonjour l'Amérique* became the most listened to program of the period. It ran from 5:30 to 9 a.m. every morning. As Cameroon is officially a bilingual country, soon after the launching of *Bonjour l'Amérique* an English language version, *Hi America* also began and ran for two hours every afternoon. This was less listened to, due to its timing, but in fact there were contributions to *Bonjour l'Amérique* in English as well as in French, and the occasional French contribution also cropped up in *Hi America*.

The focus of the program changed over time. Before the Lions were eliminated from the competition, the audience was called upon to make suggestions on the composition of the team, and in general, the program expressed the support of the nation for its team. After the defeat, the listeners were invited to analyze the causes of the fiasco and to make suggestions on how to improve Cameroonian football in the future. As Cameroon's fortunes changed for the worse, however, the program became a forum for people to pour out their hearts, air their disappointment, and try to find reasons for the

poor showing. As it was a call-in program many said that this was the first time in Cameroon's history that people were allowed to freely express their views in the media. Actually the openness of the program decreased over time. I have written elsewhere on how after a period of considerable freedom of expression, censorship slowly re-emerged until eventually the program was cut off by music at a point when there was a likelihood of the soon to be dismissed Minister of Youth and Sports contradicting the Minister of Communication towards the end of the World Cup (cf. Nkwi and Vidacs 1997).

Nevertheless, Cameroonians responded enthusiastically to the opportunity to make themselves heard. Phone calls came in from all corners of the country, although predictably the greatest number of calls came from Yaoundé and Douala, both the most urbanized areas and historically the strongholds of Cameroonian football. One might suppose that phone calls meant that responses would be limited to a narrow well-to-do layer of the society. However, calls came from phone booths as well as from offices. One informant pointed out in households with telephones the members come from a variety of social backgrounds,¹ and anyone could make use of the telephone to participate in the program. In addition, there were daily sessions with the provincial stations of Cameroon, where "man-on-the-street" interview spots were commonly featured. Furthermore, people in Yaoundé could and did arrive at the Radio Broadcasting House to leave letters to be read on the program and even to participate personally, while mail arrived daily from the provinces as well. Even though the match against Russia ended about 11 p.m., by 6 a.m. the next morning there were some letters dropped off at the Radio Station which had been

written during the night.

The program began to gain in importance as Cameroon's situation in the World Cup worsened. As many journalists and listeners pointed out, especially after the humiliating defeat of Cameroon by Russia, the program served as a safety valve. Immediately after the match, journalists started talking about the importance of remaining calm. More importantly, by allowing people to speak in an almost² uncensored manner, to vent their anger, bitterness and disappointment, more drastic action, either in the form of attacking the residences of the players and coaches, or in the form of some unspecified revolutionary action was forestalled. Many Cameroonians blamed the government for the poor performance of the Lions, and their anger and humiliation may have physically turned against the government. Thus, for example, a few days after Cameroon's defeat by Russia, a Francophone caller said the following:

... every author of this defeat, everyone who one way or another had a hand in this, starting with the Prime Minister, Mr. Kontchou [the Minister for Communication], and others should resign, because, gentlemen you are enjoying yourselves, but such a coup could smear the entire government. And it is also for this reason that we demand that the Head of State should, really, open a very important

¹ It is well-known that African households, especially urban ones, are hard to define clearly, as apart from family members friends and close or more remote relatives or even fellow villagers may be found in any given household at any given time.

² Until the press conference of Kontchou there was very little contrary opinion expressed by the journalists to the contributions given by listeners. There were some instances, however, when people got cut off, either directly, or indirectly by being told that they had spoken for too long and should finish quickly. Interpreting these instances of cutting people short is difficult, but some of the other contributors seemed to think that these were attempts at censorship. Another questionable factor was the quality of the reception, or the phone connection, which sometimes was so bad as to render the contributions almost or totally incomprehensible, and the question arose, in my mind at least, whether this was not due to intentional interference with the reception.

page in this story, because if not, he too will be considered an accomplice of the first order.

No drastic action took place, perhaps at least partly due to this program. Callers were apparently satisfied with breaking verbal taboos. At the time, people were surprised and jubilant over the amount of freedom of speech the program afforded them, stressing how this was a first and unique occasion. Even months after the World Cup, people on the streets of Yaoundé derived a certain satisfaction from recalling the program, saying, usually as closure to the discussion, "the people spoke".

In the next section of the chapter I will examine some of the issues "the people" spoke about. Using football as a metaphor for their country Cameroonians took the opportunity to talk about their lived experience and through criticizing it they showed visions of how the country should be. The topics they touched upon ranged widely; among others they criticized the choice of a French coach for the Lions (I will discuss this question in Chapter VI), tribalism, as well as the disorganization and unpredictability of their lives.

I will argue that while dissatisfaction and disillusionment and even desperation are mounting in Cameroon the terms for the expressions of this dissatisfaction are Cameroonian terms. People take Cameroon as an entity and as a point of reference for granted. It is as Cameroonians that they feel disgruntled, it is as Cameroonians that they feel disappointed. Anglophones are supposed to be the least likely to buy into the ideology of national unity in Cameroon, yet the first reaction of an Anglophone intellectual, not a friend of the Biya regime by far, upon hearing from me that Joseph Antoine Bell resigned

from the national squad in 1994 was to ask whether this meant that Bell had resigned from being Cameroonian.

Talking on the program, people constantly slipped from assessing the fate of football to the fate of the country. Metaphorically identifying the sport with the country, many of their complaints no longer spoke about football, but about Cameroon. Closely connected to this is people's emotional investment in and concern for football and ultimately for the fate of the country and its people.

An Anglophone caller who began his contribution in French then continued in English was trying to analyze the reasons why football was so important to Cameroonians:

It is because, I guess, every imaginable aspect of our national life is therein represented to a very high degree. Consider the political dimension, the economic, the social, all are clearly manifested in Cameroon football. To the extent that football has come to be the last and most respected and adored source of our national pride and hope, the greatest, and now I daresay the only incarnation of our national unity – so much has been going wrong in our football, in football, in this country and in general management of affairs of this country. (July 2, 1994)

Variations on the theme of football uniting the people and its importance to them abounded coming from journalists and listeners. A Francophone woman caller said the following with great emphasis and emotional force, the tears in her eyes audible in her voice:

Our coach should understand that even if Cameroonians are starving, even if they have problems, what remains for them is their football team. And under no circumstances should anyone take our football team lightly [*s'amuser avec*] because that is the only thing that remains for us when we have lost everything. (June 25, 1994)

The urging to the government –both from listeners and journalists– to take the matter seriously kept recurring, indicating both this concern and people's assessment that the government has been found lacking in this respect. In general Cameroonians feel that the government does not care about their concerns and its members are only bent on pursuing their narrow personal or ethnic interests. Francis B. Nyamnjoh, a Cameroonian political scientist, concludes bitterly: "The system is interested in nation-destruction, not nation-building, national disunity, not national unity, disintegration, not integration. It finds comfort in chaos, and makes of conviviality a subject mostly of rhetoric" (1999:109). Many of the statements made by Cameroonians in response to the 1994 World Cup echo the despair and frustration of this statement.

When people warn and sometimes beg the government to pay attention to what happens in football they are also begging and warning it to pay attention to what happens in the country, and these entreaties are fuelled by frustration and anxiety that the government is allowing the country to deteriorate.³ These statements are often contradictory because the government is clearly paying attention to football (by interfering in it, trying to control or influence public opinion about it and by trying to usurp football victories), however, what people seem to be arguing is that the government's attention is

³There is a difference between the reading of Cameroonian social scientists and ordinary Cameroonians. The former are much more likely to attribute this phenomenon to conscious policy on the part of the political leadership (cf. Kofele-Kale 1986 Nyamnjoh 1999). By contrast the latter, at least as evidenced in these contributions, seem to believe (or hope to believe) that the government is unaware of these problems. Thus for example an Anglophone woman caller said the following: "... I think the Parliament is sitting right now. Let those parliamentarians, if they are listening to me, know that it's their duty to

misdirected (from the people's point of view), because the government should ensure that things work instead of interfering in ways that undercut people's efforts to achieve their desires.

One of the most important failures of the government was its inability to pay the players for their participation in the World Cup. To make up for this Simon Achidi Achu, then Prime Minister, launched *Opération Coup de Cœur*, a fundraising drive for the national team prior to the World Cup in May 1994. It called upon people to contribute to the effort to pay the expenses of the World Cup. People understood this to mean that they were paying the Lions.

There was considerable controversy around the demand. Many considered it to be an imposition, forced upon people, and much resented in the deteriorating economic circumstances reigning in the country. However, given the ambiguous meaning of the Lions as a symbol of both the government and the people as discussed above, many paid, seeing that it was a necessary sacrifice to help the Lions. The collection took place all over the country. In government offices they went around with collection sheets and people had little choice but to pay. Village associations (both inside and outside the villages themselves) also took up collections, and there were people who paid both at their workplace and in their village association.

There were frequent reports on radio and TV about the collection in various localities of the country, thus creating a competitive mood where different districts or

talk on behalf of the people to our Head of State." (June 30, 1994, emphasis in the original)

provinces were somewhat artificially pitted against one another. The collection extended to prisons, and many who commented on the event remarked somewhat wryly that even prisoners (who by definition have nothing) paid. Another recurring phrase was that “even old mothers” (*vielles mamans*) paid. Clearly there was something incongruous in the idea that the most miserable elements of Cameroonian society should come to the aid of the government in meeting its obligations towards the Lions.

Humor is never buried deeply in Cameroon and given the contradictions embedded in the drive, soon there were several distorted versions of its name. *Opération Coup de Cœur* (Operation heart beat) became “*opération coup de poing*” (operation blow struck) or even simpler “*opération coup de vol*” (operation theft). Since the collection drive was seen by many as an occasion for the powers that be to embezzle the funds, these distortions stressed the forced and potentially fraudulent aspects of the collection and thus criticized the government even though many people paid because they genuinely wanted to help the players as well as participate in a not uncommon display of one-upmanship.

One of the funniest, and saddest, commentaries on the campaign was when someone placed a sign saying “*Opération Coup de Cœur*” on a huge garbage heap at Biyem Assi Carréfour, a street junction in Yaoundé, where uncollected garbage was beginning to obstruct traffic. At the time there was no garbage collection in the capital, the company that had been collecting the garbage having folded (cf. Zoa 1994 and 1995). At various points in town spontaneous garbage heaps arose, which when they threatened to take up too much space, or started smelling too badly, were burnt by the population, only to begin accumulating again the next day. Thus the sign was both commentary and subversion, in itself indicating that there were more important needs than football, and that

help was needed urgently to cope with the garbage situation. It could even be said that it was a statement about where taxpayers' money should be going. The sign was pointed out to me at the time by an Anglophone university professor just before the beginning of the World Cup, and a few months later a taxi driver friend also told me about it, amid some wry laughter, adding that the sign was later removed by the police.

