

## THE GERMAN COLONIALISTS AND LINGERING ETHNIC CONFLICTS IN CAMEROON 1890-1990

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### ABSTRACT

*Ethnic boundary conflicts have been a recurring theme in Cameroon history since the German colonialists lumped arbitrarily together, in a single state, the many ethnicities in the territory they carved out in Africa in 1884 and called 'Kamerun.' In the process, they created new ethnic boundaries; suppressed the sovereignty of some traditional states and increased the territories and authorities of others by putting weaker ones under them. Unfortunately the German rule was not long enough to sustain in a lasting manner all such ethnic reorganizations. Also the British and French colonialists who succeeded the Germans in Cameroon did not show sympathy for the German ethnic regrouping in the territory. As a result many subjugated ethnicities took advantage of that to try to regain their independence with attendant conflicts. It is argued in this paper that many ethnic boundary conflicts in Cameroon today are still traceable to this brief but eventful German rule. It is further argued that ethnic boundary conflicts are some of the intangible administrative legacies which German colonial administrators left in Cameroon and that such legacies will continue to remind Cameroonians of the negative influences of the German colonization of Cameroon. Ethnic relations are still bedeviled by conflicts one hundred years since the Germans left Cameroon.*

### Introduction-Background

German colonialists did not create the numerous ethnicities in Cameroon but they influenced the ethnic politics and diplomacy (Nkwi 1996: 19-40)<sup>i</sup> tremendously. They had the up-hill task of unifying the multiplicities of ethnic polities in the area into a single state. This was because many ethnic polities resisted German subjugation and incorporation into the new Cameroon state (protectorate/colony). There were some powerful states and many weaker ones which collaborated with the German colonialists. The collaborative and non-collaborative traditional states in Cameroon and in other areas in Africa complicated and compounded the task of the

Germans and other European colonialists in the continent. In fact as we shall see below the collaborators did so more for perceived advantages than sympathy for the colonialist. Among the reasons for collaborating was the fact that collaborators could exploit the might of the Germans against their enemies, often neighboring polities or distant states which they had scores to settle with.

Thus the Bamum supported the Germans against Nso, Lewoh assisted them against LebangFontem, Mmouck-Ngie collaborated with them against Bamumbuand many other peoples in the territory (Fanso and Chilver; Ndobegang and Bowie 2008: 93-109) <sup>ii</sup>. The German diplomacy of lumpingthe ethnicities in the area together in their dreamt colony of Kamerunwas therefore that of stick and carrot. They subjugated the resistant states harshly and rewarded the ones which gave in easily fittingly with territories from enemies (Nzefeh 1990: 59).<sup>iii</sup>In fact many states which were at the mercy of their stronger neighborsaw support to Germany as a way of gaining and consolidating their territories and guaranteeing their security. Expansionist states which sought to gain territories at the expense of their neighbors but which had been restrained byregional balance of power and ritual peace pacts were usually quick to submit to the Germans. The Bali-Nyonga and Bamum States which are discussed below are some of the best examples to illustrate this in the Cameroon Grassfields.

Indeed ethnic entities in this territory were previous to German annexation in 1884 not living in constant ethnic antagonisms and conflicts. The conflicts which pitted some against the others before the German invasion emanated from historical and environmental vicissitudes. A cursory overview of migration in this territory may through more light. Long before the Bantu migration, in the first century CE, the Baka of Cameroon, also called pygmies occupied albeit sparsely the forest zone of the southern and eastern portions of the territory which became Cameroon on annexation. They are the best known first people of Cameroon who appeared to have been in the area several millennia ago. The facts about their origin, migration and occupation of this territory is still largely a matter of historical speculation. But what is certain about them is that they had little or no problem initially with other peoples over the occupation of the area until the arrival of the Bantu much later. Their encounters with the invading Bantu and Bantu related peoples forced them to retreat deeper into the forest rather than confront and resist them (Ketchouan.d. 42)<sup>iv</sup>.

