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**The moral economy of violence among  
Amba Boys (separatist fighters)  
in Cameroon**

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## Cameroon: Legacies of violence and prospects for peace. New impulses from research

Responding to a growing need to anchor the analysis of current violent crises in historical perspectives, the Arnold Bergstraesser Institute (ABI) in Freiburg organized a workshop on 16 and 17 June 2021 that had to be held as a webinar due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Studies on Cameroon slowly begin to expand (again). Academic and non-academic interest has been growing recently - mostly due to the "Anglophone crisis" which is clearly the focus of the mini-series of Working Papers proposed here. During the workshop, eight papers were presented and discussed; offering food for thought to a broad audience of quite different disciplinary backgrounds.

Compared to other African countries of approximately the same size, Cameroon's violent history has for a long time received at best a fair share, but certainly not high scholarly attention. Recently, a good number of Ph.D. and larger research projects have been started and some of the webinar's participants are themselves active in creating international networks of researchers. Some of those individuals, both senior and junior, used the opportunity to share their research results and discuss promising avenues for further research.

The conference organizers identified a number of gaps in the academic literature on Cameroon's legacy of violence. These include e.g., the general lack of a gender-lens on violence and contestation; the underrepresentation of the British UN mandate period, although more archival material should be available today; and the absence of a comparative perspective on Cameroon as an example of 'state failure', arguably because the current violence is still regarded as below the level of a 'major crisis'.

Other under-researched angles to the current Anglophone conflict have been addressed by the papers in this mini-series - all inspired by the 2021 workshop at ABI. These include the underrepresented perspectives of the pastoralist Mbororo ethnic minority (Pelican et al.); the situation of Anglophone youths displaced to the Far North, which in itself is a conflict region due to persistent insurgencies of Boko Haram (Adama); and the little-known self-perception of the separatist fighters and their emic understanding of the rightful use of force (Willis et al.). Digging deeper into the history, consequences and lateral aspects of the current violent conflict between Anglophone separatists and the government remains an important task, and the contributions of the mini-series provide exactly this.

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# The moral economy of violence among Amba Boys (separatist fighters) in Cameroon

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## Abstract

Armed rebellion has grown in the anglophone regions of Cameroon since civilian protests were suppressed in 2016/17 by the majority francophone state. What began as largely peaceful dissent against the marginalization of anglophone institutions and cultural practices has developed into a widespread movement for independence of the self-declared state of Ambazonia. This paper examines how the use of force, and the ethical limits of violence, are understood by armed Amba fighters, drawing on remote conversations with 30 anglophone fighters in the battlefields of Cameroon and 32 interviews with civilians in the minority anglophone regions. The moral economy of violence concept helps to explain when, how, and why certain elements of the Amba forces employ violence. In the process, this explanation discourages a theoretical presupposition that what motivates actors is inherent self-interest. Rather, this paper explores how the moral economy of violence makes intelligible a different motivational structure: one where people act first-and-foremost for the interest of a collective cause that ensures group survival. The authors argue that when actors contravene this collectivist logic, their acts occur outside of the moral economy of violence.

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## Introduction

The Cameroon conflict between minority anglophone populations and the majority francophone state contains severe violence (Willis et al. 2019, Pelican 2022).<sup>4</sup> It is imperative to understand the causes and nature of violence in its different manifestations, for in the absence of considered explanations, surface-level accounts and prejudiced presumptions take hold, particularly when the violence concerns racialised groups. Take, for instance, the notorious ‘sub-culture of violence’ thesis used to explain high rates of violence in socioeconomically disadvantaged neighbourhoods in the United States, which proposed violence as a normative way of life favoured, or at least tolerated, by certain groups (Wolfgang & Ferracuti 1967; Anderson 1999). Deborah Thomas (2011) has shown how this same basic idea has been used to explain violence in Jamaica. And, in a similar vein, conflict in Africa has long been viewed through a culturalist lens (for critical reviews see Goody 1995; Moore 1994; Farmer, 1996). A key presumption of cultural accounts is that the source of violence is inherent to the group being studied. However, while internal norms have a bearing on the ways in which conflict and violence surfaces, it is also crucial for theory to show how social practices are structurally constituted and that norms can operate to prevent and limit violence.

There is an association of violence with socioeconomically disadvantaged and racialised groups, which traces back at least to Enlightenment thinking. Inspired partly by the work of European scholars such as Thomas Hobbes (1651 [1968]), John Locke (1689 [2012]), and Voltaire (1763), certain kinds of force, once deemed legitimate forms of social expression in Europe, became reconceptualised as violent and as markers of barbarity and incivility in those who used them. As the centuries progressed, these ideas fed into the civilisation discourse, which (somewhat ironically) became the impetus and justification for extending European imperialism the world over (Hall 2007). It is important to be mindful of this genealogy when considering Cameroon, given its people have felt the impact over time of these ideas.

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<sup>4</sup> Throughout this paper, we consciously adopt lowercase ‘a’ and ‘f’ for the words ‘anglophone’ and ‘francophone’ respectively. We do so not for reasons of grammatical propriety, but rather that after reflection we recognise the question whether (and which word(s)) to capitalise throws up problems in either direction. The lowercase option best reflects our current thinking—notwithstanding the importance of highlighting the anglophone identity against the Cameroon state’s attempt to depoliticise the conflict by removing the descriptor altogether from its title (see Pelican (2022, 5) and Pelican et al. (2022, fns. 3-4)).

Indeed, as Enlightenment thinkers expounded on notions of civility, and as home populations were encountering them, it was European colonists abroad who committed the most spectacular forms of brutality and violence (Brown 2008; Gould 2003; James 2001; Thomas 2011). Achille Mbembe (2017) develops this point, noting that Voltaire and Jean-Jacques Rousseau wrote at length on the virtues of freedom and human dignity at the very same time as the horrors of the trans-Atlantic slave trade were inflicted on African persons forced into chattel slavery. (The area that is now Cameroon was severely affected by this trade in enslaved persons.) Likewise, when John Stuart Mill (1836; 1859a; 1859b) was writing on the benefits of civilisation for moral character, on the need to civilise barbarians and overcome their tendency to violence, or on the respect for liberty not owed to the uncivilised, the most uncivilised acts were being committed by European colonists on colonised populations (Dwyer & Nettelbeck 2018; Gopal 2019).<sup>5</sup> (Cameroon experienced several waves of colonial violence, first by German colonial forces and then by French and British colonists who divided the state in 1919.) Despite European imperialists committing sustained violence, in often legislatively permitted forms, it is the least powerful in the social order who have been consistently cast as savage and uncivilised (cf. Wagner 2018). Although claims of savagery or barbarity are no longer as explicit as in the past, colonial tropes continue to inform the explanations of violence among racialised groups; the ‘sub-culture of violence’ thesis affords us one such example.

In this paper, we examine uses of violence by armed secessionist fighters of anglophone Cameroon, whom we refer to as Amba fighters in accordance with the anglophone movement for independence of the self-declared state of Ambazonia. To elucidate the uses of force by Amba fighters, we situate them within the conceptual framework of ‘the moral economy of violence’; doing so reveals when violence is likely to be used against anglophone civilians (whom Amba fighters are purportedly out to protect). Moreover, the moral economy of violence also brings into view the many ways in which violence is constrained and prevented.

