

COLONIAL POLICIES AND MIGRATIONS ACROSS THE NIGERIA - CAMEROON BOUNDARY, 1884-1961.

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Abstract

It has been established that in the past the state-centric perspective, which operates largely within the framework of the nineteenth century European legal and diplomatic notions of sovereignty of states and the sanctity of boundaries, have received attention to the detriment of the transnational perspective. The transnational perspective is largely concerned with ethnic groups and culturally coherent territories divided by the colonial powers and the impact of the colonial and the successor states policies that impact negatively on the divided populations living in close proximity to the boundary. The paper examined German-British and French policies that influenced migrations across their borders to 1961. The overall picture that emerged underscored the fact that boundaries as precise lines for administrative and judicial competence can hardly function in regions where the ethnic groups are related historically, linguistically, culturally and have been condemned to live together in peaceful co-existence. It is proposed that in pursuance of the ideal of border co-operation and development the successor states should take cognisance of the realities at the their borders and utilize these features as bridges rather than barriers in trans boundary management and co-operation.

Colonial Policies And Migration's Across The Nigeria-Cameroon Boundary, 1884-1950.

Introduction

The eastern international boundary of Nigeria is its common boundary with the United Republic of Cameroon. The evolution of the present boundary was interwoven with imperialist activities of Britain, Germany later France. However, with the defeat of Germany in the First World War. its former colony in the Cameroon was placed by the League of Nations under British and French Mandates (and after World War II as Trustees of the United Nations) to be administered as integral parts of their respective colonial territories in the area.

In the London Declaration of July 10, 1919 (The Milner-Simon Declaration), Britain and France delimited an initial boundary between the parts of the Cameroon placed under the authority to their respective governments thereby constituting the administrative partition-the international boundary between British and French administered Cameroons. In 1928, there was a joint declaration by the Governor's of British and French Cameroons delimiting the boundary of their mandates more elaborately than had been done in the Milner-Simon Declaration (Chukwurah, 1981:251-258).

This paper focused on the international boundary in South Eastern Nigeria and Southern Cameroon. The partition of Cameroon created two distinct boundary configurations. The original Anglo-German boundary of 1913 which divided the Boki, Ejagham, and Becheve Akwaya and placed them in German Cameroon and British Nigeria. The Anglo-French boundary of 1916-1961 divided the Dschang, Bangwa, Mbo and Bansa into French and British Cameroons.

These periods witnessed the exhibition of clear similarities and contrasts between British, German and French policies; which in turn precipitated migrations across the inter-colonial boundaries. It is indicated that in spite of the glaring differences between British, German and French administrative and economic policies, colonial policies were aimed at the same goal - the exploitation of the region's natural resources. The paper concluded that neither the Germans, French or British were able to stop migrations across the colonial borders despite the harsh border policies instituted by the Germans and French to prevent migrations across the colonial border.

The German Administrative And Economic Policies 1884-1913.

The political system established by the Germans, like those established by the British was aimed at the exploitation of the territories' resources. The German system was markedly different from those established before 1884. The post 1884 system was partly determined by the various political systems the Germans had found on their arrival. The administrative machinery of "Kamerun" as the German colony was called was headed by the Kaiser (Emperor) who resided in Berlin. In addition, several officials resident in Berlin supervised and directed the administration of the territory (Rudin 1938:29-42.)

Originally, colonial affairs were handled by a colonial Division within the German Foreign office. The development of the German colonies led to the establishment of a colonial ministry. Kolonialamt in 1906. The ministry was generally expected to create the most suitable conditions for the economic exploitation of the colonies. In 1890, an Advisory Council of Colonial experts Kolonialrat had been created to assist Berlin in the management of the German colonies within German Cameroon. The Imperial Governor was assisted by a Chancellor and a local council Governmentstrat draw largely from the mercantile community. (Rudin, 1938: 29 - 42).

