

Belonging and Becoming: Boundary and Identity Issues in the North West Region of Cameroon

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Abstract: Inter-ethnic boundary crises are hallmarks of Cameroon with the North West Region (NWR) gaining notoriety with high propensity of aggravation. The varied ramifications of crises related to boundaries in this region, orchestrates unanimity among academics and researchers that the issue is topical and preoccupying. What seamlessly surfaced from the boundary crises is the ethnic identification. Boundaries divided ethnic groups, rendered some stranded and landless. The main thrust of this paper is the nexus between boundary and identity issue in the NWR of Cameroon. The study investigates how ethnic groups in this region belonged and/or became with the implantation of boundaries among them. The paper establishes the premises that the advent of formal boundaries in the region, a phenomenon hitherto absent, triggered the identity question. It concludes that the notion of dual, lost and void identities in the NWR owed their origins to the advent of formal boundary, introduced by the Chamba, officialized by the colonial administrations and adopted and/or adjusted by the post-colonial government.

Keywords: Boundary, Chamba, Colonialism, identity, self-determination, NWR

I. INTRODUCTION

Before German colonization, Cameroon composed of independent indigenous polities varying in sizes and political organizations, with boundaries rooted in ethnic and social contacts.¹ The polities were highly jealous and protective of their political independence. Following the Germano-Duala Treaty of July 1884, the territory became a German protectorate which she administered as an entity and thus laid the groundwork for the 'Kamerun identity'.² By 1914, the Germans had successfully taken the first step towards uniting the coastal and inland ethnic groups into a single cohesive modern entity. By this standing, modern Cameroon nation is a collection of varied autonomous groups, arbitrarily bundled together by the Germans in the 19th century. At the independence of Cameroon, the territory was bound to have a heritage of artificially and arbitrarily created international and inter-ethnic boundaries which according to W.E. East "were not visible expression of age-long efforts of the indigenous people to achieve political adjustment between themselves and the physical conditions in which they live"³ The repercussions of these forged and illogical boundaries that were lamentably adopted by resolution AGH/16 of July

21, 1964 of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) was rampant inter-state and inter-ethnic boundary crises. On this score, M. B. Funteh confirms that, "The partition of Africa was bound to leave a heritage of artificially controlled boundaries, adopted by the OAU at independence. These boundaries now serve as sources of crises in and among many African states".⁴

Cameroon having experienced colonialism is not unconnected with this boundary nemesis. In the NWR of Cameroon boundaries awakened kindness toward land, divided ethnic groups, rendering some landless and homeless. Within this context, identity issue developed. This nemesis among the peoples of NWR resulting from boundary-identity crises thus constitutes the main contention in this paper.

II. THEORIZATION

Analyses in this paper were confined to the Identification Theory. This theory according to W. Bloom, a psychologist holds that "Every individual possesses an inherent drive to internalize and identify with the behavior, moves and attitudes of significant figures of his or her social environment. People actively seek identity, derived from the need to achieve a sense of security and socio-biological survival."⁵ From this perspective, identity seeking is on-going; an evolving configuration, persisting throughout individual and groups' life as are the cases of the ethnic groups of NWR. To the Identity theory is added what social psychologists recently created and called collective identity which is threatened by social identity threat⁶. This study sets out to identify how the threats resulting from the identity theories affect relations between the different ethnic groups of the region under study.

III. CONCEPTUALIZATION OF TERMINOLOGIES

Paramount to the understanding of the liaison between boundary and identity in the NWR of Cameroon is a discussion of relevant terminologies such as ethnic group, nation, boundary and identity. Besides, a simultaneous discussion on a nation and ethnic groups within its national territory may invites controversy especially when linked to question of identity. However, to resolve the debate over the

¹ V G. Fanso, "Traditional and Colonial African Boundaries: Concept and Functions in Inter-Group Relations", *Presence Africaine*, vol.139, no.3.1986.p.60.

