

Bamileke Diasporas*: Aetiological Consideration Of The Bamileke Implantation In The Bamenda Grasslands (Cameroon), 1922-1961

Roland Mba Komo (PhD)

Abstract: - When the Germans were defeated and evicted out of Cameroon by the combined British and French troops, the failure to implement the Condominium led to the partition of Cameroon into two between the British and the French. With this partition, the borders were closed for both the mobility of goods and persons either ways. This partition was approved by the League of Nations in 1922. From 1922 when the League of Nation's Mandate started in the British Southern Cameroons and in the French Cameroon, to 1961 when the Southern Cameroons voted to reunify with the Republic of Cameroon (former French Cameroon), the hitherto fluid relations between the two territories was hindered. The study examines the motives for the migration and implantation of the Bamileke in to the Bamenda Grasslands. It maintains that in spite of the restrictions of international boundary between the two Mandate and Trust territories of French Cameroon and British Southern Cameroons, cross border mobility was not forestalled. Prevailing circumstances in French Cameroon permitted the Bamileke to create new social spaces straddling the artificially imposed frontiers. Using the chronological approach, the paper spans through key historical periods: the Mandate and Trusteeship periods. The study made use of primary and secondary sources of information. The conclusions were drawn after a qualitative analysis of the data.

Key words: Bamileke, Diasporas, Aetiological, Implantation, Bamenda Grasslands.

I. INTRODUCTION

In 1884, the Germans annexed Cameroon after staging a coup against the British. Unfortunately for the Germans, the outbreak of the First World War in Europe provoked the British and the French to extend the war to Cameroon in 1914. Initially, German Cameroon was attacked on two fronts by the French troops advancing from French Equatorial Africa and British troops from their base in Nigeria. This was met with some stiff resistance from the Germans which provoked the formation of a joint Anglo-French military command under the leadership of Brigadier-General Charles Mcpherson Dobell.¹ This was called the West African Expeditionary Force. Charles Dobell reversed the initial German victories especially on the side of the British and by February 1916, the

Germans were finally defeated in Cameroon. It was this defeat and the failure to implement the condominium that gave the opportunity for the British and the French to partition Cameroon.

As a result of the failure to implement a condominium² over German Cameroon, it was provisionally partitioned in February 1916 by British and French diplomats-Lancelot Oliphant and Georges Picot. Britain received 1/5 while France had 4/5 of the territory.³ This provisional partition was confirmed by the Milner-Simon agreement of 1919.⁴ The League of Nations through Article 22 of its Covenant, gave the former German Cameroon to Britain and France as Mandated territory. From 1922, British and French Mandates officially started in Cameroon. The partition of Cameroon between the British and the French brought about some frustration to these border people who were separated. The circumstances arising from the partition meant the institutionalization of the borders, making traditional local and distant markets to become strictly 'foreign.' Movement of persons and property was completely prohibited. The situation in Fanzo's observation was that many traders were cut off from their nearest markets across the border.⁵

The study examines the reasons which pushed the Bamileke out of their own zone in French Cameroon to find sanctuary in the Bamenda Grasslands (in the British Southern Cameroons). In spite of the administrative barriers created by

² The Condominium was a system of joint administration proposed by the French to the British over Cameroon in 1914 after the collapse of Douala to the West African Expeditionary Force (WAEF). However, the projected condominium did not materialize because of the clashing territorial and administrative ambitions, and claims of the two Allies (Britain and France). The failure of implement the condominium led to the partition of Cameroon. Vide L. Z. Elango, *The Anglo-French Condominium in Cameroon 1914-1916: History of a Misunderstanding* (Limbe: Navi-Group Publications, 1987), 8-13.

³ Ngoh, *Cameroon 1884-Present*, 94.

⁴ On July 10 1919, the British Colonial Secretary Lord Alfred Milner and the French Minister for Colonies Henri Simon met in London and signed the Milner-Simon Agreement which defined the Anglo-French partition of Cameroon. This final partition confirmed the provisional arrangement of 1916. The League of Nations approved this partition in 1922 and made Cameroon a Mandate B territory. See V.G. Fanzo, *Cameroon History for Secondary Schools and Colleges Vol.2: The Colonial and Post-Colonial Periods* (Malaysia: Macmillan, 1989), 59-60.

