Administrative Reconstitution and Political Solidary of the Ejagham in Cameroon under British Rule 1916-61

Dr. Raphael Achou Etta
University of Bamenda

Abstract: Emerging as an ethnic group that spread across the Cameroon-Nigeria borders, the different Ejagham entities were re-organized when the German colonial administrative context without agenda for their ethnography limits. As part of the Ossidainge administrative Division under the Germans, the people did not enjoy ethnic specificity as they were merged with other ethnic polities like the Bayang and Bakuka. Circumstances developing from the end of the German rule and the establishment of British rule, brought about remarkable changes in the administrative composition of the Ejagham villages. The paper using primary and secondary sources and a qualitative analytical approach contends that, the British administrative re-organisation of ethnic groups to align with their philosophy of indirect rule had a double-pronged incidence on the Ejagham. On one hand it constituted the villages into a common administrative bloc and in the other hand; it gave them the opportunity to knit political solidarity around the Cameroon option during the February 1961 UN organised plebiscite. This decision became a paradox of the social straddling that would have linked the Ejagham of Cameroon with their consanguine relative in Nigeria.

Key Words: Ejagham, British, Germans Rule, Solidarity, Plebiscite, Cameroon, Nigeria.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Ejagham of Cameroon came under British rule as a result of the outcome of the First World War that began in Europe on 4 August 1914 between the Allies and Germany. The Allies decided as a war strategy to attack and occupy German colonies in Africa, including Cameroon. This invasion of German colonies was undertaken to weaken the Germans economically. The Germans reminded France and Britain of the failure of Britain and France to jointly administer Cameroon after the defeat of the Germans. The experiment of administering the area as a condominium in September 1915 failed. The two powers went ahead to provisionally partition the territory between themselves on 4 March 1916. According to the partition agreement, pending a definite peace settlement, France got the lion share of 4/5 of the country while Britain got 1/5. Britain was satisfied with this share which was an equivalent of 79.36 out of 755.200 square kilometres. The British territory was disjointed, divided by the Benue valley. The two sections were different in terms of culture, geography and religion. The British thus divided their share into Southern Cameroons and Northern Cameroons.

The southern zone that constituted the Cameroons Province was located between latitude 4°N and 7°N with a total area of 47.872 square kilometres was later attached to the Southern Provinces of Nigeria. The reason why the British accepted only a small portion of the territory was because they felt that Cameroon was expandable and saw it merely as a useful diplomatic counter for gains in other parts of the world. Britain also wanted the territory to round up the eastern boundary of Nigeria with what she had lost to Germany by default in the period of the delimitation of boundaries between 1884 and 1894. Hence, this diplomatic settlement between Britain and France in 1916 was a result of conditionalities, forcing the British who had always tried to retain the area between River Ndian and Apkafeye considered as the Efik stronghold during the pre-colonial period. It also favoured the Efik and Ejagham of Nigeria and Cameroon who had been struggling to come under British rule. According to Elango,

Although the territories which Britain acquired were not considerable in extent, their value lay in the fact

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4. Ibid
that they had given Britain better colonial boundary and brought completely within our borders natives tribes which have hitherto been partly within British territory and partly outside.6

The boundaries of the new territory were fixed by a declaration issued in Douala on 17 March 1916 by Major-General C.M. Dobell, the British officer commanding the joint Allied forces. The provisional partition was confirmed at the end of the war by the Milner-Simon Agreement on July 10, 1919 with only minor adjustments.7 The war ended with the defeat of the Germans by the Allies and, according to the Paris Peace Conference of 1919, all the German overseas possessions in Africa and Asia were placed under the mandate of the newly created League of Nations. This was an international organisation formed immediately after the First World War to serve as a forum for describing and resolving conflicts among nations.8

Article 22 of the Covenant of the League of Nations defined the Mandate System as an obligation to take over ex-enemy territories as “a sacred trust of civilization”. The people of these territories were described as “not yet able to stand by themselves under the strenuous conditions of the modern world”.9 According to the terms and obligations of the mandates put in place by the League of Nations in 1922, the administering power of a mandated territory vowed to promote the wellbeing and progress of the inhabitants, desist from all forms of forced labour, guarantee freedom of religion and respect the right of the inhabitants to their land.