Despite the enormous amounts of money⁴ collected through *Opération Coup de Coeur* the players remained unpaid until after the match against Brazil (their second match in the competition). And even then they were only paid when, under the threat of a strike Augustin Kontchou Koumegni, the Minister of Communication was hastily dispatched, as the Special Envoy of the Head of State to pay them. The non-payment (or delays in the payment) of the players' bonuses was often compared by the listeners of the radio program to the delays in the salary payments of civil servants. This created a public debate on whether the players should put their patriotism first (and play even without pay) or whether they were justified in putting their self-interest before the national interest. A Francophone woman argued that "the players should first defend the colors of the country" (June 30, 1994) contrasting their behavior to that of civil servants whose salaries were withheld and who, according to her, continued performing their jobs anyway. There were two responses to this, one from an Anglophone woman, the other from a CRTV journalist from Ebolowa.⁵ The woman said the following:

⁴ According to official figures the collection amounted to 629 112 189 FCFA, which at the exchange rate prevailing at the time was a little over 1,250,000 US dollars. (Messang 1995b).

⁵ It is worth bearing in mind that journalists even in the government-controlled medium of

“...whatever happened to our Lions, we all are crying today to the economic crisis. We say we are not paid, we trek on foot to work, and that kind of stuff. These guys are professional players, I mean they have to be paid for what they do ...” (June 30, 1994; emphasis in the original)

She followed up by arguing that the players have for years been giving a good name to the country, therefore they deserved to be paid. The journalist responded:

Some Cameroonians would say why is it that the Lions have demanded their dues before playing. Because there are doctors ... there are civil servants who, who work without salary. I say to these Cameroonians that it is not right [*c'est pas normal*] that Cameroonians work without salary, may be it is becoming habitual [*habitude*], but it is not right [*c'est pas normal*] that Cameroonians, the Lions included, should work without salary. (July 1, 1994; emphasis in the original)

This statement takes us back to what I argued about Cameroonian perceptions of the proper way of doing things in Chapter III. The journalist is reminding the listeners that what they put up with on an everyday basis is not how things should be.

In the same vein, listeners talked bitterly about the deterioration of institutions in Cameroon. Referring to the otherwise much disparaged French head coach, some listeners pointed out that the many problems Cameroonian football faces had rendered his task well well-nigh impossible. One caller put it this way: “no matter who the coach is,

CRTV are not a monolithic category, they often express views contrary to government directives and not surprisingly when they go “too far” they are suspended or transferred to less desirable posts. For example, after the 1994 World Cup two journalists were suspended for having cut short the broadcast of the Chadian president’s departure from Cameroon in favor of broadcasting an interview with Joseph Antoine Bell. Cameroon’s

no matter what his competence, it's not three months before the event that a country like Cameroon, which moreover has great ambitions in football, should have looked for a coach..." (July 1 1994).

A woman caller went further, condemning the disarray in Cameroon's football and sports organizations:

... we blame the ... the ... the coach. He... Henri Michel. Henri Michel finds a situation which is already rotten, he cannot work with a federation which does not exist, with a Ministry of Education [she corrected herself] ... of Youth and Sports which does not exist... (July 1 1994).

Another caller, this time from the town of Ebolowa in the south, placed the problems of football into the wider context of the problems the country was faced with, and stressed the responsibility of all Cameroonians.

Let's take stock of what is happening to us today, because the problem with which we are faced [...] it is the management, the management ... of public goods, the management of people, the management even of structures ... because I put it to you to show me any department, any service where ... where we don't find Henri Michels, ... Joseph Antoine Bells. The problem is at every level. Look at the state of our stadiums, look at the national education system ... that is to say everywhere, in every domain. (July 3 1994)

Many listeners made critical comments on the general disorder in the midst of the official delegation of Cameroon at the 1994 World Cup. There was indeed considerable confusion around the organization of Cameroon's participation. Soon after qualifying in 1993 several bodies were created to manage the Lions' preparation. The spheres of authority of these groups were unclear. Usually, the Ministry of Youth and Sports and the

iconoclastic goalkeeper at the World Cup (cf. Nkwi and Vidacs 1997).

Federation share these responsibilities. In 1994, however, both of these organizations were crippled. The Federation was in disarray due to infighting which led to the deposition of its government appointed president and so was the Ministry because of jostling for power within the government (cf. Ntonfo 1994).

Many listeners called attention to the resulting sense of confusion as to who was in charge and who was responsible and complained vocally about the disorder and uncertainty this entailed. This debate, too, pointed to larger issues concerning not just football but people's daily lives, leading one listener to address himself to the journalists:

You, journalists, .. we are going to the World Cup, none of our special correspondents speak of either the Minister of Youth and Sports, or of the President of the Cameroonian Football Federation. That means at bottom [au fond], we have political problems. That they have mixed with football ... it cannot work like that. Well, we have spoken a lot of Bell, of Nkono, of Songo'o [Cameroon's three goalkeepers], I think the problem was much more with politics being mixed in with football. The president of the CTO, we don't speak of him any more, so that one no longer knows who effectively directs [dirige] the Indomitable Lions who are in the United States. (July 1 1994)

Speaking of disagreements among players another listener goes even further, exclaiming "... it is terrible. You cannot live in a country, ... you cannot live in a country where everything is in disorder!" (July 1, 1994, p. 16). Again, these statements are ambiguous. While on the one hand people resent government interference in football, by demanding clear-cut spheres of authority they also criticize the weakness of the government, in effect demanding greater interference.

It is worth noting that in decrying the confusion and mismanagement, people are

often longing for greater order, and these wishes border on demands for a more autocratic treatment, in the hopes of a more predictable life. Francis B. Nyamnjoh, writing about the 1996 constitution of Cameroon, which is viewed by many as deeply flawed, arguing that the best constitution is worthless if disregarded, wryly remarks: "I dare conjecture that if Cameroon were to be confided to a self-professed dictator, one with a vision and one ready to take Cameroon forward without a constitution -the worst-case scenario- such a person would endear himself to ordinary Cameroonians much more than have most smoke-screen democrats in high office today" (1996:113).

Many authors have noted that African governments have used the rhetoric of order and chaos to muzzle the political opposition (Bayart 1985, Haugerud 1995, Odhiambo 1987, Schatzberg 1991). In Cameroon's case this was so with the UPC rebellion, the adherents of which after the UPC's defeat were criminalized by the Ahidjo government, and a similar rhetoric was used after 1990. During the early 1990s, especially "*villes mortes*" did cause considerable disorder. Therefore it is conceivable that some of the speakers are supporters of the regime or that they have internalized the regime's language of order and disorder, and that is why they find disorder so abhorrent. However, many other contributors made their anti-government stance quite clear, and my impressions of my personal encounters and conversations in Cameroon also convince me that quite a few people, possibly influenced by government and even colonial rhetoric, genuinely believe that order is necessary not for silencing the opposition, but for living a livable life.

Some people called for quite drastic measures. Referring to Henri Michel a Francophone woman called attention to larger problems:

... it does not serve any purpose to speak of Henri Michel,

because Henri Michel has been used by the government to cover itself. The problem is that we the Cameroonians should not continue to close our eyes to our ... our situation, our problem, we are in a country that we ought to direct and we should make all efforts so that things work here because we are all united in the same fate. So, what I am saying is that the government and the whole government resign, because it is not the fault of Henri Michel. ... So, all those who are concerned in this defeat should resign because it cannot continue like this. The country has run aground and we are in the process of dishonoring ourselves in front of the whole world, we could somehow continue to exist with our shame here in the country, but if it ... goes beyond the borders, we can't tolerate that. So, I myself, I demand the resignation of the government. Thank you. (July 5, 1994)

She touches on several important issues. Unlike many of her compatriots she chooses to see the issue of Henri Michel (external forces) as a red-herring. Instead, she concentrates on the internal problems of the country, first affirming the unity of Cameroon by insisting that all are united in the same fate, and then calls for the resignation of the government because "the country has run aground," the government has failed in its stewardship of the country. It is striking that while she attributes the problems of the country to internal factors, what she seems to find the most unacceptable about the situation is that the country is being dishonored in the eyes of outsiders. Her concern with the outside world takes us back to the impossibility of separating the external and the internal aspects of conceptualizing the nation, and to the tremendous importance attributed to the external view of their country for Cameroonians. She was not the only one to demand the resignation of the government. What seems to be the most important in these is that they spring from a deep concern for the people, for the nation, and in effect

they juxtapose the nation and the government, blaming it for the humiliation of the nation and disregarding the plight of the people.

In a 1998 overview of social science writing by Africans about the prospects of democracy on the continent Dickson Eyoh, a Cameroonian political scientist, frames the debate as being that of nationalism. He argues that:

Much of modern African social and political thought articulates a nationalist discourse motivated by the desire for technology-driven modes of economic organization and by the wish to transform national territories inherited from colonialism into viable political communities. Nationalist discourse has taken for granted institutions that universalize (Western) modernity as the foundation for contemporary society, but this discourse has always resisted the 'truth claims' of paradigms that insist on the universality of the Western model of development. ... Thus, the central point of contention in African nationalist discourse has been the extent to which the institutional and normative frameworks for nation formation and economic development required an uncritical emulation of the Western paradigm. (1998a:281)

As it is amply evident from the literature, the match between nation and state in Africa is less than complete (cf. Mamdani 1996) although one could easily make a similar case for Europe. The idea of homogeneity even in the core European countries is proving to be more of an ideal than actuality (due to incomplete homogenization in the first place, ethnic revivals among hitherto "homogenized" populations and the influx of immigrants). However, this has been one of the cornerstones of the argument that nationalism is not applicable to Africa, because the arbitrariness of boundaries and the multiethnic character of the populations contained within them make ethnic sentiments more pertinent than nationalist ones. In the previous chapter I questioned the validity of this argument,

suggesting that nationalist and ethnic sentiments along with pan-African ones are likely to co-exist and do not necessarily seem contradictory to those who express them. However, part of the argument against Western-style nationalism taking hold of the continent stems from considerations of the nature of political relations in Africa. Bruce Berman, in a thorough-going analysis of the historical roots and the present workings of ethnic relations in Africa, contrasts “moral ethnicity” with “uncivil nationalism” saying:

...internal processes of moral ethnicity, groping towards defining communities of cultural identity and social responsibility, contrast with an external realm of competitive tribalism defined by purely materialistic and opportunistic relationships to the state through the control of patronage. What is missing is the development of a trans-ethnic arena grounded in universalistic norms and the essential relations of social trust in the disinterested competence and probity of millions of others that are the foundation of the day to day transactions of both capitalism and the nation-state” (1998:339).

Most Western scholars and many Africans would agree with much of Berman’s pessimistic view. In essence what Berman argues is that continuing the trajectory of the colonial state the postcolonial state has not succeeded in creating either capitalism or the nation-state, and this is what explains the “lack” of universalistic standards in Africa. In contrast to this, Eyoh’s overview, while not minimizing at all the problems faced by the continent^o, suggests a different outcome. He asserts that regardless of the side the African scholars he discusses take in the debate on the prospects for democracy and the reasons

^o In fact, in another article (1998b:249) he argues for the “incipiency of African nation-states that is, that these are as yet in an unrealized state of becoming.”

for underdevelopment they are committed to imagining a better future for the continent.⁷

As he puts it:

What is striking about the democracy debate is the determination of African intellectuals not to succumb to the despair that suffuses commentary on the continent's current predicament. The debate proclaims, in many ways, faith in the desirability, indeed the moral obligation, of articulating collective social visions. (1998a:297)

It might be argued that being an African social scientist himself, Eyoh and the colleagues he writes about, are part of the very institutional barriers that Berman points to as the reason for the incomplete achievement of the nation-state or capitalism in Africa. Eyoh actually grapples with this problem both in this article –the title of which significantly is “African Perspectives on Democracy and Dilemmas of Postcolonial Intellectuals”– and in a 1996 article in which he bitterly recognizes the likelihood of the co-optation by African regimes of intellectuals. “The result is the not unfounded popular cynicism in African societies of the political ambitions of intellectuals: as they say in Cameroon, Nigeria and other places, they protest until they get posts.” (ibid: 73). Here Eyoh argues that while the aspirations of African intellectuals express a strong commitment to Western modernism by virtue of their very positions in their societies, they are situated within reach of power even when in an opposition position and therefore

⁷ Eyoh identifies three schools, amidst disclaimers of difficulties of categorizations, universalist, popular democratic and nativist. According to him the first, roughly speaking, posits a straightforward extension of the need for universal democratic rights to Africans, the second arguing that this extension of rights would reinforce the exploitation of Africans by completing the domination of the elite, which remained incomplete under colonialism and the third rejecting the applicability of liberal democracy to African societies, nonetheless affirming the ability of Africans to create democracy on their own terms by mining their own communal “African” traditions.

easily co-opted.