Cameroon was subdivided into districts. Broadly speaking, areas near the coast were managed under a fairly regular system of civil administration but the system in the interior was largely military in character and based on Indirect Rule. The Bezirk, under the administrative charge of a Bezirksamtman, was a "first class" district under full civilian administration. Buea, Victoria and Ossindinge Districts belonged to this category. (Rudin, 1938:29-42).

Several factors accounted for the simultaneous use of both direct and indirect methods of administration. Firstly, German control was greater over the coastal and forest areas than in the north. Similarly, German economic activity and communications were larger in these areas.(Goodridge, 1087:29).

The Germans introduced the import-export trade as the basis of social and economic life in the territory. By 1916, the colonial economy dominated by import-trade, was confined to a small area in Cameroon. At the same time official opinion held the view that export products which were then obtained through trade, could be more abundantly produced through the application of scientific knowledge to colonial agriculture. This at once brought into sharp focus the question of land tenure. Should Cameroon's development be based on large-scale German plantations or peasant land holding? These views were summed up by Lieutenant Colonel Morgan when arguing for forced labour!

We can do nothing in the tropics without native workmen, and especially cannot make progress in Cameroon whose future depends on plantations.

(Chilver, 1967:479-5 11)

the All-Highest Decree 15 June, 1896 was the legal instrument which facilitated the creation of plantations. Under the terms of the decree all "unoccupied" land was declared crown land. Outright sale or leasing of such crown lands to Germans to create plantations was deemed not only right but necessary. The decree also provided for Land Commissions which actually determined the size and quality of lands to be allotted for plantations. The first Land Commission started work around Mount Cameroon in 1902 and although representatives of missionary interest were subsequently appointed to the Land Commissions these remained subordinated to planter interests. The total area of the plantations increased steadily and by 1914 as much as 264,000 acres of Southern Cameroon had been formed into plantations, covering the most fertile lands in Victoria, and Kumba Districts.

Changes in the land tenure system after 1884 brought changes in the labour system. The German plantations had provided the major catalyst to the emergence of a wage labouring class. The village heads were mandated to recruit labour for the plantations. The situation was made worse by the German taxation policy. Male adults and even youths who could not pay tax in cash were forced to squeeze twelve buckets of wild rubber on a weekly basis, while the women were forced to carry

the squeezed rubber to designated depots. Forced labour camps were established which were military in character to enforce the rules. For example, forced labour centres were located at Wula (Boki), Mamfe, Bamenda, Victoria and Kumba. Labourers from the Bamenda Grass fields and from east of the Mungo River were forced into German labour camps to provide plantation labour force (Bondchuk, 1997:284).

The excruciating effects of German policies including the militarisation of their borders to prevent 'loitering' or crossing forced the indigenous groups to draw comparisons with the British policies on the other side of the boundary which was considered more amenable and migrated to the British sphere. The Boki, Ejagham, Assumbo, Allegeti, Nsanakang migrated from the German side to settle with their kith and kin in present day Boki-Ikom and Etung Local government Areas (Bonchuk, 1997).

Other communities that resented German rule crossed the boundary and were accommodated by other groups. For example, in 1904, there was a major migration of nine villages of the Asumbo group to the Nigerian side of the boundary but continued to maintain their ancestral links with Mamfe. To a less extent, the Bakolle of the Cameron Coast, the Balondo (Efut) Baromibi, Anyang, Bafut, Nkambe, Bayangi, Ekot Ngba etc. migrated away from the German territory to the British sphere (Bonchuk, 1997).

The British Administrative And Economic Policies, 1884-1913.

Colonialism was essentially an economic phenomenon but certain political criteria have to be set before exploitation of colonial resources could be actively pursued. British political theory assumed that the need for change and the institution and management of that change in the colonies had to be resolved through devolution of power to decentralized political and administrative structures. These structures consisted primarily of European administrators, and central legislative bodies, but they also included Native Authorities, (Brett, 1972:330).

