

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Diplomacy of Intimacy: Cameroonian Women's Anticolonial Diplomacy with China in the Era of Decolonization

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(Received 11 September 2024; revised 24 June 2025; accepted 24 July 2025)

Abstract

In 1959 and 1960, Cameroonian women nationalists visited the People's Republic of China. These members of the Union démocratique des femmes camerounaises (UDEFEC) practiced what I term a “diplomacy of intimacy,” which highlighted the effects of colonialism on their bodies, fertility, and intimate relationships to create a shared affective experience of anticolonial solidarity with their Chinese counterparts. Expanding the definition of “diplomat” to reflect how diplomacy functioned in the decolonizing world reveals that women played a much larger role than previously understood. These women diplomats remained largely invisible to the Western powers and to the postcolonial Cameroonian government, but Chinese sources provide a valuable vantage point on their diplomacy. By drawing on sources from Cameroon, China, France, and the UK, I demonstrate that during decolonization African nationalist women represented their parties on the world stage, exercising far more diplomatic power than appears in histories of decolonization focused on the West.

Keywords: Central Africa; Cameroon; China; diplomacy; gender; decolonization

In 1959, the most important newspaper in China, the *People's Daily*, published a long interview with Cameroonian anticolonial activist Monique Kamen.¹ The article described how Kamen was arrested by the French while pregnant, noting that “during her two years in prison, she experienced the worst of human suffering, because she was not willing to go against the will of the Cameroonian people.”² The interview recounted in painful detail the torture Kamen experienced in prison that ultimately led her to miscarry. Through this interview, which occurred while she was visiting China with other Cameroonian women nationalists, Kamen engaged in a gendered form of diplomacy that I call a “diplomacy of intimacy.” This diplomacy allowed Kamen and her colleagues to cultivate lasting bonds with international anticolonial counterparts that were rooted in shared experiences of intimate colonial violence. Drawing on a common repertoire of anticolonial themes, they brought their interlocutors into the most traumatic moments of their lives to demonstrate the effects of colonialism on the female body, on fertility, and on young children. In so doing, Cameroonian nationalist women were able to reach their audience on an affective level—in China and elsewhere—by appealing to their own suffering under colonialism.

¹ I use “China” to refer to the People's Republic of China (PRC) and “Taiwan” to refer to the Republic of China (ROC).

² “喀麦隆人民的声音 [The Voice of the Cameroonian People],” *People's Daily* (Beijing), 1 Dec. 1959.

Kamen and her fellow Cameroonian delegates in China were all members of the Union démocratique des femmes camerounaises (UDEFEC), the party representing the women's wing of the multiethnic Cameroonian nationalist movement. UDEFEC sent two delegations to China. First, in October 1959, Kamen, Marguerite Ngoyi, and Marthe Moumié visited China for thirty-two days.³ In November 1960, a second UDEFEC delegation arrived in China. Five unnamed members of this delegation departed in January 1961, while the delegation leader, Marie Tsad Tjad, stayed until May 1961.⁴ Funding for the visits appears to have come partially from the Chinese government and partially from international organizations: the Chinese national committee of the Afro-Asian People's Solidarity Organization supported the first visit, while the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF) funded the second.⁵ Both delegations were composed of high-ranking Francophone UDEFEC leaders in their late twenties and thirties, all of whom were then resident outside Cameroon.

From its very inception, UDEFEC was enmeshed in networks of international women's anti-colonial organizing. The women who formed UDEFEC were first active members of the Union des populations du Cameroun (UPC), the main and male-led wing of the nationalist movement, from its founding in 1948. In 1951, these women struck up a correspondence with the WIDF, a transnational women's organization founded in 1945 and headquartered in East Berlin that sought to promote peace and advocate for women's and children's rights.⁶ The WIDF supported many African women's movements during this time, and the famous Nigerian activist Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti occupied a leadership position within the organization for several years.⁷ Although often considered a "Soviet front organization" by the West, recent scholarship on the WIDF has shown that the women involved had their own political agenda and were not merely following orders from Moscow.⁸

With the WIDF's support, the UPC women formed their own party—UDEFEC—in 1952.⁹ While UDEFEC was officially an independent political party with its own leadership and statutes, it has often been lumped together with the UPC in the historiography on Cameroonian decolonization, and Rose Ndengue's research highlights how male UPC leaders often marginalized UDEFEC within the broader nationalist movement.¹⁰ Meredith Terretta argues that the UPC, like Algeria's Front de libération nationale (FLN), attempted to carry out what Matthew Connolly coined a "diplomatic revolution" by mobilizing international opinion in its favor.¹¹ It was a very similar struggle that animated

³"喀麦隆妇女代表团到京 [Cameroonian Women's Delegation Arrives in Beijing]," *People's Daily*, 28 Oct. 1959.

⁴ Author's collection, 非洲国家 (地区) 与中国的关系 [African Countries' Relations with China (by region)], 3. 新华通讯社国际部编印 [Xinhua News Agency International Department], 1965, 170; Marie-Irène Ngapeth Biyong, *Cameroun: combats pour l'indépendance* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2009). Biyong includes oral histories from Priscia Bonyemb and Tjad that she collected.

⁵Marthe Moumié, *Victime du colonialisme français: mon mari Félix Moumié*, ed. Patrice Burtin (Paris: Éd. Duboiris, 2006), 119; Biyong, *Cameroun*, 295–99.

⁶Yulia Gradska, "Women's International Democratic Federation, the 'Third World' and the Global Cold War from the Late-1950s to the Mid-1960s," *Women's History Review* 29, no. 2 (2020): 271.

⁷Cheryl Johnson-Odim and Nina Emma Mba, *For Women and the Nation: Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti of Nigeria* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 139.

⁸Francisca de Haan, "Continuing Cold War Paradigms in Western Historiography of Transnational Women's Organisations: The Case of the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF)," *Women's History Review* 19, no. 4 (2010): 547–73.

⁹Meredith Terretta, *Petitioning for Our Rights, Fighting for Our Nation: The History of the Democratic Union of Cameroonian Women, 1949–1960* (Oxford: Langaa RPCIG, 2013), 38–39.

¹⁰Rose Ndengue, "Deprovincializing the Feminine/Feminist Cameroonian Nationalism of the 1950s: The UDEFEC and Pluriversal Black Feminism," trans. S. C. Kaplan, *Journal of Women's History* 35, no. 3 (2023): 70.

¹¹Meredith Terretta, "Cameroonian Nationalists Go Global: From Forest Maquis to a Pan-African Accra," *The Journal of African History* 51, no. 2 (2010): 200; Matthew James Connolly, *A Diplomatic Revolution: Algeria's Fight for Independence and the Origins of the Post-Cold War Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 7.

UDEFEC's diplomacy with China, but as we will see, the content and context of their diplomacy differed significantly from that of the UPC.

There is a large literature on empire and intimacies, in which the intimacies under analysis are generally those between the colonized and the colonizer.¹² With some important exceptions, "intimacy" in the imperial context has tended to refer to sexual or romantic relationships. Similarly, the literature on diplomacy and intimacy has also focused almost exclusively on sexual intimacies. However, here I am interested primarily in the non-sexual, *anti*-imperial intimacies that existed between anti-colonial activists in the decolonizing world. While the violent intimacies of colonial rule served as an important unifying experience for these anticolonial activists, my analysis is primarily focused on the intimacy between Cameroonian and Chinese women. In focusing on anti-imperial intimacies, I build on work by Michele Louro that examines the (sexual and romantic) "intimacies of anticolonial solidarity" exemplified by American journalist Agnes Smedley during the interwar period.¹³ And in adopting a non-sexual definition of "intimacy," I draw on Tony Ballantyne's work on the "strategic" and "politically useful forms of intimacy" of the British empire in southern New Zealand. Ballantyne employs an older, non-sexual meaning of "intimacy" that refers instead to "the dynamics of communication" and knowledge flows.¹⁴ The intimate diplomatic exchanges I analyze between Cameroonian and Chinese women were of this nature.

