

Nigeria- Cameroon Boundary Relations in the North of Nigeria, 1914- 94

Duyile Abiodun

Department of History and International Studies, Faculty of Arts, Ekiti State University, Ado Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria

Abstract

This study looks at Northern Nigeria prior to the origination of the Court Case at The Hague in 1994. This research will review historical facts in context with the interpretations of Nigerian Boundary Commission before the commencement of the court case at The Hague. A retrospect of the facts will be made, in order that we understand the controversies that have ensued since the verdict on the case was made in 2001. The research will focus majorly on historical events before 1994. It will also discuss issues that concern the various boundary controversies in Northern Nigeria, through the facts on ground in Nigeria. The boundary crisis in Northern Nigeria correlates very much to the mistakes created by the colonial government. The boundary problems in Northern Nigeria are as contending as the border issues that ensued between Nigeria and Cameroon in the South of Nigeria. Although, the oil politics embedded in the Bakassi Peninsula dispute may have elevated the crisis in the South above that of the North. It is important to revisit Nigeria's boundary crisis in the North with Cameroon so as to properly put into context Nigeria's case at The Hague. The North of Nigeria was as turbulent in terms of boundary problems as that of the South; it is within this context that a study such as these will be significant to academics. The undefined border with Cameroon in the North still lingers until this day.

Keywords: Boundary, Nigeria, Cameroon, Northern Nigeria.

Introduction

Prior to the amalgamation of 1914, the people in what is now known as Northern Nigeria consisted of different "empires", some of them extending into parts that are not part of current-day Nigeria like parts of present-day Cameroon and the other neighbouring states surrounding Nigeria. Some parts of current day Cameroon were still considered part of Nigeria even during the independence of the two countries. The Northern Region contain the Bornu Empire, some Hausa States such as Zazzau, Gobir, Kano, Katsina, Biriri, Daura and some other groups such as Gwari, Kebbi, Nupe, Yelwa...etc but in some parts of Northern Nigeria, precisely the Adamawa sector, Benue sector, Taraba sector and Bornu sector, there is this mix-up of where lies the correct boundary demarcation between Nigeria and Cameroon. In some of these towns, there is an extension between the two nations, of kinship and affiliation across the borderlines of the two countries. This makes the relationship between Nigeria and Cameroon very complex especially when it is viewed from a historical undertone.

The Anglo French Declaration of January 1931 used natural and artificial features to describe the boundary between Northern Nigeria and Cameroon except on few occasions when references was made to the British German pillars and landmarks erected by Messrs Vereker and Pition in 1920¹. These two gentlemen were presumably Germans and references to them was made in clause 27 of the treaty whilst clauses 32-33 of the same legal instrument made reference to Beacon 6, 7, and 8 of the old British – German frontiers². These relevant beacons were beacons No.6, 7, 8, and 10, and they fell between Mayo Faro and Mao Hesso in Gurin District. Apart from the references, the rest of the boundary description was made using rivers, hilltops, cairn of stones, villages, ranges of hills, watersheds...etc.

The boundary point between the northern communities of Nigeria and their counterpart groups in Cameroon can only be found in Bornu, Benue, Taraba and Adamawa State on the side of Nigeria³. However, in some of the problematic local government areas in Northern Nigeria such as the Ngala local government area, Madagali local government area, Michika local government area, Mubi local government area, Maiha local government area, Fufore local government area, Ganye local government area, Bama local government area, and Jada local government area; Nigeria and Cameroon had continued to have unresolved border demarcation challenges which is still a problem today (early 21st century). The study will therefore identify Northern Nigeria's boundary problems with Cameroon beginning from the mouth of Ebeji in Bornu State to a point in Ganye local government in Adamawa state; this also includes boundary points of Benue and Taraba.

Boundary Problems between the two Nations in the North of Nigeria

The relationship between the Nigerian and Cameroonian communities who live along the border areas has been relatively cordial. The inhabitants on both sides of the divide intermarry, perform some social functions together and generally regard themselves as brothers and sisters. As a matter of fact, some of these communities have cultural link with one another and speak the same language. Even though skirmishes do occur from time to time, the traditional rulers have a way of resolving such disputes without any recourse to government machinery.