The more general ‘moral economy’ concept can be traced to the seminal work of E. P. Thompson (1993a; 1993b), which anthropologists have used to explain contemporary forms of collective resistance the world over (Scott 1977; Alexander et al. 2018). By ‘moral

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<sup>5</sup> For more discussion from a range of perspectives on Mill’s imperialism, see Mehta (1999), Schultz (2007), and Marwah (2019, Ch. 5).

economy', Thompson (1993a; 1993b) describes a normative order prevalent in eighteenth-century England, which included, e.g., that rural communities expected the price of bread to be fixed, even in times of shortage. Thompson contrasts this with a global political economy emerging at the time, which stipulated that even in moments of shortage, grain could be exported to those able to pay a higher price. Hence, whereas the moral economy was rooted in a logic of subsistence and collective interests, the emergent political economy operated on an alternative logic dictated by free-market principles and self-interest. By appreciating the normative expectations of the time, Thompson is able to explain when bread riots were most likely to have arisen, which he locates at just that point when these norms were undermined. Although Thompson developed his thesis in relation to the conditions of eighteenth-century England, the concept of moral economy has been adapted to explain a range of phenomena in different contexts and time periods, with important caveats (Scott 1977; Palomera & Vetta 2016).

An especially relevant adaptation for us is that of the moral economy of violence, with which anthropologists and criminologists have analysed communities in Nicaragua (Rodgers 2015), the US (Karandinos et al. 2015), and UK (Willis forthcoming), as well as Africa more broadly (Chabal & Daloz 1999; Olivier de Sardan 1999). The 'moral economy of violence' concept elucidates how communities exposed to violence might circumscribe it by norms which legitimate or forbid its use. This is not to say that such a moral economy thesis shows or claims violence to be morally permissible; rather, it shows how violence may be motivated by or situated within a background normative framework which affords an otherwise illicit act a certain degree of internally recognised legitimacy. Moreover, in contrast to sub-cultural theory, the moral economy of violence does not treat these practices in isolation, instead understanding them as historically rooted and responsive to wider socioeconomic systems of inequalities.

Beyond illuminating the practices of Amba fighters, our analysis also contributes to theoretical developments of the moral economy of violence concept. We propose that a fundamental feature of the moral economy is its ability to bring into view an alternative way of being in the world, which contrasts to the individualised logic of the global capitalist economy by recognising interrelations, co-dependencies, and an ethics of mutuality. For these reasons, we find the 'moral economy of violence' helps make sense of Ambazonian uses of violence, which in certain respects seem to be defensive and motivated by concern for the

wider collective. Hence, some acts of violence seem to maintain a normative order that prioritises subsistence and collectivity, which serves a deeper and more lasting purpose than acts motivated by self-interest and self-advancement. However, our interviewees also report a use of violence which seems to contravene the collectivist logic of the moral economy: the opportunistic violence of certain armed individuals in the anglophone regions of Cameroon for self-interested purposes of economic gain. In contrast to the approach adopted by George Karandinos and colleagues (2015), we recommend that these alternative self-interested motivations are treated as external to, distinct from, and at times in contravention of the moral economy of violence. It is possible, we argue, that in time and with regularity such uses of violence could be understood as part of an 'ethics of illegality' instead (following Janet Roitman (2006)), but in either case they ought to be seen as external to the moral economy.

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. In the next section, we provide details about our research methods. We then present our research findings in two parts. First, we show how Ambazonian violence is defensive in nature, and in so doing, we highlight some of the historical and structural context of the Cameroon conflict. Here, the analysis is shaped by Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Philippe Bourgois's (2004) notion of a continuum of violence, which outlines multiple forms of oppression, many of which anglophone minority populations of Cameroon have been subjected to in the past and still in the present. This sets the scene for our discussion on the moral economy of violence, which we find makes many acts of violence purportedly committed by Amba fighters against civilians intelligible (which is not to say justifiable). We close the section with a reflection on an alternative economic motivation for the violence, which operates outside of the moral economy. Accordingly, in this paper we contribute to the development of the moral economy of violence concept in general, while outlining the features of the Amba moral economy of violence in particular.

## **1. Research Methods**

The present paper is based on two pieces of empirical research with civilians (n=32) and Ambazonian fighters (n=30) in the anglophone regions of Cameroon, which form part of a larger and ongoing grounded investigation into the anglophone conflict. In accordance with the grounded approach (Glaser & Strauss 1967), we have engaged in a continual process of data-coding, analysis, and memo-writing, which informs the theories we draw on, and, in



turn, contributes to the growth of these theories. Our work is currently at the theoretical sampling stage of the grounded process, and we have not yet reached a point of theoretical saturation (Sbaraini et al. 2011), which will likely take several further years of inquiry. However, because this research project is action-focused, and due to the present state of neglect of this ongoing conflict, we have opted to publish our theoretical insights as they are developing, so that the grounded analysis can be an open and dialogical process. Accordingly, we invite others to join us in these continuing conversations.

The first phase of research involved document analysis. This comprised an initial investigation into the colonial roots of the conflict, consideration of the past and present human rights abuses committed by Cameroon state actors, a review of reports published by international humanitarian organisations about violence committed in the conflict, and the development of a log of multimedia footage we received depicting acts of violence purportedly committed in the conflict (Willis et al. 2019). Next, we designed an initial empirical piece of research, which sought to better understand the conflict from the perspective of civilians caught in the conflict's regions (Willis et al. 2020). Some of the quotations cited herein also form part of this previous report. Informed by our initial indications, we then returned to the field and interviewed Ambazonian separatist fighters to further refine our observations and theoretical developments.

We began our empirical investigations with an aim to learn more about the causes of the Cameroon conflict and to find potential solutions for peace—reviewed by the Central University Research Ethics Committee at the University of Oxford, reference (R67677/RE001). The research team conducted 32 in-depth semi-structured interviews with a range of civilian stakeholders in the North-West (n=26) and South-West (n=6) regions. Participants include men (n=24) and women (n=8), between the ages of 24 and 88, from village (n=19) and urban (n=13) backgrounds. In addition to including a range of communities in the study, we accessed research participants through six different gatekeepers to widen the diversity of the sample.

Each civilian interview lasted up to an hour and was audio recorded in the first instance. Most of the interviews were conducted over an encrypted communications application, in either Pidgin English (n=18) or English (n=14), depending on interviewee preference. In order to learn more about the conflict from the perspective of those living through it, we asked broad and open-ended questions, allowing themes to emerge directly from the collective experiences of research participants. Questions included the following:

‘What do you think about the conflict?’, ‘How have you been affected by it?’, ‘Who are the main parties in this conflict?’, ‘What are the main issues of the conflict?’, and ‘What can be done to resolve the conflict?’. The interviews were translated (when required) and transcribed by the team. Once transcribed, the dataset was coded using Nvivo software for qualitative analysis. We began publishing the first phase of our data analysis in the form of policy reports (Willis et al., 2019, 2020). Since then, we have sought to analyse the data in greater depth by drawing on relevant theory and scholarship, which we are in the process of publishing as peer-reviewed working papers (such as the present one), and in peer-reviewed journals (forthcoming).