⁵ V. G. Fanzo, "Trans-Frontier Relations and Resistance to Cameroon-Nigeria Colonial Boundaries 1916-1945" (Doctorat D'Etat Thesis in History, University of Yaounde, 1982), 207.

*The term Bamileke Diaspora is used to describe the Bamileke who migrated and settled in other parts of Cameroon like in the Bamenda Grasslands and in the Mungo. Bamileke Diaspora also involves the Bamileke settled in most countries especially in the Central African Sub Region.

¹ V.J. Ngoh, *Cameroon 1884-Present (2018): The History of a People* (Limbe: Design House, 2019), 94.

the border control, the Bamileke created new social spaces straddling the artificially imposed frontiers. The study focuses on the Mandate and Trusteeship periods. The Trusteeship period ended in 1961 when the Southern Cameroons voted in the UN supervised plebiscite to reunite with the Republic of Cameroon.

II. THE BAMENDA GRASSLANDS, CONCEPTUAL SETTING

The Bamenda Grasslands covers what is presently the North West Region of the Republic of Cameroon. It is part of what is generally referred to as the Western Grasslands.⁶ The Bamenda Grasslands formerly covered the administrative Divisions of Bamenda, Wum, and Nkambe.⁷ It lies between latitude 5°15' North and stretches from longitudes 9°17' to 11°25' East. It was marked from the upper Cross River basin by a sharp escarpment- the Mamfe depression and from the middle basin of the KatsinaAla River by a range of hills running North-East to the Gayama gap. To the North it was marked off from the Takum district and the South-western Adamawa region respectively in Nigeria by an arc of mountains which formed one flank of the upper Donga valley. To the East, the Mape River and the Noun marshes divided it from Banyo and the Bamum kingdom respectively in French Cameroon. Southerly, the region shared frontiers with part of the Bamileke highlands.⁸

Concerning the physical geographical aspects, the Bamenda Grasslands forms part of the Western highland relief zones of the Republic of Cameroon.⁹ The region covered an approximate surface area of 17409 square kilometers representing 3.7 percent of the total surface (475000 square kilometers) of the territory.¹⁰

From the administrative point of view, the Bamenda Grasslands began as a myriad of autonomous traditional polities in the pre-colonial period collectively called the Grasslands chiefdoms. Examples included the chiefdoms of Ndop, Nso, Moghamo, Mbembe, Mfunte, Fungom, to name but these.¹¹ During the German colonial epoch in the region from 1902 to 1916, it represented what was known as the Bamenda *Berzirk*.¹² At the time of the British colonial administration from 1916 to 1961, the Bamenda Grasslands became part of the British Southern Cameroons, being

governed under Nigeria. In the study, Bamenda is also used to represent the Bamenda Grasslands.

III. BAMILEKE IMPLANTATION DURING THE MANDATE PERIOD, 1922-1945

When the Anglo-French partition of Cameroon was confirmed by the League of Nations in 1922, Britain and France hurriedly imposed custom formalities on each side of the frontier and ordered custom guards and preventive officers to patrol the frontier regularly. This reduced the indigenous free long distance trade that had taken place since the pre-colonial and German colonial periods.¹³ As a result, many Bamileke, Bakossi and Douala traders (in French Cameroon) crossed the borders through smuggly, and settled in the lucrative trade centres in the Southern Cameroons. In 1925, an administrative report from Dschang stated that the Bamileke traders who migrated to Victoria, Buea, Bamenda and Calabar were more and more numerous.¹⁴ The settled immigrant traders served as middlemen between indigenous and Nigerian traders who supplied them with British goods from Nigeria and the long distance traders from French Cameroon who smuggled French goods into the British territory.¹⁵ This view is given some impetus by the work of Geschiere and Konings from a study in the 1950s. They posit that:

.... Another, a Bamileke who migrated to Bamenda in the early 50s, bought wrappers (a fathom length of cloth) in Onitsha or Lagos and sold them in the markets of the Northern Grassfields. By 1956, he had made sufficient savings to buy his first truck and now has a fleet of twenty and has diversified into real estate of petrol station.¹⁶

Chapnga disclosed that they migrated and settled in Bamenda in their numbers from Bafang. In Bamenda, they bought goods like gun powder, watches and motorcycle parts from Nigeria and took them back to the Bamileke region. On return, they brought cowries, works of art and pottery and sold in Bamenda.¹⁷ Trade, either legal or illegal, was therefore an attraction for French Cameroon immigrants because of the high currency, high prices and the profitable nature of smuggly trade into the Bamenda Grasslands.