Because I was never granted access to the diplomatic archives in Cameroon or China, by necessity I adopted a very different methodological approach from conventional diplomatic histories. This limited archival access has, paradoxically, proven crucial for my research, because it forced me to look beyond state archives for evidence of diplomacy in unexpected places. Following recent innovations in PRC history methods that have developed as access to Chinese state archives has decreased, many of the Chinese sources in this paper are "garbology" sources that I found and purchased from collectors in China.¹⁵ I read the writings and oral history testimonies of Cameroonian delegation members alongside Chinese sources that include publications on Africa, newspaper reports on the delegation visits, and classified diplomatic reference material, and I supplement them with French and UK intelligence. This transregional methodology is particularly important for studying Cameroonian women's diplomacy, as evidence of it is almost nowhere to be found in the colonial archives in France and the UK, or in what little remains on UDEFEC in the Cameroonian state archives.¹⁶ These women diplomats remained largely invisible to the Western security services and to the postcolonial Cameroonian government, but Chinese sources provide a valuable vantage point on their international diplomacy.

By taking seriously the diplomacy of Cameroonian women not normally considered to be diplomats, this study advances scholarship on African women nationalists, on African women's global engagements, and on gender and diplomacy more broadly. My analysis owes much to the rich literature on African women nationalists, which has changed the political history of African nationalism by exploring the unique and indispensable roles that women played, both in the anticolonial struggle and in nation-building efforts.¹⁷ I show how women's contributions to the nationalist cause were not confined to the domestic political landscape, and that examining Cameroonian women nationalists'

¹²See Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010); Tracey Rizzo and Steven Gerontakis, *Intimate Empires: Body, Race, and Gender in the Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

¹³Michele Louro, "From Wife to Comrade: Agnes Smedley and the Intimacies of Anticolonial Solidarity," in *The Anticolonial Transnational: Imaginaries, Mobilities, and Networks in the Struggle against Empire*, eds. Erez Manela and Heather Streets-Salter, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), 111–34.

¹⁴Tony Ballantyne, "Strategic Intimacies: Knowledge and Colonization in Southern New Zealand," *Journal of New Zealand Studies* 14 (2013): 4–18.

¹⁵Jeremy Brown, "PRC History in Crisis and Clover," *positions: Asia Critique* 29, no. 4 (2021): 689–718.

¹⁶For a comprehensive overview of this methodology, see Matthias Middell, ed., *The Routledge Handbook of Transregional Studies* (London: Routledge, 2018).

¹⁷Susan Geiger, *TANU Women: Gender and Culture in the Making of Tanganyikan Nationalism, 1955–1965* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1997); Elizabeth Schmidt, *Mobilizing the Masses: Gender, Ethnicity, and Class in the Nationalist Movement in Guinea, 1939–1958* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2005); Shireen Hassim, *The ANC Women's League: Sex, Gender and Politics*,

diplomacy with China illuminates aspects of African decolonization that remain out of sight when we remain focused primarily on African engagements with Europe.

In her article on the UPC in Accra, Terretta argues that new and important patterns emerge when scholars follow global connections around decolonization that do not lead to Europe.¹⁸ My research takes this call seriously, engaging with the growing scholarship on how Africans collaborated with counterparts in the decolonizing world.¹⁹ There is also a growing literature on African women's global engagements that has highlighted the expansive networks of anticolonial solidarity and knowledge production in which many women participated.²⁰ While this literature has primarily focused on the Atlantic world and the French empire, my work demonstrates that African women's networks expanded east as well, where they engaged in meaningful anticolonial exchange with Chinese women.

The relatively small subfield of African diplomatic history has encountered the same problem facing diplomatic history as a whole, namely, that “despite available evidence of women as agents and subjects in the arena of diplomacy, the core historical narratives of international politics have remained depleted of women.”²¹ While my analysis builds on recent scholarship that does gender diplomacy, this important literature is still largely concerned with official diplomats representing states.²² However, expanding our definition of “diplomat” to more accurately reflect how diplomacy worked in the decolonizing world reveals that women played a much larger role than previously understood. Although the first two decades of official Cameroonian state diplomacy were conducted almost exclusively by men, this article shows that Cameroonian women served as diplomats long before the postcolonial Cameroonian state even had its own foreign policy—not to mention diplomats.²³

To explore how Cameroonian women deployed their diplomacy of intimacy, I analyze UDEFEC's delegations to China in 1959 and in 1960–61. The first section illustrates how the UPC and UDEFEC successfully forged an alliance with China in the face of a competing and concurrent Sino-Cameroonian alliance between Taiwan and the legal Cameroonian government. Next, I demonstrate that UDEFEC brought its own, gendered approach to the “people's diplomacy” then common in the decolonizing world. The third section explores how UDEFEC women overcame significant challenges from both the colonial powers and the men within their own movement to marshal information exchange as a diplomatic tool. Section four examines the “tales of suffering” that formed the content of the information the women exchanged, which gave a human face to otherwise abstract political demands and helped UDEFEC formulate charges against the colonial powers. The fifth section explores how its relative invisibility in the eyes of the West allowed UDEFEC to operate abroad with much less scrutiny than the UPC. Finally, the conclusion shows that for a crucial

(Auckland Park: Jacana Media, 2014); Judith A. Byfield, *The Great Upheaval: Women and Nation in Postwar Nigeria* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2022).

¹⁸Terretta, “Cameroonian Nationalists Go Global,” 211.

¹⁹See Ismay Milford, *African Activists in a Decolonising World: The Making of an Anticolonial Culture, 1952–1966* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023); Jeffrey James Byrne, *Mecca of Revolution: Algeria, Decolonization, and the Third World Order* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

²⁰Annette K. Joseph-Gabriel, *Reimagining Liberation: How Black Women Transformed Citizenship in the French Empire*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2020); Pascale Barthélemy, *Sororité et colonialisme: Françaises et Africaines au temps de la guerre froide, 1944–1962*, (Paris: Éditions de la Sorbonne, 2022); Jamie Monson, “Performing Internationalism: Tanzanian Women's Delegations to China, 1961–65,” *Cold War History* (2025): 1–21; Naaborko Sackeyfio-Lenoch, “Women's International Alliances in an Emergent Ghana,” *Journal of West African History* 4, no. 1 (2018): 27–56.

²¹Carolyn James and Glenda Sluga, “Introduction: The Long International History of Women and Diplomacy,” in *Women, Diplomacy, and International Politics since 1500*, eds. Carolyn James and Glenda Sluga (New York: Routledge, 2016), 2.

²²Karin Aggestam and Ann E. Towns, eds., *Gendering Diplomacy and International Negotiation*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

²³Victorine Fotso was the first woman to enter Cameroon's diplomatic service via the competitive entrance exam, in 1976, shortly after she also became the first woman to graduate from the diplomatic training program of the International Relations Institute of Cameroon. Mispä Ebenye Ngalle, “Le profil de carrière de la femme diplomate camerounaise: essai d'analyse du genre et des parcours dans la diplomatie camerounaise” (MA thesis, University of Yaoundé II, 2017), 40.

period, UDEFEC's diplomacy had precisely its intended effect in China, and that even after the political alliance with China withered away, important personal connections persisted. The history of UDEFEC's short-lived but significant alliance with China demonstrates that African women exercised far more diplomatic power than is evident in histories of decolonization focused on relations with the West.