However, that these yearnings are not limited to intellectuals could be seen from the response I got from a FÉCAFOOT official when I asked him who had been the best President of the Federation. He answered without hesitation that it was Issa Hayatou, because in his time “the law applied equally to everyone.” (The official in question is Bamileke, while Hayatou is from the North). Based on Cameroonians’ articulations of their profound disappointment with their government and their very palpable yearnings for a better world presented here I do not think we should deny or dismiss the existence and significance of these ideas.

Nationalism may not be the right term to describe the popular rhetoric international football gives rise to in Cameroon. At the very least, we need to differentiate between official and popular nationalism.

Because of the continued saliency of ethnicity in many contexts, and the obvious emptiness of much of the official nationalist rhetoric. Africans, and among them Cameroonians, tend to be distrustful or at the very least doubtful about the possibilities of national integration, and do not easily accept the exhortations of their governments for national unity, which are seen to be empty, even cynical, rhetoric. In as much as nationalism is an ideology of the modern (nation-)state, it is largely rejected by Africans (cf. Eriksen 1993). One of the questions this chapter raises is whether this also means that nationalist sentiments are non-existent.

It may be useful to adopt the distinction Neil Lazarus (1994) makes via Frantz Fanon (and Anouar Abdel-Malek) between nationalism as an ideology of the ruling classes aimed at wresting power for themselves away from the colonizers, and nationalitarianism

as an expression of genuine popular sentiments, which would lead to much greater social revolution, in fact to “the reconquest of the power of decision in all domains of national life” (Abdel-Malek 1981:13, quoted in Lazarus 198). Lazarus is talking about the anti-colonial struggle and the aspirations of a revolutionary vanguard. Eyoh (1998a) talks in a similar vein about official and unofficial discourses of contemporary nationalism in Africa similarly applying the latter term to a minority of intellectuals only. This view seems to me to be too restrictive. Ordinary Cameroonians, not just the educated élite, also protest the government’s attempts to usurp the nationalist agenda and through negating it articulate a vision of a better world.

Merely using the term nationalism hides as much as it reveals. The meaning of these sentiments depends on the circumstances. The 1994 discourses on the Lions’ humiliation throw light upon how the people conceive of the state and the nation and what they hold the duties of the government to be. People were challenging and calling to task the government in the name of the nation, accusing it of disregarding the problems the people are faced with, humiliating them in the eyes of the world, and generally just not caring enough about their fate.

In his 1996 article, Eyoh states that it is a mistake to take for granted “that the nation-state has passed from being a contested referent for political community in Africa” (1996:66). A little later, however, he suggests that the dismissal of the notion of nationalism for Africa may be premature, raising the question “whether there exists in African societies today social agents to write alternative scripts for the ongoing task of inventing nations that depart significantly from the statist-developmental versions of nationalist ideology” (ibid 67). He argues that in viewing nationalism as a ruling class

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ideology, the North American political sociology literature “grossly underestimates the ubiquity of the yearnings of African nationalism...” (ibid 67).

The discourses that emerged in *Bonjour l'Amérique*, and *Hi America* can also be seen to express this “yearning of nationalism” but they come from a larger cross-section of the population than the circle of intellectuals Eyoh is talking about. This yearning is in part connected to the external aspects of nationalism I discussed in the previous chapter, based on Malkki’s notion of the “national order of things,” in which nationhood serves to legitimate African countries as equal members of the global world, but in part, springs from internal factors as well.

Chapter VI – Visions of France/Visions of whites

In this chapter I return to the external dimension of identity formation and nationalist sentiments in Cameroon. I will concentrate on how Cameroonians see their relationship to France and the wider world –to whites as an essentialized general category– as articulated through football. I will argue on the one hand, that football provides a way for Cameroonians to define themselves in opposition to France, define who they are not. Talking about this relationship, they recall their colonial history and reaffirm their anti(neo)-colonial sentiments and create a framework to talk about the external constraints the country's continuing relationship to France imposes on their lives. These constraints reflect more accurately than does the Cameroonian government's and France's official rhetoric the self-interested nature of France's dealings with Africa. These anti-colonial sentiments are not rooted exclusively in the past, nor even in the neo-colonial constellation of things in Cameroon in the abstract, but also constitute responses to the events of the present, in this case, to what took place at the World Cup. World Cup football also allows Cameroonians to envision symbolic revenge for the indignities of colonization. I will argue that in situating themselves as a part of Africa and the Third World, and reacting to what they see as unfair treatment, Cameroonians call attention to the hypocrisy of the West and claim for themselves the application of the universal standards supposedly so dear to Westerners.

We should recall that Independence came to Cameroon in 1960 on the wave of granting independence to the majority of African countries, but in fact Cameroonians

waged a bloody struggle against the French in the late 1950s which was ultimately unsuccessful. The fact that independence came about on French rather than Cameroonian terms and therefore with many compromises made in France's favor has created a sense that independence is less than complete and has undermined the legitimacy of subsequent governments in the eyes of many Cameroonians (cf. Bayart 1985, Mbembe 1986).

Opposition to France is thus never far from people's minds, all the more so as Cameroon's largely unpopular governments are seen to be propped up by the French. On the surface, however, France is projected by the official propaganda of the Cameroonian government and by the French themselves, as the "mother country," as a benefactor of Cameroon (and of its other former colonies).

In part this closeness between France and its former colonies is due to what is usually referred to as the colonizing style of "direct rule" employed by the French as opposed to "indirect rule" exercised by the British: the former were much more committed to imparting their cultural values to the peoples colonized by them than the latter.¹ In the present, this is also a question of France's wish to maintain the primacy of the French language, "*la francophonie*," (a hegemonic quest if there ever was one) to counterbalance the spread of the influence of the English language and American culture. Jean-François Bayart puts forth the argument that this closeness, or as he calls it "intercontinental cultural sociability" (1993:197), plays an important role in the creation of "postcolonial historic blocs," which successfully dominate African politics. This may well be true on the

¹ It is worth noting, however, that this opposition of "direct" and "indirect" rule is something of a simplification, in as much as the French were quite willing to resort to indirect rule when circumstances and their interests required (cf. Berman 1998, Mazrui and Tidy 1984, Shimada 1984.)

level of *élites*.² and apart from the very real sense of cultural connections it may also bear the stamp of realism and pragmatism. However, on the level of the “little people,” as Bayart refers to them, opposition to the French is never far from the surface, and football appears to be one of the areas where this otherwise submerged dislike comes to the surface.

Most of what has been written by social scientists about the relationship of the colonized and colonizers in relation to sport concentrates on the colonial period (Fair 1997, 2001; Martin 1991, 1995; Ranger 1987, Stoddart 1988, Stuart 1996). These authors by and large see sports as an area where Africans could challenge the *status quo* of the colonial order by appropriating the imported organizational forms and by aspiring to beat the colonizers at their own game while at the same time forging new identities for themselves. Due to the pervasive effects of colonization and the continuing neo-colonial ties that still bind former colonized peoples to their erstwhile masters in the “post-colonial” period, the relationship remains unchanged to a great extent. The socio-economic relationships of subordination/inequality continue. Africa is more than ever dependent economically on the West and the cultural and psychological effects of colonization persist. People in Cameroon are not blind to this and as I argued in Chapter IV, in this context of continuing inequality on a global scale, football takes on a special significance as a possible means of redressing -at least symbolically- the balance.

² An example of this closeness with France of Cameroon’s ruling *élite* could also be heard from Gervais Mendo Zé, the director of CRTV. For example in the opening ceremony of the World Cup broadcast on Cameroonian TV in a quasi-religious ceremony where French- and English-speaking priests prayed for the success of the Lions, he also asked that France, as the organizing country, be especially blessed. When he also declared on

One of the ways in which the legacy of colonialism manifests itself in Cameroonian and African football is in the choice of the head coach of the national team. A quick survey of African national teams will show that very often they tend to employ foreign coaches.³ What is more, these coaches are not only foreign, but also white, and often come from the former colonizers of the country. This raises the specter of colonialism and reminds people of the continuing ties to the ex-colonial powers, thus forcing them to rethink these issues and their relationship to the colonizer. Needless to say, football is not the only crucial field in Africa which is dominated by foreigners in general and the former colonial masters in particular. As a result, frequently we find that, just as the comments speaking to the internal affairs of Cameroon presented in the previous chapter, football serves as a metaphor for the country, but in these cases the fate of the country is considered with regard to the outside world, and especially the former colonial power, in the Cameroonian case, France. In 1994, besides blaming local circumstances as discussed in the previous chapter, much of the blame for the Lions' poor performance was put on Henri Michel, the French head coach. Thus, employing metonymy, Henri Michel also stood for the French, and even for whites; and the question of

national radio that he supported France and Cameroon in equal measure the comment upset quite a few people.

³ Cameroon has had a succession of expatriate coaches over the years. Some were French, some German, but there were also some Yugoslav coaches in the 1980s, and in 1990 the victorious "Italia" squad was led by a Soviet (cf. Ntonfo 1994 a). In recent years the pattern in Cameroon has been for national/local coaches to qualify the national team for international competitions only to have to relinquish their powers to incoming foreign coaches who then take the team to the next, international level. This was the case in 1994, when Henri Michel was engaged to lead the Indomitable Lions to the World Cup in the United States, just a few months before the beginning of that competition. Things have not changed much since, although at the 2000 Olympics the national team had a Cameroonian head coach, Jean-Paul Akono. The French head coach was re-instituted after the Lions' return, however. See also Bissohong 1998 for an analysis of Cameroonian fascination with "heroes coming from elsewhere".

the relationship of Cameroonians to Henri Michel also became the question of the relationship of Cameroonians to France, and when blaming Henri Michel for the poor showing of Cameroon it was also France that was being blamed.

We have to keep in mind that in the current political climate of Cameroon, for many Cameroonians opposed to President Biya's regime, France is seen as maintaining him in power against the will of the people. Therefore criticism of Henri Michel, and by extension of France, also reflects indirect criticism of the regime. The fact that Henri Michel was French greatly contributed to the chagrin of the people, both because of this and because it served as a reminder of the colonial past and the neocolonial present, the incompleteness of the ending of colonialism. At the same time, however, the reverse was also seen, reminiscent of the anti-government discourses I discussed in the previous chapter. Several callers drew attention to the fact that Henri Michel was taking orders from the Cameroonian President.