The Bamileke were involved in businesses of all types. That is, they got involved in petty businesses, or small trade necessitating simple apprenticeship or even short

⁶ The Western Grasslands according to Nkwi and Warnier, covers the highlands of Western Cameroon including the Bamileke, Bamum and the Bamenda areas. See P.N. Nkwi and J. P. Warnier, *Elements for a History of the Western Grassfields* (Yaounde: Publication of the Department of Sociology, The University of Yaounde, 1982), 6.

⁷ P.N. Nkwi, *The German Presence in the Western Grassfields 1891-1913: A German Colonial Account* (Leiden: African studies Centre, 1989), 13.

⁸ N.K. Takor, "The Bamenda Grasslands in Long Distance Trade c.1850-1961: Evolutionary Dynamics, Socio-Economic and Political Transmutations" (PhD Thesis in History, University of Yaounde I, 2011), 36-37.

⁹ A.S. Neba, *Modern Geography of the Republic of Cameroon*, 17.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Nkwi, *The German Presence in Western Grassfields*, 11.

¹³ Falso, "Trans-Frontier Relations and Resistance," 316-317.

¹⁴ J.L. Nfi, "French Cameroonians in the Politics of the Southern Cameroons 1922-1961" (DEA Thesis in History, University of Yaounde I, 2007), 64.

¹⁵ Interview with Martin Nchinda, aged 75, businessman, Bamenda, 12 November 2009; also Interview with Tandinda Dieudonne, aged 73, paramount chief to all Bamileke in Ndop, 13th June 2016.

¹⁶ P. Geschiere and P. Konings, *Pathways to Accumulation in Cameroon* (Leiden: Editions Karthla et Afrika-Studiecentrum, 1993), 74.

¹⁷ Interview with Jean Chapnga, aged 88, former Bamileke businessman, Bamenda, Abangoh quarter, 29 December, 2009.

apprenticeship (drivers or mechanic) as was the case in Ndog and the town of Bamenda in the 1940s and 50s.¹⁸ No matter the nature of the activity, all fought to prosper, to have better opportunities, and finally become successful, coming out of a precarious state to a modest one.¹⁹

For Brain, “trade appears to be the most vital factor in Bamileke expansion and in the understanding of Bamileke migrations. The Bamileke chiefs, while spurning trade and marketing themselves, depended for their wealth on the commercial activities of their retainers and their sub-chiefs.”²⁰ Smuggly trade, he argues, attracted a great deal of Bamileke to the Bamenda Grasslands and most parts of the Southern Cameroons.

In spite of the preponderant role played by the trade factor, the role played by French colonial policies in French Cameroon was also crucial. French colonial policies acted as a push factor to the Bamileke. Perhaps no where was colonial law more haphazardly applied than in Cameroon. The French arrived in French Cameroon decades after colonization of their other territories in Africa. From 1919, with the delineation of the Anglo-French boundary, French administrators in French Cameroon began trying to catch up with their counterparts in other parts of Africa. Poor French policies in French Cameroon provoked widespread revolts and migrations into the British Cameroons. Since the Bamileke were on the border with the Bamenda Grasslands, they migrated in their numbers to the Bamenda Grasslands. French colonial policies that scared the Bamileke and caused them to move into the Bamenda Grasslands included amongst others, forced labour, exploitive tax policy, *indigénat* and police repression and the destruction of native customs and tradition.