The Bantu also immigrated and settled in the forest zone of Cameroon long before the European colonialists came to the territory. Their migration is believed to have started from the Benue-Cross-River Basin around the first century CE and went southeastwards until they reached South and East Africa by the 12<sup>th</sup> century CE (Olaniyan 1982: 22-25)<sup>v</sup>. Throughout this long migration, they encountered and admixed with other peoples. They also split into different entities, created states and built nations according to the peoples they came across; the challenges of the environment and the technological achievements they had made. Actually the pre-European Bantu and Bantu related peoples of Cameroon were boundary conscious before the advent of Europeans (Sobseh 2013: 127-152)<sup>vi</sup>.

The Duala for example are known to have chased the Bassa from the Wouri estuary to occupy and make it a country with different polities. A big chunk of the forest zone of Cameroon and the immediate grassfields zone are peopled by a multiplicity of Bantu and Bantu related peoples who organized themselves in states and nations with well-defined boundaries before the advent of Europeans in the territory. Indeed many ethnicities in this territory called Cameroon appeared to have lived in relative harmony before the trans-slave trade claims to territories notwithstanding. And although the trade engendered hostility, resulting from slave taking raids and counter raids (Brown and Lovejoy 2011)<sup>vii</sup>, the enmity was not about ethnic state boundaries. Many states had established among them reasonable regional balance of power for trade and other interactions.

There are many cases of pre-European boundary agreements among states and nations in the region (Fomin and Ngitir 2013: 35-54)<sup>viii</sup>, suggesting the fact that there had been boundary disagreements and also that there were conflicts resolution mechanisms (Fomin and Ngitir 2013: 35-54)<sup>ix</sup>. This notwithstanding, many recrudescing ethnic boundary conflicts in Cameroon today remained the legacy of the German colonial adventure in this country. From this background we have devoted the rest of this paper to the study of persisting ethnic boundary conflicts in three main areas of Cameroon. We have chosen the three areas from the Cameroon Grassfields (parts of Southwest, Northwest and West Regions of Cameroon) to illustrate this (see map of Cameroon below) in a type of random selection because we cannot treat the whole country in

this limited article. The areas selected include Lebiam Division in the Southwest, Mifi and Bamboutos divisions in the West and Mezam and Bui divisions in the Northwest of Cameroon.

### **1The Germans andEthnicConflicts in Lebiam**

A major German colonial legacy in Lebiam Division in the Southwest of Cameroon is the ethnic boundary conflicts that have pitted the collaborative ethnic states against the ones which resisted the German colonialists. Lebiam Division lies on the Southwestern slope of the Bamboutos Mountain. It occupies a good portion of the Cameroon eastern Grassfields and some tracts of the forest zone. It was the gateway from the Atlantic Coast at Limbe (Victoria) to the eastern Grassfields.<sup>x</sup> The indigenous inhabitants of Lebiam are state builders and there were many such states in the area before the arrival of the Germans, the first Europeans (Fomin 1994)<sup>xi</sup>. Their states were typically centralized and governed by paramount rulers called *Fua-Atemagwat*, the leopard knife holders Fomin and Ndobegang 2011: 73-84)<sup>xii</sup>

The Germans first visited Lebang (Fontem) in this area (Fomin 1994)<sup>xiii</sup> around 1889 when it was under FontemAsonganyi, arguably the most outstanding and best known Lebang ruler before and after colonization. He and his peers of Nweh(Bangwa) country in the sub-region seemed to have already established a reasonable balance of power among them and with well-defined boundaries for their polities. Some polity boundaries in the area were fixed through warfare and ritual peaceful diplomacy. Many of them were marked by ritual spots and geographical features (Fomin and Ngitir 2013: 35-54)<sup>xiv</sup>. Lebang shares such boundaries to the South-east with Esoh-Attah; North-east with the Bamileke chiefdoms, South with Njoagwi (Fotabong III); and West with Lewoh. Each sovereign ruler in the sub-region had subordinate rulers under him. They were traditionally known as leopard knife holders<sup>xv</sup> and the European colonialists called them paramount chiefs. There were also paramount polities in the Mundani clan which, with the Bangwa clan, makes up Lebiam Division. Rulers in the area were very conscious and proud of their individual sovereignties. As it is shown elsewhere in this paper, Bamumbu, the largest of the Mundani polities had also direct confrontation with the Germans.