Building International Alliances

Cameroon's status as a UN Trusteeship gave Cameroonian nationalists a particular awareness of the role that international alliances could play in their quest for independence. The UDEFEC women were therefore keenly observant of and attuned to global anti-imperialist struggles, and it was this international orientation that informed and fostered their diplomatic engagements. In February 1953, an article on UDEFEC in the WIDF periodical *Femmes du monde entier* described how the UDEFEC women refused to participate in a donation drive to support the French in the First Indochina War.²⁴ And at UDEFEC's first official party congress in August 1954, the thirty-four delegates saluted "the end of the war in Vietnam as a victory for the forces of peace and the anti-colonial struggle."²⁵ Terretta argues that through their work with the WIDF and other international organizations, the women of UDEFEC were "urged on by the sense of belonging to an international movement for improving the status of all women" and that UDEFEC leaders sought to give members "the knowledge that women worldwide shared many of their same concerns."²⁶ Their diplomatic work in China epitomized this approach.

The two UDEFEC delegations visited China in 1959–61, a period of significant social and political change in China, Cameroon, and Africa more broadly. 1960 was famously the "Year of Africa," when seventeen African countries became independent and began exerting their diplomatic power in the UN General Assembly. For Cameroon, this period witnessed the struggle for and eventual independence of French Cameroon in 1960 and of British Southern Cameroons in 1961, as well as their reunification following the referendum of 1961. At independence, the UPC's ongoing armed struggle against the French and British colonial powers grew to include amongst its enemies first Cameroonian president Ahmadou Ahidjo and his Union camerounaise (UC) party, which UDEFEC and UPC members saw as a puppet of the (now former) colonial powers.²⁷ In Chinese foreign relations, the Sino-Soviet split that began in 1956 culminated in the cessation of Soviet aid to China in 1960 and a period of competition for support and leadership in the decolonizing world. This marked the height of Mao's support for liberation movements in Africa, and saw increasing numbers of newly independent states grant diplomatic recognition to China.²⁸ The UDEFEC visits also coincided with the famine years of the Great Leap Forward, although the women do not mention it in available sources.²⁹

While today there is a single Cameroon-China alliance, my research shows that from the 1950s until 1971, there were in fact two competing and concurrent Sino-Cameroonian alliances. On the right was the alliance between Taiwan and Cameroon's legal government, eventually led by Ahmadou Ahidjo. On the left was the alliance between China and the exiled UPC and UDEFEC leadership. China embraced the UPC/UDEFEC's argument that they represented the legitimate Cameroonian

²⁴International Institute of Social History (IISH), Amsterdam, "La femme au Cameroun," *Femmes du monde entier* (East Berlin), Feb.–Mar. 1953, 17.

²⁵IISH, "Pour la première fois, les femmes du Cameroun tiennent un congrès," *Femmes du monde entier*, Dec. 1954, 8–9.

²⁶Terretta, *Petitioning for Our Rights*, 39.

²⁷Richard Joseph, *Radical Nationalism in Cameroun: Social Origins of the U.P.C. Rebellion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 332.

²⁸Ning Lu, *The Dynamics of Foreign-Policy Decisionmaking in China* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2000), 53.

²⁹The Chinese government tried hard to present a positive image for international delegations, and many delegates romanticized the PRC: Mohammed Turki Alsudairi, "Arab Encounters with Maoist China: Transnational Journeys, Diasporic Lives and Intellectual Discourses," *Third World Quarterly* (2020): 1–22.

government fighting an illegitimate, foreign-backed regime (Ahidjo). This was, after all, precisely how the Chinese government understood its own relationship to Taiwan, which it saw as illegitimate and propped up by the United States. The Cameroonian nationalists were aware of this perceived similarity by their Chinese counterparts, and they consequently went to great lengths to support China against Taiwan in their statements to the Chinese media.³⁰ Thus, from the perspective of the Chinese government, when they hosted UDEFEC and UPC members, they were hosting the probable future government of Cameroon. UDEFEC women even traveled on diplomatic passports secured from the various African states that hosted them. In 1960, for example, Marthe Moumié wrote to her husband, UPC President Félix-Roland Moumié, imploring him to secure new diplomatic passports from Patrice Lumumba, as their existing Guinean diplomatic passports were being revoked due to deteriorating relations with Sékou Touré.³¹

The Chinese government had good reason to seek an alliance with the parties it deemed to be the Cameroonian government-in-waiting. China was subtly beginning to challenge Soviet leadership in the decolonizing world by presenting the Chinese revolution as a model for colonial and semi-colonial countries in the “intermediate zone.” The intermediate zone was the vast swath of the world that belonged neither to the Eastern nor Western bloc and which, according to a Maoist analysis, was the central site of conflict with imperialism.³² Mao held that revolutionary struggle in the intermediate zone could be a way to confront and weaken imperialist forces while defending the socialist camp.³³ Cameroon was a perfect example of the “intermediate zone.” In September 1956, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) introduced a new pillar to its foreign policy: support for liberation movements in the decolonizing world.³⁴ Shortly thereafter, UDEFEC and the UPC began receiving strong public support from the Chinese government. In the late 1950s they began receiving arms and guerrilla warfare training from China as well, although without access to Chinese archives, the sources on this are few and flawed.³⁵

China was not UDEFEC’s only international ally, but the relationship between UDEFEC leaders and their Chinese counterparts was unique and formative for several reasons. Most importantly, the CCP regarded African women as having real political power within their countries. Drawing on now-inaccessible records from the Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives on Tanzanian women’s delegations, Jamie Monson argues that in the early 1960s, the CCP recognized that African women nationalist leaders “were politically influential because of their ability to ‘move the masses.’”³⁶ Liz Perry’s research on “emotion work” and the Chinese Revolution has also highlighted how the CCP and various mass organizations worked to “move the masses.”³⁷ In China, UDEFEC women were therefore received

³⁰See “非洲人民深信最后胜利必属中国人民 喀麦隆人民联盟副主席坚决支持我国正义斗争 [The African people firmly believe that the final victory will belong to the Chinese people. The Vice Chairman of the UPC firmly supports our country’s just struggle],” *People’s Daily*, 21 Oct. 1958.

³¹Archives Nationales (AN), Paris, AG/5/F/625, “Les activités de l’Union des Populations du Cameroun,” 6 Jan. 1961.

³²Jian Chen, “China, the Third World, and the Cold War,” in *The Cold War in the Third World*, ed. Robert McMahon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 85–100, 87.

³³John W. Garver, *China’s Quest: The History of the Foreign Relations of the People’s Republic of China* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 94.

³⁴Mao Zedong, “Section 5: War and Peace,” in *Quotations from Mao Tse Tung* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1966).

³⁵The best information currently available on Chinese military aid to the UPC concerns the year 1960, see British National Archives (BNA), London, FCO/168/134.

³⁶Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives (CFMA), Beijing, 108-00844-02, “Newsletter on Foreign Guests issued by the International Correspondence Office of the Chinese Women’s League, Special issue during the 1963 National Holiday Foreign Guest Activities, first issue on the Zanzibar Women’s delegation,” 30 Sep 1963, Issue 197, 1, quoted in Monson, “Performing Internationalism,” 2.

³⁷Elizabeth Perry, “Moving the Masses: Emotion Work In The Chinese Revolution,” *Mobilization: An International Quarterly* 7, no. 2 (2002): 112.

by Chinese women as serious diplomats practicing a highly legible form of anticolonial diplomacy, rather than as an appendage of the UPC.³⁸

Gendering People's Diplomacy

UDEFEC's intimate diplomacy arose out of the diplomatic practices of the decolonizing world. For much of the Cold War, the main diplomatic goal for both the UPC/UDEFEC and their counterparts in China was to resist international isolation and to cultivate international legitimacy. Both parties primarily addressed this challenge through "people's diplomacy" (人民外交) a concept named and formalized by Chinese foreign minister Zhou Enlai, but which described the existing nature of diplomacy for many anticolonial parties.³⁹ People's diplomacy was unique in that it included unofficial agents and entities (such as opposition parties) not normally included in conventional, state-centric understandings of diplomacy. "People's diplomats" usually occupied other roles besides that of diplomat, and they carried out their diplomacy primarily through personalized relationships with other unofficial (people's) diplomats. The UDEFEC diplomats, for example, were also journalists, politicians, nurses, and mothers.