Beginning with forced labour, the manner in which it was carried out was such that even today, one feels trapped in a verbal and statistical labyrinth in trying to sort out the various forms of forced labour employed by the French in Cameroon, a labyrinth in which some members of the Permanent Mandates Commission (P.M.C.) became hopelessly lost.²¹ Whatever the case maybe, the fact remained that French Cameroonians suffered greatly from being conscripted to work against their will- especially during the first decade of French rule and continuing until the time when political reforms²² were instituted after World War II (from

1945). Forced labour was used for the extension of the railways and the construction of roads.²³

This story was told about how French administrators told the natives to work off their ten-day *prestation* tax and, once having assembled them, have marched them off to the railway for a period of nine months.²⁴ If one were to ask a question like: What recourse had the French Cameroonians when faced with this oppressive system? The answer was obvious. Those who refused to submit to it had no other alternative but to flee, and many chose this option, going either Westward to the British Cameroons or South to Rio Muni. It is interesting to note that some of those French Cameroonians who implanted themselves in the British Cameroons during the mandate period, were later to constitute a core of those who took a front line in demanding reunification of the two Cameroons. This to them, was an easy means of freeing the French Cameroons from French rule. In support of forced labour as a cause of migration and implantation of the Bamileke in the Bamenda Grasslands and other communities, Fanso contributes that:

Those concerned with movement might be people discontented with a colonial situation on the side on which they lived, like tax or forced labour. The Bamileke and Bamum were noted for such migrations. During the inter-war period, large migrations were reported among the Bamileke border villages of Bagam, Baminyam, Babadjou, Bangang, Bafou, FossongEllelem, FongoTongo, Fongo-Ndeng and Santchou, where it was stated that the majority of the population of whole districts were crossing the boundary because of French Policies and settling with their relations in the British territory.²⁵

‘*NdjockMessi*’²⁶ played a role in moving a good number of Bamileke to settle in the Bamenda Grasslands. Dongmo opines that it was the British Cameroons bordering the Bamileke area, which had been the principal place of refuge for those who did not want to do ‘*NdjockMessi*’ and those who did not want to pay taxes.²⁷ In the Southern Cameroons as in most parts of British West Africa, forced labour did not appear to have lasted as long as in the French territories where systematisation of this usage merely led to

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ J.L. Dongmo, *Le Dynamisme Bamileke (Cameroun) Volume 1: La Maitrise de L'espace agraire* (Yaounde : Ceper, 1981), 74.

²⁰ R. Brain, “The Fontem – Bangwa: A Western Bamileke Group” in Claude Tardits, *The Contribution of Ethnological Research to the History of Cameroon Cultures*, Vol. II (Paris: Editions du CNRS, 1973), 359.

²¹ J. A. Richard, *Radical Nationalism in Cameroon: The Social Origin of the U.P.C.* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), 27.

²² In 1944, General De Gaulle organized the Brazzaville Conference to thank the Africans for the role they played in the liberation of France from the hands of the Vichy regime. It was during this conference that some reforms were undertaken for the political advancement of the French colonies especially from 1946.

²³ P.M.C. Thirteenth Session, 1928, 191, in Richard, *Radical Nationalism in Cameroon*, 28.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Fanso, “Trans- Frontier Relations and Resistance,” 86.

²⁶ *NdjockMessi* is a Bamileke word which means the same as forced labour. This was used during the colonial period when the Bamileke were forced to work on French projects. This policy caused a lot of agitation and protest migrations.

²⁷ Dongmo, *Le dynamisme Bamileké Vol. I*, 202.

the adoption of the new terms such as *corvee and prestation*.²⁸ The Southern Cameroons was therefore a harbour or refuge ground for many groups and individuals from French Cameroon who staged mass emigration from their various homesteads to avoid the strains of the French labour policy.

In 1924 for instance, the French administrator for the Dschang District, Ripert, reported a mass exodus of people from the borders to join their relations on the British side.²⁹ He admitted that he was forced by such mass migrations to change the labour policy of his district. He reduced to almost zero, the quota of workers to be supplied by ethnic groups on the border with British Southern Cameroons, as an indication that he recognised that the exodus was related to labour recruitment. Forced labour and poor tax policy all contributed in pushing the Bamileke away from their homestead to other neighbouring areas.