However, it was the historic conflict between Fontem and the Germans which plunged many ethnicities in the area into conflict with the Germans also and brought about the reorganization of

the area by the latter that has continued to promote ethnic conflicts. Perhaps this will be better appreciated when we examine some of these major conflicts. In fact the Germans met every resistance proportionate to the strength of the peoples and their leader. In the case of Lebang, the first German attack was under Lt. von Gellhorn in 1890 which was beaten back. The attack was to punish Lebang people and Asonganyi their ruler for the death of a German labor recruiter, Gustave Conrau, who had died in the area.

His death was blame on them and the Germans vowed to avenge it. But the war which they waged against Asonganyi and his people and which spread to other polities in the area was more the outcome of misunderstanding than actual disagreement. The ill-fated Conrau had been to Lebang in 1898 for recruiting labor for the German plantations along the coast of Cameroon. He was well received and he took along, albeit great suspension by the people of his being a slave trader. He took 85 laborers (Nzefeh 1990) <sup>xvi</sup> from the area to the coastal plantations. He promised that they would return but when time came in 1889, he brought none to testify that the rest were not sold.

The people took him hostage and he committed suicide when he failed in the attempt to escape. The Germans held Fontem responsible for his death and attacked him and his people

### Map of Cameroon Showing Administrative Regions



**Source: Google Map of Cameroon**

but the first attack failed. The second invasion of Lebang which took place in 1901 was a much bigger expedition and divided into two main contingents to take Asonganyi's people from two fronts. One was to attack him from the Banyang country and the other through Ndungatet and Lewoh polities in the area. Polities in the area were divided in their allegiance. Many of them

supported Fontem and others the Germans. And this was to determine the German administrative arrangement of the area after the war which arrangement left lasting legacy of conflicts and hatred among states in the area. They defeated Fontem and his allies and reorganized the polities in the area, rewarding supporters and punishing the enemies.

The German colonial subjugation, reorganization and rule of Lebialem polities after their defeat was harsh and humiliating especially for enemies. Asonganyi of Lebang, Tanjoanji of Essoh-Attah, Tongwa of Ndungatet, Nkenglefac of Mmouck-Ngie were exiled as punishment for resisting the Germans (Fomin 1994).<sup>xvii</sup> The ethnic rulers in the area who collaborated like those of Lewoh, Mmouck-mbin and initially Mmouck-Ngie received favors from the Germans which included territories taken from enemies. This created antagonism and sowed the seed of lasting boundary conflicts among polities in the sub-region. Collaboration and resistance were two main diplomatic options which polities had to choose from. The collaborators appeared to have done so for the purposes of securing additional territories and protection from the Germans. Some had acquired territories but appeared to have been living at the mercy of their hostile neighbors. In fact while Asonganyi of Lebang had made a firm ritual boundary pact with Tanjoanji of Essoh-Attah at Arheankeng before the advent of the Germans, he had not done so with Lewoh. This may explain why Essoh-Attah supported him but the former are purported to have assisted the Germans (Fomin 1994).<sup>xviii</sup>

Among the Mundani clan of this division the situation was not much different. Bamumbu was powerful and expansionist and was a threat to the Mmouck villages of Bangwa area. Mmouck-Ngie a small but dynamic polity is known to have supported the Germans as a way of using them against Bamumbu. Indeed they used the Germans to subdue it but did not maintain friendship with Germans for long. As a result, the Germans crushed the Mmouck-Ngie people and exiled their ruler (Apundem 1996: 29-30).<sup>xix</sup> Learning from the plight of Mmouck-Ngie, Mmouck-Mbin polity collaborated with the Germans and was compensated with some Mundani polities (Ngemasong Personal Communication, March 9 2000).<sup>xx</sup>