² Tabe Eyongetah and Brain al, A History of Cameroon, 1987,p.122

³ W.E. East *The Changing World*, London, Allen and Unwin, 1956, p.54.

⁴ M. B. Funteh "Cameroon-Nigeria Dispute over the Bakassi Peninsula: A Specimen of Collective Peace Approach", in *Boundaries and History in Africa*, Yaoundé, University of Yaoundé, 2011, p.72.

⁵ Bloom W. *Personal Identity, National Identity and International Relations*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990, p.2.

⁶ S. K Barbara "Dual Identity in Interethnic Context" An International Journal of Pure Communication Inquiry Volume 2 Issue 1, 2014 p. 28

concepts of nation and ethnic group, we borrowed from A. Smith who opines that, “Ethnic groups are similar to nations with regard to shared culture but differ with regard to territorial attachment.”⁷ On his part, Udogu E corroborates:

Ethnic groups integrate elements of shared culture with a belief in “myths of common ancestry, shared historical memories...and a sense of solidarity. Both nations and ethnic groups are social constructions. Ultimately, territorial attachment is needed to attach ethnic perceptions and cultural beliefs.”⁸

It is therefore important to note that nationality and ethnic identity are part of social identity. They mainly serve to help individuals place themselves between various ethnic groups by using the dimensions of familiar and foreign.

III:1 Boundary

The notion of “boundary” is complex, especially with the existence of synonyms like “border” and “frontier”. However, A. Malcolm, attempts a distinction between “boundary” and “frontier”, insisting the former is reserved for international lines of demarcation between states while the latter for line of demarcation at the sub-state level.⁹ Kruskoski W. thought that while “boundary” and “frontier” are well defined, demarcated and marked by physical lines, “border” is more abstract and with the absence of delineating activities.¹⁰ Despite the synonymic differences, Asiwaju A. was more synoptic:

A boundary indicates the sharp edges of territorial limits within which a states exercise their distinct jurisdiction. They are therefore lines of contact, more often for conflict than for harmony between rival systems of governmental control. A boundary can also be a line of demarcation or delimitation between administrative units and geographical regions of all types. Three fundamental concepts underline the establishment of international boundaries: definition, delimitation and demarcation.¹¹

Away from the meaning of “boundary”, V.G Fanso was emphatic that the concept and function of boundary differed fundamentally in the African and European contexts. He concluded:

In traditional Africa, the concept of a political or ethnic boundary was expressed in terms of neighbours with whom the particular state or polity shared a territory and such a boundary was conceived of in terms of a region or a narrow zone fronting the two neighbours marked off by it.

In this sense, boundary was the zone where two states were united or joined together.¹²

African boundaries were therefore usually rooted in ethnic and social contact while European conceived boundaries as lines or points of separation. This is why, while Asiwaju A. considered European concept of boundary as “lines of contact, more often for *conflict* [emphasis mine] than for harmony”,¹³ Fanso V .G. saw boundaries in African perspective as “Zones where two states were *united or joined together* [emphasis mine]”.¹⁴ The word “Boundary” in this study was in line with European conceptions, though application of such notion in the NWR predated the arrival of the Europeans. Application of western concept of boundary in the NWR was linked to the arrival of the Chamba as Hongie G. testified:

Prior to the arrival of the Bali in the Western Grassfields (NWR), the ethnic groups of this region had no definite claim on a specific parcel of land. This was because they were constantly moving in search for fertile land or fear for incorporation by more powerful groups. For example, the five *mamagie* villages of Ndop plan lived and farmed together.”¹⁵

From the above analyses therefore, the notion of western boundary in the NWR was initiated by the Chamba and concretized by Europeans as E. Y. Sobseh. confirmed “In the Bamenda Grassfields (NWR), the inhabitants thought the new European boundaries were only important to the Germans and the British until they were chucked at cross-points.”¹⁶ The transportation of European concept of boundary to Africans was problematic as D.Abwa contended:

European colonial boundaries have had profound effects in Africa, generally, negative on the history of statehood in Africa as they are responsible overtly or covertly for the many inter and intra-state conflicts and related crises.¹⁷

The advent of boundary with European conception was thus problem-infested, with issue of identity in the NWR of Cameroon.