As regards the poor tax policy, chiefs (*mfo, fo*) were used by the French administrators to collect taxes. A chief's quality as ruler was determined by his ability to raise the requisite tax. In cases where the French administrators were not satisfied with the amount collected, they could bypass the *mfo* and rely directly on the *mfonte, fonte* (notables) and *mwabo, wabo* (quarter heads). Because of the pressure brought to bear on the chiefs, they sometimes abused the power vested on them as they acted with excesses as mentioned by Terretta:

In 1934, *fo*Nganjong of Bandrefam replaced a *mwabo*, OuamboNzezip, with an eight-year old boy as his regent, and began to send his armed guards (*tchindas*) to notables' compounds to collect taxes. The *fo's* coercive tax collection methods caused a number of inhabitants, including titled notables, to emigrate to neighbouring chieftaincies in protest. Concerned by the exodus, the administration categorised Bandrefam as a problem chieftaincy... and tried to reconcile the chief with his notables in order to enable them return home.³⁰

The notables' emigration could be seen as resistance to a *fo* who had overstepped what they perceived as an acceptable level of taxation in that district. This move triggered protest migrations to the Bamenda Grasslands (in the British sphere) which had a much more relaxed taxation policy engrained in the Indirect Rule system. Generally speaking, the French tax system played a vital role of scaring and causing a great number of people to migrate in order to

avoid the payment of taxes. To this cause, should be added the attempt to destroy the native customs and traditions of the Bamileke.

French policies and practices such as those related to chieftaincy institutions, relocation of settlement and unpleasant forest regulations hurt the cultural pride of many Africans. This led to their exodus from French colonies into neighbouring territories of British West Africa.³¹ The case of the Bamileke migrations stemming from this cause would just be one out of the many cases in French Cameroon. Fanson argues that,

In the Cameroons, many migrations across the Anglo-French frontier resulted from the French chieftaincy policy and other reforms in French Cameroon. French Cameroonians from strong traditional chieftaincies in Bamileke and Bamum districts who objected to the French maltreatment of their chiefs and creation of artificial regional chiefs over them migrated to the Southern Cameroons.³²

The 'warrant chiefs' or 'artificial chiefs' that the French appointed were power drunk. They collected taxes for the colonial administration and even collected more than what they were asked to. In the conscription of labour, they often recruited labour for their private plantations.³³ This angered French Cameroonians and migration was the best option. Therefore, the steady flow of protest migrations from the Bamileke chiefdoms into the Bamenda Grasslands resulted partly from the chieftaincy crisis created by the French and the consequent Cameroonian resentment to this destruction of the traditional power base.

The French policy of administration which impinged most constantly on the lives of Cameroonians was the *indigénat* and associated police repression. This legal code relating to persons of 'native status' - or more technically '*sujets*' rather than '*citoyens*' - permitted French administrators both to try cases and impose summary disciplinary punishment.³⁴ Although this arbitrary judicial power was supposed to be employed only for ordinary offences against the regulations, such as not cleaning a street, leaving refuse in prohibited places and similar offences, this was not the case. It was in fact a wide ranging instrument in the hands of local French administrative officers to use as they saw fit, with little or no supervision from judiciary trained personnel and needless to say, no recourse open to those summarily imprisoned.³⁵ This summary punishment and

²⁸ A.I. Asiwaju, *Political Aspects of Migration in West Africa: The Example of French Colonies with particular Reference to the Ivory Coast and Upper Volta up to 1945*, 1977, 86.

²⁹ Fanson, "Trans - Frontier Relations and Resistance," 207.

³⁰ M. Terretta, *Nations of Outlaws, State of Violence: Nationalism, Grassfields Tradition and State Building in Cameroon* (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2014), 52.

³¹ Asiwaju, "Political Aspects of Migration," 89.

³² Fanson, "Trans- Frontier Relations and Resistance," 210.

³³ A. Nji, M.A. Mbakwa and J.N. Agwe, *A History of Tugi: An Empirical Study in the Sociology of Politics and Development* (Bamenda: Akwi Memorial Foundation, 2009), 60-62.

³⁴ Richard, *Radical Nationalism in Cameroun*, 26.