Our civilian interviews informed the second stage of empirical investigation. We observed a pattern in the violence of the Ambazonian fighters which we sought to explore further. Moreover, several of the civilians we interviewed encouraged us to try interviewing some of the Ambazonian fighters as the next stage of our work. Accordingly, we designed a different form of interview for Amba fighters, for which we secured amended ethical approval. The Amba interview included general questions about the conflict and reasons for the armed response. We then asked the Amba fighters the following questions, related to a fictional vignette:

1. Pa Jude and Madam Beatrice them di travel for inside motor for ring road and Amba fighters them stop their motor. Wheti go happen next?
2. Pa Jude and Madam Beatrice them di travel for inside motor for ring road and Amba Figters them stop their motor and talk with them. If after that they take them for Amba camp, wheti go happen next?
3. If Pa Jude e be killed by Amba. Why e fit be so?
4. Then Madam Beatrice e be killed by amba, why e fit be so?
5. Wheti again fit happen for Pa Jude and Madame Beatrice when Amba boys them stop the and take them for camp?<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> English translation: 1) Pa Jude and Madam Beatrice are travelling by car on the ring road. The car is stopped by Amba fighters. What happens next? 2) Pa Jude and Madam Beatrice are travelling by car on the ring road. The car is stopped by Amba fighters. Pa Jude and Madam Beatrice are taken to an Amba camp. What happens next? 3) Pa Jude is killed by the Amba. Why might this be? 4) Madam Beatrice is killed by the Amba, why might this be? 5) What else might happen to Madam Beatrice and Pa Jude in a situation where they have been stopped by Amba boys and taken to the camp?

Once again, we conducted the Amba interviews remotely, over an encrypted social media service. Due to internet difficulties and the conditions of warfare, we used a combination of continuous interviewing and turn-by-turn voice recordings to adapt to the circumstances on the ground. The interviews were mostly conducted in Pidgin English, and were audio recorded, transcribed, and analysed through Nvivo. We interviewed 30 Ambazonian fighters in total, in 25 different village locations, which included the North-West (n = 19), the South-West (n = 9), and two locations unspecified. We accessed fighters through local commanders on the ground (n=10) and through leaders from the diaspora (n=5). The majority of our interviewees were men (n = 26), though we managed to speak to a small number of women (n = 4).

In order to ensure anonymity, all identifying information of research participants has been changed and pseudonyms are employed throughout.

## **2. 'They come and meet us': The necessity of defence**

In this section, we outline multiple forms of violence to which anglophone peoples of Cameroon have been subjected, against which Amba fighters purportedly aim to defend. Part of this task is to map the socio-historical and structural context within which the moral economy of violence surfaces. Our analysis of violence is informed by Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois's (2004) influential 'Violence in War and Peace: An Anthology'. Accordingly, we assess different forms of violence along a metaphorical continuum, where at one end we find slavery, colonialism, and genocide, which are overt and more severe forms of violence that transmute into concealed and indirect forms, such as political, structural, and symbolic violences.

As noted in the introduction, the area that covers the anglophone regions of modern-day Cameroon was affected by the violence of both transatlantic slavery and subsequent European colonisation: two forms of violence Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois (2004) place at the extreme end of the violence continuum. The coast of Cameroon became a prime site for the capture and sale of African persons from the early-fourteenth century onwards. Despite abolition, slavery continued within Cameroon into the mid-twentieth century (Weiss 2000). First, German colonial forces relied heavily on the labour of enslaved African peoples (Eckert 1998). Then, after World War I, Britain and France divided the former German colony of

Cameroon, and, although less active in the propagation of slavery, their colonial forces reportedly ignored the forced labour in the plantations of Cameroon, which strongly resembled the institution of slavery, while extracting the benefits through colonial taxation and trading policies (Eckert 1998). In addition to the violence stemming from European colonial rule, anglophone activists in Cameroon claim that the anglophone regions suffered ‘double colonisation’ when they ostensibly became independent in 1961 by means of a weak federalism, which, over time, gave de facto control to the majority francophone state of Cameroon (Mougoué 2019; Konings and Nyamnjoh 1997). It is this period, post-independence from direct European colonisation, which we focus on for the purposes of the present discussion.

In the many references to slavery and colonialism by our interviewees, the Cameroon state was pitted as both the slave owner and colonial master against which the anglophone minority must defend. For example, one civilian lamented the anglophone situation: ‘We are just living like slaves. But even to slaves you give food; we are not being given anything.’ Similarly, another civilian proclaimed, ‘[w]e are just slaves to La République.’ Almost half of our civilian interviewees expressed views of this nature, as did several of the Amba fighter interviewees. Reference to colonialism by our interviewees played out in a similar way. For example, Amba fighter Felix explained ‘we have to take back our land from the hands of the enemy, which is La République du Cameroun—who is trying to colonise us.’ Similarly, Amba fighter Stanley asserted, ‘we don’t want to be under the rulers of the French Cameroun ... the colonial government’.

Independence from European colonial rule appears to have left the anglophone regions of Cameroon exposed to several continuing forms of violence, which we can conceptualise as structural, political, and symbolic. Structural violence is a concept developed by Johan Galtung (1969), which Bourgois (2004: 426) defines as ‘[c]hronic, historically entrenched political-economic oppression and social inequality, ranging from exploitative international terms of trade to abusive local working conditions and high infant mortality rates’ (see also Farmer 1996). Inequality, exploitation, and patterns of underdevelopment are long-running in Cameroon. Economic underdevelopment in the anglophone regions can be traced to British colonial rule, which involved minimal investment to support economic growth, leaving the anglophone regions to fall behind their francophone counterparts (Chiabi 1997; Stark 1976). This pattern of underinvestment in the anglophone regions was then

further entrenched by policies of the Cameroon state in the post-independence era (Pommerolle and Heungoup 2017; Konings and Nyamnjoh 2003).

Indeed, our research participants expressed much frustration over economic underdevelopment in the anglophone regions, seemingly compounded by the perception that underdevelopment was worse in the anglophone regions due to discrimination. Civilian interviewees raised several areas of contention. For example, Ozias points to the failure of the state to install resilient electricity supplies, which leaves people for prolonged periods without access to power, and further failure to build main roads, meaning residents rely on cumbersome dirt roads which are time consuming to travel along. Wendy discusses natural resources being extracted from the anglophone region, without these populations receiving the benefits: 'The best of our produce like banana and rubber are all taken out of the anglophone zone.' Kelvin notes also the extraction of minerals such as petroleum and timber, which he claims are piped or transported to neighbouring francophone towns for refinement and processing. Similar concerns were raised by Amba fighters; Amba fighter Samson states: 'we know that the cake does go round and that we are being marginalized.' It seems this perception motivates Amba fighters too—Amba fighter Ruth comments that 'since they have decided to marginalize the minority, which is the British Southern Cameroons, we have decided to fight for the restoration of our independence.' Indeed, the influential speech of Mancho Bibixy during early protests, which led to the 'coffin revolution', explicitly drew on these economic concerns (Mougoué, 2017).