When Cameroonian nationalists first made contact with the CCP in 1954, the CCP's own experience of practicing diplomacy without a state to call its own was still quite recent. Beginning when they joined the Comintern in 1922 and continuing until the founding of the PRC in 1949, the CCP spent nearly three decades conducting diplomacy as a party without a state.⁴⁰ The Chinese government therefore took the UPC and UDEFEC's diplomacy seriously, even though they constituted an "illegal" opposition movement, because the CCP had also practiced diplomacy in a very similar context with the same goal of winning the international opinion battle. For a time, people's diplomacy proved highly successful for all parties, although the CCP eventually came to power and developed the full diplomatic infrastructure of a state, while the UPC and UDEFEC did not.

The people's diplomacy that Cameroonian nationalists practiced with China was highly gendered. It manifested differently in the UPC's interactions with China than it did in UDEFEC's, even though both parties worked to mobilize international support for their shared goal of immediate independence and unification for French and British Cameroon. In 1954, UPC leader Ernest Ouandié attended the World Democratic Youth Congress in Beijing. He recounted that during this visit—one of the first to China by a Cameroonian—he transmitted official greetings from UDEFEC to the All-China Women's Federation (ACWF), and returned to Cameroon with published material from the ACWF for UDEFEC.⁴¹ From the earliest contacts between the Cameroonian nationalists and their Chinese counterparts, therefore, their diplomacy had two channels: one diplomatic channel for the women of UDEFEC, and a second one for the men of the UPC.

While the women's diplomacy centered on sharing personal experiences of intimate colonial violence, the men's diplomacy instead sought to situate Cameroon within the broader anticolonial movement via data, numbers, and theoretical frameworks. "He cited many facts in order to assail colonialism," reads a 1957 *People's Daily* article on UPC president Félix-Roland Moumié's speech at the first Afro-Asian People's Solidarity Organization conference, "he said that colonialism is the face of imperialism that manifests itself in all aspects of politics, culture, religion, and society."⁴² Moumié

³⁸ The Chinese government and press consistently treated the UPC and UDEFEC separately, even when their visits to China coincided. See *People's Daily* for 24 Oct. 1959, "喀麦隆人民联盟主席穆米埃到京 [UPC Chairman Félix Moumié Arrives in Beijing]" and "喀麦隆妇女代表团到京 [Cameroonian Women's Delegation Arrives in Beijing]."

³⁹ Ronald C. Keith, *The Diplomacy of Zhou Enlai* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989), 34.

⁴⁰ Lu, *The Dynamics*, 40.

⁴¹ Centre des Archives Diplomatiques (CAD), La Courneuve/Paris, 443QO/29, "Ernest Ouandié à Monsieur le Secrétaire Général de la Fédération Pan-Chinoise de la Jeunesse Démocratique," 3 Sep. 1955.

⁴² "喀麦隆代表揭露殖民主义残暴丑恶面目要求动员一切力量消灭殖民主义 [Cameroonian delegates exposed the brutality and ugliness of colonialism and called for mobilizing all forces to eliminate colonialism]," *People's Daily*, 29 Dec. 1957.

cited examples including settler land ownership rates in Algeria (an average of 500 hectares per French landowner) and the cost of electricity in Cameroon (the price per thousand kilowatts was twenty times more expensive than electricity in France).⁴³

Delegation visits formed the core of the people's diplomacy that Cameroonian nationalists practiced towards China. With the mail heavily monitored, meaningful exchange with their Chinese counterparts occurred primarily in person. By 1963 at least sixteen delegations of Cameroonian nationalists had visited China, with each delegation composed of several members and often lasting two or three months.⁴⁴ Chinese interpreters trained in French accompanied the delegates on all their activities.⁴⁵ The first UDEFEC delegation, in October 1959, was preceded in China that same year by several other Cameroonian delegations. In February, UPC leader Jean-Paul Sende visited China for "Cameroon Day," a day observed by several of their allies with rallies marking the UN General Assembly special session on the future of Cameroon. A Cameroonian trade union delegation celebrated international labor day in China, novelist Benjamin Matip visited in June, and UPC leader Ernest Ouandié visited in July.⁴⁶ Cameroon and Algeria were the two countries most heavily represented amongst the thirty-nine African delegations to China in 1959, with both the UPC and the FLN finding great public Chinese support for their independence struggles that year.⁴⁷ By the time the first UDEFEC delegation visited China, therefore, their hosts were already well-versed in the role women were playing in Cameroon's anticolonial movement. A March 1959 *People's Daily* article, for example, described Cameroonian women as being "at the forefront of the fierce armed struggle."⁴⁸

People's diplomacy also characterized the hosting infrastructure that the UDEFEC delegations encountered in China. Both UDEFEC delegations were received in China by the ACWF, a mass organization led by the CCP that was designed to represent and include women in national reconstruction.⁴⁹ Although not technically a branch of government, ACWF officials were on the Chinese government payroll.⁵⁰ Wang Zheng argues that via their membership in the WIDE, Chinese state feminists made "conscious efforts to merge the women's movement in the PRC with socialist women's movements globally" and that the ACWF played a vital role in the young PRC's international relations.⁵¹ Elizabeth Armstrong and Yasser Ali Nasser have also demonstrated that the ACWF, like UDEFEC, sought to construct a framework for women's anti-colonialist diplomacy that was separate from that of men's.⁵²

The Chinese women who hosted the UDEFEC women had similar life experiences as their guests, and this did much to facilitate intimate exchange. Just as Marthe Moumié edited the UDEFEC publication *Femmes Kamerounaises*, so too had ACWF standing committee member Shen Ziju (one of the 1959 delegation's main hosts), served as the editor of the CCP publication *Women's Life*, which

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ 非洲国家 (地区) 与中国的关系 [African Countries' Relations with China (by region)], 169.

⁴⁵ For a Chinese interpreter's account, see Tung Chi-Ping and Humphrey Evans, *The Thought Revolution* (New York: Coward-McCann, 1966).

⁴⁶ 非洲国家 (地区) 与中国的关系 [African Countries' Relations with China (by region)], 169.

⁴⁷ Bruce D. Larkin, *China and Africa, 1949–1970: The Foreign Policy of the People's Republic of China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), 45.

⁴⁸ 鲁映 [Lu Ying], "非洲妇女在英勇斗争着 [African Women are Fighting Bravely]" *People's Daily*, 8 Mar. 1959.

⁴⁹ Gail Hershatter, *Women and China's Revolutions* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2019), 220.

⁵⁰ Zheng Wang, *Finding Women in the State: A Socialist Feminist Revolution in the People's Republic of China, 1949–1964* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017), 17.

⁵¹ Ibid., 13.

⁵² Elisabeth Armstrong, *Bury the Corpse of Colonialism: The Revolutionary Feminist Conference of 1949* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2023); Yasser Ali Nasser, "Finding 'Asia' After Imperialism: Transnational Visions of the 'Asian Woman' in China and India, 1949–1955," *Twentieth-Century China* 46, no. 1 (2021): 62–82.

focused on anti-Japanese resistance.⁵³ And like Moumié, Shen too spent several years in exile, organizing Chinese women overseas for the CCP. Another host was Shi Liang, China's first minister of justice who became vice-chairperson of the ACWF. Like Monique Kamen, Shi herself had also spent time in prison (under the Nationalist government), and later became involved in assisting the women and children refugees who converged on Chinese cities during the Japanese invasion.⁵⁴ She was also an experienced international delegate, having represented China on visits to France, Czechoslovakia, India, and the Soviet Union.⁵⁵ Similarly, the Chinese hosts assigned to Marie Tjad's 1960–61 visit demonstrate that she was received as a serious revolutionary. Tjad met with some of the most high-profile women soldiers in China: Zeng Xianzhi, one of the first female soldiers in the Chinese Revolution, and Li Zhen, the first female People's Liberation Army (PLA) general and another veteran of the revolution.⁵⁶ These similar life experiences facilitated the particular type of intimate exchange that UDEFEC's diplomacy prioritized.