Britain which was already occupying their Cameroon portion arbitrarily solicited to continue administering it as an integral part of the adjoining territory of Nigeria, putting it into a customs and fiscal union with it.10 It was under this circumstance that Southern Cameroons in general and the Ejagham area in Cameroon became under the British rule. The expulsion of the Germans from Ejagham land relieved the people from the German oppressed rule. There was general rejoicing by the people who felt relieved from arbitrary beating, unlawful seizure of property, raping of women and arbitrary hanging. This was testified by thirty-four chiefs in the Ossidinge District, which happened to be responsible for the British administration of the Ejagham area in Cameroon.11 The taking over of the territory by the Britain after the First World War gave them new hopes.

II. REORGANISATION OF THE EJAGHAM GROUP

The Ejagham of Cameroon came under British administration immediately following the defeat of the Germans in the course of the First World War. The principal British interest in this area was to re-direct the trade that the Germans had controlled during their occupation of the territory. The Ejagham area had once been under the Efik commercial influence and when the Germans occupied and established their trade post at Nsanakang, it prevented the flow of trade to the Calabar port controlled by Efik and Ejagham middlemen in Nigeria. There was euphoria everywhere among the African and the British when the area became British territory, despite the conditions laid down by the League of Nation and the Mandates Commission. Prior to the end of the war, Lord Luggard Governor General of Nigeria had ordered British political officers into the parts of Cameroon occupied by British troops, following instructions from the Colonial Office.12 On 1 April 1916, the Governor-General personally installed British Officials in Buea the capital of what eventually became the Cameroons Province.

These officials were the Resident of the new Province and the District Officers who maintained the former German Bezirks, namely Victoria, Kumba, Ossidinge (Mamfe) and Bamenda (See map I). The British authorities consolidated their position in Cameroon by a series of proclamations. The first proclamation was the Royal Commission issued from London appointing the Governor of Nigeria to be the administrator of those parts of Cameroon occupied by British forces.13 Two months later, the Governor issued a proclamation applying to the Southern Cameroons Native Court Ordinance of 1914 and the Native authority Ordinance of 1916 as far as local circumstances permitted. This proved that the British were already interested in bringing the Southern Cameroons territory and the Ejagham region in Cameroon in line with the administrative system operating in Nigeria. These ordinances were introduced in Cameroon before the status of the territory was defined in 1922 as a Mandated Territory of the League of Nations.14

The first British report to the League of Nations was to confirm the administrative system in Cameroon. They “saw their task of educating the natives to manage their own affairs and to evolve from their own institutions a mode of government which shall conform to civilized standards”.15 As concerns the Ejagham area, it was administered under the Mamfe District (See map I). Prior to 1922, the Ejagham in the new British territory had only one Native court at Nsanakang, the formal German post. The Keaka area was administered as an integral part of the north-western half of the Banyang group under the Mamfe Native Authority. It was only in 1922

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6 Elango, The Anglo-French Condominium in Cameroon, p.75.
9 Ibid.
10 Ibid.
13 Ibid.
14 Ibid.
15 Ibid.
that Mr Rutherford discovered that the Keaka group was a different group from the Banyang and part of the Ejagham ethnic group. Even after this discovery, he still had difficulties determining which Clan Council to place them because the clan system in Ejagham both in the Ekwe and in the Keaka areas had completely broken down.

In the Ejagham country, there was no indication of any chief having been paramount over any other clan but his own. The most prominent traditional authority that ever existed in the whole of Ejagham land was Chief Mfonettm of Kembong who acted as protector to other clans during the great Kebu war. Since the British system of administration was that of indirect rule in which the local indigenes were used to run their own affairs under the supervision of British officials, the colonial administration had to try to find competent rulers among the people.

During the German period, chiefs were chosen to serve the administration according to their loyalty. For example, the chiefs of Kembong and Ossing who had assisted the Germans and remained loyal during the 1904 rebellion were allowed to handle petty cases and to impose fines within the range of 5-10 marks, in a case of the absence of a Native Court. The official chiefs appointed in the villages were directly answerable to the administration. This status quo was maintained by the British until 1922 when the Ejagham Native Authority was created. This Native Authority was comprised of the Ekwe, Obang and the Keaka clans. The Native Court which existed at Nsanakang was to be abolished. The opinion of Mr Cantle the Divisional Office of Mamfe was that “in the final constitution of Native Authority Areas, the Nsanakang Native Authority should be abolished”. His reasons were as follows: the unsatisfactory state of the court, the small amount of work accomplished by it, and the extraordinary lack of control it exercised over its area.