Usually, they call a joint meeting and sometimes visit the disputed areas. Among the border communities, they recognise the fact that they belong to different countries. The border communities recognise the boundary lines and jealously protect it.

On few occasions, the border communities have had to protect the territorial integrity of their countries which more often than not always lead to disputes that sometimes sour their relationships. Though, for some government officials working for the Nigerian administration then, they “accused the Cameroonians of inordinate attempt to remove or destroy pillars, cairn of stones and sometimes also take over any space created by the change in the water course from its original boundary position into Nigeria”⁴. This problem varies in the different border towns between Northern Nigerian communities and Cameroon. For easy reference, the problems facing the different border communities, is identified below according to the Local Government Area the delineation falls on.

First, the study of border problems will begin from a place called Kumshe in Bama Local Government Area, Bornu State. Alhaji Zanna Arji Nome Sale, the District head of Woloji(1992), orated that, “the dispute between the people of Kumshe and the neighbouring Cameroonian authority started when there was a dispute on who owns the Kumshe Dam”⁵. The Cameroonians claimed this dam whilst the Nigerians disagreed with their claims causing a minor fracas between the two border communities. This difference was however resolved by their leaders⁶. Conversely, the problem in Gwoza is different from that of Kumshe. The problem has to do with a river called Kirawa. There are two points where the river changed course and these are at Kirawa and Balavraza. In Kirawa, due to flood the water could not be controlled, forcing the water to chart a different course leaving the old course to dry. The old course is the original boundary as both the communities in Nigeria and Cameroon recognise this fact. The fear of some Nigerians is that Cameroon in nearest future (post 1994) may disregard this fact and follow the new course of River Kirawa. At Belvraza, the river covered the land from the Nigerian side thereby changing its original course. It later joined the old course in a cyclic form at a point in the south of Belvraza systematically creating an artificial island on the Nigerian side⁷. Here likewise the old course has dried up and the Cameroonians are moving with the new course. The Cameroonian authorities because of this change of the course of Kirawa, now claim the area created by the change in river course as their territory.⁸ The Nigerian authorities disagrees and maintained that the boundary line cannot change with the course of the river stressing that the area created by the new course naturally belongs to them. The Cameroonians, nonetheless, disagreed with this assertion and this was the crux of the problem between the two nation’s boundary communities in that local government. However, in Adamawa state, at Ganye local government, to be precise at Toungo and Sugu District, the problem faced here is that the border community’s disagreed over where the precise border line is truly situated. Even though, an attempt was made in 1959 by the district officers on both sides to resolve the conflict, nothing has been done to award ownership of the area to either the Nigerian state or the Cameroonian state⁹.

The circumstance of Ganye local government is similar to that of Gwoza, of which, in this instance; the River Tiel changed its course to about one kilometre into the Nigerian boundary¹⁰. In this case, the Nigerian state, stuck to the old course of the River Tiel rather than the new course. Whilst the Cameroonians preferred the new course which had favoured them. Similarly in Mubi Local Government in Nigeria, in a place called Madugura, Cameroonian farmers were accused of coming into the Nigerian territory for farming. This offence also extends to Customs Officials at Burha (Cameroon), who were also accused of coming into Nigeria to perform their duty to the Cameroonian state¹¹. However, at a joint meeting between the representatives from Nigeria- Cameroon in February 12, 1980, it was resolved that farmers then farming on the disputed territory should continue to do so pending the authorities in Lagos (former capital of Nigeria) and Yaoundé were able to determine the actual boundary¹². In Bagira(Nigeria), the dispute arose because Cameroonians who settled on the Nigerian farmland refused to pay tax to the Nigerian authorities¹³. This dispute was resolved by the officials of the Mubi local government area (Nigeria) and Burha local government area (Cameroon) who met to settle the matter. Whereas at Mukta in Nigeria, some Cameroonians who settled on the Nigerian side to farm refused to pay to Nigerian authorities¹⁴.

