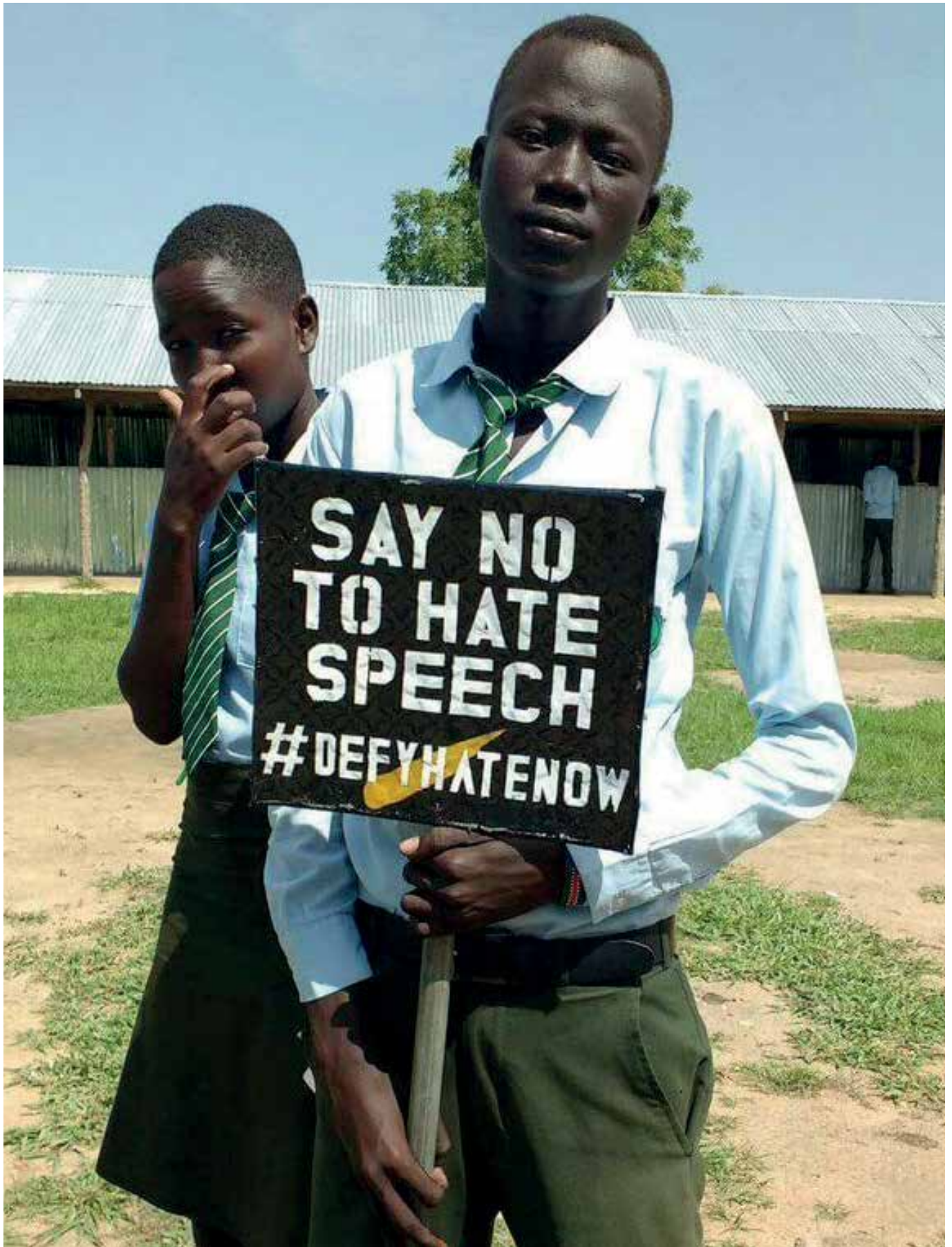


6

Common Hate Speech Expressions in Cameroon



*Empowering communities on Combating Hate Speech.
Photo by Hakim George Hegily*

Common Hate Speech Expressions in Cameroon

Francofou

Origin: Francofou is one of Cameroon's widely used expressions with a hateful connotation. Cameroon's colonial past has led to there being French-speaking and English-speaking Cameroonians. Tensions exist between the two communities, due to the quest for domination by the one and bitterness over subjugation by the other. Language and behavioral differences add to these tensions and manifest in a number of hate words that are used against each other. Along with francofou, Anglophones refer to Francophones as frog and Francophones use Anglofou or Anglofufu in reference to Anglophones.