One listener was satisfied with merely raising the rhetorical question: "We are looking at Henri Michel, but at the end of the day who gave the orders to Henri Michel?" (June 29 1994) Others went further and firmly, if ironically, pointed out the connection:

Everyone complained that Henri Michel is a dictator. ...
Let us remember that the President of the Republic asked
him in France ... told him in France that he had green light.
Well, when it is the President of the Republic who gives
green light to someone, then this gentleman has no longer
to be accountable to anyone. (July 5 1994)

Another caller goes further in irony expressing the same sentiment in a tongue in cheek statement.

I would like to call to the attention of Cameroonians that if
they reject [*désavouent*] Henri Michel today that they
should nonetheless know ... that the President of the

Republic, as First Sportsman [*premier sportif*⁴] had given full powers to Henri Michel in Paris by even giving him a grant of a hundred million to distribute to the players. That they pay attention! that they don't hide behind this story to reject the Cameroonian First Sportsman. (June 30 1994)

The implication of the powerlessness of the people in the face of such powerful forces is hard to escape, yet the ironic undertone of the statements also subverts the message.

Many of the callers to *Bonjour l'Amérique* demanded a local Cameroonian coach to head the national team. They pointed out that there were Cameroonian coaches equally well qualified as the foreign coaches.⁵ Contributors also reminded their fellow listeners that the national team had been qualified by local coaches, and Henri Michel only took over after the qualification had been achieved. An Anglophone woman caller for example said:

... the ... the national team qualified with people like Manga Onguéné and Jules Nyongha [the actual assistant coaches of

⁴ According to Nketcha (1991), "*premier sportif*" is one of the official (honorific) designations of President Biya. Golf is his preferred sport.

⁵ Apart from the felt need to assert sovereignty, one of the main reasons why expatriate coaches are resented by many, and especially by sportsmen, is that in a stark reminder of the continuation of colonial values the resources to which expatriate coaches have access are far superior to those at the disposal of local coaches. The salary of the foreign head coach is several magnitudes higher than that of the local head coach. The latter is a civil servant, and being appointed to be coach to the national team does not bring any immediate financial benefit, although in the case of a good performance by the Indomitable Lions the coaches receive generous bonuses and decorations. Furthermore, it is widely known in Cameroon that expatriate coaches work under infinitely better conditions than local ones. For example, they have a car with a government provided petrol allowance to go prospecting for players, which, according to Cameroonian coaches, would never be the case for Cameroonians. The inequity of these practices does not escape anyone's notice, and Cameroonian coaches, as well as the general public, are quick to draw attention to this. Like so many other things it drives home to them that even in their own country they cannot have the respect that is their due.

Henri Michel]. I don't see why Henri Michel is there. He has not done anything at all and if I were the Cameroonian authority ... I would ask that he resign or we ... we dismiss him! (June 25 1994)

A little later she continued:

... I believe this ... this is time we have to overcome our complex and trot out ... our nationals ... our nationals. When they were qualifying, was Henri Michel there? He wasn't there. Why is it that when ... when ... when we qualify ... they ... they have to go and bring an expatriate to come and spoil our team?! (June 25 1994)

Similar comments abounded, sometimes stressing the need for Cameroonians to take charge of their affairs, as for example in the comments made by a man in Maroua, in the course of a "man-on-the-street" interview:

I say, when we are speaking about Cameroonian football, Cameroonians should be in charge of our ... our football. Because what I see actually, is that the coaches who ... the expatriates whom they bring here to Cameroon cannot really control things. When we speak ... when we speak on the national level, really it is still our coaches who can at least achieve something. When they bring the expatriate coaches we do not get to the outcome that we want. So, let us really, us Cameroonians do our thing so that, so that we can see what may arrive. (July 1 1994)

Another Francophone speaker made the connection between nationalism and foreign coaches even clearer:

We have seen what Jules Nyongha was capable of doing, and the other one.... Well, this is the result ... that is really ... [...] because if they bring a Westerner here ... that is something, that is somebody who has no patriotism. (June 29 1994)

There were two counter-arguments to the demand for national coaches. One was employed primarily by journalists and sports professionals but it was also echoed in some

contributions by listeners. This was that foreign coaches were necessary because if the results were unsatisfactory and the coach was local, the population would attack the coach and his family. The second one was mostly found in listener contributions. This was the question of tribalism, where the argument ran that expatriate coaches were necessary because not being Cameroonian they could stay above the problems caused by tribalism.

Here is for example what a woman caller from Yaoundé said:

In addition we ... Henri Michel here and there and everywhere, no, we are all tribalists and really we practice tribalism in Cameroon. If it had been Manga Onguéné or Jules Nyongha we would have said he had taken more Bamilekes than Ewondos. No, we shall always need an expatriate because we are too tribalist in Cameroon. Too much. So, we are shooting at Henri Michel, we need such a person to come ... to settle our quarrels. Let's try in ... amongst ourselves to stop this tribalism, that way we would be able to go further. Thank you. Goodbye. (June 29 1994)

Others acknowledged the force of this argument but argued against having of all whites, a French head coach. Another Maroua speaker said the following in a man-on-the-street interview:

Because ... to bring a French coach here to Cameroon, we want that to stop. Henri Michel is the last French coach who came here to Cameroon. To bring a coach to say that we have to ... that they propose a Cameroonian. We know that Cameroonians will always be Cameroonians. They won't improve anything this [way].... That they bring other coaches, because the Cameroonians will always do their tribalism. So, I myself, I propose that they bring a coach other than a Frenchman. This is what I wanted to say. (July 1 1994)

There was more to these vehement rejections of Henri Michel than the assertion of national autonomy. Several contributions to *Bonjour l'Amérique* represent an

undercurrent of strong anti-colonial sentiments. As another caller put it succinctly "... already the choice of Henri Michel, it's as if it was a form of re-colonizing, well, Africa," (June 29 1994, emphasis added). These sentiments gained their fullest expression in a discourse which was fully anti-colonial. In effect they articulate the strongest anti-French perspective, basically suggesting that since the French had not been able to qualify for the World Cup, themselves, it was foolhardy for Cameroonians to think that a Frenchman would lead Cameroon to success.

A woman who had submitted a letter set the stage for her contribution by stating that "since 1960, and even before these French did not want to give us our independence, but we got it at the price of blood." Rejecting Henri Michel she continued later, "we want that our affairs return into our own hands." (July 2 1994)

Others went further in their statements, outlining a veritable conspiracy theory. The following statement is from the Francophone man I quoted above, who suggested that foreign coaches cannot have the necessary patriotism to lead a national team. He continued, saying:

Let's look at the case of Henri Michel, this is a Frenchman. We know that France was eliminated by Bulgaria. I don't know how Henri Michel could find it in his heart of hearts to want to do something for ... for [... the line is bad] from his heart. The white man says to himself that the Negroes, the Negroes cannot ever advance ... (June 29 1994)

Another caller placing the question into the context of international politics went even further and described the expatriate French coach of Cameroon during the crucial and humiliating Cameroon - Russia match as someone who was on a special mission to undermine Cameroon. He said:

... I would like to call the attention of the Cameroonians to what happens on the international scene. We have seen the great powers who put everything into destabilizing other rising powers I think that from the moment when Cameroon was, wasn't it, considered to be one of the great football nations of the world ... well, we must not forget about these little games. So, I see clearly that if we observe carefully Henri Michel's comportment through this competition, his intrigues have shown that he was, wasn't he, a special agent [envoyé special] who came to destabilize our team in this World Cup. So, really if we look back at the Cameroon - Russia match, you will see his outbursts, you will see his outbursts of satisfaction, his eye movements, his attitude which was, wasn't it, one of a ... of a man who was satisfied at having accomplished a certain mission. (July 3 1994)

In the very fact of their construction these narratives transcend the question of the actualities of football and become metaphors for the relationship of the colony/post-colony and the colonial/neocolonial power. Naturally, there is no way of knowing whether there is any factual basis to them; in fact they seem rather far-fetched to me, but that is not the point. Taken as symbolic statements they talk about a different layer of truth, that of colonial past and neocolonial present, where the intentions of the erstwhile masters have not changed and cannot change, because they are based on self-interest and pride. It is, I think, in the sense of this deeper historical truth about the French that the significance of these remarks about the French head coach have to be understood. It is clear to everyone that independence has not delivered to Africa the prosperity or the social and economic justice, in short, the promise it held. The root causes of this failure are very often to be sought in the past, in colonial history, and in the exploitative neocolonial present. France, as well as other Western powers, continues to safeguard its own interests, and despite rhetoric to the contrary, its interests are often served by upholding a *status quo* which may

serve the local élites, but to the majority of Africans, seems to be against the interests of the people. Thus victory on the football pitch against the former colonizers would take on dimensions well beyond the scope of the match itself, demonstrating the “revenge” of the underdog.

As André Ntonfo (1994a) has shown, this is the case even at a remove, as for example when Bulgaria beat France for the qualification to the 1994 World Cup, Cameroonians, despite their usual interest in and support for French football, were openly rejoicing. When defeat is the order of the day, blaming the French coach evokes history in a symbolic way and sees the shortcomings of the national team, and the nation itself, as the result of this history. Fantastic and hyperbolic as these narratives may seem they are not so different from those explanations of the defeat discussed in Chapter V which take stock of the less than ideal circumstances in which Cameroonian football finds itself. These anti-colonial narratives see the same situation but take a wider view, and contextualize the problem differently.

In light of the above reactions to the French head coach in 1994 it should not be surprising that the fact that the 1998 World Cup took place in France was especially significant to Cameroonians even before the event. A Francophone university professor told me in 1995 that for him it was essential that Cameroon should qualify for the 1998 World Cup because it was going to be a unique historical moment for the country to play against France. As it happened Cameroon never got a chance to play France, and in fact was eliminated after the first round of the tournament under circumstances which were highly irregular.

The match which seemingly decided Cameroon's fate was that between Cameroon and Chile. It was a dramatic match with dramatic consequences. It took place on June 23 in the afternoon. In order to advance to the second round, Cameroon absolutely had to win, whereas for Chile even a draw was enough to advance. Chile opened the score around the 30th minute. Towards the end of the first half a Cameroonian goal was refused because of being offside. In the second half, one of the Cameroonian defenders got a red card and Cameroon continued the game at a numerical disadvantage. Despite this, with beautiful and determined play the Cameroonians started to dominate and eventually managed to equalize. Then François Omam Biyick, the captain of the team, positioned a little behind two Chileans, scored a goal, which was refused by the Hungarian referee for no reason that anyone could see.

I watched the match in a bar in Yaoundé and there was palpable shock in the room. People could not believe their eyes. They shouted scandal, someone yelled "it's impossible, the whites don't want blacks to win." A woman behind me asked in disbelief "so, whites do such tricks?" They kept repeating "it was a good clear goal!" Meanwhile another Cameroonian player was expelled, and eventually the match ended on the score of 1-1, and thus the Indomitable Lions were eliminated.