Mmouck-Mbin polity is in the Bangwa area but with the friendship and support for the Germans, it was enlarged by the Germans placing Besali and other Mundani polities under it. In fact that

arrangement infringed clan boundary of Mundani and Bangwa and the British colonial administration had to reverse but Mmouck-Mbin has since been in boundary conflicts with Besali and other Mundani neighbors. In fact hostility has remained quite rampant between Besali and Mmouck-Mbin even in recent times (Ngemasong Personal Communication, March 9 2000)<sup>xxi</sup>. The latter had taken the advantage to exploit rich palm oil resources of the former.

The ruler of Bamumbu annexed the small Mmouck polity of Letegh when the British colonial administration did not show firm support in the German arrangement of the area. Today the Bamumbu and Mmouck polities live in constant border conflicts which date back to the German re-organization of the area which did not respect the pre-German boundaries of polities especially those of enemy polities. In fact the circumstances which got the Germans to war with Asonganyi and his allies was the outright colonial policy of trying to prove tough.

Asonganyi had to allay the fears of his people of Lebang who had sent off dear ones and Conrau for the plantation adventure reluctantly (Nzefeh 1980)<sup>xxii</sup>. By not bringing them back was to confirm the suspicion that he was a slave trader. Fontem was under great pressure to let Conrau know that he had breached the agreement he made with him and his people. He told Conrau as Lebang people demanded that he would not leave Azi Palace until the first consignment of the people he took away was brought back (Nzefeh 1980)<sup>xxiii</sup>. There seemed to have been a great problem of communication between the two parties because of language differences. One is tempted to believe that either the interpreters did not understand Bangwa well or they deliberately distorted the information they got from Asonganyi. However, according to some accounts Conrau went back to Lebang prematurely to collect the possessions he left in Asonganyi's care and not to recruit more laborers (Chilver 1967: 155-160).<sup>xxiv</sup>

The people needed just proof that their dear ones he went with were alive. He wrote back to the German authorities at Victoria on 11 December 1899 and the letter was received on 24 December same year to report that he was held hostage on rumors that the first consignment of the laborers he took to the plantation the first time had all died (Chilver 1967: 155-160)<sup>xxv</sup>. Instead of proving the contrary to the people, a relieve expedition was dispatched under Lt. Von Krosigk to release him but the squad was still on the way when he died. It is alleged that his Bali



servant told him that Fontem wanted to kill him so he tried to escape thus confirming the fears of the people and aggravating the situation. In the midst of mounting tension he started escaping and of course the people hotly pursued him so he committed suicide. This led to a German punitive war against Lebang and polities that supported it in the area. It lasted intermittently from 1900 to 1911 when Fontem Asonganyi surrendered and was taken to Dschang, tried and exiled to Garoua (Ndobegang and Bowie 2008: 93-109).<sup>xxvi</sup>

The exile of Asonganyi and other traditional rulers who supported him against the Germans was a grievous crime in Nweh country. The people had never before seen such mistreatment of their rulers whom they considered semi-divine. It was difficult for the Germans and their allies to earn respect among Nweh and other peoples of the sub-region. The Germans made matters worse by exacting very severe indemnities on the defeated polities. Asonganyi of Lebang had to pay 30 cows, 80 goats, 100 pigs, over 1000 bunches of plantains and to supply laborers to the German coastal plantations on demand (Nzefeh 1980)<sup>xxvii</sup>. The extortion of these things from Lebang people over 100 years ago was indeed not only punitive but revengeful and they have hardly trusted neighbors who supported the Germans against them.