Meaning and use: The expression translates into "Francophones are fools" - a phrase used to attack anything Francophone or anything with an origin in the French-speaking regions.

Proper use: The appropriate use of the expression will simply be "Francophone" to mean any person who uses French as their first language or citizens from the eight French-speaking regions of Cameroon.

Corrupt Francophones

Origin: It is based on the notion of notorious French corruptibility and legendary British integrity perceived in their colonial and post-colonial track records.

Meaning and use: Anglophones believe, rightly or wrongly, that Francophones are corrupt and label all Francophones as such, notwithstanding whether individual Francophones demonstrate laudable integrity and Anglophones do not always live up to standards of integrity. It is believed to pervade Francophone Africa, especially Francophone Central Africa, a far cry from perceived better governance in Anglophone Africa (west, east and southern Africa) and a nostalgic past of Anglophone Cameroon (West Cameroon).

Proper use: Both in fairness and for the sake of peace, avoid generalizing. Instead, say "some Francophones are corrupt", not "Francophones are corrupt".

Anglophone: Anglofou

Origin: It is perhaps in satire that the term was first used. Challenge Hebdo, a defunct French-language newspaper, used the expression on page 2 of edition Nr. 58 in 1992, attributing it satirically to President Paul Biya. The newspaper ran a satirical conversation between the President and his then Prime Minister, Peter Mafany Musonge, an Anglophone: "Mr President, the people want you to hand over power..." And Biya retorted: "What? What are you saying? Don't bring your Anglofou thing to my house, you understand?"

Meaning and use: It is a term to belittle English-speaking Cameroonians. Anglofous is French for "crazy Anglophones."

Proper use: Simply call them Anglophones or English-speaking fellow citizens.

Anglophone: Gauche-Gauche

Origin: The origins can be found in Cameroon's colonial history, in which the country was under British and French mandates. The British drive on the left side of the road, the French on the right. Thus, during this period Cameroonians participated in road traffic as applicable in their territory. As boundaries between the two separate territories progressively collapsed around and after independence and reunification, Anglophones drove cars into former French Cameroon and vice-versa. Francophones who witnessed that period say it was curious to see Anglophones driving on the "wrong side," the left side of the road. There are claims vehicles collided as a result. This idea of Anglophones driving on the "wrong side" developed into stigmatization of Anglophones as always being in the wrong. Nowadays, due to a combination of their often poor understanding of French and unfamiliarity with Francophone ways, Francophones feel that Anglophones are always fumbling when they have to follow otherwise clear instructions or guidelines.

Francophones also find Anglophones to be too assertive and too leftist, in the political sense.

Meaning and use: Gauche-Gauche is French for

"left-left." Francophones use the expression to imply that Anglophones are always thinking or behaving oddly, either saying "les Anglophones sont toujours à gauche" (Anglophones are always on the left) or "les Anglophone sont gauche-gauche" (Anglophones are left/always getting it wrong).

Proper use: Anglophones are different. Francophones are different. Their backgrounds easily explain their peculiarities. So Francophones ought to simply say, "Anglophones are different." That is true, but hurts no one.

Les Bamenda

Origin: Before independence and reunification, most of the present-day Northwest region was called Bamenda Province. Since reunification, the Northwest provincial capital has been called Bamenda city. People of Northwest origin are the Bamenda people. To Francophones, all Anglophones (both Northwesterners and Southwesterners) are Les Bamenda. In a derogatory sense, Francophones call their domestic servants les Bamenda. The latter use originated from the influx of women from the Northwest Region to Francophone cities, especially Yaoundé, who came in search of jobs. Most of them found jobs as domestic servants and were then referred to by members of the households where they worked as Le Bamenda or Les Bamenda.