Immediately following the match there were riots in Yaoundé and Douala, where the public, –for the most part the young and disenfranchised of these two cities– attacked all whites who happened to be around. Being Hungarian like the referee I had an additional reason to be concerned for my safety, but in fact I saw nothing of the riots, as

after the match I took refuge first in a restaurant and later at a friend's house.⁶

Apparently, what had happened was that spontaneously from some of the popular areas of town young people, carrying placards saying things like, "enough is enough," "whites go home" and chanting anti-white and anti-FIFA slogans had filed down to some central areas of the city trying to find whites to beat up, and in several instances managed to do so. Ironically, many of these whites happened to be people who were completely unaware of what had happened. The rioters surrounded one of Yaoundé's supermarkets where many whites are known to shop and had a face-off with the police who were protecting it. Elsewhere in town some whites were pulled out of their cars and roughed up, while some windshields got broken. The police dispersed the crowd with tear-gas and by evening the hostilities were over. According to an Anglophone news report:

The pandemonium was brought to a halt when the delegate general for National Security, Bell Luc René, suddenly appeared. He called his boys to order then moved towards the demonstrators who were already constituting groups and pleaded. 'Your cause is genuine and your point has been made'. (*The Herald* No. 624, 24-25 June, 1998:2)

Apparently, elsewhere too, the police mostly pleaded with the population to stop.

One can imagine how difficult it was for the police themselves to contain their own emotions.

⁶ Until this match I took pleasure in telling people that I was Hungarian. Following it I found it prudent to say when asked that I came from the United States (an equally true statement). My personal friends, aware of my nationality, could easily make the distinction between me and the referee, and if anything they were amused by the irony of the situation I found myself in, while at the same time remaining sympathetic. All of them expressed concern, one going so far as to come and visit me two days later, saying that he had been worried about me as he had not seen me the previous day.

All the headlines of Cameroon's newspapers the following day dealt with the match and the racism involved. To quote some of the titles: "The cretin," "Dracula devours the Lions" ("Two goals cynically refused, and two red cards. Dracula has freed himself to drink the blood of the Lions." *La Nouvelle Expression*, 380:6, June 24 1998). They were unanimous, regardless of political leaning, that what had happened in the match was a blatant example of racism. This confirmed what had been the opinion of many people all along, that whites were in cahoots to frustrate Africans. Even prior to this match, throughout the World Cup the distribution of red cards as well as other decisions of the referees seemed to people to be biased against Third World peoples in general, and against Africans in particular. (Although, as I discussed in Chapter IV, in other contexts Cameroonians are apt to identify Brazil as a Third World country, in discussions of this aspect of the competition Brazil was identified as one of the "great football countries," and thus assimilated to the powers that be). In this context the riots seemed justified and there was practically no condemnation in the newspapers of the violence unleashed on the capital and on Douala, as it was seen by everyone as a natural response of frustration to what was seen as inadmissible partiality on the part of the referee.

This perception of bias was further reinforced by the fact that the same evening there were two other matches, one between Morocco⁷ and Scotland and another one between Brazil and Norway. They were played simultaneously to avoid fixing the results

⁷ Morocco's coach in this competition was no other than Henri Michel. After Morocco was eliminated under these dramatic circumstances the black sheep of Cameroon's 1994 participation was welcomed back in Morocco as a national hero and was given honorary citizenship according to the Cameroonian media. Interestingly, while other aspects of the 1994 competition kept cropping up, in 1998 there was practically no reference to Henri Michel's role in the performance of the Lions in the 1994 World Cup.

to benefit one of the teams in passing to the second round. Brazil was already qualified, but if Norway managed to beat Brazil it would advance instead of Morocco. Morocco beat its opponents 3-0, but at the last minute the referee of the Norway-Brazil match awarded a penalty kick to Norway, which the Norwegians translated into a goal and won the match. The penalty did not seem justified, raising charges that it was awarded in order to ensure that Morocco would not pass to the second round. This event coupled with Cameroon's questionable elimination made the suspicion of racism perfectly plausible to everyone.

The following day I spent most of the morning in a "*teleboutique*."⁸ As I entered the shop, the first sentence I heard from the young woman running the store was, "we are going to kill whites here!" At almost the same moment, a young man who was setting up his CD-stand which was also inside the boutique, said to me "Don't be afraid, Madame." Amidst these contradictory statements I sat down to wait my turn to make a long-distance phone-call to Douala. I spent more than an hour waiting, and got a wide array of commentary on the match, and people's interpretations of what had happened. During most of the discussion I was ignored (perhaps studiously) but some people (people kept coming and going during the whole time) even engaged me in conversation.

Primarily the discussion consisted of reliving the match and the disbelief and hurt that everybody experienced during and after. A lot of what was going on was venting, in general against whites and the injustice that had befallen Cameroon. The young woman

⁸ These are little stores where there are a couple of telephone booths and often one can also find a photocopying machine, or a computer where there is someone who does word processing. It is an ingenious way of overcoming the lack of infrastructure. People can make and receive phone-calls, receive messages and keep 'phone dates'.

kept repeating that whites were going to be killed. Another young woman added that “it is not even the referee, but FIFA. But what is FIFA? Is God white? The whites cheat. They are afraid of us, so they resort to such tricks.” The young CD vendor said that if he were the government he would declare the return of the Lions a holiday. Behind this statement was a sentiment that kept being repeated for the next few days, and which was actually how the match got etched into Cameroonian memories: in the eyes Cameroonians the Lions had won the match. The return of the Lions is declared a holiday when they win or do extremely well, as for example in 1990, or when they qualified for the participation in the 1994 World Cup,⁹ thus making the day a holiday would symbolically “correct” the result on the football pitch.

The pure hate that emanated from people against whites was quite amazing to experience. The most striking example was that strangers on the street who normally refer to me and address me as “*la Blanche*” (white female) when they want to call my attention to themselves, suddenly would be looking at me appraisingly and say with considerable disgust “*le Blanc*” (generic white [male]). This “de-gendering” and essentializing indicates more eloquently than anything else the depth of people’s bitterness over what happened in the Cameroon - Chile match, and it demonstrates how such discourses are constructed. I, along with all whites, became the enemy, reduced to one aspect of my identity, the color of my skin. Race and gender are two of the most obvious markers of any person’s biological identity, taking away one of these, as these people were doing.

⁹ As mentioned in the previous chapter, this was the time when the public holiday declared by the head of state coincided with the day of a general strike called for by the opposition to commemorate the anniversary of the ‘stolen elections’ of 1992, thereby subverting it completely.

meant that the battle lines could be drawn more sharply, white against black, black against white, just as people perceived it to have happened on the football pitch. Add to this that women are not considered to be seriously concerned with football, therefore leaving my identity as a female would have given an opportunity to side-step the issue and see me as negligible from the point of view of the “war” that was being declared.

Within a few days the sentiment got translated into jokes, some of them also indicating that recognition or non-recognition of my gender status constituted an important dividing line in deciding whether I was perceived as the enemy or not. Two days after the match I was in one of Yaoundé’s textile markets with a friend, and we overheard two teenagers making the following exchange: “is this the white who killed us?” “no, this is a woman!”

The discourse to which the Cameroon - Chile match gave rise in Cameroon is remarkable for its consistency and centeredness. It was an essentializing discourse, which as shown in the above example, removed all possibility of ambiguity and alternative interpretation. To a great extent the government set the stage for it. Thus, it was the Minister for Youth and Sports who first started to talk about the injustice and racism of whites already in the case of Cameroon’s second match against Italy, where Raymond Kalla had received a red card. In an interview on Cameroon Radio he recalled the 1982 World Cup in Spain where Roger Milla’s goal against Peru was refused, and attributed the refusal to the racism of the referee (cf. *La Nouvelle Expression*, 24 June, 1998, 380:8). CRTV later proceeded to re-broadcast that segment of the match. The riots were a spontaneous expression of people’s frustrations. The newspaper coverage produced a seamless totalizing discourse on white racism, and a conspiracy theory according to which

FIFA wished to eliminate all Third World teams from the competition. This theory was buttressed by evidence from earlier matches of the World Cup.

Dissent within this discourse was almost impossible, which is surprising in the sense that as I showed in the previous chapter, Cameroonians on other occasions have been quick to lay the blame on the government or on other factors within Cameroonian society, even if we accept Mbembe's thesis that ultimately there is a certain kind of collusion in these expressions of dissent. In this case, however, in finding an external enemy, the government and the people could find a common ground, and in the totalizing anti-FIFA, anti-white and anti-European discourse the fragmentation of the postcolonial is temporarily hidden, and the wink (which Werbner (1996), paraphrasing Clifford Geertz, has called the *par excellence* gesture of the postcolony) is lost. Mbembe's collusion is there, in that everybody forgets what they know about the insufficiencies of the preparation for the competition and the pervasive ills of Cameroonian football. It should also be noted that an important feature of this essentializing and totalizing discourse is to be found in a decontextualization of the match in different ways. Cameroon's World Cup participation is reduced to this one match; the other matches Cameroon played are of no relevance, and the effects of the local (insufficient preparation, lackluster performance in the African Nations Cup, late appointment of the head coach) on the performance of the team are forgotten. At the same time the match is also recontextualized within the historical framework of earlier World Cup injustices and of global power relationships (which also is historically conditioned).

There were some attempts to frame the match differently, but they were drowned out. The following discussion of the grounds on which some people tried to put this

particular match into a larger context in a certain way falsifies the tenor of the debate because by devoting equal time to it I will give an exaggerated sense of its importance. Nonetheless, it merits our attention because it highlights the nature of the postcolonial condition both in and out of football in Cameroon. The main voice of criticism was that of Joseph-Antoine Bell, the outspoken former goalkeeper of the Lions who tried to frame the debate within the context of Cameroonian football. Bell's main points were a flat denial that there was a conspiracy against Third World peoples. He claimed that Cameroonian players were just not as good as their opponents and that crying racism was a way to hide the inefficiency and corruption of the Cameroonian football establishment, and of Cameroon in general. He also called attention to the fact that if Cameroon had won its first match against Austria, the "misjudgement" of the referee would not have mattered against Chile. He also criticized some of the tactical choices of the French coach, Claude LeRoy.¹⁰

¹⁰ Bell maintained that Cameroonians were blaming racism when in fact they had been less than well prepared for the competition, his main point being that if Cameroon had beaten Austria in the first place then the actions of the Hungarian referee would not have made any difference. Partly, however, he criticized LeRoy for having made a wrong tactical decision once Marc Vivien Foé was prevented from participating in the competition because of a broken leg. LeRoy decided to put Patrick Mboma, who normally is an attacker, in the midfield to replace the midfielder Foé. Bell's argument was that any team that goes to the World Cup goes with 22 players exactly to have two people in every position, therefore, instead of making Mboma take on a new position, LeRoy should have maintained him as an attacker and put whoever was the regular replacement for Foé into Foé's position. I have heard this argument explained in great length in a taxi, without any reference to Bell, put forth in answer to someone's remark that "you have to admit that Claude LeRoy did the best he could in so short a time". This statement was made just before the final of the World Cup, ten or so days after Cameroon was eliminated from the competition. However, there was an even earlier manifestation of the same argument, the day of the Cameroon-Chile match. LeRoy changed his lineup for this match, and for the first time lined Mboma up in his proper position, that is to say as an attacker instead of as a midfielder. Mboma, finding himself in his element delivered a good game, so much so

Many Cameroonians were of the opinion that Bell was being unpatriotic and an apologist for FIFA. One opposition paper dubbed him a "spokesperson of FIFA," primarily trying to safeguard his position as commentator to RFI, and accused him of being bitter since he had made an unsuccessful bid for the position of President of the Cameroonian Football Federation, in 1996. Others accused him simply of unpatriotic conduct. Among my friends there were people who simply stated that they could not agree with Bell even though many of them had supported him in earlier times.