The war also ended in Essoh-Attah and the other Nweh polities which had supported Lebang in the confrontations with the Germans. Tanjoanji of Essoh-Essoh (Foreke Cha-Cha) and Tongwa of Ndungatet (Foto) were supporters who bore the greatest brunt for supporting Asonganyi in Nweh country. The Germans also punished them and their peoples severely. Fua leke Tanjoanji of Essoh-Attah and Foto Tongwa of Ndungatet were also exiled to Tinto and Banyoro respectively, as punishment for their roles in the war (Fomin 1994)<sup>xxviii</sup>. Boundary hostility between Lebang and Lewoh has remained since and the last open confrontation between them in 1951 (Ndi Nkemateh Personal Communication, May 12 2016)<sup>xxix</sup> was over a piece of territory which Lebang purported lost to Lewoh in the German post war reorganization of the Nweh country. It is one of the eloquent testimonies of boundary problems the Germans created which continues to create tension today.

## **2 The Germans and Ethnic Conflicts in the Cameroon Eastern Grassfields**

There are many recrudescence ethnic boundary conflicts among the Bamileke and other peoples of the Cameroon eastern Grassfields which can be traced to the German administration in the sub-region over one hundred years ago. Although the creation of states in the sub-region before the advent of the German colonialists involved warfare, the German reorganization halted it but opened a new chapter of ethnic border conflicts. For example Djomo I of Bangou had annexed a good portion of Bamekekep despite the opposition of other neighbors like Babouantou Temgoua (2013: 153-172)<sup>xxx</sup>. The Germans were worried about the expansionist ambition of Djomo I of Bangou and decided in 1913 to contain him by building a trench to mark the boundary between his and the polity of his neighbor. Though the French colonial administration reversed the German marked boundary in 1922, this did not bring lasting peace (Temgoua 2013: 153-172)<sup>xxxi</sup>.

The Germans were not responsible for his expansionist ambition but appeared not to have treated him like an aggressor as they dealt with such individuals in Lebialem and Cameroon Western Grassfields. As a result Bangou has caused boundary contests among polities in the area repeatedly over the years with the most recent in 1992. Indeed from 1983 confrontation was common among Bangou and her neighbors on a regular basis. It took place in 1983, 1984, 1985, 1988, 1991 and 1992 (Temgoua 2013: 153-172)<sup>xxxii</sup>, a very clear indication of the unfinished assignment of German and French colonial administrations in the area. As seen elsewhere in this paper pre-European mechanisms for fixing lasting boundaries between states existed but were abandoned because of the interference in traditional geo-political diplomacy from the colonialists.

In the same Bamileke sub-regions some rulers also tried to exploit the presence of the Germans to expand their territories. Fomekong of Bafou tried to provoke a general border conflict among his neighbors in order to attract German colonial intervention. Thus he attacked neighbors such as Bansoa, Bangang, Bamendjio and Babete. As expected the Germans actually intervened and the outcome was that Bafou emerged a paramount polity over the others, engendering the hostility that polities in the area have witnessed in the past years. This appeared to have set an unfortunate example for other expansionist states in the area. Batcham expanded at the expense of Bansoa

and Bangang with impunity around the same period. In fact the boundaries between Bansoa and the two neighbors have remained volatile since the Germans left Cameroon over one hundred years ago.

The bone of contention between Batcham and Bansoa has been over a fertile border territory which purportedly belonged to the latter. The expansion of Batcham between 1916 and 1919 at the expense notably of Bansoa, Bangang and Bamendji cannot have taken place without the support or the acquiescence of the German administration. It would be recalled that the German colonial administration would not tolerate such expansion from an enemy polity as it was the case with Bamumbu and the Mmouck villages. Thus on the departure of the Germans the sub-region continued with boundary conflicts with Batcham at the center (Temgoua 2013: 153-172).<sup>xxxiii</sup> In fact Batcham and Bangang polities have had repeated boundary conflicts over the years with serious consequences like the destruction of the Bangang market in 1946 and destruction and counter destruction were only put to rest by the French colonial administration.