The grouping together of the Ejagham villages of Cameroon consequently emerged from the formation of the Keaka Native Authority which brought together the people of Keaka, the Ekwe, and the Obang Clan formerly jointly administered with the Balundu under the Bakuku Native Authority. The newly created Ejagham Native Authority which united the Ejagham clans in Cameroon had its Native Court at Kembong graded “C”. All the members of the defunct Native Courts of Nsanakang and the Obangs formerly under Bakuku were incorporated into the new Ejagham unified political unite. (See Table I).

### Table I: The First Executive of Ejagham Native Authority under British Rule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vice-president</th>
<th>Oben of Bajo</th>
<th>Obang</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vice-president</td>
<td>Asu Obi of Ndebaya</td>
<td>Ekwe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member 1:</td>
<td>Aiyimossin</td>
<td>Abokem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member 2:</td>
<td>AsuOjongNdip</td>
<td>Bakwelle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member 3:</td>
<td>Fombi</td>
<td>Tenaku</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member 4:</td>
<td>OjongAgbo</td>
<td>Bakut</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member 5:</td>
<td>EnowKengwa</td>
<td>Mfuni, representing EgbeOsa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member 6:</td>
<td>Ayamba</td>
<td>NdeBaiyib</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member 7:</td>
<td>Eta Orock</td>
<td>Mbakang</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member 8:</td>
<td>Avenge</td>
<td>Mbinjong</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


This Native Authority area eventually became the Eyumojock Sub-Division after independence of Southern Cameroons (See mapII). The creation of the native Authority was in line with the British administrative system of indirect rule in Africa.

### III. THE EJAGHAM AND THE BRITISH SYSTEM OF INDIRECT RULE

The British sought to harmonize the system of administration in the Southern Cameroons and Nigeria through the extension of Indirect Rule into Cameroon. Indirect Rule was first introduced in Northern Nigeria by Lord Frederick Lugard in 1906.

Indirect Rule as a “policy” was introduced in the Southern Cameroons in 1921 by the District Officer known as Cadman, who was transferred from Northern Nigeria for that purpose. Although the German administration in Cameroon was, to an extent, based on this system, the traditional systems of the coastal areas did not suit it out rightly. The Germans had attempted to rule the area directly and the most important administrative center was Victoria. They applied indirect rule in some specific areas. As Chem Langhêé puts it:

> in the interior, that is in some parts of Kumba, Mamfe, and nearly all of the grasslands, the Germans discovered many powerful a-fon through whom they ruled indirectly. The Germans entered into treaties with these a-fon and gave them German flags.

The British policy in Cameroon was therefore relatively similar to that of the Germans. The main difference between the two policies was that “the Germans interfered more in the coastal areas of Southern Kamerun than the British did”.

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20 Ibid.
23 Ibid.
24 Ibid.
But, both the British and the Germans were willing to rule the people through their own traditional rulers.

MAP I: Southern Cameroons showing the Location of the Ejagham
Source: Adapted by the Author from Field Work.

MAP II: Ejagham Settlements in Eyumojock Sub-Division
Source: Sub-Divisional Archives Eyumojock.
The British blamed the weak nature of traditional authorities on the Germans and were willing to correct the blunder and in order to preserve the customs and traditions of the people in the territory. As Chem Langhёё captions this philosophy aptly when he states that:

As regards native affairs, the British policy in the Cameroons follows that of Nigeria, and is an endeavour to rebuild the tribal and ethnological institution which had to some extent suffered disintegration during the period of direct German administration, to find the hereditary native rulers and to educate them in their duties in that capacity, and to seek their co-operation and help, and to maintain their prestige in all matters concerning the areas under their control.  

This promise could not hold in the Ejagham area because there were no strong central authorities to rely on due to the absence of any hereditary traditional rulers. In some areas, the authority of the a-fon to an extent had been sapped. The only alternative in such areas was to establish local councils, which would make decisions for the people under the jurisdiction of councils. Where traditional heads were based on age and not on hereditary or influence as in the Ejagham clan, councils were established comprising of clan heads. These clan heads were mandated by the British to govern their subjects according to British rules. The British Indirect Rule system was therefore not totally new in the Southern Cameroons. The administrative organisation of the Ejagham set up legal machinery for the collection of taxes.