In the same local government, there was a dispute between Sahinda and Giriburum in Nigeria and Mabizi in Cameroon. As a result of the dispute the following people met in 1973 and declared the place a no man’s land, those involved in this committee are:

NIGERIA

- a. Alhaji Umaru Leila, Senior Councillor, Mubi Native Authority
- b. A.B. Diya, Dangalandima of Mubi
- c. D.O. Mohammed Bawa
- d. Ardo Alim, village Head of Giriburum ¹⁵

CAMEROON

- a. D.O Haroun, Prefect of Bourha
- b. Alhaji Hassan, Chief of Bukula
- c. Mallam Maude, Village Head of Mabiji ¹⁶

Although an agreement was made, the Cameroonian later encroached on Nigerian soil and fell down Nigerian economic trees.¹⁷ In Madagali local government area (Nigeria), there is a village called Wula Hauko. This village was in Nigeria before, but between 1951 and 1957, part of it was excised to Cameroon ¹⁸. People close to the borders lines have built houses across the borderline and they move freely between Nigeria and Cameroon. The peculiar case of Hudu (Nigeria) or Bwande in Cameroon, should be mentioned, here the river separating the two countries disappeared underground for about two kilometres stretch and re-surfaced again. These two kilometres is now being claimed by Cameroonians.¹⁹

The length of the border between Taraba State and Cameroon is 107km. However, disputes occur from time to time in Taraba State. The disputes are as a result of the movement of cairn of stones from where they were originally piled into Nigerian territory by persons believed to be Cameroonians. In this way, Nigerian land easily falls into Cameroonian hands. It was also revealed that Cameroonians who farm on Nigerian territory on the basis of trust assume ownership of the land after some time. Tamiya and Ba Isa hamlets are also in dispute because a Cameroonian herdsman who used the area for a long period of time on a lease basis has denied this but instead claims the land belongs to him.

Contrary to the people's belief in Taraba, the boundary is not situated at River Abong because a recognised beacon still exists up the hill at Ndumlagi in Cameroon. The people of Abongshe pay tax to Cameroon due to the erroneous belief that River Abong is the boundary and therefore they live in Cameroonian territory. Abongshe is three kilometres after River Abong. Couple with these facts, Taraba, has about thirty villages and hamlets which are not reflected on the State map. There was also a need for Nigeria to recommend for Taraba the right legal instruments to adopt for the demarcation of their borderlines. The Nigerians were totally ignorant of the appropriate borderlines and as such was manipulated.

Appraisal of the Boundary Problem

From the evaluation of the boundary problem between Nigeria and Cameroon in Adamawa, Taraba, Benue and Bornu States respectively, the only applicable legal instrument which is recognised and respected by the people who live along these borderland areas on both sides is the Anglo French Declaration of 1931. Since the Anglo-French Declaration of 1931, several new villages have sprung up along the borderland while some other villages mentioned in the Treaty have also been deserted ²⁰. The study also noted that certain villages had expanded beyond Nigeria into the Cameroon and vice-versa. Some features used in the 1931 Treaty had disappeared.

The cairn of stones in some areas had either been removed by the Cameroonians or pushed extremely into Nigerian territory to change the position of the boundary. In some instances, according to the Nigerian Boundary Commission, "pillars have had to be removed and where possible, destroyed by the visiting Cameroonians in their attempt to distort the boundary"²¹; whilst in some border points, it was the rivers changing course that have been the source of disagreement among the border communities.

Nigerians in the border area accommodate the Cameroonian and sometimes allowing them to farm, fish and settle on Nigerian land.²² The negative effect of this is that it may cause confusion later. The local government district heads in the Nigerian area has been very helpful in resolving the boundary problems. Though the boundary is relatively peaceful, disputes do occur from time to time especially in Baro, Antere, Inkori, and Tamiya resulting from the removal of cairn of stones into Nigerian territory by people believed to be Cameroonians.²³ The Cameroon authorities had attempted to establish security post at Durfi, something strongly rejected by Nigerians.

There is very little Nigerian government presence in these border areas before the year 1994. This has made it possible for some inhabitants to cross-over to the Cameroonian side where government presence was better, in fact, before 1994 some Nigerian border towns were still been inaccessible by roads.²⁴ The poor infrastructure provided in the border areas in Nigeria makes it difficult for the communities to remain within their boundary areas. The effect of this was, however, to become pronounced after the attainment of democratic rule in 1999. There were also other factors that limit the boundary created by the colonial administration. The social, economic, and political crises highlighted can be traced to the historical datum below.