Information Sharing

Recalling her 1959 delegation visit to China, Marthe Moumié later characterized the experience as being primarily about the exchange of information between Cameroonian and Chinese women. She stated that Chinese women invited the UDEFEC women to China in order to have "an exchange about their experiences in the anti-colonial struggles."⁵⁷ She described how "the Cameroonian women informed the Chinese women about the fight that we were leading for independence, and about the repression we suffered (imprisonment, torture, beatings)."⁵⁸ The way she frames this is important: the Cameroonian women were not visiting so they could learn from China, but in order to exchange experiences with Chinese women and to "inform" them of the situation in Cameroon.

Terretta has detailed how UDEFEC women wrote thousands of petitions to the UN exposing their suffering under the French and British Trusteeships. Literate women then read these petitions out loud at meetings within Cameroon, ensuring that the message reached all members regardless of their ability to read French.⁵⁹ She describes how a member's personal experience would be circulated throughout the party as a written tract and that "the personal nature of these stories encouraged more stories to be shared, allowing members to identify with people outside their own locale."⁶⁰ UDEFEC applied this technique to their diplomacy abroad as well, by sharing their personal experiences with Chinese women and the Chinese press. China was not the only country to feature stories of Cameroonian women; the Egyptian press also profiled them. Laura Bier argues that showcasing women anticolonial activists from other countries was "a means to imagining other possible futures" for Egyptian women, and helped construct new gendered national identities.⁶¹ While the UDEFEC women were remarkably successful in exchanging information with their international counterparts, they did so in the face of very significant barriers.

⁵³Jinping Zhao, "Shen Zijiu," in *Biographical Dictionary of Chinese Women: The Twentieth Century 1912–2000*, eds. Lily Xiao Hong Lee and A. D. Stefanowska, trans. Li Sheung Yee (New York: M. E. Sharpe, 2003), 449.

⁵⁴Hershatter, *Women and China's Revolutions*, 183.

⁵⁵Lily Xiao Hong Lee, "Shi Liang," in Lee and Stefanowska, *Biographical Dictionary*, 454.

⁵⁶"全国妇联茶会欢送喀麦隆妇女代表团 团长马丽 贾德盛赞我国建设成就, 严厉谴责美帝国主义侵略, [ACWF Tea Party sees off the Cameroonian women's delegation, delegation leader Marie Tjad praises China's construction accomplishments, severely criticizes US imperialism's invasion]" *People's Daily*, 24 Jan. 1961.

⁵⁷Moumié, *Victime du colonialisme français*, 119.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*, 120.

⁵⁹Terretta, *Petitioning for Our Rights*, 19.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, 21.

⁶¹Laura Bier, *Revolutionary Womanhood: Feminisms, Modernity, and the State in Nasser's Egypt* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2011), 176.

Following their expulsion from French Cameroon in 1955 and from British Cameroon in 1957, the UDEFEC and UPC leadership operated from exile in a succession of African cities.⁶² And yet, UDEFEC's diplomacy relied on receiving regular and reliable information from their colleagues in Cameroon, which was a constant challenge. Writing from Cairo in March 1959, UDEFEC president Gertrude Omog explained to her colleague in Cameroon how crucial it was for the UDEFEC diplomats abroad to receive regular and up-to-date reports from home. "We can never forget to insist on the importance of keeping us regularly informed, as the news we receive on the repression you suffer has moved not only *Les femmes du monde entier* [the WIDF newspaper] but also international organizations... you can therefore see that, thanks to your information, our work can be effective on an international level."⁶³ Another letter from Omog to a close friend in Cameroon, intercepted by the French and translated from Basaa, demonstrates that the problem of safely and accurately transmitting information between Cameroon and the exiled diplomats was a serious problem. "Several countries are asking us to tell them about how our comrades are carrying out the struggle, but we do not have any real news on this subject," Omog wrote in March 1959. "I beg you to inform me quickly of the women's situation. How many are in prison? How many have died in combat? What repression are they suffering from soldiers?" she asked.⁶⁴ Despite many letters exhorting their colleagues in Cameroon to share information, intense colonial surveillance of the post meant that the UDEFEC leadership in exile rarely had the prompt and secure access to information that they needed.

The colonial powers were not the only ones surveilling UDEFEC women and seeking to hinder their participation in international anticolonial movements: the men of the UPC sometimes constituted a major barrier as well. Patricia Bonyemb recounts several alleged attempts by the male UPC leadership to block UDEFEC's diplomatic efforts. She describes, for example, how the UPC leaders in Accra quietly seized scholarship money and material goods intended for UDEFEC that were sent from women in "friendly countries," as the UPC and UDEFEC shared one office-in-exile in Accra. Because the UDEFEC leaders were unaware that these gifts had been sent, they could not appropriately thank the senders, which Bonyemb alleges strained UDEFEC's relationships with international partners.⁶⁵ Pascale Barthélémy argues that many women African nationalists had to navigate around the surveillance not only of the colonial powers but also of their male colleagues, a theme that emerges as well in Shireen Hassim's work on the ANC Women's League.⁶⁶ Examining UDEFEC/UPC foreign relations seems to bring out these gendered tensions more clearly than does studying the nationalist movement within Cameroon.⁶⁷ However, just as Susan Geiger showed that paying attention to women's experiences in the Tanzanian nationalist movement also revealed crucial but less obvious aspects of the movement's political history, examining the gendered tensions in UDEFEC/UPC diplomacy may also elucidate little-discussed aspects of their relationship within Cameroon.⁶⁸

These disputes with the UPC men likely worked to strengthen UDEFEC's intimate exchanges with other women nationalists abroad, however, who were themselves often engaged in similar struggles with their own male colleagues. Indeed, Ndengue argues that instead of hampering the women of UDEFEC, conflicts with their male colleagues allowed them to frame their struggle within global movements to question and challenge gender relations, including within the nationalist movement itself.⁶⁹ These obstacles to information sharing allowed the UDEFEC women to identify even more

⁶² Moumié, *Victime du colonialisme français*, 96–110.

⁶³ Centre des Archives Diplomatiques (CADN), Nantes, 743PO/1/7, Gertrude Omog to unnamed colleague, 3 Mar. 1959.

⁶⁴ CADN 743PO/1/7, Gertrude Omog (under pseudonym Kajija Safoiat) to unnamed colleague, 23 Feb. 1959.

⁶⁵ Quoted in Biyong, *Cameroun*, 300.

⁶⁶ Pascale Barthélémy, "Macoucou à Pékin. L'arène internationale: une ressource politique pour les Africaines dans les années 1940-1950," *Le Mouvement Social* 255, no. 2 (2016): 33; Hassim, *The ANC Women's League*, 13.

⁶⁷ Terretta, *Petitioning for Our Rights*, 37.

⁶⁸ Geiger, *TANU Women*, 232.

⁶⁹ Rose Ndengue, "Mobilisations féminines au Cameroun français dans les années 1940-1950: l'ordre du genre et l'ordre colonial fissurés," *Le Mouvement Social* 255, no. 2 (2016): 79.

strongly with their Chinese women counterparts, who were also fighting for a similar “double emancipation” themselves. Wang has argued that the “state feminists,” or feminists who worked in official positions within the CCP after 1949, were keenly attuned to the structural forces of oppression perpetuating gender inequality in New China, but they had to “camouflage their feminist agenda with legitimate, seemingly un-gendered Party slogans” or “hidden scripts” designed to subtly promote women’s rights.⁷⁰ During the delegation visits, the Cameroonian and Chinese women were thus navigating similarly fraught gender relations within nationalist causes that were officially ungendered.