Meaning and use: Les Bamenda is now used to denote cheap labor, someone to be minimized, an underling, a servant, or a slave. Demeaning slangs abound. For example "c'est mon Bamenda," meaning "she is my idiot" or "she is my underling." Francophones, meaning to warn someone not to take them for granted, say "je ne suis pas ton Bamenda," French for "I am not your Bamenda" or "I am not your idiot."

Proper use: It should be established that it is wrong to identify someone by their origin when that identity is used in a demeaning and pejorative way. Simply call people by their name (if they are doing work for you) or if referring to people arriving from a region, use the correct term of Northwesterners.

Graffi

Origin: This is a negatively connotated slang term for people from Grassfields or Grassland areas, that is, from the Northwest and West regions. The origin is not entirely known. Most often those using it are forest people, especially Anglophone peoples of the Southwest region and Francophone peoples of the Littoral, Centre, South and East regions.

Meaning and use: Graffi is often used in a derogatory sense to label people and implies they are lesser. It is used in sentences like "Look at that Graffi" or "They were there doing their Graffi things."

Proper use: Simply call them people from the grasslands and do not associate specific behaviors with regions.

Nkwa

Origin: The origin of this word is unclear, but in some grassland languages the term is used to call someone lazy. It is used by people from the grasslands, who are generally considered hardworking and enterprising, to describe people from the forest areas.

Meaning and use: It is used to mean a lazy person or people. For example, "He is a Nkwa" or "He is of the lazy people."

Proper use: It is wrong to label or characterize someone based on their origin, especially if that label is pejorative and stigmatizing. Simply call them by their name and allow each individual to be accountable for their behavior.

Come No Go

Origin: This phrase's origin can be traced to the Southwest Region in the 1990s. Then-Governor Oben Peter Ashu, who was from the Southwest Region, used it to mean nuisance settlers, by which he meant the people of Northwest Region origin who made up a vast segment of the Southwest Region population. Decades prior, people from the Northwest Region had come to the Southwest Region to work on the plantations of the Cameroon Development Corporation (CDC) and settled in the region. Come no go emerged in the 1990s when the Social Democratic Front (SDF), whose leader and most of its founders were people of Northwest origin, was at its peak. That party had won municipal elections in many of the major cities in the Southwest Region and some of the mayors of these cities were now people of Northwest origin. This made the Southwest political elite and a segment of the Southwest general population jittery, fearing that the then-dominant Northwest population would have its way over Southwest interests. People of the Southwest Region felt that the political fate of the region was being decided by non-indigenous people, hence the phrase and negative outburst.

Meaning and use: It means "came and did not go back." The governor implied that people of Northwest Region origin were nuisance settlers and implied they should go back to the region they came from.

Proper use: When referring to various people, simply use the name of the region, such as calling them people from the Northwest or Southwest Region.

Bayangi, Akpara, Ashawo, Vendeusse de Piment

Origin: The origin of akpara is not known. Ashawo is used in much of West Africa, especially Nigeria. Both of these terms are associated with the reputation of Bayangi women as sexually promiscuous and willing to engage in prostitution. Historically, the Bayangi were among the first people to migrate in considerable numbers to settle in other parts of the country. A neighbourhood in Douala was named Quartier Bayangi, where city-dwellers claimed prostitutes were easy to find and was seen as Douala's red light district. Other common terms used degradingly are the French terms wolowos, maboya, and more recently, vendeuse de piment.

Meaning and use: All of these labels are used to mean a sex worker (prostitute). The use is problematic because it associates a particular tribe with this work. Yet no particular tribe or ethnic group can be exclusively associated with sex work, nor can any be absolved.

Proper use: When talking about sex workers, use that term. Do not use the terms listed above as code for sex workers and do not stigmatize one specific group as being a people who engage in this profession.

Banso, Bali ,Cheap Girls

Origin: This slur is based on the mistaken belief that girls and women from those two tribes of the Northwest Region are "easy," meaning that they are easily convinced to engage in sexual activities. This belief is often held by people from other tribes also of the Northwest Region and was further spread when a local Bamenda musician sang a song that became popular that mocked the various ethnic groups over qualities and behaviors considered to be their characteristics.