III:2 Identity

People identify necessarily with a group as it exists because, given the consciousness of the larger whole, all people need a sense of belonging and security. This raises the discussion about the inherent social nature of humans and the universal tendency to draw connections and form relationships with others. E. Bornman. considered identity as:

¹² V.G. Fanso. “Traditional and Colonial African Boundaries”, p.71.

¹³ A Asiwaju . *Partitioned Africans*, p.66.

¹⁴ V.G. Fanso, “Traditional and Colonial African Boundaries”, p.71.

¹⁵ G. Hongie. “The Relevance of Warfare in the Foundation and Sustainance of the Bali-Chamba, 1830-2000: A Historical Perspective”, PhD Thesis in History, University of Yaoundé I, 2013, p.310.

¹⁶ E. Y. Sobseh. “The Demise of European Colonialism and the Emergence of Boundary Conflicts in the Bamenda Grassfields of Cameroon”, in *Boundary and History in Africa*, Yaoundé, University of Yaoundé, 2011, p.88.

¹⁷ D. Abwa. “Preface to Fanso’s FESTCHRIFT” in *Boundary and History in Africa*, Yaoundé, University of Yaoundé, p.15.

⁷ A. Smith. *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*, Oxford, Blackwell, p.34.

⁸ E. Udogu. *The Issues of Political Ethnicity in Africa*, Hampshire, Ashgate, p.14.

⁹ A. Malkolm., *Frontier, Territory and State Formation in Modern World*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, p.11

¹⁰ W. Kruskoski. *Frontiers and Boundaries*, London, Macmillan, 2008, p.15.

¹¹ A. Asiwaju. *Partitioned Africans: Ethnic Relation Across Africa’s International Boundaries*, Lagos, Lagos University Press, p.65.

A social construction through which people acquire meaning and sense of belonging, common platforms for identity are seen in gender, race, ethnicity, language, religion, history, class and geography. Identities may exist within personal, sub-national, national as well as supra-national spheres.¹⁸

Consequently, with many platforms and spheres of identity available, some people hold multiple identities simultaneously. However, while shared values as aforementioned may encourage the formation or acceptance of a group identity, just because individuals share these values, interests, ideologies or traits with others does not mean that he or she will adopt a sense of collective identity based on these factors. That is why F. Polletta insisted that “For an individual to perceive a sense of identity, he or she must feel an iota of connection to other people who share the same interests, ideologies or traits.”¹⁹ She termed this “collective identity” which entailed “Individual’s cognitive, moral and emotional attachment with a broader community, category, practice or institution.”²⁰

In this regard, cultural beliefs and practices form the basis of collective identities. That is why collective identity helps to develop and reinforce individual’s self-perceptions, resulting in the feeling of inclusion as well as potential exclusion. This rationalized Joseph J. assertion that “Identity is dialectic between similarity and difference”²¹. But, identity is never static; it is always being re-examined and re-evaluated hence E. Bornman averred “Identity formation is an interactive process that involves *belonging* and *becoming* [emphasis mine] to the past as well as the future.”²² Consequently, there is a psychological imperative need not only to form identities but also to protect, defend and enhance them as revealed in this study by the ethnic groups of the NWR. Bloom M. authenticates this thesis by asserting that, “Individual naturally seeks to bolster and defend their sense of identity.”²³ It is on such premises that the “identity question” would be examined in this study.