While civilians in both anglophone and francophone regions may be exposed to structural violence (for example, see Amber Murrey's (2015) work in Nanga-Eboko and Kribi), the structural violence experienced by anglophone peoples is compounded by perceived and actual discrimination. The Bourdieusian (1984) concept of symbolic violence helps to elucidate this form of violence. In contrast to violence by which power is exerted through overt and physical force, symbolic violence is subtler—'the "little" violences produced in the structures, habituses, and *mentalités* of everyday life' (Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois, 2004: 19). Symbolic violence essentially occurs when an individual internalises deficiencies that stem from inequality, so that they experience shame and self-blame, rather than recognising that the limitations they encounter stem from structural causes. *Distinction* is the process through which symbolic violence is produced, which involves a dominant individual or group

marking out a less powerful individual or group, often by adopting terminology that serves to diminish and other.

A large proportion of our interviewees shared personal experiences of what they perceived to be discrimination because of their anglophone heritage, ranging from denied entry into limited civil service jobs to being forced to speak French to obtain official papers (Willis et al. 2020: ch 1). A common scenario brought up by many of our interviewees is summed up by Amba fighter Dathan: 'I was frustrated because I was qualified but unemployed.' As our civilian interviewee Wendy further explains, 'You see a lot of people with bachelor's and master's degrees out there without jobs.' Several of our interviewees claimed that despite having obtained higher qualifications, or performing better in examinations, anglophone youths were still overlooked for jobs given to less qualified francophone applicants. Expressing a representative sentiment, Amba fighter Felix claims that '[d]iscrimination comes in, because we are anglophones', and civilian Nina suggests 'that this crisis was caused by discrimination by the majority authority.' Instead of accepting unemployment among the anglophone population as a fair situation, it was common for our interviewees to point to discrimination as the cause. For example, civilian Esther attests:

Before 2016, if the children wrote an examination, if about 100 children wrote the examination, only one would pass from the North-West. This was not because the children were not intelligent: the children were really intelligent. It was because we were being looked upon as slaves. And they didn't want anyone from the North-West to be successful.

Expressing similar frustrations, civilian Kelvin laments that 'no matter how an English-speaking child is educated, there is no place for that child in this country.'

When our interviewees articulate structural barriers that they purportedly experience on account of their anglophone identity, they can be seen as resisting the force of symbolic violence. Rather than believing that innate personal limitations prevented them access to formal employment (i.e., not being 'good enough', as symbolic violence requires), our interviewees explain their lack of access to these lucrative jobs as directly related to discrimination on account of their anglophone identity. Accordingly, in line with the insights

of Jaqueline Mougoué (2019), some interviewees employ their anglophone identity to resist and subvert the symbolic violence imposed by the state.

Since independence in 1960/61, Cameroon state actors have also regularly been physically violent to civilians (cf. Fanso & Chilver 1996; Deltombe 2011; Terretta 2014). We can categorise this as political violence (Bourgois 2004). There is a growing body of international jurisprudence which details a pattern of arbitrary arrests, detention incommunicado, prolonged detention without trial, the regular use of torture, and extrajudicial killings of anglophone minority civilians by the Cameroon state police and security forces.<sup>7</sup> The Cameroon state recurrently responds to civilian protests against anglophone marginalisation with excessive force. Examples include the use of military violence to suppress civil protests during the reintroduction of multipartyism in the 1990s: Piet Konings and Francis Nyamnjoh (1997) report that on 26<sup>th</sup> May 1990, Cameroon state forces killed six anglophone youths engaged in political assembly in the anglophone city of Bamenda. Similarly, state agents have responded with excessive force to anglophone student protests over purported unfair treatment at universities in Cameroon; reports include accounts of sexual violence, arbitrary arrests, and torture (see Nyamnjoh, Nkwi, and Konings 2012; Fomunyan 2017; Fokwang 2009). This pattern was repeated during the recent protests by lawyers, teachers, and civilians in the anglophone regions which sparked the current conflict: the state military's use of fatal levels of force is well documented (Amnesty International 2016; Human Rights Watch 2018). Not only has political violence continued into the present, but, following the onset of the anglophone conflict, these forms of state violence have escalated (Nyaundi 2021; US Department of State 2021).

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<sup>7</sup> See (1) Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, Concluding observations on the nineteenth to twenty-first periodic reports of Cameroon (CERD/C/CMR/CO/19-21) 26 September 2014, para 13. (2) Committee Against Torture, Concluding observations on the fifth periodic report of Cameroon (CAT/C/CMR/CO/5) 18 December 2017. (3) Committee Against Torture, Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 19 of the Convention, Concluding observations of the Committee against Torture (CAT/C/CMR/CO/4) 19 May 2010. (4) Committee Against Torture, Consideration Of Reports Submitted By States Parties Under Article 19 Of The Convention, Conclusions and recommendations of the Committee against Torture (CA T/C/CR/31/6) 11 February 2004. (5) Human Rights Committee, Concluding observations on the fifth periodic report of Cameroon (CCPR/C/CMR/CO/5) 30 November 2017. (6) *Mukong v. Cameroon*, United Nations Human Rights Committee, 458/1991, May 21, 1994. (7) *Fongum Gorji-Dinka v Cameroon* Communication No 1134/2002, UN Doc CCPR/C/83/D/1134/2002 (2005). (8) *Titiahonjo v Cameroon* No 1186/2003, U.N. Doc. CCPR/C/91/D/1186/2003 (2007). (9) *Mgwanga Gunme v. Cameroon*, Comm. 266/2003, 26th ACHPR AAR Annex (Dec 2008 – May 2009).

Since the onset of conflict, overt forms of state violence have become commonplace in the anglophone regions of Cameroon—a condition that Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois (2004) place at the extreme end of the violence continuum. The main strategies of violence attributed to the Cameroon state during the anglophone conflict, alongside the misuse of the state apparatus and legal system noted above, are intermittent massacres, setting alight villages claimed to house dissenters, mass executions of suspected Ambazonian fighters, and the infliction of mass rape against anglophone women (Willis et al., 2019). Human Rights Watch (2021) reported on an incident that occurred in Ebam in March 2020 in which state armed forces inflicted sexual violence on at least 20 women, including persons living with disabilities. It took almost a year before these crimes were reported—for several reasons, including the victims’ fear of stigma and reprisals. The use of rape as a weapon of war to territorialise women’s bodies is well documented, and several civilians we interviewed shared first-hand experiences of sexual violence, which have become widespread in anglophone Cameroon.

Alongside mass rape, there have been state-led massacres in the anglophone regions of Cameroon. While some massacres have been reported by journalists and humanitarian organisations, others seem to have evaded official reporting due to limited oversight of the conflict, which is compounded by strategies the armed forces use, such as cutting the power supply of targeted villages, confiscating the phones of survivors, and killing in relatively low, yet recurrent, numbers. The most widely reported massacre occurred on 14<sup>th</sup> February 2020 in the remote village of Ngarbuh, in which at least 21 civilians, including 11 children, were killed by an armed group led by state soldiers (HRW 2020). Here, we might recall Philip Gourevitch’s reflection on the massacres that occurred in the years prior to the Rwandan genocide: he suggests in retrospect they ‘can be seen as dress rehearsals for what proponents of Hutuness themselves called the “final solution” in 1994’ (2004: 140).