Meaning and use: This term is problematic not only because it demeans the girls and women from these tribes by calling them "cheap," but it also is problematic because it implies that there is a correct amount of resistance that women should put up against the advances of men. This level of resistance is a way that men control the behavior of all women.

Proper use: Do not generalize when speaking of people. Every person is unique. So do not lump all Banso and Bali women together.

99.999 Sense

Origin: In the early 1990s the Lebialem Division in the Southwest Region was created out of the Fontem Subdivision, formerly part of the Manyu Division. The euphoria of the Lebialem people over their "independence," as they called it, was viewed negatively by other people and mocked. The Lebialem Division comprises about five tribes in two ethnic blocs and the people are generally called the Bangwa. Bangwa are often seen as overly clever and crafty.

Meaning and use: The 99.999 Sense implies the Bangwa are only a fraction of a percent less intelligent than God. As such, the label bears both positive and negative connotations and is sometimes humorously received by the Bangwa. On the one hand, the Bangwa are considered intelligent. On the other hand, this intelligence is also linked to being crafty and deceptive.

Proper use: To be on the safe side, simply say that someone is intelligent or smart, without using the 99.999 sense term.

Kata

Origin: 7 Kata refers to an old legend about the Bafut, a tribe near Bamenda. According to lore, seven Bafut men once head-loaded the car of a European colonial explorer, while he was seated inside, across an impassable portion of a damaged road in order to enable the European to reach their village. The term Kata comes from local vocabulary and means head-load cushion, so 7 Kata refers to the seven men who head-loaded the car.

Meaning and use: This term has two very distinct uses. On the one hand, it is used both to mock the Bafut for their servility (towards the colonialist and in general). On the other hand, it is used by Anglophone separatists in Bafut to denote resilience, strength, and determination. The term Kata comes from local vocabulary and means head-load cushion.

Proper use: Avoid using this term and simply say someone is strong, determined, or resilient.

L'age de Kumba

Origin: There is no history or reason for the existence of this myth, but Francophones often claim that all documents (especially birth certificates) issued in Kumba, in the Southwest Region, are fake.

Meaning and use: L'age de Kumba is French for "Kumba age," which implies a fake age. Another

usage is née à Kumba, French for “born in Kumba.” It suggests one of two things: either that the birth certificate details of anyone born in Kumba are unreliable or that if someone was born elsewhere, they go to Kumba to falsify their birth certificate. The use of this phrase also suggests that people from that area, and Anglophones in general, use fake birth certificates and fake other documents as well.

Proper use: There is no evidence that documents are falsified in Kumba and even if that were the case, there is also no evidence that records are not falsified elsewhere. This phrase should therefore be avoided. It generalizes a negative view of a group of people.

Blackleg

Origin: The term blackleg comes from Britain, where it was used to describe strikebreakers – people who continued working when all others were on strike. The expression is linked to the rook bird, whose legs are black. Rooks were thought to have thieving habits because they stole food from other birds. So the term blackleg implies that someone is willing to go against a strike in order to benefit themselves and thereby steal from others.

Meaning and use: In Cameroon, blackleg is used in protest movements to label those who oppose the protest or collaborate with the oppressor. In the current Anglophone protest movement, fellow Anglophones opposed to the protest or viewed as collaborating with the oppressor (government defence and security forces) are tagged blackleg and run the risk of physical attacks or even assassination.

Proper use: There is no form of this expression that is neutral. Avoid and simply refer to people as those opposed to the movement.

Ambazonians, Ambazozos, Ambaboys

Origin: The Republic of Ambazonia or Ambaland is the name given by Anglophone separatists to the self-proclaimed state comprising the Northwest and Southwest regions of Cameroon. The term was first used in the years after reunification, inspired by Amba Bay on the coast of Limbe. Ambazonia is used in place of Southern Cameroons to not confuse this entity with the South Region (Southern Cameroon). The term Ambazonian is also a way to avoid using the term Cameroon, which separatists dislike and view as a reminder of their annexation by French Cameroon.