III.3 Boundary And Identity Issues In The Nwr

The advent of the Bali-Chamba in the NWR brought two phenomena; firstly, their conquest and formation of empire triggered scarcity of land; and secondly, the circumscription of Bali empires within defined territorial limits. This is confirmed by Hunt W. that, “the boundaries between Bali and the lands of neighbours were circumscribed by judgments given in many cases by Native Courts and administrative

decisions”²⁴, brought the concept of territoriality in the definition of ethnic groups. A group was perceived in terms of sovereignty and territoriality, concepts that engendered self-determination. Self-determination within the empires was problematic to the Bali and the colonial administration. In an attempt to resolve this crisis, boundaries were created after administrative and court enquiries were done. As E. Y. obseh avows “From administrative to court enquiries, boundaries were created between Bali and neighbours though in some cases became causes of future conflicts.”²⁵ The demarcation of boundaries, traced and reinforced with pillars became a common phenomenon in the region. These boundaries were equally supported by maps, established by the departments of Land and Survey. Nonetheless, what is pertinent to this section is not boundary per-se but the incongruities contained in the decrees and ordinances that determined the erection of these boundaries that triggered the identity question. In this light, Hongie G. states:

Different decrees and ordinances such as the Inter-community Boundary Settlement Law of 1932 and 1962, the Presidential Decrees of 1972, 1974 and 1982 were passed to tackle boundary and land issues in the NWR. These ordinances and decrees minimized problems related to land and boundary but created the identity issue.²⁶

It is on this premise that the Chamba arrival and its raids were regarded as they orchestrated and made the boundary and identity issues problematic in our entire region under study.

111:4 Dual Identity

To curb turmoil in British Southern Cameroons especially among the Bali Empire according R. Fardon affirms that, the British in 1932 introduced the Inter-community Boundary Settlement Law which entailed the progressive liberation of vassals from the Bali Empire. However, Article 3, of the ordinance clearly stated that liberated villages had no claim to the land where they had lived. It went further that villagers or villagers concerned by the liberation had no claim nor can make such claim on Bali land.²⁷ Ndifontah N. argues that “Failure of the ordinance to tackle the land question raised the problem of dual identity”.²⁸ This stemmed from the fact that, the very ordinance indicated that vassals who preferred to remain on the Bali land, had to submit to Bali suzerainty. As a result, most villages, frustrated by the unavailability of settlement land remained on Bali land yet continued to resist the Bali hegemony. D. Russell divulges that “some villages

¹⁸ E. Bornman . “Struggle for Identity in the Age of Globalization” in *Communication*, no 29, (182), 2003,24.

¹⁹F. Polletta . “Collective Identity and Social Movement” in *Annual Review of Sociology*, no 27, p.23.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ J. Joseph. *Language Identity: National, Ethnic and Religious*, Basingstoke, Macmillan, 2004, p.4.

²²E. Bornman “Struggle for Identity”, p.75.

²³ W.Bloom *Personal Identity*, p.34.

²⁴ W. E.Hunt “The Bali in Bandop Area”, 1925.p.32.

²⁵E.Y. Sobseh “The Demise of Colonialism”.p.87.

²⁶G Hongie. “The Relevance of Warfare”, p.314.

²⁷ R. Fardon “ The Bali-Chamba: A Comparative of Tribal Foreign Policies”, PhD Thesis in Anthropology, University of London, 1980, p.321.

²⁸N. Ndifontah *The Bali-Chamba of Cameroon, A Political History*, Paris, CAPE, 1987.P.76.

were separated, as portion of the indigenes left and settled elsewhere while others preferred to remain.”²⁹

This cacophony produced the problem of dual identity because for villages that remained, the law considered them indigenes of Bali yet they resisted Bali authority and considered themselves independent. This was the case of Mbatu that accepted liberation from Bali hegemony but rejected departure from their land. To enforce the clauses of the ordinance, the colonial administration coerced them to pay taxes to the Bali but the sustenance of such a policy could not be continued by the post-colonial administration hence the Decree of 1982, carved out the parcels of land from the Bali to give not only to Mbatu, but also to Nsongwa and Chomba.³⁰ This information was buttressed by Nuvala F. “The Decree no 82/525 of January 8, 1982, carved parcels of Bali and distributed to neighbours: Chomba, Mbatu and Nsongwa.”³¹ Nevertheless, before the 1982 Decree, the indigenes of Mbatu maintained their identity but were considered as Bali elements, especially in official representation and contribution. The dual identity of Mbatu was in line with Bornman E.’s concept of identity that “Identity formation is an interactive process that involves *belonging* and *becoming* [italics mine]”³² thereby rationalizing the title of this article.