A limited number of our research participants explicitly described the violence inflicted on the anglophone peoples of Cameroon in terms of genocidal intent. As one elderly civilian interviewee commented,

the international community allowed the Rwandan genocide to go on for so long and to take so many lives. There is a silent genocide in Southern Cameroon, and it is real.



Comparably, Amba fighter Ndamukong asks,

Do you not yet believe that what is going on here is genocide by Paul Biya? I won't blame you because you are not at the scene to witness or see for yourself what is happening. Paul Biya has made us to be inhuman.

Our interviews with civilians indicate that the impetus to pick up arms was a perceived threat of survival, and not just survival of the individual, but the survival of the entire anglophone peoples. This was pronounced among civilian interviewees who professed their support for the Amba fighters. For example, civilian Michel claims that 'but for those boys we should never be existing. We should have been crushed and enslaved instead of counterparts.' Similarly, civilian Fabian states, 'in truth, they are defending us. If they were not there, we would have all been killed.' In as stark terms, Patience portrayed the necessity of the Ambazonian fight as ensuring that the anglophone people were not 'eliminate[d] from the surface of the Earth.' Fears of being 'eliminated' were also pronounced in our interviews with Amba fighters. Amba fighter Nufi comments, 'I cannot retreat, because if I retreat then obviously all of them will die.' Likewise, Amba Theo explains that the Amba boys are trying to defend 'their entire community that the oppressor is trying to extinguish.' Several other fighters described the anglophone peoples being 'killed at random' (Mpho) and 'over killed' (Nufi). Several also reported that the state military conducts mass executions and mass graves.<sup>8</sup> Perhaps bolstering these claims, we have viewed several pieces of (unverified) multimedia footage of executions and mass graves purportedly from the conflict (see Willis et al., 2019).

There are warning signs of genocidal violence, especially cultural genocide, due to the targeted yet indiscriminate killing of anglophone peoples by the Cameroon state and attempts by the state to deny the anglophone identity, language, and cultural practices (cf. Lemkin 2005). Limited space, and the complexity of the issue, prevents us expanding on the

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<sup>8</sup> For example, Amba fighter Ruth reports: 'The La République military came in the other time and killed five of my brothers, five of them and one old woman of seventy-something years old. Those five boys... those five youths all, were buried in one hole. They dug a hole and buried the five of them. I think that is the most difficult and terrible experience that I have ever had in this struggle.'

risks of genocide here.<sup>9</sup> However, our research to date leads us to concur with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, which treats Cameroon as a country of concern, and suggests that ‘civilians in Cameroon’s Anglophone regions are at immediate risk of mass atrocities.’<sup>10</sup> Indeed, Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois (2004) treat genocide as intricately connected to ‘smaller violences’, such as structural and symbolic kinds, where a group’s being treated as inferior is liable to escalate into more overt and extreme forms of violence against them, including genocide.

Compounding state violence inflicted on the anglophone peoples is the complicity of other states in the economic and military actions of Cameroon. For example, the United States has channelled hundreds of millions of dollars into the Cameroon state military, and the US army has directly trained the elite branch of the Cameroon armed forces (Willis et al. 2020: ch 3). Similarly, France has provided substantial military support to Cameroon, and continues to influence trade deals and the wider political process (Willis et al. 2020: 71–75). Between 2017 and 2019, Germany reportedly paid the largest sum of development funding in the world to Cameroon, at approximately €100 million, and has also conducted a four-year covert military operation in Cameroon to train the army in anti-terrorism techniques (Willis et al. 2020: 75). In recent years, particularly post-Brexit, the United Kingdom has sought trade deals with the Cameroon state, which includes supporting the London-based firm, New Age, to win a contract to develop an offshore gas project in Cameroon estimated to be worth \$250 million (Willis et al. 2020: 61–66). This lucrative contract sees money going directly to the state-owned company Société Nationale des Hydrocarbures, which reportedly funds the elite armed forces of the Cameroon state (see Willis et al. 2020: 65, and the references therein). Additional military support has been supplied by China, Israel, and Serbia, among other actors (Emmanuel Freudenthal & Weide 2020; Marzouk & Andric 2018; Willis et al. 2020: 75–78).

Several Amba fighters lamented over the necessity of continued defensive action, in lieu of support and intervention by the ‘international community’. Amba fighter Peter sums up the shared disappointment:

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<sup>9</sup> We intend to publish our data and observations on this elsewhere.

<sup>10</sup> See <https://www.ushmm.org/genocide-prevention/countries/cameroon>.

we had believed that by now one or two friendly countries would have come in to give us some support but up till today we see that countries are instead supporting La Republique du Cameroun to fight against us. The United Nation which we had thought would come in to solve the matter that was created by it itself is just lukewarm, lukewarm. The US tries to make a statement, one or two statements but doesn't carry out so much action [...] The United Kingdom, which is really the mother of all this struggle, has just totally abandoned us. They don't just say anything.

In reference to the lack of action by the United Nations, Britain, France, and the African Union, Amba fighter Stanley comments, 'I don't know if they want that the whole population of the English-speaking Cameroon be wiped out first completely before they come to resolve the matter.' Amba fighter Agbor frames the fighting as a placeholder for a real, dialogical solution: 'we will continue fighting and shooting until whenever there will be dialogue. There has never been any solution to a problem without dialogue.'

It is in this context that the purported need for self-defence arose. 'We were never invited to come and fight,' explains Amba fighter Theo, 'but we just decided to fight back against someone who came to our house to fight us.' This is reiterated by Agbor: 'When we are fighting, we don't go to the French-speaking part of the country. We do not go there to fight. They come and meet us.' Recently, a limited number of attacks by Amba fighters in francophone areas has been reported.<sup>11</sup>

What may add weight to the interpretation of the Amba fighter movement as defensive in nature is how civilians describe what motivates the forces to act. Several civilians we interviewed explained that Ambazonian fighters are drawn to warfare primarily when the military was on the attack. As Ozias comments, '[w]hen they hear the sound of guns, and people are running away, and they realise that soldiers are looting people's property, it's at that time that they try to come to defend.' In keeping with this claim, some civilians explained that many of those fighting had 'never dreamt of even seeing a gun' but were forced into this position when the state began to attack.

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<sup>11</sup> For example, see A, 2022, "Verified Incident: Attack on Pia Market, Fondonera (July 2022)", <https://doi.org/10.5683/SP3/JFWMPT>, Borealis, V1.

Wendy, a civilian largely critical of the Ambazonian movement, likewise notes such motivations:

Many youths have joined the Amba boys not because they like it but because of the brutality they have witnessed. Many have seen their fathers and mothers killed right in front of them. That anger has pushed them to join the armed groups.

Indeed, these civilian accounts resonate too with how the Amba fighters we interviewed perceived themselves. Amba fighter Agbor expresses those shared experiences:

We the anglophones did not declare war on them. I cannot say or count the number of times I have witnessed them gun down people. I was a big businessman and my shop, my car, my house, and everything was burnt down. So I have nothing at moment. I didn't just go into fight. It was because I lost everything. I have lost a lot, not to talk of my junior brother who was taken and killed. Even today, if someone decides to join the fight at the moment, it is because they have caused him a lot of harm.