³⁵ P.M.C. Third Session (1923), 28-29, in Richard, *Radical Nationalism in Cameroon*, 26.

imprisonment was one of the reasons why people migrated from the French Cameroon to the British Southern Cameroons. Richard summarised it when he says "...one consequence of this system was the emigration of numerous French Cameroonians either to other areas of Cameroon, or away from Cameroon to neighbouring territories during the inter-war period."³⁶

The policy of *indigénat* deprived French Cameroonians of their liberty of criticism, association and movement. French Cameroonians complained bitterly against the policy and its inhumanity such that, it provoked mass migration to the Southern Cameroons. Many people from Babadjou, Bare and Bagam for instance, crossed borders to the Bamenda Grasslands where the British never empowered their agents to inflict disciplinary penalties for wide range of offences without trial. By 1944, it was estimated that 90 percent of the youths had escaped the district of Bafoussam as a result of the policies of *indigénat* and forced recruitment of labour for work on European plantations.³⁷ The presence of open land and weak administrative structures outside the cities made it only natural that many Africans responded to colonial abuses, especially before World War II, by simply escaping to an area that was not under the direct control of the European power. This view is supported by Asiwaju in his study of other French and British colonies in Africa when he argues that:

Because British colonialism was relatively less oppressive than French rule in West Africa, massive protest emigrations involving whole villages and townships from the French to the British side of the Nigeria-Dahomey border were common and regular occurrences in Western Yorubaland in the period 1914-1945.³⁸

He further supports that protest migrations were a universal phenomenon in almost all French West African colonies, taking the case of protest migrations which were staged by the Wolofs from French Senegal to British Gambia.³⁹ From this perspective, and taking into consideration the castigation against the French rule as backbone for numerous migrations out of French colonies, it is evident that the Bamileke were not left out the whole scenario. The Bamileke implantation in the Bamenda Grasslands was just one out of the numerous migrations in French colonies especially in West Africa, to British colonies. In spite of all these, a more revolutionary cause of the Bamileke movements was to come up with the

formation of the nascent and 'rebellious' *Unions des Populations du Cameroun* (UPC) party in French Cameroon.

IV. BAMILEKE IMPLANTATION DURING THE TRUSTEESHIP PERIOD, 1946-1961

In 1946 the UN Trusteeship officially began in French Cameroon. This came after the Brazzaville conference had made far reaching political reforms in the territory. These reforms gave birth to the first indigenous political party to be formed in French Cameroon, the UPC party. It was founded on the 10th April 1948 by Leonard Bouly. It came to be led by its charismatic leader Ruben Um Nyobe. The main elements of the UPC's political discourse included severing from France; building an economically and culturally independent nation, relying on the UN to serve as an advocate in the global political arena; and establishing a clear timeline for progression to total independence and reunification with the British Cameroons.⁴⁰ Because of the party's links with the *Rassemblement Democratique Africain* (R.D.A.), its 'radicalism' and petitions against the French administration, serious measures were taken by the French administration to contain the party.⁴¹

The French administrative political repression was even more evident in May 1955 when the main nationalist party, the UPC was outlawed after staging an uprising to decry excessive French extortion and oppressive governance. This party which had as one of its key leaders, Ernest Ouandie, a Bamileke, had sizeable militants and sympathizers among the Bamileke. Colonial authorities issued warrants of arrest for the UPC leaders. The president, Felix Roland Moumie and twelve others escaped to the Southern Cameroons.⁴² These were; Ernest Ouandie, Samuel Mekou, Jean Paul Sende, Sakeo Kamen Martha Moumie, Gerturde Omog, Francois Fosso, Elie Ngné, Aloys Njock, Marguerite Ngaye and Victor Nantia.⁴³ These leaders were followed by thousands of other UPC militants who feared political persecutions following the ban of the UPC and its sub-organs in July 1955. Richard suggests that the massive involvement of the *Kumze* of the Bamileke region in the decolonisation process under the *Union des Populations du Cameroun* party attracted suspicion and hatred from the colonial authorities.⁴⁴ The attack by the French administration caused many of them to flee from the French Cameroon to the Southern Cameroons. The Bamileke were among those who fled from the UPC crisis into the Bamenda Grasslands. Dongmo gives according to the 1976 population census in Bamileke land, the percentage of those who had emigrated to different directions according to the five divisions as seen in table.

³⁶ Geschiere, and Konings, *Pathway to Accumulation*, 79-80.

³⁷ Fanso, "Trans-Frontier Relations and Resistance," 362; also RAB, file no. NW/Qa/f.1951/1, French Cameroonian Population in Bamenda Province 1951-1952.