Another instance of dual identity is traceable from the Balikumbat- Bafanji boundary problem. Since the creation of boundary between both villages by the Germans in 1909, Pinyinchu M. unraveled that “there have been intermittent conflicts, related to this boundary.”³³ In an attempt to solve the problem, the post-colonial administration introduced the Inter-Community Boundary Law of 1962, which specified measures and modalities for the modification and fixing of community boundaries.³⁴ It was in line with this, that the boundary between Bafanji-Balikumbat was modified in 1969. This modification, According to Hongie G., this modification raised the identity issue, because the 1969 boundary placed some Balikumbat indigenes who had illegally occupied the Bafanji land into Bafanji. Meanwhile, Article 3 of the 1962 Law stated that the individuals from a particular village who found themselves in another one due to boundary demarcation had to quite or remain.³⁵ In case of the later, the concerned paid allegiance to the host village. It equally specified that individuals who showed proof of perennial plants and

property would be compensated by the state in case they intended to leave.³⁶

The complexity of the 1962 law was that, it was difficult for individuals who had lived in a site for decades to dislodge, especially as they were attached to their landed property and shrines sites. Consequently, most Balikumbat indigenes found themselves in Bafanji with the 1969 boundary modification. Hongie G. cited the case of one Pashia, a Balikumbat indigene that preferred to remain in Bafanji after the boundary demarcation. However, he cautions that “though Pashia remained in Bafanji and by the law was supposed to be a Bafanji indigene with complete allegiance, he continuously paid his taxes in Balikumbat and at times paid in the two villages to avoid suspicion.”³⁷ Pashia in his double standard attitude had a dual identity of belonging to Bafanji and becoming Balikumbat, a situation necessitated by the implantation of boundary.

111:5 Lost Identity

If boundary demarcation created the problem of dual identity, in some cases, groups completely lost their identities. This could be rationalized by two factors. *Primo*, the creation of empires presupposed the incorporation of other groups by a dominant and hegemonic one. In this regard, incorporated groups lost their identities. Again, the Germans and British forcefully settled some villages in Bali-Nyonga during the colonial period. Though, these villages created tension in the empire, leading to their progressive liberation, some remained permanent, frustrated especially by the controversial clause attached to the liberation process which forbade all claims of liberated villages to Bali land.

Concerning the incorporation of some groups by others to form empires, this was a common practice in the NWR. Expansionist groups such as Kom, Mankon, Bafut and more especially the Bali submerged other groups. This was through direct or indirect means. Directly, warlike groups attacked, conquered and incorporated weaker ones while indirectly, some vulnerable groups voluntarily submitted to stronger ones as was the case of Bati, who submitted to Bali-Nyonga for fear of Bamoun conquest.³⁸ Nkwi P. argues that the Bali were one of the last to arrive the Bamenda Grassfields but was the most aggressive as it attacked, conquered and incorporated other groups especially the Wedikum and Meta (Bossa in particular) which had earlier settled in the region.³⁹ Forkwang J. corroborated, “Bali Kontan was subjugated and incorporated into the Bali Nyonga and its leader compensated with the title of sub-chief. Other villages such as Baku and Kenyang were also completely incorporated.”⁴⁰ These incorporated groups thus lost their identities.

²⁹D. Rusell “Aspect of Development in Rural Cameroon: Political Transition Among the Bali of Bamenda”, PhD Thesis in Anthropology, Boston University, 1980, p.56.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹F. Nuvala “Boundary Disputes in the North West Region” *Lela Magazine*, no 9, 2008, p.8.

³²E. Bornman “Struggle for Identity”, p.7.