Despite these challenges, Chinese sources show that the UDEFEC women still succeeded in sharing information with their Chinese colleagues, a crucial step in their diplomacy. This process is particularly apparent in a February 1961 *People’s Daily* interview with Marie Tsad Tjad. “What are the facts?” asks the article about the situation in Cameroon. “Marie Tjad took out a stack of letters and showed them to us. Her comrades-in-arms in Cameroon had recently sent the letters to her. She read a few paragraphs from the letters out loud.”⁷¹ The article summarized the content of the letters, which apparently detailed hardships suffered by women in Cameroon, alongside military advances by the armed wing of the nationalist movement. This is a striking example of the information sharing component of UDEFEC’s emotion work. Tjad noted that in return, “the Chinese instructors gave us a general overview of the history of the Chinese revolution through films and plays, and visits to historical sites of the Long March.”⁷² Her account points to a two-way flow of knowledge that served as the foundation for UDEFEC’s diplomacy in China.

Tales of Suffering

The content of the information the women shared most clearly differentiated UDEFEC’s diplomacy from that of the UPC. By sharing the devastating effects of French colonialism on their bodies and fertility, UDEFEC women appealed to their Chinese hosts’ own experience of gendered colonial oppression. Research on French colonial violence in other parts of the empire, such as Vietnam, has revealed that colonized women experienced “differentiated abuse designed by French soldiers along the lines of race, gender and sexuality.”⁷³ For Cameroonian women, this gendered torture included violence directed towards their genitalia and reproductive capabilities, as well as sexual assault and humiliation. Accounts of this gendered colonial violence formed the content of the stories they told as part of their diplomatic work.

As seen at the beginning of this article, for example, UDEFEC Vice President Monique Kamen gave an interview to journalist Wang Boqing during the 1959 delegation visit. Wang was a seasoned war reporter who had been embedded with the PLA at the end of the Chinese Civil War, so he was experienced in reporting on revolution and violence.⁷⁴ Of Kamen he asked rhetorically, “this year she is only twenty-nine years old. What has made her so strong in such a short number of years?” As an answer, Kamen told Wang about her personal experiences of loss, imprisonment, and gendered torture.

Choking back tears, Madame Kamen Monique said that her husband was the person in charge of the Moungo region branch of the UPC, and he gave his life to the cause of Cameroonian national liberation during the White Terror of 1955. She was already four months pregnant when she went to jail, but she miscarried due to the colonists’ torture.⁷⁵

⁷⁰Wang, *Finding Women in the State*, 17–18.

⁷¹汪波清 [Wang Boqing], “复仇的火焰 [Flame of Revenge]” *People’s Daily*, 25 February 1961.

⁷²Quoted in Biyong, *Cameroon*, 329.

⁷³Helle Rydstrom, “Politics of Colonial Violence: Gendered Atrocities in French Occupied Vietnam,” *European Journal of Women’s Studies* 22, no. 2 (2015): 192.

⁷⁴“汪波清同志逝世 [Comrade Wang Boqing Passes Away]” *Guangming Daily*, 14 Mar. 2008. https://www.gmw.cn/01gmrb/2008-03/14/content_748177.htm.

⁷⁵*People’s Daily*, “喀麦隆人民的声音 [The Voice of the Cameroonian People].”

What Chinese readers would learn from Kamen is that French colonialism took her husband, her unborn baby, and her home. These were powerful and lasting details to impart, and they were also all too familiar to Chinese women, who experienced a great deal of intimate violence and displacement during the Japanese occupation.⁷⁶ The interview conveys how Kamen experienced colonialism on a personal and emotional level, which is precisely what UDEFEC's diplomacy prioritized.

The details that Kamen shared in the *People's Daily* about gendered torture are difficult to read. She describes being beaten, burned, and deprived of food, water, and fresh air while in prison. As punishment for ignoring the urging of a Catholic priest to leave the nationalist movement, "the French military police took all her clothes off and one by one plucked all the hair from her body. The inhuman colonists then dragged her up by her arms and took photographs of her bearing this bitter humiliation."⁷⁷ This harrowing account comports with details that UDEFEC shared in other publications as well. The February 1959 issue of their party newspaper, *The Voice of Kamerun*, contains a memorandum to UN Secretary General Dag Hammarskjöld on "the gravity of the situation in Kamerun." The first example given is of gendered torture, describing "torturing by electric current in the genital parts and the ears, bottles in the anus, twisted bosoms, torn off hair."⁷⁸ Such descriptions of torture would have been familiar to Chinese readers: in the CCP's emotion work during the Chinese Revolution, it was often those who had been tortured who were picked to speak first.⁷⁹

Publicizing how women were affected by colonialism was one of the main ways that the WIDF supported and strengthened its connections with women anticolonial activists around the world. An interview that Marthe Ouandié gave to the WIDF periodical *Femmes du monde entier* begins by inviting the reader (gendered female in French, *lectrice*) to "listen with us to the tale of suffering and courageous struggle."⁸⁰ As both the Chinese and Cameroonian women worked closely with the WIDF, both parties were familiar with recounting and listening to similar "tales of suffering" from other women anticolonial activists.⁸¹ Annette K. Joseph-Gabriel has also identified a similar phenomenon in her work on Black women anticolonial activists in the French empire.⁸² It was also a strategy that the Chinese themselves employed during the Second World War, under the framework of "emotion work," when anti-Japanese propaganda often featured graphic cartoons of Chinese women being raped by Japanese soldiers, because it was thought that this would "inspire patriotism and resistance" in the Chinese population.⁸³

That UDEFEC women highlighted fertility and the female body in its diplomacy was no accident. In the regions of Cameroon where the UPC and UDEFEC were most active, women were understood to be the traditional stewards of agricultural and biological fertility, and so bringing attention to how colonialism threatened these spheres fell under their purview as guardians of fertility.⁸⁴ Barthélémy has argued that women in West Africa associated problems related to fertility and maternal health with their own emancipation, and Lynn Thomas has explored the importance of reproductive issues to African political history more broadly, what she calls a "politics of the womb."⁸⁵ The Chinese women would also have been receptive to the theme of fertility, as one of the ACWF's major projects during the 1950s was improving midwifery in order to reduce the high infant mortality rate.⁸⁶

⁷⁶ Hershatter, *Women and China's Revolutions*, 165.

⁷⁷ *People's Daily*, "喀麦隆人民的声音 [The Voice of the Cameroonian People]."

⁷⁸ CADN 743PO/117, "Memorandum to the Secretary General of the UN The Women's Democratic Union of Cameroon," *Voice of Kamerun*, Feb. 1959, 21.

⁷⁹ Perry, "Moving the Masses," 117.

⁸⁰ IISH, Marthe Ouandié, "Mon pays le Kameroun," *Femmes du monde entier*, Mar. 1958, 19.

⁸¹ Gradska, "Women's International Democratic Federation," 274.

⁸² Joseph-Gabriel, *Reimagining Liberation*, 16.

⁸³ Hershatter, *Women and China's Revolutions*, 181.

⁸⁴ Terretta, *Petitioning for Our Rights*, 9.

⁸⁵ Barthélémy, "Macoucou à Pékin," 18; Lynn Thomas, *Politics of the Womb: Women, Reproduction, and the State in Kenya* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 4.

⁸⁶ Hershatter, *Women and China's Revolutions*, 226.