In Eastern Nigerian and elsewhere, the British had to devise at least three kinds of structures and to resolve several major problems to enhance the operation of the political and economic system. The British required a political structure capable of regulating conflict between the indigenous groups and themselves and boundary relations with the Germans. They also needed some structures capable of handling the often contradictory demands of European interests - Trader, Missionary and Administrators. Finally, the British needed an administrative structure capable of maintaining law and order, collecting taxes and servicing the colonial system (Lugard: 1965:94).

The system of local administration was crucial to the success of British colonial rule in South-Eastern Nigeria in terms of the political, cultural, monetary and economic contributions to the promotion of British interests. The system adopted was indirect rule or the system of supporting "native rule and rulers, their council and courts, customs and traditions..." (Lugard, 1965:94). Native Courts and Native Treasuries were established to foster British economic interests.

The British colonialists needed to create the productive capacity in order to maintain the minimal administrative and military presence required to sustain foreign control. The British also sought to encourage the speedy development of economic activity, especially the production of agricultural products for export which would make the most direct contribution to the metropolitan economy and at same time bolster the political apparatus raised on Indirect Rule.(Lugard: 1965:94)

There were two main views on the organisation of the export sector of the economy. One view, the settler view held that agriculture should be based on a class of expatriate producers.

The settle view, which was most articulately presented by J.C. Smuts, held that Africans could only be "civilized" through close and continuous contact with a dominant expatriate (i.e. European Community in the colonies) (Smuts, 1930:50-51).

Those advocating an economic system dominated by peasants included two men who were Governors of Nigeria from 1916 to 1939. These were Sir Hugh Clifford (1919-1925), and Sir Donald Cameron (1931 - 1935). In their view, "civilization" of Africans and the modernization of Africa could be best led by administrators, missionaries and traders. The work of these three groups, they argued, would be facilitated by retention-of land by Africans and the exclusion of European plantations. (Smuts, 1930:50-51).

Though F. Lugard believed that a limited number of European plantations would display-improved methods of cultivation, he, like Clifford, recognized that plantations were not self-supporting as regards labour. Clifford had found out that peasant owned agricultural enterprises were incomparably the cheapest means of agricultural production yet devised and were also capable of a rapidity of expansion and a progressive increase of output which had never been displayed by European plantations in the tropics.

Thus, unlike the Germans whose economic policy laid emphasis on plantation agriculture. British policy encouraged peasant cultivation and this system was less exploitative. The peasant farmers had the latitude to produce what they wanted to and forced labour was not associated with this system.

Faulty as the British system may have appeared, they were desirous to govern their territorial possessions with caution and through indigenous institutions. Even though the hierarchy of government was tenuous, the local chieftains played appreciable and recognisable roles. Whereas the Germans did not disguise their desire to use the colonies to obtain economic glory.

German approach was more brutal than that of the British. This prompted the divided peoples in the region noted earlier to migrate from the German to the British sphere.

The Anglo-French Condominium 1916 - 1961

The Germans were defeated during the First World War (1914 - 1918); Britain and France provisionally divided the territory in March 1916 under the terms of the London Agreement which gave more than eighty per cent of the territory to France. By Article I 19 of the Versailles Treaty. Germany renounced in favour of the principal Allied and Associated powers all her rights and titles over her over-seas possessions. It was decided that these territories should be administered as mandates on behalf of the League of Nations (Gooding, 1987:57).

As a result of the 1919 partition of Cameroon, Northern and Southern Cameroon were placed under British rule. In Southern Cameroon, the Bamenda or Western Grass-fields along with Ossindinge and Kumba Districts including the economically important Buea and Victoria Districts which housed some of the German plantations formed the southern extremity of British Cameroons. In the South East, the Mungo River formed a convenient boundary between French and British spheres. By this boundary configuration, the Boki-Ejagham-Becheve Akwaya hitherto divided between Nigeria and Cameroon by the 1913 Anglo-German boundary were re-united with their kith and kin in Eastern Nigeria and South West Cameroon. (Bonchuk : 1997 :230).