The polity of Bamendjou in the same region carried out expansionist adventure which engendered boundary conflicts in the same region and within the same period. Many of the conflicts started before the arrival of the Germans in the region around 1905 and they actually put an end to some but allowed some of the powerful expansionist polities like Bamendjou to retain annexed territories. Indeed it was a general German colonial policy in the region to allow powerful polities except enemy ones to retain conquered territories (Temgoua 2013: 153-172).<sup>xxxiv</sup> But the French rescued such polities especially as they did not cherish strong traditional monarchs which the Germans maintained in the area. Thus in 1946-1947 Bangang was freed from Batcham subjugation and its annexed territories regained. The Cameroon administration has also been involved in trying to find solutions to the unfinished task of regulating the boundaries of ethnic polities in the Bamileke country of Cameroon. It has done this through a series of administrative orders. As late as 2003, law No.02003/016 of 22 December 2003 gives to the local administration (Governors, Senior Divisional Officers and Sub-divisional officers) the authority to resolve ethnic boundary disputes but this has not put an end to such conflicts in the area because of the deep-rooted nature of their origins.

### **3-The Germans and Ethnic Conflicts in the Cameroon Western Grassfields**

The Germans arrived the Cameroon Western Grassfields at the dawn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century when polities in the area were well in place. Many of the neighboring polities had secured their boundaries through different mechanisms which ranged from warfare, peaceful and rituals settlements. However some states that had just arrived the sub-region like the Chamba groups were usually reluctant to enter into boundary pacts with their neighbors because they had expansionist ambitions (Fomin and Ngitir 2013: 35-54)<sup>xxxv</sup>. Though the German colonialist would not tolerate ruthless expansion they tried to favor their collaborators even in the reorganization of the ethnic entities which they carried out. The expansionists were often warlike but had opted to cooperate with Germans albeit with obvious ambitions. The Bali-Nyonga had taken a good chunk of the Meta land before the Germans arrived the scene, they were not able to seize Bafut and Mankon lands and felt their German allies would help in that direction. In fact the two powerful polities were in alliance.

Bafut, Nso, Mankon and Lai-Kom were powerful states in the area when the Germans arrived and because they were not ready to lose their sovereignty to the Germans unconditionally the latter subjugated them, robbed some of them of territories to the advantage of their collaborators (Gwanfogbe 1988: 9-22)<sup>xxxvi</sup>. The German reorganization of ethnic boundaries on the basis of compensation and reward sowed the seed of the recurring ethnic conflicts in this area where ethnic sovereignty is very highly cherished. The antagonism which pits the Bali-Nyonga in Mezam Division with almost all her neighbors was fanned by German reorganization of ethnic boundaries in the sub-region (Gwanfogbe 1988)<sup>xxxvii</sup>.

Yes, the Bali-Nyonga had seized land from the Meta before the German arrival but the boundary conflict between the two is traceable to the German administration that confirmed Bali control over such lands. According to the German reorganization of ethnic polities in the area around 1905, some 31 weaker polities were placed under Bali-Nyonga (Gwanfogbe 1988)<sup>xxxviii</sup> most of them Meta villages. It seemed that since the Germans left Cameroon, successive administrations in this country have also been preoccupied with the Bali-Nyonga ethnic boundary conflicts with her neighbors but without much success. Though the British administration freed some ethnic

entities which the Germans put under Bali-Nyonga, the Meta have not been at peace with the former. From 1952 to 1953 there was a major confrontation between Bali and Meta polities in alliance (Gwanfogbe 1988)<sup>xxxix</sup>. As recent as the 1980s, the Cameroon government constructed a wall to separate the two in the much disputed Ngyen-Mbo area.

The Bali-Nyonga also assisted the Germans in their wars against Bafut and Mankon. The two polities had sensed the Bali annexationist ambition and were in the process of curbing it when the Germans arrived the scene and cooperated with Bali to subdue them. Bali-Nyonga was conscious of the danger from Bafut and Mankon especially as the two were in close friendship. In fact though the Bali did not sign boundary pacts with neighbors for obvious reasons, they signed military pacts with friendly states such as Bafreng and Bamendankwe (Nkwi 1996: 19-40)<sup>xl</sup>. There was therefore a tense diplomatic situation in this sub-region characterized by military pacts and counter pacts before the advent of the Germans. The Germans therefore had reason to interfere in the setup as it existed at the time. And their interference left lasting enmity among many states in the area.

