PART FOUR

NATIONS BUILDING BOUNDARIES
The modern Cameroonian nation-state is an interesting case-study of a nation forged with conflicting and contradictory identities. It displays a multiple identity morphology reflected by over 250 linguistically identifiable ethnic groups (Tadadjeu 1990: 5; Fonlon 1976: 196). Historically, “inter-ethnic cleavages in Cameroon have presented a formidable array of social, political and economic tensions” (Le Vine 1976: 272). The most notable and politically fissiparous ones were those between the Fulani Jihadists and their Southern neighbours, those between the various elements of the ethically related grassfield (savannah) Bamileke—Tikar—Bamoun—Bangwa configuration of groups; and those between the coastal peoples and the aggressive, land-grabbing and dynamic hinterland immigrant groups. In addition to this fragmentary ethnic picture of the Cameroonian society, can be added such crosscutting cleavages of religion (Muslim versus traditional religionist; Christian versus traditional religionists and so forth); economic modes (pastoral versus agricultural); and different levels of economic development (considerable primary and secondary industry in the south versus little in the north). The ethnic conflicts and cleavages that rock Cameroon are compounded by an ever-widening Anglophone—Francophone identification syndrome that is directly attributable to the legacies of colonialism and is visibly the nation’s Achilles’ heel and fault line.

Like Canada, Cameroon shares a heritage of an English and French colonial past, and English and French have come to be its official languages. While Canada with a population of 32 million has a 20 per cent French-speaking population, Cameroon with a population of 14 million

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1 A Muslim cleric, Usman dan Fodio, stared a jihad in 1804 in Sokoto in North Nigeria with the aim of purifying and expanding Islam. After reaching and encompassing Northern Cameroon circa 1809, jihadists systematically harassed the Southern populations of Cameroon throughout the 19th century until the advent of colonialism (Njema 1974, Awasom 1985).