Although the British and French wanted to “make the boundary conform in a general way to the ethnic and tribal facts”, the 1919 boundary split some ethnic groups notably the Mandara and Kanuri in the North, and the Dschang, Bangwa, Bakkossi and Mbo in the South. (Bonchuk: 1997: 230).

The prosperity of the plantations in Southern Cameroon depended on the availability of large amounts of cheap, unskilled labour provided by immigrants who were foreign to the ethnic communities of the plantation zone. In British Cameroons the population of the plantation zone was insufficient in number to provide the required number of workers. Thus, for example, in 1924, the population of Victoria Division was a mere 30, 965 out of the total for Cameroon province which stood at 358,028. Furthermore, the Bakweri were much opposed to working on the plantations and rather insisted that their lands should be returned to them (Weladgi, 1934:57-67).

Yet by 1926 the plantations labour force was estimated at 12,128. Certain incentives and pressures had combined to produce this labour force. Firstly, there was a need to acquire cash with which to pay taxes to the British and French authorities. Selling labour to the plantations became one method of doing so. In addition cash was needed to purchase any imported foods used by the people. Further, the Native Authorities and Native Courts helped to compel people to render their labour services. People within and without the boundary zone migrated to find employment in British and French colonial firms which had begun to monopolise the trade of the area.²³

The payment of taxes in cash was not only vital for the operation of both economic and political structures, it also stimulated labour migration across the boundary between Britain and Nigeria and French Cameroon. The British boundary policy did not prevent valuable immigrants from entering the British Colony. For example, the British Deputy governor, F. James instructed F.

Hives a member of the Anglo-French patrol team not to interfere with immigrants from French Cameroon while in British territory²⁴.

This policy was a disguised British diplomatic ploy to accept and encourage immigrants from French Cameroon into British Southern Cameroon.

The French reduced the local chiefs to agents for the collection of taxes, recruiting forced labour for public works in European plantations and carriers for the French administrators. Most chiefs suffered humiliation from the commandant who most frequently could arrest, imprison and even beat up a chief for “failing” in his duty²⁵. The case was different in British Southern Cameroon where the chief was able to preserve his position and in fact effectively integrated into the scheme of British administrative machinery.

The contrasting policies of the French and British caused more resentment in French controlled areas. The result was that whenever taxation exercise was taking place frequent migrations occurred among the Dschang, Bangwa, Mbo and Bakkossi on the French side to the British sphere which was considered more tolerable.

The immediate reaction of the colonial authorities to breaches in boundary regulations by the local communities was to clamp down heavily on such communities. Initially too, the reckoning of the French colonial authorities was that after all migrations would stop after a while. But it soon dawned on the authorities that migration meant a loss of taxable population and viable labour force. Consequently, stringent measures were instituted by the French to check further migrations from their territories.

From 1916 to 1961 the Anglo-German boundary of 1913 was not functional and therefore did not restrict immigrants from Eastern Nigeria. Since 1924, but particularly in 1929 as the Depression set in, many people from Eastern Nigeria migrated to Victoria and Kumba Divisions in Southern Cameroon. The establishment in 1949 of the Cameroon Development Corporation (C.D.C.) added impetus to migrations by South Easterners and French Cameroonians to Southern Cameroon (Otorde : 1992).

In 1933, Kumba Division had 7,494, “strangers”, with “strangers” outnumbering the indigenous population by a ratio of 3 to 1 in the Balong areas. In 1938, the “stranger” population in Victoria Division was put at 1/3 of the adult male population with the concentration being heaviest in urban areas of Buea, Tiko and Victoria (Baker, 1933).

The question arises why Britain adopted so favourable a posture towards “strangers”. British officials frequently referred to people of Kumba Division as “lazy”, “shiftless”, “indolent” and slothful”; such types of people, they argued, could not be allowed to retard the expansion of the colonial system. Furthermore, several officials were of the opinion that “strangers” except vagabonds, are an “asset to Southern Cameroon Province and...” where land is available they should be encouraged to settle. The value of “strangers” lay in their supplying labour to the plantations and in their cultivation of export produce. These activities endeared “strangers” to the British overlords who showed their appreciation by appointing “strangers” to Native Authorities (Baker, 1933).