The Anglo-German decision of 1900-1901, which was, the adoption of a new boundary in the south between Nigeria and Cameroon to a new margin at the River Akpayafe, the following survey was carried out in subsequent years by the British and Germans: Yola to Lake Chad including the Arc in 1903-04 and accepted by Agreement between (No.284) Great Britain and Germany of 19th March, 1906.²⁵ The demarcation was jointly carried out by the British and the Germans. Yola to Cross River in 1907-09 carried out first by Britain and repeatedly by Germany in 1912-13. The Anglo-French Declaration of 9 January, 1931.²⁶ The declaration came to being as a result of the World War of 1914 when the forces of the United Kingdom and France conquered and

occupied German Cameroon into two administrative parts in 1919. The newly established boundary was eastwards of the Anglo- German boundary except for the segment of the Yola Arc²⁷. This Anglo-French boundary was agreed upon by an exchange of Notes of the two nations on January 9, 1931. In 1961, the British – Cameroon voted in a plebiscite for a union with Nigeria while its southern counterpart chose to unite with the Republic of Cameroon.²⁸ The result is a new Nigeria-Cameroon boundary alignment consisting of three distinct sections for Northern Nigeria, thus:

- i) Nigeria- Cameroon – Chad Tri-point in Lake Chad to Hosere Gesume based on the Anglo- French Declaration of January 9, 1931.
- ii) Hosere Gesume and Gamena river based on the British Order in Council of 16th January, 1923 and proclamation of the Governor of Nigeria, 1954.
- iii) Gomena River to the Gulf of Guinea based on Anglo-German Agreement of 11 March, 1913²⁹

Conclusion

At The Hague, the major contention was who the true owner of the Bakassi Peninsula is, but the study had proved that Nigerian boundary crisis with Cameroon was more complex and problematic than what has been portrayed through commentaries over the Bakassi Peninsula. The boundary crisis also extends to the borderlines in the Northern Region (Nigeria) between Nigeria and Cameroon. The boundary created by the colonial masters has been and still is a problem to those nations who inherited them. With the cession of a section of British Cameroon to the newly independent Republic of Cameroon, Nigeria has had to contend with an ill-defined border region. This is one of the reasons for the frequent border skirmishes between the two nations. The new era of Nigeria-Cameroon relations is not just that of neighbours at daggers drawn but also that of partners and brothers in progress, this is clearly demonstrated in the common body of organisations that they belong to and the bi-lateral trade, political, social and cultural agreements and accords signed by both countries.

However, the legal instruments that defines the relationship between the boundary of Nigeria and Cameroon in the North of Nigeria is the Anglo-French Declaration of January 9, 1931, British Council in Order of 16 January, 1923 and proclamation of the Governor of Nigeria of 9, September, 1954. The 1931 Anglo French declaration from the Tri point of Lake Chad to Hosere Gesume. The only problem envisaged with this treaty is the Ebeji River which has two wings. There were three possible options in resolving the problem.

- (i) Either of the two wings could be used.
- (ii) Nigeria or Cameroon could project the boundary line from Lake Chad to meet the Eastern wing.
- (iii) Or from Lake Chad to the point where the river split into two.³⁰

People have built houses across the borderlines and they move freely between Nigeria and Cameroon. This is a common feature along the border land areas and it is a function of cultural affinity and integration. Unless and until the border is clearly demarcated, the people would be confused as to what exactly constitutes our border with the Cameroonians. There is need for urgent demarcation of the border. As much as possible, law enforcement agents should not only be present in the border areas but must report any activity which may likely jeopardise Nigeria's interest. Finally, as the importance of keeping our borders safe and secure cannot be overemphasised, government should implement a policy of border development, as that would give the people a sense of belonging to Nigeria.