³⁸ A. I. Asiwaju, *Western Yorubaland Under European Rule, 1889-1945* (London: Longman, 1976), 141.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 145.

⁴⁰ Terreta, *Nation of outlaws*, 98.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 159-160.

⁴² A. Mukong, *Prisoner Without a Crime* (Alfresco Books, 1985),

4.

⁴³ Fanso, "Trans-Frontier Relations and Resistance," 207.

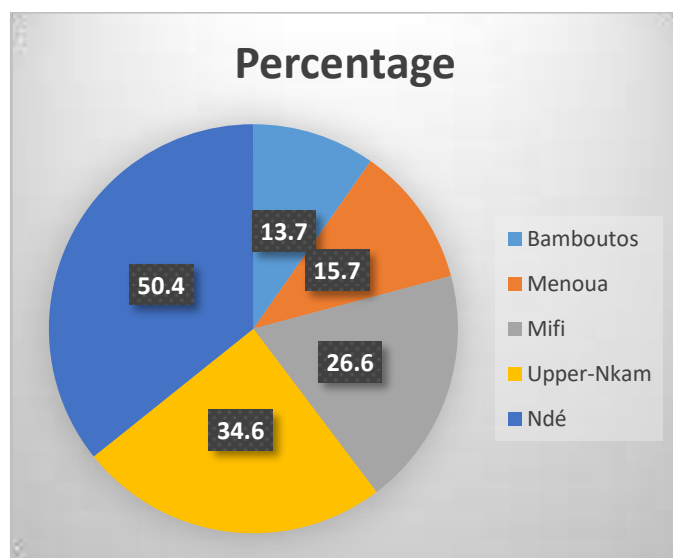
⁴⁴ Richard, *Radical Nationalism in Camerooun*, 285-288.

Table 1: The Percentage of Emigrants from Bamileke Region By 1976

Division of origin	Percentage of population absent from Home (that is those who emigrated)
Bamboutos	13.7% of the natives are absent
Menoua	15.7% of the natives are absent
Mifi	26.6% of the natives are absent
Upper-Nkam	34.6% of the natives are absent
Ndé	50.4% of the natives are absent

Source: Dongmo, *Le Dynamisme Bamileke*, 195.

Graph 1: The Percentage of Emigrants from Bamileke Community



Source: Author's Conception from Table 1

From the statistics in table 1 and represented in graph 1, one can observe that the UPC cause was one of factors that triggered Bamileke migrations. With the proscription of the UPC, the government used high repressive measures against the population as they were accused of supporting the outlawed UPC. In effect, a great number of the Bamileke took refuge in the bushes, while about half of the population migrated. This is one of the reasons why the Bamenda Grasslands received great numbers of people from the affected Bamileke areas.

In 1956, just after the proscription of the UPC in French Cameroon, French administrators deposed, imprisoned, and sometimes forced a number of young Bamileke chiefs who had recently inherited power to flee into exile. These were chiefs who were suspected of showing sympathy with the UPC cause. This younger generation of chiefs became spokespersons for the UPC nationalism throughout the Bamileke region and in their immigrant communities. One of the first to be deposed, the chief of Baham, Pierre KamdemNinyim, was preparing to run for a seat in the territorial assembly in the December 1956 elections. The French replaced such chiefs with those less likely to support the UPC and more likely to support the

administration's efforts to eradicate the UPC influence in the Bamileke communities.⁴⁵ Once the chiefs fled their communities, they went with some of the villagers who supported them.

The UPC's use of violence in the post proscription era coincided with the period in which increasing numbers of UPCists left their homes and began long years of peripatetic exile or hiding out in the hills and forests of the internal *marquis*. The actual number of political refugees that fled to the entire Southern Cameroons as a result of the 1955 UPC rebellion is not known. However, most towns of Southern Cameroons like Bamenda, Kumba, Victoria and Tiko are purported to have received political refugees.⁴⁶ The UN Visiting mission in October 1955 also noted the presence of an unknown number of persons from French Cameroon, many of them ostensibly as political refugees and considered them to constitute a new element in the political life of the Southern Cameroons.⁴⁷ No estimates were given according to ethnic group for those who had arrived in the Bamenda Grasslands and it is possible that those who settled in villages across the borders were not recorded.⁴⁸ The terrorist campaigns in the Bamileke *Départements* and throughout the Littoral area of French Cameroon, between 1956 and 1961 introduced another wave of immigrants in other parts of the Southern Cameroons such as Santa, Bamenda, Ndop, Nso and Batibo amongst others.⁴⁹ These were mostly from Bamileke communities of Bafoussam, Mbouda, Bafang and Dschang where the UPC terrorism throughout the 1950s and 1960s was high. In the town of Bamenda for instance, these political migrants settled in Abakpa (old town), Sisia quarter, Abangoh, and New Lay out.⁵⁰