By 1948, the number of “strangers” living among the Bakweri posed such a problem that the Victoria and Buea Native Authorities were asking all Igbo from Eastern Nigeria to leave and any Bakweri lady whose indiscretion might be instrumental in their leaving progeny behind them was to be fined 5 pounds (Goodridge, 1987:158-176). The British official however, attempted to dissuade the Bakweri Authorities from such actions.

Trade and communications were vital to the British in the creation of the colonial system in Eastern Nigeria and Southern Cameroon. Lugard had one stated that the material development of Africa depended on transport. British attempts at laying down an infrastructure of roads were guided by the determination to establish administrative and economic control over the border region with French Cameroon (Goodridge, 1987:158-167).

Up to 1929, the erection of road communications was aimed at promoting the export of agricultural products and the importation of British goods. The system of road communication was also designed to further British trade at the expense of Duala and ultimately, France. Thus, the Mamfe-Bamenda road that linked the (cross River was based on the above criteria. According to the Acting Governor, emphasis should be placed on those roads which would “hastily open up the resources of the country and swell the volume of our trade (CSO 26/1/09402).

With a network of roads linking Eastern Nigeria with Southern Cameroon, Eastern Nigeria began to migrate into the French Cameroons either as traders or smugglers or both. By the end of the 1920 Nigerians had become important participants in the smuggling enterprise and tobacco and cloth were the major articles of the illicit trade. It was suspected that the smugglers were mainly from Calabar Province and the financiers were primarily from Abomena, Degema and Owerri province. By the 1950s the migration into French province was increased in spite of the customs and tariff barriers erected by the French along the Mungo River (Benduk, 1997:64-368).

The main reason why Eastern Nigerians and British Cameroonians carried their trade to the French borders was purely profit motives. Greater remuneration awaited those who traded with French firms in the French territory. In the 1950s prices of meat, foodstuff, spirits, etc. were higher in French Cameroon than in Nigeria and British Southern Cameroon. Thus, from 1916 to 1961, Nigerians constituted the largest number of foreign residents in British and French Cameroons (Bonduk 1997: 364 - 368). These migrations were highly variable in size and character over time as well as its motivations, destinations and pre-occupations. The migrants usually respond to the changing political, economic and social characteristics prevailing across the inter-colonial boundary. These features were fairly constant until after the independence of Nigeria and Cameroon. With the Ahidjo's Cameroonisation policy after Cameroon's independence and after the Nigerian Civil War of 1967 - 1970 this trend has continued unabated in spite of the conflictual nature of the Nigerian- Cameroon borders.

Conclusion

The paper examined British, German and French Colonial policies that influenced migrations across the inter-colonial boundary from 1884-1960s. It was indicated that both the Anglo-German boundary of 1913 and the Anglo-French boundary of 1916 divided related ethnic groups and placed them in British Nigeria and German Cameroon, and later in British Southern Cameroons and French Cameroons.

The German, French and British policies were highlighted. It was indicated that the German and French policies were military in character and associated with forced labour, low wages and excessive taxation; thus, the indigenous groups were compelled by the logic of that situation to migrate to the British sphere which was apparently more tolerable.

Though the British system was tenuous, it preserved the autonomy of the local chiefs who participated in the British Indirect Rule system. In spite of the contrast between the British, German and French administrative and economic policies, one glaring similarity should not be glossed over. That is, the aim of colonialism was the exploitation of the regions' natural resources and the subjugation of the indigenous populations.

The migrations that took place across the inter-colonial boundary were protest movements against the German and French systems, they were also actuated by economic motives - the desire by traders and smugglers to make profit in the French sphere. These migrations reduced the effectiveness of the inter-colonial boundaries as barriers to free movement by the indigenous peoples.

Therefore, European notions of boundaries as precise lines of separation and for administrative, jurisdictional and economic competence could hardly function in a region with related but divided ethnic groups along and astride the borders.

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