Speaking also to the emergence of the Ambazonian forces, one soldier recounts that he first became involved in the conflict by catapulting stones at the military who were spraying civilian protestors with water cannons, but the violence escalated when their teachers stopped attending school and the military started killing civilians. As the young man explains, 'they over kill us [...] and that's how we grew up [...] protecting the civilians from death.' Likewise, one of the few women we interviewed who had joined the Amba forces, Henriette, explains:

we are fighting to bring an end to the sufferings we are going through, I don't want our children to suffer [the] same in future. [...] Houses have been burnt down and our mothers are in the bushes. We really pity them. That is why we are fighting.

These accounts align with humanitarian reports on the escalation of the conflict. Peaceful protests by lawyers, teachers, and civilians, some of whom carried 'peace branches', were

violently suppressed by the Cameroon state using disproportionate military force. This led to multiple civilian fatalities in 2016 (Amnesty International 2016) and again in 2017 (Amnesty International 2017). In response, some anglophone youths attempted to ward off the armed forces with makeshift catapults, locally called 'rubber guns', consisting of a singular large tree branch, shaped like the letter 'Y', with a rubber band from an old tyre placed around the top points of the branch, so that when the band is pulled backwards, stones are propelled on release (for images and discussion see Mbiydzenyuy 2018: 66–68). Subsequently, some anglophones in resistance moved to using old 'cumbersome' hunting rifles (Freudenthal 2018; cf. Warnier 1980). And although more advanced equipment has gradually been acquired by some factions of the resistance, Ambazonian military power pales in comparison to the military strength of the Cameroon state forces, which are backed by multiple state actors. (Despite this, the Ambazonian forces have managed to challenge the state forces in notable ways, capitalising on local knowledge, traditional forms of defence, and alternative strategies such as implementing 'ghost town' and school boycotts, touched on further below.)

The analysis up to this point, then, reveals that the assorted peoples who occupy, or have occupied, what are now the anglophone regions of Cameroon have been subjected to multiple and transmuting forms of violence—from enslavement, to colonialism, forced labour, and continuing forms of structural, symbolic, and political violence. Amid some of that violence, a spirit of collective resistance emerged—such as the highlighting of structural barriers to avoid internalising and so turning symbolic the violence of structural factors, or jurisprudential efforts to document systematic state violence against the anglophone peoples. Taking that historical context into account allows us to more easily recognise when anglophones (both civilians and fighters) qualify the more overtly violent Ambazonian resistance as a specifically defensive endeavour. This recognition works directly against the contrary theoretical tendency to interpret violence through a culturalist frame, or to simplistically associate race and violence—as noted in the Introduction. Likewise, as we see in the next section, Ambazonian violence is rendered more intelligible still when understood as having collectivist moral underpinnings. Indeed, in light of a varied and cycling history of violence and resistance, it would be more surprising were Ambazonian violence not situated within what we understand as such a moral economy of violence, which invokes defensiveness and collectivism to legitimise and circumscribe its use.

### 3. Legitimate uses of violence and moral limits

We have seen how Amba violence, in the view of the civilians and fighters we interviewed, may be perceived as defensive in nature, and that, moreover, this violence relates to a history of oppression endured over centuries and into the present. To take seriously the idea that such violence operates chiefly according to a pattern or principle, we conceptualise and examine the moral economy of violence among the Amba fighters in Cameroon. In contrast to individualistic understandings of violence, the moral economy is rooted in an alternative logic of collective subsistence and protection. And so in this section, we suggest that such an alternative logic dictates norms concerning the internal legitimacy of violence, for example when to use it in defence of the wider collective, how it ought to be limited, and when it is illegitimate.

Thinking in terms of the moral economy helps highlight certain motivations behind the anglophone armed resistance. Alongside the expressed aim of fighting in defence and for the freedom of the anglophone peoples, some of the Amba fighters we interviewed, such as Agbor, also expressed hope for a fairer society:

We want everyone to understand that life is not all about material things, but it is all about understanding. So we are fighting for what everyone knows is right and how it should be.

Understanding and fairness connote a kind of unity, and indeed the vision of a fairer society that some fighters work with involves a collectivist element which emphasises a shared identity. Stanley points out that the wealth anglophones have is again not material, but a solidarity and commonness: 'We are poor here, but we are not poor. We are hardworking ... We share with friends. We have a lot of one spirit, oneness in us as anglophones.' For some, such as Amba fighter Simeon, such collectivism underwrites the political goal of independence:

when the struggle started [...] the way the constitution was in the country, it did not favour us at all. So we decided that we were going to form this group so that we would be against the government, so that it will favour everybody in the country, and that is why today we are in the bushes.

Collectivist sentiments such as these remind of the socialist ideals that infused influential African philosophies during the struggle for independence from European colonialism (cf. Nyerere 1967; Nyerere 1968); they make more plausible the thesis that it is norms of collectivity which mark the moral bounds of violence.

In line with a collectivist ethos, many Amba fighter interviewees described the struggle for freedom as being fought not only for themselves, but for the benefit of the wider collective. As Amba fighter Ndamukong states, '[t]he Amba are fighting for the interests of the people—that is, the Ambazonians.' Others explained how the struggle is also being fought for those who will inherit the fruits of the struggle. Amba fighter Samson explains,

we are fighting to free ourselves, not only the fighters; we are fighting to free our children's children who will be given birth to in the English-speaking Cameroon in future. We are fighting to free the one that has not yet been.

Thinking beyond the self, and including others in the present, as well as those of the past and future, accords with the logic of the moral economy, which can be seen as contrasting with the self-interested logic of the capitalist political economy of the state.

Despite having picked up arms, for the most part, the Amba fighter interviewees insist that killing is wrong. As Ruth explains in relation to an anglophone teacher allegedly killed by Ambazonian fighters, 'these people that they [other Amba fighters] are killing are not just nothing, they are not just useless people... in fact, they are brain box [intellectuals] in the anglophone region.' Another soldier, Thibault, explains:

We are not out to kill because the number of us keeps on dwindling. Our people have been killed to the extent where we consider the population to be far too small, so why should we be killing them? [...] Nobody can bring a dead person back to life.

Rather than taking this as an absolute claim that Ambazonian armed fighters do not kill civilians, the point made here is that harming civilians is not an ultimate aim, a view reiterated

by other fighters interviewed. The last two quotations indicate, at least, that civilian life is greatly valued, and is expressly what is being fought for.

There are several means by which the use of violence is circumscribed among the Ambazonian fighters. This includes the overt adoption of a 'Code of Conduct' among at least one element of the separatist movement, the Ambazonia Defence Forces (ADF), which states 'no fighter of the ADF shall engage in rape, extortion, theft of property, torture, or killing of innocent civilians' (as cited by Freudenthal 2018). Moreover, it seems that ADF soldiers have been trained about the legal mechanisms that will apply to those who fail to act in accordance with this Code. Two interviewees mentioned the International Criminal Court as an institution that would convict fighters who caused harm to the civilian population. Many other Ambazonian fighters referred to the administration of justice within the Ambazonian armed forces itself, and several explicitly mentioned internal investigations that had taken place to find the offenders of heinous acts of violence.<sup>12</sup>

In addition to formal and informal legal redress, the interviewed fighters also mentioned spiritual forms of justice. One source was religious, as when Lionel claimed 'God will punish those people, there is judgement in future', regarding those who murdered a woman in a particularly distressing manner. Another source of justice is rooted in African theology, apparent in Ruth's account:

So as [far as the] the African culture is concerned, if you kill somebody very innocently [an innocent person], the spirit of that person you have killed will haunt you. Since we don't know you, the gods of the land will know you, or the ancestors will know and they will join the spirit of the person who was killed to hunt you.