Some letters to the editor in the opposition paper, *Le Messager*, tried to defend Bell. One letter writer started with the provocative and ironic title "Let's kill Joseph-Antoine Bell." Among others he wrote:

For some, the majority of Cameroonians only the results count; for others, above all for Joseph-Antoine Bell, the way in which they are achieved is just as important He goes against the tide. Here in Cameroon a market share obtained by corruption, an election won by the stuffing of the urns, a profit realized by the exploitation of the people [*les salariés*] are proof of patriotism. It is sad, really sad to see the journalist who takes "gombo" [bribe], the policeman who sells the road, the teacher who sells exam papers, the minister who gives away an enterprise for a symbolic franc after having received a tip, to declare that Joseph-Antoine Bell is not a patriot." he concludes saying "Henceforth it is clear that Bell is our bad conscience. While the entire Republic is praising the Indomitable Lions he is still pointing accusatory fingers. . . . Let's kill Joseph-Antoine Bell, so that we can finally have peace in carrying out our dirty little affairs. (*Le Messager*, 19 July 1998)

that Cameroon's lone goal that was admitted by the referee was scored by him, and the second disallowed goal, which caused all the furor, scored by Omam Biyick, came from a pass by Mboma. Seeing Mboma so useful in his accustomed position, one of the spectators at the bar where I was watching the match said "Oh, so Claude LeRoy did kill us [*nous a tue*] by not aligning Mboma as an attacker!"

This impassioned defense of Bell shows that there are some Cameroonians who see the problem of football in the larger context of the problems of the country. His bitterness about problems that are largely internal to Cameroon is unmistakable. There were a few other such voices too. Primarily Pius Njawe, the then imprisoned journalist and owner of *Le Messager*, one of the main opposition papers, in his editorial also called attention to the lack of preparation and other problems, but in the same issue there were also two scathing articles decrying the racism of the World Cup. Mongo Beti, one of Cameroon's most famous writers, also raised similar objections. Unlike Bell these commentators agreed with the popular interpretation that these events were part of white racism, but contextualized the problem similarly to Bell. However, on the whole these voices were drowned out, and the average Cameroonian could not but see the issue in the totalizing framework described above.

After the Indomitable Lions' questionable elimination the interest of Cameroonians turned to the matches of France. The wish that France be defeated by any opponent was oft-repeated throughout the event and in what follows I will examine the ways in which Cameroonian anti-(neo)colonial attitudes to France were played out and how Cameroonians, at least on a symbolic and rhetorical level, managed to wrest the victory from France.

France's performance at the World Cup took place in the context detailed above. How it was perceived was also conditioned by what happened to other African and "Third World" countries in the competition. These impressions were also influenced by the commentary of *Canal+*, the French cable television company, which broadcast the

matches to Africa. Beyond the immediacy of the World Cup as an event, but closely related to it, is what Cameroonians perceive about France today, in particular, the way immigrants are treated and the influence of France's extreme right-wing politician Jean-Marie Le Pen. Beyond these spheres of reference lies the history of Cameroonian-French relationships, which leads Cameroonians to see France as ungrateful towards the people whose exploitation led to her greatness.

The general impression of most people in Cameroon was that there was a bias against Third World teams in general and African teams in particular and this set the tone for the World Cup. This view was reinforced by what seemed to be an overwhelming number of red cards given to Third World teams for less than obvious infractions. Among these, naturally, the highly controversial refereeing decisions made in the Cameroon - Chile match had a special significance for Cameroonians. These decisions had the effect that only one of the five participating African countries (Nigeria) made it to the second round. As in the case of Cameroon, this perceived bias was largely explained as fear of the "outsiders" among the powers that be of world football, which forced them to resort to "dirty tricks" to protect *their* interest in maintaining the footballing *status quo*, i.e. the domination of European and a few (selected) Latin American teams.

In seeking to find explanations for this bias Cameroonians drew upon two further issues which had to do with FIFA, the governing body of world football, and saw them as subtexts of the referee decisions. One was the change in the leadership of FIFA just prior to the beginning of the competition and the other, closely related to it, was the issue of the number of places allotted to Africa in the competition (cf. Chapter IV). In early June

1998 Joseph S. (Sepp) Blatter was elected the new President of FIFA, replacing Joao Havelange who had dominated the world football body for 24 years. This surprised many commentators because Lennart Johansson, the head of UEFA (*Union des Associations Européennes de Football*.) seemed to be the favorite candidate prior to the elections. In fact, John Sugden and Alan Tomlinson (1998.) British academics who had studied FIFA, as good as predicted Johansson's election. As they clearly demonstrate African countries and CAF (*Confédération Africaine de Football*) represent an important voting bloc in FIFA, therefore whomever they support has a good chance of winning such an election. One of the corner-stones of their argument for their prediction was that Johansson had been supportive of Issa Hayatou (the Cameroonian president of CAF) who waged a long battle within FIFA to secure more places in the final phase of the competition for African countries. In the event, however, the African countries were split and Blatter was elected.

Thus –to some extent extrapolating from their experience of politics in their own country– as they were watching the unfolding of the World Cup, Cameroonians wondered aloud whether the distribution of red cards and the favoritism shown towards European teams was not a reflection of Sepp Blatter's "revenge" towards those countries whose delegates voted against him in the elections. Alternately they wondered whether the early elimination of African countries did not have to do with a wish on the part of FIFA/Blatter to revert to having fewer African teams in the final phase of the competition, thus maintaining a European monopoly on the game.

I watched most of the matches of the 1998 World Cup in one of two bars. One was a large popular place attracting an audience consisting predominantly of poor people,

the majority of whom were men. The other was more upscale and expensive in the administrative center of town. Here the audience was largely made up of civil servants, often dressed in suit and tie. In both places commentary flew freely on all aspects of the game, including the broadcasting. We may add to the list of injustices the nature of the commentary on *Canal+*, the French chain broadcasting the matches to Africa. Cameroonian TV had its own broadcast of the World Cup with bilingual French and English commentary, but for a variety of reasons most people preferred to watch the French broadcast.¹¹

Watching the World Cup on *Canal+* was an unsettling experience. The French commentators wholeheartedly and unashamedly praised their own team, even when at the beginning of the competition the “*Bleus*” (as the French team is familiarly called) faced teams that were rather weak. It should be said that this kind of unbridled nationalism is nothing new in sports broadcasting, and certainly not limited to the French, but what was discomfiting about it was the fact that they were broadcasting to an international audience which was likely to have loyalties elsewhere (cf. Blain, Boyle and O'Donnell 1993,) and there did not seem to be any acknowledgement of this in the coverage. It was as if the commentators expected everyone to share in their admiration of the French team.

There were instances when the surrounding programming was in bad taste, if not downright racist, as for example in two sketches where two Cameroonian players in a pre-

¹¹ One reason given was that there were technical hitches on Cameroon Radio Television (CRTV) at least at the beginning of the World Cup. For example there was considerable delay between sound and picture. Some people explained to me that they preferred the French broadcasts because of the quality of the commentary. There were often famous non-participating football players commenting on the game, and during breaks and after matches the French broadcasters had greater access to coaches and FIFA officials and

match light entertainment were seen enacting the “wake up call *à la française*,” and the “wake up call *à la camerounaise*.” In the first sketch upon hearing the alarm the two players jump up immediately and run to wash and get ready, whereas in the second, they turn over and continue to sleep!

The not so latent racism of the commentators was also evident during matches. For example, when Nigeria defeated Bulgaria the French commentators explained Nigerian superiority by arguing that it was very hot in Paris and the heat favored the Africans. Most of the players on the Nigerian team play in Europe and thus are as used to or unused to the heat as the Bulgarians. An older man, sitting a few places away from me, also noted the partiality of the statement and using me as a reference point exclaimed with feeling: “The heat! They are only looking for excuses, always excuses, they can't accept it that Africans can beat them. During the summer it's hot there too, isn't it. Madame, in Greece it is 40 degrees, hotter than in Africa!” This sweeping attempt to cast the World Cup in a hegemonic light where seemingly everything was justified about the refereeing, the rules were applied even-handedly and the *Bleus* were just one team among many, but clearly the best and playing the most beautiful game, seemed to send a message of French hegemony.

The overwhelming majority of Cameroonians wanted France to be beaten. After the wish that Cameroon should meet France, the second choice expressed by many was that Nigeria, standing as proxy for the whole of Africa, should encounter and beat France. Beyond that the majority of the population supported whomever was France's adversary.

other experts for quick commentary.

Naturally the opposition to France was most evident in the response during the matches the French team played. Apart from rooting against France, the tenor of these comments also tells us about the larger concerns of Cameroonians, such as their perception of inconsistency in referee decisions and how they fitted into a broader discourse about the relationship of Cameroon and France.

Saudi Arabia - France

A case in point is the Saudi Arabia - France match. This took place the day after Cameroon played Italy and lost, and one of its defenders (Raymond Kalla) received a red card, which many Cameroonians considered terribly harsh. This perceived injustice influenced Cameroonians' reactions to what happened in the Saudi Arabia - France match. After about 10 minutes of play the referee expelled a Saudi player for an infraction that was less than clear – supposedly for tackling from behind. My companion, the coach who is something of a free thinker and also an upholder of the rules, said to me in great disgust that “this World Cup is no good. It's not worth it.” Obviously others were of the same opinion because following the expulsion of the Saudi player, every time there was an action where they took the ball away from the French, people started to mockingly shout “Red! Red!,” sarcastically urging the referee to sideline more Saudi players. Furthermore, the spectators in the bar expressed their general sentiment by clapping ferociously when the French failed to score. The impression of biased refereeing was not even dispelled by the expulsion towards the end of the match of the French team's star player and playmaker, Zinedine Zidane. Despite the French broadcasters' boasts to the contrary, generally people also insisted that France was in a rather weak group for the first round.

some going so far as to suggest that the draw for determining these groups had been rigged to favor France.

France - Italy

The first really serious opponent the French team faced was Italy in the quarter-finals. The match was one of the most tense of the World Cup. The bar where I watched the game (the more popular of the two) was full to capacity with about 80 people, which was double the regular crowd. Everyone seemed to support Italy. Although people around me kept affirming that the Italians would beat France, after 90 minutes the game ended in a goal-less draw. The match went to extra-time and eventually was decided by penalty kicks. As we were waiting intently for the penalty kicks to begin and I sat nervously tapping my hand, one of my fellow viewers said to me encouragingly: "don't worry, Madame, we are going to beat them!" The impersonal "*on*" is used to mean "we," and in this case Italy became the "we." But it was not to be. France won the penalty shoot-out.

People left quietly after the match, and I too left the bar, somewhat bleary eyed, and very disappointed. On the street I crossed paths with a young stranger, who asked me whom I had supported. When I answered "Italy" he replied with great feeling "we were together!" This sense of *communitas* (cf. Turner 1974) that emerged through opposition to the French, speaks volumes to how football unites people, and how easily anti-French sentiment, despite or perhaps because of the close ties with France, can come to the surface at the smallest of provocations.