Meaning and use: These terms refer to the separatist

movement and by extension all citizens of these two regions of the country. People are labelled as Ambazonians when they are perceived to not support the government in Yaounde or when they advocate for the official recognition of a separate state. Amba Boys refers to separatist combatants.

Proper use: It is okay to say Anglophone separatists, but it is wrong to generalize and use the label for all Anglophone Cameroonians because not all of them support the separatist movement. Ambazozo is derogatory and should not be used.

Tontinards & Sardinards

Origin: The Cameroon political landscape was rocked during the October 2018 presidential election. One of the post-electoral outcomes were the heightened tensions between the Bamileke and the Beti, perhaps because the two top candidates were from the two ethnic blocs – Paul Biya (a Beti) for the ruling Cameroon People’s Democratic Movement (CPDM) and Maurice Kamto (a Bamileke) for the Cameroon Renaissance Movement (MRC). The Bamileke began to mock the Beti as Les Sardinards and the Beti called the Bamileke Les Tontinards.

Meaning and use: Both tontinard and sardinard are coined from existing words, adding “ard” to denote “those noted for.” Tontine is the word for thrift and loans often done within social or socio-cultural groups, especially within tribal associations. The Beti and other critics of the Bamileke imply that the Bamileke are too preoccupied with saving money and deny themselves the comfort they could afford, seeing them as stingy and overly frugal. On the other hand, Sardine is a kind of ready-to-eat tinned fish. During the election campaigns, sardine tins with bread were often handed out at campaign events and party supporters were seen on video scrambling to hungrily collect and eat the sardines. Thus, to the Bamileke, the Beti sold their conscience and were able to be easily bought with only a little fish as a payment. Thus the Beti are mocked as being sardinard.

Proper use: Both words are mocking and meant to demean. Avoid using and instead describe specific actions you agree or disagree with among the parties.

Les Kamtalibans

Origin: Kamtaliban is a combination of Kamto and Taliban. The term is used to describe supporters of Maurice Kamto, leader of the opposition Cameroon Renaissance Movement (MRC). Kamto was declared runner-up in the 2018 presidential election against

President Paul Biya, but Kamto claims he won and that his victory was stolen. Protests by him and his supporters plunged the country into a post-election crisis and Kamto was held in detention for eight months. His supporters have continued to organize protests in Cameroon and abroad (most of which are banned by the government). His supporters abroad, called BAS (Brigade Anti-Sardinard), have also continued to demonstrate. Due to the determination of their protests and the violent turn of some of their protests abroad, they have been likened to the Taliban in Afghanistan. Kamto has denied any link to the BAS.

Meaning and use: Using the term kamtaliban implies that Kamto supporters are as violent as the Taliban and is a generalization that should be avoided. It also unfairly connects Kamto's name with the Taliban.

Proper use: If you mean to say MRC supporters have acted violently or that the protests have turned violent, say so using the term MRC and the people themselves. Do not use the term kamtaliban.

La meute

Origin: The origin of La meute is similar to that of Kamtalibans. It came into use with the rise of Kamto and his supporters.

Meaning and use: La meute means "a pack of hunting dogs" and suggests that supporters of Maurice Kamto are wild and fierce, like hunting dogs.

Proper use: Do not use this. If you mean to say Kamto's supporters are being aggressive, use that adjective. But rather than generalize all supporters, be specific in your descriptions.

Moutons

Origin: Mouton is French for sheep and this term is then used to label the Sudano-Sahelian people of the three northern regions (Adamawa, North and the Far North). The term comes from the fact that the primary livelihood in the region is sheep rearing.

Meaning and use: The term is used to imply that the people are malleable and easily misled, as sheep are, by political forces. It is a way of calling people ignorant or simple.

Proper use: Do not use terms that group everyone together or compare humans to animals. Simply call them Northerners or Nordiste in French or if you are speaking of an individual, use their name.

Kirdi

Origin: Kirdi is the word for "impure" in a local language spoken in northern Cameroon.