For Dongmo, a good number of people who left the Bamileke region as a result of the troubles of the 1950s were those who had lost much of their property and were still young to restart their life elsewhere. The 1955-1960 events rendered the Bamileke lands repulsive first by insecurity, and then consecutive misery. This accelerated the emigration during these five years.⁵¹ Perhaps the high rate of migration from Nde stemmed from the presence of Ernest Ouandie in the 1960s.⁵² After the death of Um Nyobe in 1958, and Roland Moumie in 1960, the leadership of the UPC passed to Ernest Ouandie.⁵³ His stay in Bangangte, provoked the

⁴⁵ Terretta, *Nation of Outlaws, State of Violence*, 15.

⁴⁶ RAB, file no. NW/TB/1940/1, Relations with French Authorities 1940-1961.

⁴⁷ NAB, File No vb/b1957/3, The UPC, 76.

⁴⁸ This is explained by the fact that having been tagged as terrorists, the Bamileke UPC immigrants in the Bamenda Grasslands did not want to be identified.

⁴⁹ Interview with Michel Fortso, aged 79, political migrant from Ndé to Bamenda and former businessman, New Lay Out, on 15 December 2009.

⁵⁰ Interview with Chobji, aged 75, political migrant and a businessman, Sisia Quarter Bamenda, 03rd January, 2010

⁵¹ Dongmo, *Le dynamisme Bamileké Vol.1*, 159-160.

⁵² Interview with Michel Fotso.

⁵³ Mukong, *Prisoner Without a Crime*, 4-5.

government to think that he had trained so many UPC 'terrorists.' The government therefore took very hard repressive measures to disband the network. Since Ernest Ouandie and his supporters had taken to the bush, Gendarmes were dispatched to hunt them out. This situation brought about the 'reign of terror',⁵⁴ and insecurity causing so many people to emigrate.⁵⁵ The out migration as a result of the UPC cause continued up to 1972 when the remnants of the UPC leaders were arrested, tried and executed.

V. CONCLUSION

From the foregoing discussion, it is therefore evident that political demarcation separating the British Southern Cameroons and the French Cameroun generated occasional moments of heightened tension between the two territories. The stringent border control measures did not leave the Bamileke and the people of the Bamenda Grasslands indifferent. The Bamileke developed new social spaces straddling the artificially imposed frontiers. This was conditioned by the obnoxious French colonial policies in French Cameroon which equally affected the Bamileke. They chose the exit option as a means to escape from such French policies. In addition, the trade advantages that the Bamileke enjoyed in the Bamenda Grasslands before the partition enabled them to develop new strategies to continue with the trade. It was clear that commercial activities and free movement of people between the communities of the pre-partitioned Cameroon could not be easily controlled by political manipulation. The Bamileke therefore adopted the method of smuggling to facilitate trade with the Bamenda Grasslands. Perhaps, the legendary hospitality displayed by the people of the Bamenda Grasslands to a fair extent helped in attracting the Bamileke in the area. The Bamileke in the Bamenda Grasslands took active part in the UN conducted Plebiscite in the Southern Cameroons in favour of Reunification option. Reunification of the two Cameroons in their opinion would mean the elimination of the British and French boundaries.

⁵⁴ It was actually disheartening for the French administration to have brandished people who were fighting for the independence of their fatherland as terrorists. This situation was even more touching because after independence in January 1960, the home government still treated them on the same platform as the colonial powers had done. This unfortunate situation led to the execution of UPC leaders and militants in the Bamileke territory.

⁵⁵ Interview with Michel Fotso.