IV. THE EJAGHAM AND THE SOUTHERN CAMEROONS PLEBISCITE

The support for Southern Cameroons independence was espoused by two Ejagham chiefs and their councilors. The chiefs of Ntenako and Ndewi in the present-day Eyumojok Sub-Division together with their councilors on 30 July 1960 pleaded with the UN to change its mind. They stated that, the two alternatives provided for the plebiscite did not reflect their aspirations and were considered an “imposition against which they protested very strongly”.

Endeley and Foncha made several attempts to agree on the questions of the plebiscite, from April to July 1959 in the presence of a British official and qualification for voting but all the attempts failed. A new attempt involved a wider section of the society at Mamfe during what was convened as the Plebiscite Conference. The conference was presided over by a British official who proposed three alternatives to the Southern Cameroonians. These were; (a) the status of a self-governing region within an independent Federation of Nigeria; (b) separation from Nigeria to become an independent trusteeship; (c) separation from Nigeria to be followed by early negotiation with the future Republic of Cameroon with a view of reunification on acceptable terms.

The compromise between Endeley and Foncha which settled the problem of alternatives and the voters' qualifications was put out as Resolution 1352 XIV of the UN General Assembly. The compromise stated that the arrangements for the plebiscite should begin 30 September 1960 and end not later than March 1961. The questions to be put at the plebiscite should be; (a) Do you wish to achieve independence by joining the independent Federation of Nigeria? (b) Do you wish to achieve independence by joining the independent Republic of Cameroon?  Only persons born in the Southern Cameroons should vote in the plebiscite. The administering authority should consult with the Southern Cameroonians government and take steps to separate the administration of the territory from that of Nigeria not later than 1 October 1960.

The two UN plebiscite options were strongly rejected by some political parties. The first was the Cameroon Commoners' Congress (CCC) founded by Chief S. E. Nyenti of Mamfe. The integrationists and the reunificationists referred to it as “Cameroons Cheap Cargo”. The second was the Cameroon Indigenes Party (IDP) referred to as the “Cameroons Ignorant Party” was founded by Chief Jesco Manga-Williams of Victoria. The objectives of these parties corroborated with the opinions of the Chiefs of Southern Cameroons. They stood for a smaller Kamerun state with membership in the Commonwealth. When they became active, they tried to influence the United Nation to change its mind by occasionally stating that, after full independence, Southern Cameroons would then decide to join either, Nigeria or Cameroon Republic and that in order to be respected in such a union, it should first obtain its own independence. But these were belated efforts and the plebiscite was finally slated for the 11 February 1961.

The results obtained in Mamfe Division which incorporated the Ejagham was in favour of the unification with the Republic of Cameroon. The Ejagham during the vote were referred to as Mamfe West and voted overwhelmingly in favour of the Cameroon option (See table II). The most invaluable factor that prompted the Ejagham to vote for reunification with the Cameroon Republic was the presence of the Igbo and their domineering attitudes in all aspects of life in Ejagham land.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mamfe Division</th>
<th>Number of Votes for Nigeria</th>
<th>Number of votes of Cameroon</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mamfe West Ejagham</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mamfe North Akwaya</td>
<td>5.432</td>
<td>6.410</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