Meaning and use: This term is used to refer to the indigenous non-Muslim populations of northern Cameroon by the Muslim majority, who view non-Muslims as impure. Rather than rebuff the appellation, those stigmatized have embraced it and created a movement they call Kirditude. Their ideology is based on the history of the region and a rhetoric of victimization in order to build resilience and formulate political claims.

Proper use: Words such as pure or impure are not appropriate labels for people and using this term only heightens tensions. Simply call this segment of the population non-Muslim northerners.

Kaado

Origin: Kaado is a term similar to the term Kirdi and also means impure.

Meaning and use: It is also a way to degrade people based on their religious affiliations.

Proper use: Do not use the term. Instead, call them non-Muslim northerners.

Wari-wari

Origin: The Kanuri are a group that straddles the border in the Far North Region of Cameroon and Nigeria. Their current home base is in Maiduguri, Borno State in Nigeria, which is also the base of Boko Haram. For this reason, the Kanuri are often associated with Boko Haram.

Meaning and use: The term wari-waru means "coming and going" in the Fulani language. It is used to discriminate against internally displaced people of the Kanuri ethnic group who flee from areas affected by the Boko Haram crisis. The receiving communities consider the internally displaced people to be invaders or indirectly associated with Boko Haram.

Proper use: Using a term to disparage internally displaced people is not acceptable. Simply call them by their tribe, group, or their actual name and if needed, refer to them as an internally displaced person.

Wadjo

Origin: Wadjo is a term used to negatively speak of the indigenous people of North America. It contains wrong assumptions about how they lived, implying they lived almost naked and led primitive lives, which is incorrect. In fact, the Iroquois Confederacy, a collection of tribes of North America, was founded in 1142 and is the oldest living participatory democracy on earth.

Wadjo came into use in Cameroon in the 1990s and was used by young people to refer to people of northern Cameroon. In recent times, this connotation has undergone a shift. With the advent of Boko Haram, the term Wadjo is no longer used only for the people of the northern regions, but is used to label anyone seen as a terrorist, rebel, or person seeking to destabilize Cameroon.

Meaning and use: The term Wadjo emerged as a synonym for northerner and is now used more broadly, always with a negative connotation.

Proper use: Do not use this term. Simply call people northerners or Muslims, if they are.

Gadamaayo

Origin: Gadamaayo is an old term that means the one on the other side of the shore.

Meaning and use: Northerners use this term as a discriminatory word to describe southerners. Gadamaayo is like a hit back at southerners for referring to northerners as Wadjo. This term refers to particular ways of behaving, acting, and thinking, as well as specific language and clothing.

Proper use: Avoid these terms that characterize all people of a group. Simply say someone is from the south or describe an individual and their traits in particular.

Guiziga, Voleurs de chèvre

Origin: Voleurs de chèvre means "goat thief" and is a term used to designate a person of the Guiziga ethnic group in northern Cameroon.

Meaning and use: Using this term is offensive because it expresses a strong prejudice against the Guiziga people, implying all of them are thieves. The name of the ethnic group, Guiziga, is also used to substitute for the word thief, which is greatly unfair.

Proper use: Do not use the tribal name to imply thievery, only use it to say that someone is indeed

of that tribe. And call a thief a thief. Do not make connections between someone's tribe and their personal behavior.

Midin houwoum, Sumsa djo'ona

Origin: Among the Musgum and the Massa tribes of the Logone plain in Far North Cameroon, Midin houwoum and Sumsa djo'ona are used to designate people suspected of collusion with Boko Haram terrorists, who are active in the mountain range along the Cameroon-Nigerian border.

Meaning and use: Sumsa djo'ona means mountain people and is a derogatory reference to mountain dwellers and implied connections with terrorism.

Proper use: Do not use this term. Simply use neutral language.

Les pédés, les bilingues, les ndepsos

Origin: Etymologically, the word comes from the Greek pederast that was used to refer to the sexual and mentoring relationship between a higher class male and a young boy in ancient Greece, which was a practice that every male of higher standing engaged in – although it is highly problematic by today's standards since the sexualization of children is wrong. But this shows how our sense of childhood and the need to protect children has thankfully evolved over the past 2500 years.