Notwithstanding attempts to limit violence, some Ambazonian soldiers were observably distressed that separatist fighters have killed civilians. For example, in response to the vignette mentioned in §1 of this article, at the point in the scenario where 'Pa Jude' is killed, Stanley comments, 'that is not correct and very traumatizing to us ... taking away Pa Jude's life is very improper and very traumatizing, that is one of the most painful things that has

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<sup>12</sup> We pick up this theme in another (forthcoming) publication.



happened with the fight.’ According to Nufi, the fact of such killings brings into doubt the ability of anglophone fighters to rejoin society:

I’m not sure that I can live in the society again because of the type of life that we are living here. ... We have been in the bush for a very long time and our mentality has changed because at the moment to kill somebody is just normal for me now. To shoot someone to death is just normal for me now. [...] I’m not okay, because this is not the lifestyle that I had wanted to live from my childhood. I am just doing this because I have to save the lives of people.

Nufi, who was enrolled in school prior to the conflict, spoke in distressed tones when he shared this information with us. It seems Nufi has an acute awareness of the morally ambiguous space he has entered, and as a result, he describes himself as having acquired a mental state not conducive to living within the moral bounds of society. Rather than seeking to justify this mentality as right, he describes it as abnormal. This is far from a culture of violence or the glorification of killing.

Up to this point, then, we have gleaned three main insights. First, that the primary motivation behind the Ambazonian armed resistance seems to be to defend the anglophone people from state violence; second, that there are active attempts to limit the use of violence against civilians; and third, that Amba fighters express regret over civilians having been harmed. Yet we still know of credible reports that Amba fighters have harmed civilians in severe ways. Most notably, government schools have been a main target of violence, both by the threat and actual use of violence to enforce Amba-backed school boycotts (UNICEF 2020). Reports of Amba violence against teachers and students mention decapitation, the amputation of limbs, severe bodily mutilation including of female breasts and genitalia, the torture and beheading of women suspected of colluding with the state, as well as kidnappings, unlawful detention, torture, extortion, and arson (see Willis et al. 2019).

Mindful of these reports, we might wonder whether the Ambazonian fighters themselves ever justify violence against the civilian population. We can gain some understanding by examining how our interviewees explained why Ambazonian forces might kill ‘Pa Jude’ and ‘Madam Beatrice’ in the fictional vignette. Almost all the Ambazonian fighters we interviewed agreed that the only legitimate reason to kill ‘Pa Jude’ and ‘Madam

Beatrice’—i.e., anglophone civilians—is that they are ‘blacklegs’. Sakeh explains that to be a blackleg ‘means he is one of the enablers—these are guys who arrange the way for La République to come and kill our people’, while Edgar notes ‘blackleg means someone who wants to come and study (spy on) our environment... and gives information to the military to come and chase us out or kill us.’ The position is succinctly summed up by Theo: ‘He may be killed by Amba for two reasons. It is either that he is working with the French Cameroon that we refer to as La République du Cameroun or he is an informant.’ In this situation, the civilian becomes a ‘traitor’ to the cause and is treated as being part of the enemy state. In contrast to this majority response, a few fighters insisted that even if ‘Pa Jude’ and ‘Madam Beatrice’ were blacklegs, they ought not to be killed. On that minority view, they should instead be taken to the Amba camp for ‘interrogation’ and, if necessary, imprisoned until the war is over.

If fatal forms of violence are only deemed appropriate for blacklegs, then we might imagine that civilian killings by authentic Ambazonian fighters are relatively limited. However, an atmosphere of distrust heightens the potential to expand this exceptional use of violence. There was great fear and suspicion among the fighters about being betrayed by blacklegs. The most spectacular forms of violence attributed to the Amba fighters, such as performative beheadings and bodily mutilation, have notably been reserved for those suspected of collaborating with the state in some way. For example, there have been at least two particularly graphic films circulated of anglophone women killed in horrific ways, which have been attributed to Ambazonian fighters, though none of the armed groups has accepted responsibility, instead claiming the acts were committed by state-sponsored actors masquerading as Ambazonian fighters to discredit their cause. Significantly, many of the Amba fighters we interviewed described these spectacular acts of violence against women as a completely unacceptable form of violence, and some claimed that enquiries were made within the movement to find out who perpetrated the acts, with a view to punishing the offenders involved. What was clear from our interviews is that this form of violence is not treated as internally legitimate.

Suspicions about blacklegs can be seen to have historical precedent. Colonial elites perfected the strategy of divide and rule by co-opting some colonised groups into the hierarchical structure of power, thereby assigning them privileges over subordinated groups in return for loyalty to the rulers (Pieterse 1989; Haider 2018). For centuries, powers have found success in aligning the interests of certain subjugated groups with those of the ruling

regime, particularly in moments of mass uprising (Lowe 2015). Such strategies aim to fragment dissent so it can be more easily suppressed. Moreover, traditional forms of patron relationships might further compound the potential for fighters and civilians to defect to other sides, since those who acquire resources might be able to entice over new supporters (see Chabal & Daloz 1999). Given the long historical tradition of elite co-option, Amba fighter fears and suspicions about similar techniques at play in the anglophone conflict at least make sense, even if—at their paranoid extremes—some lose contact with reality.

Related to a fear of blacklegs, another frequent explanation offered as to why ‘Pa Jude’ and ‘Madam Beatrice’ might be killed is that the persons committing the act would not be real Amba fighters. Instead, we were told, such actions might be committed by criminals masquerading as part of the cause to extract money from citizens. A further and oft-repeated claim is that, as expressed by Ndamukong, ‘the Minister of Territorial Administration, Atanga Nji Paul has a group of boys here who move around committing atrocities to tarnish the reputation of Amba fighters in the eyes of the world.’ Whether or not these suspicions are correct, widespread rumours about the existence of the so-called Atanga Nji Boys are still significant, for rumours can reveal the fears of the communities in which beliefs spread (cf. Eckert 2012). Moreover, such beliefs may provide a way for fighters to morally neutralise acts of violence by those who purportedly fight for the same cause (cf. Sykes & Matza 1957).

Other widely reported acts of violence attributed to Ambazonian fighters in the conflict relate to civilians failing to comply with separatist enforced boycotts, such as the closure of the schools and ghost towns (for further discussion, see Willis et al. 2020; on the former use of ghost town see Argenti 1998). According to our armed fighter interviewees, the appropriate punishment for the breach of a boycott is a fine. As Kian states, ‘if you are arrested on a day slated for ghost town, and because they no longer burn down cars, you will be taken and you will be asked to pay a fine for violating the law.’ However, our civilian interviews indicate that punishments inflicted by Ambazonian fighters for such violations are far more severe than fines. Some have had their vehicles or homes burnt down for failure to follow separatist-backed orders or pay a fine. In extreme cases, people have reportedly been killed by Ambazonian fighters for failing to comply with a boycott, particularly in the early days of the conflict when these forms of mass resistance were being instated. On other occasions, civilians have had limbs amputated, including children attempting to attend school (see Allegrozzi 2020).