27 Ibid. p,197.
virtually every vice in their area. They claimed that the Igbo such as the Bakweri. The Bakwerians accused the Igbo of manifested by other communities in Southern Cameroons. As already mentioned, the anti-Igbo sentiment was also advocated by the chiefs of Ntenaku and Ndewai in 1960. Preferred a separate independent Southern Cameroons state as and voted for reunification. Deep in their minds, they convinced the people to succumb to the campaign of Foncha constituency all would be well for the Ejagham clans. N. O Effiom in government from their Mamfe West more convinced that with the presence of one of their sons W. more sympathetic with their kith and kin in Nigeria from the results of the plebiscite (See Table II), they voted 5,432 for Nigeria and 6,410 in favour of reunification. They went further to petition the Resident of Buea through the Boki Development Association on the danger of separating them from their kith and kin in Nigeria. The favourable results in the Boki area for reunification were obtained because of the influence of S. A George, an indigene and member of House of Assembly 1954-1959 and a member of KNPD who had left Endeley’s KNC after he changed to the philosophy of integration rather than continuing with secession or reunification. V. CONCLUSION The paper seeks to examine the British initiatives to administer the Ejagham ethnic group in Cameroon under a separate political unit through their administrative system of indirect rule. During the German rule, the Ejagham although part of the Ossidinge Division, they were not constituted into one Native Court Area, but rather divided into three Native Courts which comprised of other ethnic groups, The bringing together of the various Ejagham groups during the British rule into one Native Authority instilled in them a sense of oneness and as a force to reckon with in the political evolution of Southern Cameroons. The German administration did not give them the opportunity to express themselves politically. Through the British administrative system of government, the Ejagham were united and recognized as a people. The paper concludes that, the identification and unification of the various Ejagham groups into one Native Authority Area made them a force in the political evolution of southern Cameroon.

SOURCES CONSULTED

ORAL INTERVIEW


ARCHIVAL MATERIALS

[2] National Archives Buea


Interview with Dickson Nfone, age 89, traditional Chief, Ekok, December 10th 2010.

Idem.


Igbo country was not much further away from Ejagham land traversed by the Cameroon-Nigeria frontier. In such a locality they were the first to bear the brunt of any alien influence from Nigeria. When Southern Cameroons became an integral part of Eastern Nigeria the huge influx of Igbo to the Southern Cameroons made every community to know and to dislike them. A vote for integration was therefore considered as a vote in favour of Igbo domination. Amazee says that;

The anti-Igbo gospel was preached up and down the length and breadth of the territory and, it had special meaning for the Boki and Ejagham people who were eventually coming face to face in contact with the realities of Igbo political, social and administrative dominations of Cameroon. This was especially so because they occupied the zone of entry into the Cameroon from Nigeria and bore the brunt of Igbo excesses in British Cameroons. 31

The Ejagham people saw the plebiscite as an opportunity to permanently escape Igbo domination on their land. According to Dickson Nfone;

You just need to ask them how much an item of their goods is sold and the item was imposed on you to buy whether you like it or not. They embarrassed and fought us in our own land. They never have respect for our people or our elders. 32

The Ejagham people knowingly voted against integration despite their cultural and historical affinities with their kith and kin in Nigeria. But the reunification option which they voted for was not really what they like because they had never been in contact with French Cameroon despite being with them in a common colony under German rule. They were more convinced that with the presence of one of their sons W. N. O Effiom in government from their Mamfe West constituency all would be well for the Ejagham clans. 33 He convinced the people to succumb to the campaign of Foncha and voted for reunification. Deep in their minds, they preferred a separate independent Southern Cameroons state as advocated by the chiefs of Ntenaku and Ndewai in 1960. 34

As already mentioned, the anti-Igbo sentiment was also manifested by other communities in Southern Cameroons such as the Bakweri. The Bakwerians accused the Igbo of virtually every vice in their area. They claimed that the Igbo were thieves; they sold poisoned food, adulterated drugs and palm wine, charged excessively high prices for their goods, snatched people’s wives and made their husbands sterile. They also dominated the junior service level and conspired to assist each other to obtain public appointment. 35 The anti-Igbo sentiment among the Ejagham and other Southern Cameroonians was the most important factor that caused them to vote against reunification with Nigeria.

The Boki who were in a similar situation like the Ejagham were more sympathetic with their kith and kin in Nigeria from the results of the plebiscite (See Table II), they voted 5,432 for Nigeria and 6,410 in favour of reunification. They went further to petition the Resident of Buea through the Boki Development Association on the danger of separating them from their kith and kin in Nigeria. 36 The favourable results in the Boki area for reunification were obtained because of the influence of S. A George, an indigene and member of House of Assembly 1954-1959 and a member of KNPD who had left Endeley’s KNC after he changed to the philosophy of integration rather than continuing with secession or reunification. 37

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mamfe South</th>
<th>685</th>
<th>8.175</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mamfe East</td>
<td>1,894</td>
<td>10.177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>10,070</td>
<td>33,267</td>
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</tbody>
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