Pamela Feldman-Savelsberg's research has shown that memories of gendered violence and reproductive threats during "the troubles" (the period of the UPC war in Cameroon, 1955–71) even persist to the present in Bamiléké society, and are invoked to make meaning of contemporary crises.⁸⁷ The lingering power of these events, she and her co-authors argue, is due in part to the fact that "the troubles were a singular instance in which victimization was combined with organized resistance to state power."⁸⁸ This is precisely what we see in UDEFEC's diplomacy: it harnessed women's victimization by the colonial powers in order to convince their international allies to care about the Cameroonian nationalist cause. It did so both by displaying the most shocking aspects of colonial rule, and by giving women of other decolonizing countries a common point of reference. It was easier to relate on a personal level to shared experiences of intimate colonial violence than to an abstract political platform, which was the content favored by the men of the UPC. These "tales of suffering" also helped UDEFEC formulate legalistic charges against the colonial powers for violating international law. "They are violating the principles of the UN Charter," wrote Marthe Ouandié in *Femmes du monde entier*. "They consider themselves to be our masters and are comporting themselves like real colonists by submitting us to humiliating racial discrimination."⁸⁹ The details UDEFEC shared of intimate colonial violence served as evidence that the French and British were enacting violence in Cameroon that transgressed international norms.

In sharing how their lives were intimately affected by imperialism, the UDEFEC women were indeed engaged in a deliberate, gendered form of diplomacy, but these accounts were also an accurate reflection of the women's precarious reality. Even for the women who were resident outside of Cameroon and thus afforded some amount of protection from the colonial regimes, imperialism still posed a genuine threat to their marriages, their children, and their very bodies. The French secret service assassinated Marthe Moumié's husband, Félix-Roland Moumié, in Switzerland, only one year after her visit to China. Perry argues that the emotions the CCP sought to elicit via its emotion work were not "phony or inauthentic," and the same must be said of UDEFEC.⁹⁰

The UDEFEC women drew a direct line between their fertility and susceptibility to gendered colonial exploitation, and to their power as revolutionaries. Katharine McGregor has demonstrated that the WIDF too used "seemingly contradictory images of Asian and African women as vulnerable, suffering victims and as empowered, armed, female anti-colonial resistance fighters or heroines."⁹¹ For the UDEFEC women, both were true: it was their experiences of colonial oppression that gave them strength and wisdom. This was particularly clear in their discussions of motherhood, an important theme in African women nationalist discourse that Barthélémy places in broader West African context, and which Selina Makana observes in the Angolan context.⁹² For example, in a 1961 pamphlet about the life and assassination of her husband, Marthe Moumié makes a striking analogy between giving birth and being a revolutionary militant:

A woman cries while giving birth because she lets herself be dominated by the pain. When she has learned how to give birth and what she must do, she dominates the pain and gives birth without screaming or crying. So too, with revolutionaries, the combatant who lacks revolutionary faith lets himself be frightened by the crimes committed by his adversary.⁹³

⁸⁷ Pamela Feldman-Savelsberg, *Plundered Kitchens, Empty Wombs: Threatened Reproduction and Identity in the Cameroon Grassfields* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999).

⁸⁸ Pamela Feldman-Savelsberg, Flavien Ndonko, and Song Yang, "Remembering 'The Troubles': Reproductive Insecurity and the Management of Memory in Cameroon," *Africa* 75, no. 1 (2005): 24.

⁸⁹ Ouandié, "Mon pays le Cameroun," 18.

⁹⁰ Perry, "Moving the Masses," 114.

⁹¹ Katharine McGregor, "Opposing Colonialism: The Women's International Democratic Federation and Decolonisation Struggles in Vietnam and Algeria 1945–1965," *Women's History Review* 25, no. 6 (2016): 926.

⁹² Barthélémy, "Macoucou à Pékin"; Selina Makana, "Motherhood as Activism in the Angolan People's War, 1961–1975," *Meridians: Feminism, Race, Transnationalism* 15, no. 2 (2017): 353–81.

⁹³ Michigan State University Special Collections, East Lansing, Marthe Moumié, *Mes souvenirs de sa vie*, 1961, 58.

This is a clear example of UDEFEC's diplomacy of intimacy at work: she invokes a woman triumphing over the pains of childbirth as a means by which to inspire her (largely female) readership. UDEFEC's diplomacy was itself a way to "dominate the pain" of colonial exploitation.

Intimate Diplomacy

Part of what made UDEFEC's diplomacy in China "intimate" was that it took place under the radar of Western intelligence services. While the colonial regimes deemed them threatening enough to torture and imprison within Cameroon, the UDEFEC women are almost nowhere to be found in the French intelligence reports on the Cameroonian nationalist movement abroad. The war against the UPC represented a rare point of collaboration between French and British intelligence services, with surveillance intensifying right when the two UDEFEC delegations visited China.⁹⁴ Vincent Hiribarren argues that it was largely the fear of communist infiltration—and in particular Chinese training of UPC militants—that motivated the two rival imperial powers to join forces. And yet they knew almost nothing at all about the UDEFEC women, not to mention their close connections with China.

An early surveillance report on Marthe Moumié by the French, for example, says merely that she is "one of the spouses of Félix Moumié" (she was his only spouse) and that she had "no profession" (she was in fact trained and employed by France's own colonial medical system, as a nurse).⁹⁵ While subsequent reports filled in more details about her, they remained sparse compared to the voluminous files on the male UPC leaders. Marguerite Ngoyi, who participated in the 1959 delegation visit, appears in a French surveillance file with only an approximate date and place of birth and the fact that she was widowed with one child.⁹⁶ With few if any details on the UDEFEC women's work, the French authorities—and soon also Ahidjo's government, which relied heavily on French intelligence in its war against the UPC—underestimated the role that these women played in the nationalist movement's success at home and abroad. This is illustrated in a September 1959 French military report, which fails to include a single woman in its "alphabetical list of Cameroonians of note."⁹⁷ Compared to their male colleagues in the UPC, UDEFEC diplomats could thus move about with relative ease.

This invisibility in the eyes of the West was particularly apparent in UDEFEC's visits to China. A French report on the overlapping October 1959 visits of Félix-Roland Moumié and the UDEFEC delegation to China focuses almost exclusively on Moumié: whom he met with, what he did, and what he said.⁹⁸ The women only appear in passing. If one were to rely primarily on Western intelligence in analyzing the Cameroonian nationalist movement, the UDEFEC women would appear highly unimportant. However, the Chinese-language coverage of the two delegations focused equally on the men and women's diplomatic channels, and treated UDEFEC as its own party worthy of independent receptions, speeches, and high-profile meetings with Chinese government leaders. Ndengue notes that most historiography on the Cameroonian nationalist movement has accepted the colonial archive's logic in analyzing the role of UDEFEC, and the China visits present a particularly striking example of just how incomplete a picture the colonial archive paints of UDEFEC's diplomatic activities and importance on the world stage.⁹⁹ To understand the diplomatic power they wielded—and the role that China played in supporting women nationalists—we have to examine sources produced by their diplomatic counterparts.

⁹⁴ Vincent Hiribarren, "Renseignement et guerre contre l'UPC dans le Cameroun britannique (1959–1961)," in *Histoire du renseignement en situation coloniale*, eds. Jean-Pierre Bat, Nicolas Courtin, Vincent Hiribarren (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2021), 87–98.

⁹⁵ CAD 443QO/1, "Note de renseignements, Moumié, Marthe" 1957.

⁹⁶ CADN 743PO/1/7, "Note de renseignements, Ngoyi, Marguerite," 1957.

⁹⁷ AN AG/5/F/626, "Liste alphabétique de personnalités camerounaises," Sep. 1959.

⁹⁸ CADN 743PO/1/7, "Bulletin de Renseignements," 15 Dec. 1959.

⁹⁹ Ndengue, "Mobilisations féminines au Cameroun français," 83.