³³M. Pinyinchu “The Balikumbat-Bafanji Intermittent Land Conflict, 1925-1998” MA Dissertation in History, ENS Yaoundé 1, 2002, p.34.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ G. Hongie “Balikumbat and Her Neighbours, from 1898 to 1998”, MA Dissertation in History, University of Yaoundé 1, 2005, p.56.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.p.57.

³⁸ J. ForkwangJ. *Historical Background to the Chiefdom of Bali-Nyonga*, Pretoria, University of Pretoria Press, 2003, p.87.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ J. Forkwang *Historical Background*, P.90.

This rationalized the view that the existence of aboriginal Bali is doubtful, because through incorporation, willful submission of other groups and conquests, the group remained very diverse as N.Ndifontah posits:

By 1909 when turmoil started in the Bali Empire, there were more than thirty Wedikum and Meta villages in Bali. By 1924, when the British intensified the liberation, there were eighteen non-Bali villages still under Bali Suzerainty and finally, when Bali was reduced to its smallest by 1932, through massive liberation of vassals by the British, Bawock, Sangaam, Kufad, Bati, Buti, Tikali, Fuleng Ngonlan and Mbelu among others remained permanently in Bali.⁴¹

The above-mentioned groups later became quarters in Bali-Nyonga. Through sheer integration, they lost their identities. It was revealed that Bali-Nyonga, liberal in nature, had to fuse cultural aspects of the incorporated groups into Bali culture. For example, Bali Nyonga, unlike other Bali villages in the NWR spoke *Mungaaka*, a local parlance that was a mélange of Bali original dialect, *Mubaku* spoken by the rest of Bali villages, Bati which is a Bali vassal.⁴²

Another situation of a lost identity is noticeable as a result of the conflict between Bambui and Finge in the present Tubah sub-division of Mezam which has prolonged and has looked difficult to handle. According to E. Yenshu, Finge village living apparently as a dependent site vis-à-vis Bambui, decided to sue the Fon of Bambui to the Native Authority Court in 1954 demanding that a boundary be fixed between the two groups⁴³. The Finge people claimed the Germans had maintained a pre-colonial boundary between the two communities but the British during their era ignored and disregarded the Finge claim to an independent chiefdom different from Babui under the Native Administration system. As such the Native Authority court dismissed the Finge claim under the grounds that she was a "sub-town" and it would be absurd establishing a boundary. Two subsequent appeals by Finge in October 1954 and July 1955 for a review of the lower court's decision were all rejected on the pretext that the only recognized boundary was between Bambui and Kedjom Keku. Another attempt in 1960 to settle matters by the Premier of West Cameroon was still futile. The Premier confirmed the colonial decision on grounds that:

All chiefdoms were fully established and that there could be no question of creating new ones. He said there was no empty space in Cameroon since all land was owned. This meant that new settlers on any land must be prepared to

*subject themselves to the jurisdiction of the owners [emphasis mine] of the land*⁴⁴

These verdicts by the Native Authority Court and the Premier of West Cameroon culminated in sanctioning Finge with a lost identity and placing her as a sub-unit under Bambui. By all judgment and standard Finge people were incorporated into the Bambui hegemonic chiefdom. Bambui has therefore exhibited an expansionist tendency by submerging Finge into her chiefdom so that Finge lost her identity as a separate chiefdom. In dissatisfaction, the people of Finge while maintaining their settlement continued to assert their autonomy from Bambui till of recent. This has resulted in hostilities and attempts to resolve them have been futile. Such is the threat of boundary, self-determination and identity in the NWR.

The above example and many more divulges that incorporation or submergence of groups by other others was not a particularity of Bali but its specificity explained by the fact that the concept of territoriality and inviolability attached to boundary was the matrix of the Bali empire. Even other non-Bali groups were involved in incorporation, identities were not necessarily lost because established boundaries never existed hence incorporation was nominal.