Some civilians and Ambazonian fighters explained that civilians are expected to comply with boycotts and to contribute funds as means of showing loyalty to the anglophone cause. For example, Michel, a civilian, framed the school boycotts as 'in solidarity with those [imprisoned striking teachers and lawyers] who were suffering'. Likewise, Amba fighters seem to expect, and many civilians also (though many also challenge), that anglophones will pay dues to the Ambazonia forces, and that more advantaged anglophones should pay higher dues akin to a form of taxation. Nathaniel conceded that certain groups of Ambazonia fighters arrest and torture anglophone civilians whom they believe fail to make sufficient contributions, since they need money 'to be able to have some basic materials which they use for self-defence'. A relatively advantaged civilian we interviewed, Roland, who has himself been a victim of such suspicions, shared how local Ambazonian fighters accused him 'of riding a good car, staying in a big house while they are suffering in the bush.' Roland alleges that Ambazonia soldiers told him he should either contribute more funds or leave the area, because it was not right for him to be enjoying wealth when other anglophones were suffering from the effects of the conflict.

Accordingly, we can see how demands for financial contributions are internally legitimated in certain circumstances, when the funds are channelled into the resistance movement and used for the defence of the anglophone peoples. Moreover, in accordance with this moral economy, it seems to be normative that those enjoying greater privileges contribute more to the cause and redistribute resources. Nonetheless, suspicions and accusations abound that some Ambazonian fighters are opportunistically extorting funds for their own self-advancement. This suspicion was particularly pronounced among our more advantaged civilian interviewees, who were more likely to be targeted by Ambazonian fighters. For example, Delphine comments, 'somebody who is in the bush and has previously not been getting money can now harass people and get money.' Consequently, Delphine fears that the fighters may be reluctant to give up this opportunity. Another civilian, Fredrick, suggests that 'thieves' commit this kind of behaviour, who have 'infiltrated' the moment to harass civilians. Indeed, this view was shared by many Amba fighters, such as Lennard:

So there are some people who have gained advantage over the fight to be stealing from people, extorting money from the people, but that is not the real aim of Amba boys. The real Amba boys do not do that.

Significantly, the Amba fighters we interviewed explicitly condemned such behaviour, denouncing it as illegitimate. To do so is not necessarily to maintain that opportunistic behaviour does not occur, but rather that when such behaviour does take place it is outside a particular normative remit—i.e., that of the moral economy of violence. Indeed, this is the analysis that we find most plausible: that actions motivated by self-interest fall outside of the moral economy collective logic, and so ought to be classified as distinct from the moral economy. This contrasts with the approach of Karandinos et al. (2015), who centre the self-interested economic actor in their development of the moral economy of violence.

But to carve self-interested acts out of the moral economy of violence is not thereby to declare them irrelevant or of little theoretical interest. And acts' being external to the moral economy of violence alone need not make them normatively simple. For there is a space between what is explicitly endorsed as shared moral norms, on the one hand, and what is regarded as completely beyond the pale. Here, we might think of Roitman's analysis of the illegal petroleum trade in the Chad Basin (2006). She describes an 'ethics of illegality' as distinct from a moral economy, and contends that certain forms of economic activity, such as road banditry in the Chad Basin, may locally be recognised as illegal but treated as permissible, and sometimes legitimate, without internally being coded 'as an autonomous "moral economy" that etches out a space of independent economics, cultural creativity, or political resistance' (Roitman 2006: 249). Usefully, Roitman's placing these licit but illegal economic activities outside the moral economy not only characterises the activities themselves; it simultaneously circumscribes and underlines the moral economy concept. That is, the moral economy concept is properly applied in order to elucidate an alternative collectivist way of operation—one which can, sometimes, engender mass resistance, especially when dominant individualist norms begin to undermine collective subsistence. Roitman's approach, in contrast to that of Karandinos et al. (2015), reserves the moral economy concept for the task of capturing moral conflicts between collectivist causes and individualistic pursuits (in closer accordance with Scott 1977; Thompson 1993a)—though it remains to be seen whether it is best to classify some self-interested acts among Ambazonians in the anglophone conflict as constituting something licit in line with the ethics of illegality approach.

Thus, when civilians are made to pay dues to the Amba fighters, which are directed to defend the collective interest and support the armed struggle, this can be seen as part of the

moral economy. But when Amba fighters (and other actors) economically exploit civilians for personal gains, this might form part of an 'ethics of illegality'—that is, something that is deemed to be wrong, yet becomes permissible in a context where other forms of legitimate economic activity are inaccessible. More research is needed to assess the accuracy of the 'ethics of illegality' in circumstances such as these.

## **Conclusion**

In this paper, we sought to examine the uses of violence by Amba fighters in the Cameroon conflict. We developed a two-part analysis to render intelligible (as distinct from justifiable) the violence employed by separatist fighters. First, we examined how the Amba fighters act in conditions which appear to make necessary the defence of the minority anglophone populations. We explored multiple forms of violence, ranging from slavery, colonialism, and political violence to the structural and symbolic violence downstream of them, which, following Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois (2004), can be treated as lying along a continuum. The continuum device brings into view that different forms of violence transmute across time, in some periods surfacing in overt and extreme forms, and at other times operating in less direct and more covert ways.

We then explored the uses of violence by Amba forces which arise in these conditions. We elucidated them through what we have termed here a moral economy of violence. Although the Amba moral economy of violence legitimates violence to defend and protect the anglophone peoples, there are clear moral limits to its use. For example, harming anglophone civilians is predominantly treated as wrong, with exceptions in cases where violence is deemed necessary to progress the collectivist cause or defend against potential informants. Given a historical context of elite divide-and-rule strategies, and a present-day context of warlike conditions exacerbating fear of such strategies, there is a risk that these exceptional uses of violence become more frequent. And regrettably, in this conflict, Amba fighters have indeed plausibly harmed civilians in significant ways.

We also noted that there may be an alternative motivation to the uses of violence, not for the furtherance of the collectivist cause but for the purposes of individual economic gain. Our interviewees indicate that when violence is used for personal gain, it is illegitimate, and thus, it does not fall under the moral economy of violence. We posit that were certain

unregulated economic activities to gain an internal legitimacy, following Roitman (2006), it may well still be fruitful to treat these as external to the moral economy (cf. Karandinos et al. 2015).

Analyses of violence, like the one presented herein, are vital to overcoming analytically 'thin' accounts which fail to account for structural inequalities and histories of oppression that continue to play out in the present. Surface-level accounts of violence risk stigmatising socioeconomically disadvantaged and racialised communities. Countering this requires efforts to make intelligible the actions of those oppressed. We hope this working paper has gone some way to begin this process in relation to Amba fighters in the conflict in anglophone Cameroon and to offer a springboard for further studies.

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