France - Croatia

The semi-final match saw France face Croatia. The latter were the surprise team of the World Cup, having beaten Germany in a dramatic game. I saw this match in the smaller, upscale bar, but even here, where some of the lower echelons of the bureaucracy congregated, the mood was decidedly anti-French, with exclamations like “Croatia is going to give at least five [goals] to the French. We are going to win, France can't do it. Croatia!” flying freely.

When the French made fouls and were not penalized there were comments calling attention to the arbitrariness of the distribution of cards by the referee: “there are no more cards” or “give the card!” Seconds into the second half, Croatia scored and everyone jumped up and cheered in jubilation. Half a minute later when the French equalized, only three people cheered. One of those cheering was a man who exclaimed that “now there is match!” His remark indicated that to him it was the spectacle rather than the anti-colonial political agenda that counted, and the equalization promised a more exciting game.

When Laurent Blanc, one of the French players, received a red card, there was some jubilation. Suddenly the French were in complete disarray. One viewer exclaimed: “Come on, you are not the first ones [to play at a numerical disadvantage]! We have played eight against fifteen!” Amid general laughter he explained, “against eleven Chileans and the center judge, and the [two] linesmen and even against the fourth referee who is now there!” This was of course a reference to Cameroon’s match against Chile discussed above. The speaker actually made a mistake, because Cameroon played with nine and not eight players, but the hyperbole only heightened the effect.

When France won 2-1, people were subdued. One person said “Brazil is going to cure that.” Another exclaimed “Brazil is going to correct the French!” This was in

anticipation of France's next and last match in the finals of the World Cup, against Brazil, the acknowledged best team in the world.

During the match against Croatia a portly gentleman in suit and tie remarked that "France's best goalkeeper is on the bench because he is black." He was talking about Bernard Lama. Scrutinizing the ethnic composition of the French team seemed to be a favorite pastime for Cameroonians. I have heard remarks on other occasions as well, asking what kind of French team this was when all the players were foreigners. Indeed many of France's players bear the stamp of France's colonial past: Lilian Thuram from Guadeloupe, Christian Karembeu, who is a Kanak from New Caledonia, and Zinedine Zidane, the star of the French team, of Algerian Kabyle origin.¹² During this particular match someone remarked that there were no French players on the team, to which somebody else replied that no, there were some, and started enumerating them. The portly gentleman interrupted and said "oh, they are Germans, as they are bordering on Germany, the people of Strasbourg!" By hyperbolically denying the presence of any "French" players in the ranks of the French national team he was playing with the notion of divisions within France that have nothing to do with race. When France won the match with two goals by Lilian Thuram, a player of color, this fact did not go unnoticed, and was cause for jubilation. Even though people wanted France to loose, if that was not to be at least France should win through a representative of the very people whom the French wish

¹²In fact thirteen out of the twenty-two players were more or less directly originating from elsewhere than France, their places of origin including Armenia, Ghana, Guyana, Italy, Tunisia, Spain, etc. (cf. Marks 1999: 52-53).

to eliminate from the competition, and, according to the French far right propaganda, from France itself.

Cameroonians take vicarious pleasure in the fact that “foreigners” (naturally they have to be nationals of France in order to qualify for the team) play such a prominent role in French football. Some of this is the triumph felt by the underdogs who are aware that France, through stringent immigration laws, is forever trying to prevent them from migrating there, and that there is racism and discrimination against Blacks. Nobody in Cameroon is ignorant of the progress of the extreme right in France, and Jean-Marie Le Pen's career is watched with care. This scrutiny is not exclusive to ordinary people. It is reflected in the Cameroonian newspapers as well. *La Nouvelle Expression* (No. 387, 10 July 1998), one of the two most important opposition newspapers in the country, carried Thuram's photo with the caption “Lilian Thuram, the Guadeloupean who qualified France.” In the same issue two articles discussed the paradoxes between the composition of the French team and French racism. One was entitled “The Black Heroes of a Racist France,” the other “Blues, Whites and Blacks.” In addition an article about immigrants in Paris was published, the title quoting one of the interviewees: “God has chosen Thuram to speak to the French” while the subtitle was “Ingratitude.” Another typical response was the headline of *Le Messenger*, (No. 787, 13 July 1998) Cameroon's other widely-read French-language opposition paper, which read “Africa saves France” after the final when France had won the World Cup. The caption under the headline again played with the nickname of the French team and the French tricolor, referring to them as the Blues-Whites-Blacks. The article drew a parallel between African participation in the liberation of France during the Second World War and the role of Africans in this victory.

Underlying this emphasis on the presence of players of color on the French team is the sentiment that France would be nowhere without the very people who are otherwise looked at with disdain in France. These are concretized instances of a much broader argument that the wealth of France is due to France's colonial past.

The ethnic composition of their team also raised eyebrows in France. Previously, in 1996, Jean-Marie Le Pen objected to the number of "foreigners" on the national team (cf. Marks 1999). When Thuram's play helped France to victory against Croatia, his ethnic and racial background did not escape French notice either, and it was reported to me that according to the press review of Radio France International, one French journal carried the headline: "France - Croatia 2-1, France - Le Pen 2-0."¹³ From what I saw of the eventual celebration of victory in the World Cup, notwithstanding the less than sensitive coverage that *Canal+* provided, the French media did present the event as a cause for celebrating multiculturalism.¹⁴

¹³ I am indebted to André Ntonfo for calling my attention to this.

¹⁴ It is also clear from Western coverage of the 1998 World Cup that some of the French public as well commentators considered the victory to be of tremendous importance in combating the National Front. As Mignon (1999) comments, "The celebrations of 12 July were indeed a symbol of a call for unity precisely because that unity is far from real. The multiracial nature of the French national team exemplified a diversity which is not accepted by everyone, in particular not by those for whom the experience of life is not one of successful integration, but the experience of the difficulties young people have, whether 'white', 'black' or *beurs*, in integrating themselves in society." (1999:96) A similar appreciation of the unusual nature and importance of the effects of a victory by a multiracial team on French consciousness is expressed by Lucy McKeever in the same volume: "It is hard to conceive the following eulogy to multiracial France appearing in *Le Figaro* [which she characterizes earlier as a right-wing paper] before or since: 'What would we be without our ethnic communities? Thank you to our overseas territories, thank you Africa, and thank you Kabylia'." (McKeever 1999:163)

It is evident from French reports of the World Cup that the French themselves were not at all certain of their victory and that it came as not only a great surprise but also as a source of great relief to them. The uncertainty in fact may explain in part the boasting that went on in the commentary of *Canal+*, rather than a sign of strength it could be seen as an attempt to bolster French self-confidence. However, this aspect of their commentary was not evident when watching the broadcasts in Cameroon.

It is an interesting question how and why this aspect of the French discourse about the World Cup did not make it to Cameroon. While on the one hand the Cameroonians were turning Le Pen's arguments upside-down, by calling attention to the multi-racial and multi-ethnic nature of the team, they also insisted that the French should both be grateful for and acknowledge the contributions of "foreigners." Yet when Le Pen's French enemies celebrated the victory as a coup for greater inclusiveness in France, for the most part this was ignored. I can only make a tentative suggestion as to why this should be so. Grant Farred, in an insightful paper about South African township football argues that the working class colored community of Cape-town could overlook the racism evident in English football when identifying with English clubs because these details are "lost in the process of cultural translation." (1999: 77) In the same way some of what was significant in the World Cup victory for France was also lost in translation to the Cameroonians, and the details that fill in the gaps left by the loss reflect their own concerns.

The final of the World Cup produced a discourse which again highlights the anti-French sentiments of Cameroonians, but at the same time also exhibits a certain kind of accommodation to the realities of life. Within a day of the French semi-final victory

against Croatia, people in taxis, bars and alongside football pitches were convinced that a French victory was a forgone conclusion.

I heard one of the fullest expositions of this view in a taxi. The argument was that France had bought the match from Brazil. The French had gone to the Brazilians and said "You have had the honor four times, give us the honor and we'll give you the money." When I hazarded that the Brazilians might not wish to forgo the honor the answer was immediate: they are a Third World country, they are poor, they cannot but accept the money. I tested this view on as many people as I could. Most were convinced that this was the case, and this included one of Cameroon's foremost intellectuals. He went so far as to call me the day after the final to explain that he was right, that you only had to look at the "purposeful" misses of the Brazilian team, the bad positioning of the players, etc. He even suggested that the fact that all was ready for the celebration of France's victory, including signs, fireworks and the like, clearly indicated that they knew in advance that they were going to win the World Cup.¹⁵

¹⁵In fact the host country often wins the competition. Whether this is due to some kind of favoritism or to the well-known advantage that home teams have on all levels of competition is open to debate. However, suspicions of partiality among referees in World Cup competitions is not limited to Cameroonians. François Thébaud (1998), a veteran French sports journalist, analyzing the decisions of referees throughout the history of the World Cup, suggests that many times the results of past World Cups were dictated by politics with the collusion of referees. Thus he cites as a clear case of favoritism the quarter final match of the 1934 World Cup where Italy, the eventual winner, was pitted against Spain, and the Swiss referee allowed seven Spaniards to be injured without penalizing the Italians. He was afterwards recalled to Switzerland and banned from refereeing. Thébaud also sees the same pattern in the 1954 World Cup where Hungary, then the best national team in the world, was beaten in the final by West Germany. In the author's analysis this was the result of a cold war political necessity to make sure that a Communist country did not win, and at the same time led to the first public recognition of West Germany since the ending of World War II, significantly followed by Germany's admission into NATO in the same year, as a final act of that country's post-war political

In any case, most people I spoke with or listened to were convinced that France had bought the match. There were some exceptions to this view. One of them was my friend the coach, who, found it impossible to credit that any team in the world, and especially the Brazilians, would do such a thing. He also added that there were enormous financial interests behind the Brazilian team and they did not need France's money to benefit financially from the World Cup. Another person said that he could not believe it because the Brazilians could not do such a thing to all the poor people in Brazil who had been putting aside their money for four years (since the last World Cup) in order to go and see their team win the World Cup in France. One of Cameroon's eminent opposition figures and intellectuals found fault with the argument, not on the merits of whether Brazil would or would not sell the match—he is one of the few people I know in Cameroon who professes to have no interest whatsoever in the game— but rather with the framing of the whole issue. Upon hearing the rumor he wondered aloud whether this meant that Cameroonians thought their own team would do so in a similar position, and then queried the notion that Brazil should even be considered a Third World country in the same way as Cameroon.

There is a certain kind of logic to this assumption. In part, it follows from the observation made throughout the competition that the World Cup seemed to be going

rehabilitation. Interestingly, this explanation did not gain currency in Hungary. Most likely this is because it would have benefited the Communist regime, to which by and large all Hungarians were opposed at the time, and thus it would have sounded like official propaganda to them. In fact, the loss gave rise to the first open expression of popular dissatisfaction with the regime (cf. Handler 1994).

against Third World peoples. Therefore the idea that whites in general, and the French in particular, would do anything to win the competition was already well-rooted. As in match after match, people's wish that France should be beaten and drop out of competition failed to materialize, the only possible explanation that remained was that France would win by cheating, and thus not really win. Also, as was suggested by the noted opposition figure above, this particular explanation would be readily comprehensible in a country from which Jean-François Bayart could borrow the expression "politics of the belly," to characterize the entire continent. Money will get most Cameroonians out of trouble, and their identification of Brazil as a Third World country made the assumption perfectly plausible, while at the same time achieving the desired end of denying France the very glory that it was striving for.