111:6 Void Identity

The western concept of boundary initiated by the Bali, officialized by the colonial and adopted by the post-colonial administration in the NWR rendered some groups without a territorial space and hence affecting their identity. This stemmed from the fact that, a group in this perspective, composed a people or peoples, government and territory as W. Dze-Ngwa confirms, "In the migration and settlement of peoples in the NWR, most groups settled in specific locations under a leadership but others found no separate geographical space and settled amicably among autochthons hence were considered *outsiders* or *strangers* [italics mine]"⁴⁵ Those who had no territorial space were late arrivals, especially after the settlement of the Bali in the region and initiation of Western notion of boundary. This was the case of the Mbororos among the late arrivals in the NWR and had to negotiate with the earlier settlers in order to be ceded land for exploitation and settlement for which they paid royalties. They are scattered around the seven divisions of the NWR and did not constitute a single polity of their own hence were considered as strangers where ever they settled.⁴⁶

The Mbororos reached NWR when Western concept of boundary (sovereignty, territoriality and inviolability) had

⁴¹ N. Ndifontah. *The Bali-Chamba*, p.67.

⁴² G. Hongie. "The Relevance of Warfare" p.311.

⁴³ E.V. Yenshu and G. A. Ngwa, "Changing Intercommunity Relations and the Politics of Identity in the Northern Mezam area, Cameroon" *Cahiers d'études africaines*, 2001, p. 177-78

⁴⁴ Cf. Minutes of the meeting to settle the dispute between Bambui and Finge people by the Premier, Hon. J. N. Foncha on 23, January 1960.

⁴⁵ W. Dze-Ngwa "Boundary Dynamics and the Search for Geopolitical Space: The Case of the Mbororos in the North West Region of Cameroon" In *Boundary and History in Africa*, Yaoundé, University of Yaoundé, 2011, p.15.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

gained roots in the region. In this situation, they found themselves void of identity and simply referred to as strangers or outsiders where ever they settled. That is why A.Rhaman posits that, "The Mbororos had no permanent sites which they could call theirs and though they have stayed in different localities for a about century, they are still treated like landless intruders"⁴⁷ and M. Pelican buttresses, "The Mbororos looked upon themselves as the bird people."⁴⁸

As a result, though the Mbororos represent a people with a cultural and historical connection, they were identified as strangers, outsiders or landless intruders. This was due to the presence of boundaries among villages which specified their territorial spaces. They equally had sovereignty over such spaces, coupled with the notion of inviolability by others. This is why Dze-Ngwa linked the emergence of concepts such as indigenous peoples (indigenes, autochthons, natives) and foreigners (strangers, outsiders, settlers, and late-comers) in the NWR to the notion of boundary.⁴⁹ Such concepts about boundary are however only raised with Western connotations.

IV. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that by re-defining pre-colonial notion of political space in Africa in general with territoriality, sovereignty and inviolability, European colonialism established a new dispensation and interpretation of belonging and becoming in the NWR of Cameroon. The results were unprecedented wave of identity consciousness among ethnic groups as well as a redefinition of the limits of their hitherto geographical confines. With the emergence of both consciousness to identity and geographical confines, land-related crises became rampant. To solve these crises, both the colonial and post-colonial governments established inter and intra national boundaries that neither reflected the peoples natural evolution nor their cultural, economic and historical realities. Linked to these factors was the fact that inquiries into these boundary conflicts were hastily done hence the laws developed to guide boundary demarcations contained serious incongruities that generated the identity issues. Consequently, attempts to curb land-related conflicts in NWR by the establishment of boundaries among ethnic groups rather led to some people belonging and becoming in dual, lost or void identified groups.

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⁴⁷ A. Rhamani A. "The Political and Socio-economic History of the Mbororos in Mezam Division in the 20th Century", MA Dissertation in History, University of Yaoundé I, 2004, p.4.

⁴⁸ M Pelican. "The Mbororos Claim to Regional Citizenship and Minority Status" In *Africa*, no 4, 2008, p.12

⁴⁹ W. Dze-Ngwa "Boundary Dynamics" p.17.

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