The term pederast began to be used again much later in Europe, but took on a different meaning and was used as a term to mean anyone who was homosexual. The diminutive pédé appeared around 1836, followed by its feminization pédale around 1935, pédoque in 1953 and pédoque in 1972. In the late 1990s, the usages evolved into another form of jargon: ndep or ndepso to mean homosexual.

Meaning and use: In Cameroon, pédé is used to refer to men considered too effeminate or who do not meet the standards of traditional masculinity and also refers to all men who engage in homosexual relations. There is a strong anti-LGBTQ+ sentiment that is often expressed with phrases such as "we're not gay" or "it's not a gay thing." The closeness of pédé to the term pedophile, which is the designating for sexual attraction of an adult towards a pre-pubescent child, regardless of whether that child is of the same or different sex, makes all of these terms highly problematic and stigmatizes people. The term bilingual refers mainly to bisexuals who generally had to lead a double life in Cameroon since

homosexuality is illegal and still punishable with fines and imprisonment. Thus people often have to marry a person of the opposite sex, yet in secret, they have a partner of the same sex. This forced way of life is described as bilingualism, that is, dual languages.

Proper use: All of these terms imply that there is something wrong if a person is attracted to the same sex, which is incorrect and unkind and stigmatizes them. However, given the laws of Cameroon, it is also dangerous to make assumptions or call someone by any of these terms, since there can be consequences as serious as prison. So the safest route is to not discuss other people's sexuality, regardless of whether they are hetero- or homosexual in nature. Nobody's sex life should be a topic of discussion or mockery. If you do however discuss someone, use the terms gay (originally only used for men, but it is today used for both men and women), lesbian (only used for women), bisexual (used for men or women), etc. These are non-offensive terms.

Eboa, Kotto Bass

Origin: Eboa Lotin was a Cameroonian musician who died in 1997 after an impressive career. He won several awards and endeared himself as a talented musician across Africa. Eboa had a physical disability that affected his right leg, which left him limping. As the musician became more and more popular, his name inevitably became associated with his physical disability. Similarly, Kotto Bass also has a physical disability, much like his mentor Eboa Lotin, of the leg that forced him to have to use a stick to ease his movements. He also was a talented and experienced musician. When he died in 1996, folks began using his name as a mockery for other people with physical disabilities, especially those affecting the leg.

Meaning and use: Both terms are used as shorthand for people with physical disabilities affecting legs. The use of these terms is so common that people do not even realize how pejorative the expression is. Sentences such as "Please, I'm looking for one Eboa who often passes by here" or "The new teacher is a Kotto Bass" are common. The term is both demeaning for the musicians, whose names are being associated not with their work or talent, but with a disability that they were not responsible for. And it stigmatizes all other people with disabilities and reduces their entire personhood to only what is disabled, focusing on the negative.

Proper use: People have complex identities and should not be reduced to one trait, especially when that is a negative trait such as a disability. Do not use these terms. Simply refer to people by their names

and if needed, you can add that they have a physical disability. In general, do not say someone is disabled, because this makes the disability the center of their identity. Instead, say that they have a disability, which makes it just one of many markers that define them.

Nges Man

Origin: In the mid-2000s, the rise in access to the internet led to a rise in internet scamming in Cameroon. Many young people, especially boys, indulged in online scamming, robbing unsuspecting foreigners of huge sums of money. These people then took to a life of excessive spending and began to be called nges men. The more that the rest of society began to understand the source of this wealth and the internet scamming that continued to support it, nges man became a term to describe any immoral, unorthodox, or unacceptable way of acquiring wealth. Over time, it also became a term to describe anybody who earns a living through the internet, irrespective of the integrity of their activities.

Meaning and use: In local parlance, nges is the word for jewelry. Nges man came about because scammers displayed their newfound wealth with layers of expensive jewelry (rings, chains, watches, etc.).

Proper use: Though there were and are many people who use the internet for criminal purposes, calling every internet entrepreneur or employee a nges man is unfair because it generalizes and stigmatizes work. So avoid the term and simply call internet workers by their professional titles and for those that make their living scamming people, call them scammers.