Invisibility also characterized the work of Cameroonian women in the *maquis* (underground) within Cameroon, where it served as a remarkable asset. Both Léonard Sah and Ndjé Second, in their studies of Bamiléké and Basaa women in the *maquis*, have argued that women performed crucial intelligence work for the nationalist cause within Cameroon because they were less suspect in the eyes of colonial authorities.¹⁰⁰ Drawing on oral testimony from Basaa women who recounted acting as spies and messengers, hiding letters in their hair, the diapers of their babies, and even the intimate parts of their own bodies, Second argues that women were “the eyes of the *maquis*” because they enjoyed significantly more freedom of movement than their male colleagues.¹⁰¹ Meanwhile in the Moundou region, Sah gathered testimony from Bamiléké women detailing how women were the ones who performed missions so swift and anonymous that people would say that “the wind had been there.”¹⁰² In addition, Jacqueline-Bethel Mougoué’s work has made visible the “seemingly invisible women” of anglophone Cameroonian nationalism, who, she argues, played vital political and social roles in the anglophone Cameroonian nationalist movement, despite being largely ignored by the press and most political commentators of their day.¹⁰³

Conclusion: Diplomacy of Intimacy Bears Fruit

For a time, UDEFEC’s diplomacy of intimacy was quite effective: their Chinese counterparts described it themselves, and expressed exactly the anticolonial solidarity it was meant to provoke. After Félix-Roland Moumié’s assassination, for example, a Chinese delegation visiting Guinea in August 1961 from the Africa-China Friendship Association traveled with Marthe Moumié and her daughter Hélène to lay a wreath at Félix-Roland Moumié’s grave on the Guinea coast.¹⁰⁴ Feng Zhidan described the interaction in his 1962 book *Glimpses into West Africa*, which was one of the first travelogues on Africa published in China, and the excerpt on Moumié was published as a stand-alone article in the *People’s Daily*.¹⁰⁵ In first-person prose, Feng described the emotional experience shared by the surviving Moumiés and the Chinese delegation. Marthe Moumié invited the Chinese delegates inside her husband’s tomb, where she took out a small brass key, opened the casket, and allowed them to view his embalmed body resting beneath a sheet of glass. The Chinese delegates then laid the UPC flag and a wreath on top of his coffin and offered comforting words to Marthe Moumié. Feng described how moving the scene was for him: “I found myself in tears of emotion. I felt that there was a true feeling of brotherhood being shared between the Chinese and African people. The Chinese people have had their own share of disasters in the past! I recalled that dark decade when the blood of the Chinese people was spilled all over the motherland.”¹⁰⁶ UDEFEC’s intimate engagements allowed precisely the shared emotional experience that Feng described, prompting each party to reflect on how imperialism had touched their own lives.

The diplomacy that UDEFEC practiced with Chinese counterparts drew on a shared repertoire of international anticolonial experiences. Writers like Feng presented Africa-China relations as founded on “shared miseries,” and Jodie Yuzhou Sun, Mingqing Yuan, and Lifang Zhang argue that “this shared sense of victimhood and comradeship between Africa and China was critical to the emotional bonds

¹⁰⁰ Léonard Sah, *Femmes bamiléké au maquis: Cameroun, 1955-1971* (Paris: Harmattan, 2008); Second Ndjé, “La femme Basa’a du Cameroun au ‘maquis’: 1955-1971” (MA thesis, University of Yaoundé I, 2008).

¹⁰¹ Ndjé, “La femme Basa’a du Cameroun au ‘maquis,’” 50–51.

¹⁰² Sah, *Femmes bamiléké au maquis*, 117, 120.

¹⁰³ Jacqueline-Bethel Mougoué, *Gender, Separatist Politics, and Embodied Nationalism in Cameroon* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2019), 3.

¹⁰⁴ 冯之丹 [Feng Zhidan], “志士的鲜血不会白流 [The blood of patriots will not be shed in vain],” *People’s Daily*, 27 Aug. 1961.

¹⁰⁵ 冯之丹 [Feng Zhidan], 西非八国漫记 [*Glimpses into West Africa*] (Beijing: World Knowledge Publishing House, 1962), 67.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

of Afro-Asian solidarity.”¹⁰⁷ Emily Wilcox has demonstrated that at the time when the UDEFEC women were visiting China, the Chinese government sought to use dance and other mediums to “forge affective bonds and to build political alliances.”¹⁰⁸ As we can see, UDEFEC’s Chinese counterparts were themselves attuned to the connection between political alliances and affective bonds, and were thus primed to be receptive to a diplomacy of intimacy. Accounts like Feng’s call into question the scholarship that sees Africans as susceptible to Chinese “exploitation” or manipulation during this period.¹⁰⁹ On the contrary, UDEFEC women initiated and successfully carried out a diplomatic strategy that they understood would be effective with their Chinese counterparts, precisely because they engaged with them on an affective level.

But UDEFEC’s relationship with China did not last. It slowly disintegrated over the 1960s, as changes in Cameroon, China, Taiwan, and the Cold War landscape altered the diplomatic calculations for all sides. In 1971, after the execution of UPC President Ernest Ouandié effectively marked the end of the Cameroonian nationalist movement’s armed insurrection, President Ahidjo switched diplomatic recognition from Taiwan to China. The formerly robust alliance that UDEFEC and the UPC had maintained with China thus came to a decisive end in 1971, never again returning to its high point during the UDEFEC visits.

Still, despite the end of the formal political alliance with UDEFEC, the connections that delegates formed in China continued on. In her memoir, Marthe Moumié recounts a conversation with her late husband: “After his trip to China, my husband told me that if he came to pass away, I must send Héléne, our only child, to China,” writes Moumié. “There she would have a good education and ideal professional training. This is what I did later.”¹¹⁰ Indeed, after Félix-Roland Moumié’s assassination in 1960, Marthe Moumié sent Héléne to study in China, where she stayed for several years. The decision to entrust her only daughter to the care of the Chinese government after her husband’s assassination—and after China had dropped its overt support of the UPC and UDEFEC—demonstrates the strength of the ties that Marthe Moumié cultivated with her Chinese counterparts during her 1959 delegation visit. The UDEFEC women’s diplomacy with China left lasting bonds and facilitated diplomatic and intellectual engagement that must be taken seriously in studies of African decolonization. Even as new political alliances were taking shape, the afterlives of this old alliance persisted, grounded in a diplomacy of intimacy.

Acknowledgements I am grateful for the advice and encouragement I received on this manuscript from several scholarly communities. My fellow panelists at the 2024 Lagos Studies Association Annual Conference gave invaluable feedback: Harmony O’Rourke, Jacqueline-Bethel Mougoué, Rose Ndengue, and George Njung. Special thanks as well to readers in the French Colonial Historical Society’s 2024 Pre-Conference Workshop on “Intimacies of Empire,” and to my colleagues in the entity formerly known as International Security Studies at the Yale Jackson School of Global Affairs. In addition, Jamie Monson, Nwando Achebe, Aminda Smith, Yasser Ali Nasser, Zou Yun, Marissa Knaak, and Bernie Moore read early versions of this paper, and I am deeply grateful for their suggestions. Thank you to Fabio Lanza for his valuable assistance in the IISH archives, and to the anonymous reviewers for their excellent feedback. The research was funded by an International Dissertation Research Fellowship (IDRF) from the SSRC, and a Fulbright-Hays DDRA fellowship.

¹⁰⁷ Jodie Yuzhou Sun, Mingqing Yuan, and Lifang Zhang, “Third World Crossings: Afro-Asian Travelogues in the Early 1960s,” *Interventions* 25, no. 6 (2022): 850.

¹⁰⁸ Emily Wilcox, “Performing Bandung: China’s Dance Diplomacy with India, Indonesia, and Burma, 1953–1962,” *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 18, no. 4 (2017): 533.

¹⁰⁹ Donovan C. Chau, *Exploiting Africa: The Influence of Maoist China in Algeria, Ghana, and Tanzania* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2014); Julia Lovell, *Maoism: A Global History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2019).

¹¹⁰ Moumié, *Victime du colonialisme français*, 105.

Cite this article: Caitlin Barker, “Diplomacy of Intimacy: Cameroonian Women’s Anticolonial Diplomacy with China in the Era of Decolonization,” *The Journal of African History* 66, e10 (2025): 1–16, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021853725100546>.