The final match of the World Cup between France and Brazil did nothing to allay these feelings. Not only did France win, but it looked as if the Brazilian team was not even there. The result was 3:0, and Brazil did not seem to present a credible opposition, let alone threaten France's win, thus confirming what everybody already knew in Cameroon. When it was disclosed that Ronaldo, Brazil's star player, who had not played too well throughout the competition and was unrecognizable in this one had had a seizure in the hours preceding the game, this "rational" explanation came too late to change the conviction shared by so many Cameroonians that France had "taken" but not "won" this World Cup.

As metaphor, football serves in part to explain social reality but, like folk tales, it also improves on that reality, symbolically setting the world right. Faced with the seeming inevitability of a French victory, Cameroonians were quick to work out an explanatory system which, although it acknowledged the French victory, at the same time denied its legitimacy and strengthened the general view that France deserves the disdain of Cameroonians.

The perception of the level playing field, which as I argued in the Introduction lies at the heart of the game, was the one that was upset in the 1998 World Cup. The whole edifice of the notion that the better team of the moment wins collapsed, thus upsetting a certainty which is one of the few that still hold in the otherwise uncertain lives of Cameroonians. This is connected to the positive aspects of the ambiguous stereotypes held of whites, in the sense that it could be argued that lacking in local certainties, Cameroonians like other Africans ambiguously turn to (or rather create) outside models (of the "great nations") to make some kind of sense of their own lives. (Liisa H. Malkki makes a similar point about the faith Hutu refugees place in the ability of Western powers and agencies to set right what went wrong in their country). The ideals that are attributed to football do not quite function in Cameroon. One letter writer even made the point that it is illusory to think that refereeing is going to be impartial on the world scale when such "errors" are well known to happen in Cameroon all the time. However, as a reference point these ideals are very important, and by positing the level playing field, people also posit that somewhere, if not at home then outside Cameroon, there is fairness and justice. The "ideal" world of football has shown itself to be lacking in fairness. Reality (the socio-economic power structure on a global scale) reasserted itself with a vengeance and I

would argue that this smashing of the illusion of the level playing field (and the concomitant postponement of the revenge of the underdog) was what created the bitterness, disbelief and despair.

Chapter VII – Concluding thoughts

I started this work with the description of the mural in Douala in which tears flow down the “face” of a football. Can I answer in the conclusion what those teardrops mean? Are they tears of frustration or of hope? Are they tears of joy or defeat? Tears of defiance or desperation? I would like to suggest that they are all of those things and more. In other words football in Cameroon, just as the lives of the Cameroonian people, is fraught with contradictions and paradoxes.

I have argued that through examining football we are looking at the social realities of Cameroon and Cameroonians’ aspirations for a better world. People hold up football as a model (or ethos) that has the potential to transform their lives (both individually and collectively) but at the same time, the life they aim to escape catches up with them and they reproduce the very conditions which they want to escape.

This is so on the local level, in the everyday practice of the sport, but the same can be said (for different reasons) of international football. In both cases people view the sport as if it were possible to divorce it from the everyday power relations of the “outside world.” It is as if they were taking an earlier page out of sports sociological writings which were justly criticized in the following terms in 1982 by John Hargreaves: [sport is] “treated as a separate, quasi-sacred realm where values, difficult if not impossible to realise in the normal course of existence are indeed capable of realisation” (Hargreaves 1982:33).

Unacceptable as such an attitude may be from social scientists analyzing social life, I have argued that for the majority of Cameroonians this is precisely how football appears.

I suggest that this is so in great part because of the desperation of poverty and a continuing history of being downtrodden. Under these circumstances faith in the possibility of transformation is necessary. Football is just such a thing. As I explained in the Introduction, its very structure encourages such a bracketing off. I would also argue that this is one of the main reasons why football players and sportsmen in general tend to be apolitical. In order to be allowed to play (a sporting career is limited in time) most sportsmen and women often refrain from expressing political views, making Joseph Antoine Bell of Cameroon and the Black power salute of the Mexico Olympics such rare occurrences. It is this idealized aspect of sport which makes both fans and sports commentators decry the interference of politics in it. It is one of the paradoxes of sport that the very people who reject this interference are the ones who imbue sport with the symbolic meanings which make the interference possible, even inevitable. This is so everywhere, not just in Cameroon, but the meanings attributed to football in Cameroon are conditioned by the social, economic, political and historical realities of the country. It is also the polysemy (and therefore inherent multivocality) of the symbolic meanings attributed to it which lend much of the tension to the sport and which make it a worthwhile subject of social inquiry, and let's not forget it, exciting to watch.

I examined three areas where these visions for a better world are expressed, and more often than not dashed. The first is the daily struggle of football people for making football happen in Cameroon and to try to transform their lives in the face of the constraints placed upon them by the everyday realities of life in the postcolony. I mostly use the example of one team and show that to some extent exemplifying Mbembe's notion of zombification, the efforts of the owner/coach of the team ultimately failed. I suggest

that these efforts are driven by football's perceived transformative potential (its ethos), while at the same time they also express people's yearnings for a better world, where values such as meritocracy and fairness prevail and where –in contrast with what seems to be the rule in Cameroon– results are clear-cut and proportionate to the effort. Some of this is illusory because being part of the social realities of Cameroon, these efforts get regularly derailed, yet insisting on the proper way of doing things, people also uphold the ethos they have constructed for themselves.

The second area I concentrate on is the vision of a better government through examining the kind of grievances people expressed towards their government in the commentary surrounding the 1994 World Cup. What transpires from this examination is that people –reeling from what they saw as a humiliation that their country suffered on the football field– turned against the government and challenged it in the name of the nation. They rejected the government's nationalist ideology and instead presented their own version of an idealized nation. Such views are expressed in Cameroonians' notions of how things should be, in their very negation of their actual circumstances, their yearnings for an orderly and more equitable life. I argue at the end of the chapter that though these yearnings can be ambiguous they need to be taken seriously.

The third area I examine is how Cameroonians envision their place in the world as Cameroonians and as Africans through analyzing Cameroonian views about the French and about whites in general. Through talking about football, people articulate their attitudes to their history and their view of their place in the world and the forces they see to be constraining them. While in the previous chapter I concentrated on how people see the local constraints on their lives, in Chapter VI I attempt to show how Cameroonians

view the external constraints. What is striking is that, paralleling the turn against the government in the name of the nation as an ethos, and interpreting what took place as “white injustice,” people turned against whites in the name of the ethos of sports which whites do not seem to live up to. By insisting on the ethos aspect of football Cameroonians call the white man’s “bluff” of equality and universal standards.

In tracing these visions of a better world I hope to have conveyed the complex ways in which the models of and models for Cameroonian society, as created both by football’s practitioners and its spectators, influence each other and influence people’s actions and perceptions. Throughout my fieldwork I was impressed by people’s search for alternatives, ways out of the impasses that they found themselves in. For those who are in the world of football the sport seems to be one of these possible avenues. The search for alternatives is not limited to football. I am reminded of a remark one of the elder, much respected, members of the old boys’ club made when there was an attempt to introduce baseball in Yaoundé. He explained to me that he was interested in this “new” game because maybe this wouldn’t be corrupted. But this search goes even further than sport. Despite the devastation and indignities colonialism (and by extension the West) has brought upon Cameroonians, they do pin their hopes on the idea that elsewhere, in “Europe,” things work better and justice and meritocracy prevail. This is a deeply troubling phenomenon, because as I indicated briefly in Chapter IV, it recalls colonialism’s attempts to undermine the foundations of Africans’ very being (cf. Eboussi Boulaga quoted in Mudimbe 1988). However, given that Africans have -for better or worse - arrived at this juncture and are part of a globalized world (since with the possible exception of joining a sect they cannot “unthink” a hundred or two hundred, sometimes

even four hundred, years of history- their claim to the universalist values propagated -if not always practiced- by the West is as valid and justified as anyone else's. This is the basis on which Cameroonians challenged the Hungarian referee's decision in 1998 and this is also the basis on which they took to task Paul Biya's government in 1994. In both cases, what they point to are the internal contradictions between the reality and the ideal. It may be said that Cameroonians are caught up in an illusion in choosing the positive aspects of the universalist ideals and thinking that they can transform their lives through them, but if that is so, the illusion is a pan-human one: in order to go on living we have to posit that life has meaning, or –what amounts to the same– that there is hope.

There is one other underlying question that the dissertation does not deal with explicitly, but which needs to be broached. One night at a bar one of the best coaches of Cameroon asked me whether it was true that human life had begun in Africa. When I answered in the affirmative, he asked me how was it then possible that the continent that had once been the first was now the last? Afro-pessimism aside, this question is one that seems to preoccupy many Cameroonians. How did they get where they are? How will they get out of it, and the nagging question, will they get out of it?

As we have seen, when talking about football, and allocating blame for losses, Cameroonians can go either in the direction of blaming internal factors or external ones. Their response varies partly according to the actualities of the event, but partly also it depends on how the issue is framed. Some might call the various conspiracy theories paranoia. Jameson has this to offer on the question

Fully as striking on another level is the omnipresence of the theme of paranoia as it expresses itself in a seemingly inexhaustible production of conspiracy plots of the most

elaborate kinds. Conspiracy, one is tempted to say, is the poor person's cognitive mapping in the postmodern age; it is a degraded figure of the total logic of late capital, a desperate attempt to represent the latter's system, whose failure is marked by its slippage into sheer theme and content" (1988:356).

Though this explanation is tempting, I am not so sure it is correct. While it is true that the deft conspiracy theories produced by Cameroonians to explain losses on the football field can sound far-fetched if they are taken literally, I would suggest that they should rather be taken as metaphoric statements, which in such a reading do indeed address the "logic of ... capital." The point I am arguing for is two-fold. On the one hand, any oppressed group of people is likely to know far more about the world of its oppressors than the other way round, therefore to suppose that they do not understand the "logic" of what is happening to them seems to me to be questionable. On the other hand, most of the conspiracy theories discussed in the previous chapters have to do with the perceived racism of whites. Apart from the historical record of whites on this score, which would already go at least half-way to justify the conspiracy theories, in fact racism, in and out of football, continues to exist. To stay with football as it concerns Cameroonians, I mentioned briefly some examples of racist commentary in connection with the television coverage of the 1998 World Cup on *Canal+*, the French cable network, and also the Western counterpart of the "art" and "science" discourse discussed in Chapter IV, with its patronizing (if not outright racist) overtones (cf. Blain, Boyle and O'Donnell 1993 for an analysis of the European newspaper commentary on the Cameroonian team in 1990). Apart from this, there is also the issue of how African players are commented on by newscasters, who are very quick to see unbridled violence in

the play of Africans. I watched a video recording from the Hungarian TV transmission of Cameroon's match against Italy in the 1998 World Cup and found it remarkable that almost every tackle the Lions undertook was deemed too violent by the commentator. Given this pervasive bias in the "West" I don't think it is too far-fetched to imagine that referees take these, often unconscious, attitudes with them onto the playing field. Thus, while conspiracy theories can be seen to be paranoid, and as some have argued in Cameroon can lead to avoiding an objective assessment of what went wrong, at the same time they bespeak of a reality that is undeniably true, if not in its concrete details, then as commentary on the world as it is.

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