Though the boundary between Bali-Nyonga and Mankon has not brought about frequent conflicts it has nevertheless witnessed some intermittent confrontations even at the level of farmers who exploit the borderland of the two polities. By the German ethnic boundary arrangements in the sub-region Bafut does not appear to have boundary with Bali-Nyonga but the relations between them have not been cordial since the latter aided the Germans against the former. The circumstances which brought about war between the Bali-Nyonga and Germans on the one hand and those of Bafut on the others had little to do with Bali-Bafut boundary. It had more to do with the disrespect of German instructions by the Bafut king and his people (Niba 1996: 86-101)<sup>xli</sup>. However the end of the war saw Bafut losing not territories but influence over some weaker neighboring polities like BikomBambui, Bambili and Mejung (Nkwi 1996: 19-40)<sup>xlii</sup>.

Yet they too did not fail to get their own share of the German aggression, defeat and punishment. The German explorer, Eugen Zintgraff had a confrontation with Bikom warriors in 1889 on his way from Bafut to Adamawa through Bikom country called Lai-kom, in what appeared to be a show of power but for reasons not well known it seemed to have been peacefully resolved. As a

result, Lai-Kom was not roughly treated as the Bafut, Mankon, Nso' and the other polities in the sub-region (Nkwi 1996: 19-40)<sup>xliii</sup>. In fact the *fon* of Kom and his people did not delay in accepting the German colonial rule and were thus spared the humiliation that Bafut and Mankon got for standing against German intrusion in the Bamenda Grassfields.

The next major adversary state of the German annexation of polities in the Cameroon western Grassfields was Nso' yet the Nso people tried to avoid military confrontations with the Germans as much as possible. They had been advised to do so by their neighbors of the Ndop plain who advised them to appease the Germans and they tried to do so (Fanso and Chilver 1996: 102-131)<sup>xliv</sup>. But the Germans knew the *fon* was not ready to give up his sovereignty easily. Thus despite the initial friendly gesture of the Nso' *fon* and his people to the German team led by Lt. Col. Von Pavel, who had just defeated the Bafut, the Germans were not satisfied. Nso gave them entertainment in food and drinks and gave also some gifts to the German imperialist team leaders. This is one of the ways priceless art works were looted from Cameroon by the colonialists.

The Nso', after this gesture of friendship, were still required to pledge total submission to the Germans but they were reluctant and were accordingly attacked by the Germans. The Nso-German confrontations went on intermittently from 1902 to 1906 when Nso' was finally vanquished. There were casualties on both sides, enough to create bitterness on both sides also. But Nso lost many more men and women than the enemy. Most of the enemy's losses in men were again Africans, including the Bali-Nyonga allies. The Nso prisoners of war were taken to friendly polities in Ndop plain. They were maltreated. Women were forced to marry German allies in Ndop (Fanso and Chilver 1996-102-131)<sup>xlv</sup>. This to the Nso people was treachery and it created antagonism between them and their Ndop plain neighbors which is often revisited in boundary skirmishes between them.

The Bamum also used their alliance with Germans against Nso' because of pre-German grievances they had with the latter. Bamum country is to the south and east of Nso and both people are known to be kinsmen of Tikar ethnicity but for reasons connected to state creation they had been to war a number of times before the Germans arrived the sub-region (Fanso and

Chilver 1996: 102-131)<sup>xlvi</sup>. Unfortunately for Nso', while they resisted Germans the Bamum accepted to do their biddings. They did not want to risk a war against the Germans and also saw the settling of scores with their neighbors with the help of the latter. There has been frequent hostility between Nso and Bamum as well as other polities along their eastern borders since the departure of the Germans from Cameroon in 1916. The hostility finds expression often in boundary conflicts including claims to farmland. Nso-Buman geopolitical relations were further compounded in the readjustment of the 1916 partition boundary in 1920 by the English and French who ousted the Germans from Cameroon. Some Nso' land along their south and eastern borders went under the French administration, compounding and complicating the settlement of any boundary disagreement in the area because it had to involve the administrations of the two colonial powers.

## **Conclusion**

As a conclusion to this article we wish to stress the fact that European colonial rule engendered ethnic boundary conflicts in Africa contrary to the popular belief that it stopped them. From a study of the conflicts the German brought about in Cameroon we have seen that they outlived them and the British and French colonial rules and have continued to resurface at the least given opportunity even after independence. Many of the pre-German ethnic conflicts in different parts of the territory had been resolved through traditional conflict resolution mechanisms. But the German involvement in the settlement of such conflicts brought new dimensions which only helped to perpetuate conflicts. The balance of power that existed among states in the Cameroon Grassfields collapsed. The Germans reorganization of clan boundaries was in many cases intended to increase the territories of their collaborators to the disadvantage of their enemies and was indeed the cause of many of such conflicts as we have seen in this article.

As shown in the article many ethnic boundaries of German creation have hardly known peace. There is the tendency for aggrieved parties to try to regain lost territories by force while the former German collaborators who got the territories of other polities want to retain them. In fact the unfortunate recrudescence of ethnic boundary conflicts in many parts of the Cameroon Grassfields are largely a legacy of the German colonial administrative business in this country. In

fact the phenomenon of ethnic conflicts has gone a very long way to retard modern development in this country because cooperation among antagonizing polities in common projects is not often easy to come by.

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<sup>i</sup> Paul N Nkwi, "Traditional Diplomacy, Trade and Warfare in the Nineteenth Century Western Grassfields" B. Chem-Langhee and V.G. Fanson (eds.) Assisted by M. Coheen and E.M. Chilver, *Nso' and Its Neighbours: Readings in Social History* (Amherst: Amherst College, 1996) pp 19-40

<sup>ii</sup> V.G. Fanson and E.M. Chilver, "Nso' and the Germans: The First Encounter in Contemporary Documents and Oral Tradition" in B. Chem-Langhee and V.G. Fanson (eds.) Assisted by M. Coheen and E.M. Chilver, *Nso' and Its Neighbours*, pp 102-131; Michael Mbapndah Ndobegang and Fiona Bowie, "Azi Since Conrau: Anthropological and historical Perspective" in Ian Fowler & Verkijika Fanson (Eds.) *Encounter, Transformation and Identity: Peoples of the West Cameroon Borderlands, 1891-2000* (Oxford & New York: Berghahn Books, 2008) pp 93-109

<sup>iii</sup> Stanley Peter Nzeffeh, *A History of Lebang (Fonem) c.1850-1950: Dynamic Consolidation, territorial Expansion and European Imperialism*, (Mimeograph, 1990) p 59

<sup>iv</sup> Thomas Ketchoua, *Contribution à l'Histoire du Cameroun de 450 avant Jésus-Christ à nos jours*, nd. p 42

<sup>v</sup> Richard Olaniyan (ed.), *African History and Culture*, Lagos: Longman Nigeria Limited, 1982 pp 22-25

<sup>vi</sup> Emmanuel Yonkeng Sobset, "The Demise of European Colonialism and the Emergence of Boundary Conflicts in the Bamenda Grassfields of Cameroon" In Abwa Daniel, Pascal-Albert Temgoua, E.S.D. Fomin, Willibroad Dze-Ngwa (eds.) *Boundaries and History in Africa: Issues in Conventional Boundaries and Ideological Frontiers (Studies in Honour of Verkijika G. Fanson)* Mankon, Bamenda: Lagaa Research and Publishing CIG, 2013, pp 127-152

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