ENDNOTES

1. National Boundary Commission, Boundary Description (Lagos: Research and Documentation Centre, 1992), p.2
2. Ibid., p.2
3. National Boundary Commission, Report of the visit of the Sub- Committee to the Nigeria- Cameroon Land Border (Lagos: Research and Documentation Centre, 1991), p.5.
4. National Boundary Commission, Committee on Land and Maritime Border Committee (Lagos: Research and Documentation Centre, 1991), p.3
5. National Boundary Commission, Minutes of the Nigerian Team to the Nigerian – Cameroon Land and Maritime Border Committee (Lagos: Research and Documentation Centre, 1991), p.6
6. National Boundary Commission, Joint Meeting of Nigeria- Cameroon Land Border Committee of Experts, (Lagos: Research and Documentation Centre, 1991), p.1
7. National Boundary Commission, Committee on Land Boundary, p.3
8. Ibid., p.6
9. National Boundary Commission, Report of the visit of the Sub- Committee to the Nigeria- Cameroon Land Border, p.5
10. National Boundary Commission, Joint Meeting of Nigeria- Cameroon Land Border Committee of Experts, p2
11. Ibid., p8

12. Minutes of the Preparatory Team of the Nigerian Team to the Nigeria –Cameroon Land and Maritime Border Committee, held in the Conference Room of the Director (PRS), National Boundary Commission, 3, Force Road, Onikan, on Monday, 13th April, 1992
- 13 Ibid., p.5
- 14 National Boundary Commission, Committee on Land Boundary, p.3
- 15 National Boundary Commission, Report of the visit of the Sub Committee to the Nigeria- Cameroon Land Border, p.9
- 16 Ibid.
- 17 National Boundary Commission, Report of the Visit to Bornu and Adamawa States by Members of Sub-Committee on the Nigeria – Cameroon Land Border (Lagos: National Boundary Commission Records, 1991), p.10.
- 18 National Boundary Commission, Report of the Visit to Bornu, Benue, Taraba and Adamawa States by Members of Sub- Committee on the Nigeria – Cameroon Land Border (Lagos: National Boundary Commission Records, 1992), p.10.
- 19 National Boundary Commission, Committee on Land Boundary, p.7
- 20 National Boundary Commission, Report of the visit of the Sub Committee to the Nigeria- Cameroon Land Border, p.10
- 21 Ibid.
- 22 National Boundary Commission, Minutes of the Nigerian Team to the Nigerian – Cameroon Land and Maritime Border Committee (Lagos: Research and Documentation Centre, 1991), p.1
- 23 National Boundary Commission, Report of the Visit to Benue and Taraba States by Members of Sub-Committee on the Nigeria – Cameroon Land Border (Lagos: National Boundary Commission Records, 1991), p.5
- 24 Ibid.
- 25 National Boundary Commission, Joint Meeting of Nigeria- Cameroon Land Border Committee of Experts p.6,
- 26 National Boundary Commission, Committee on Land Boundary, p.1
- 27 Ibid,
- 28 National Boundary Commission, Committee on Land Boundary Communiqué (Lagos: National Boundary Commission Records, 1991), p.2
- 29 Nigeria to appeal Bakassi delay “. BBC News, 1 August, 2008. [http:// news.bbc.co.uk](http://news.bbc.co.uk). Retrieved 31 March 2010
- 30 National Boundary Commission, Joint Meeting of Nigeria- Cameroon Land Border Committee of Experts p.6,

The IISTE is a pioneer in the Open-Access hosting service and academic event management. The aim of the firm is Accelerating Global Knowledge Sharing.

More information about the firm can be found on the homepage:

<http://www.iiste.org>

CALL FOR JOURNAL PAPERS

There are more than 30 peer-reviewed academic journals hosted under the hosting platform.

Prospective authors of journals can find the submission instruction on the following page: <http://www.iiste.org/journals/> All the journals articles are available online to the readers all over the world without financial, legal, or technical barriers other than those inseparable from gaining access to the internet itself. Paper version of the journals is also available upon request of readers and authors.

MORE RESOURCES

Book publication information: <http://www.iiste.org/book/>

Academic conference: <http://www.iiste.org/conference/upcoming-conferences-call-for-paper/>

IISTE Knowledge Sharing Partners

EBSCO, Index Copernicus, Ulrich's Periodicals Directory, JournalTOCS, PKP Open Archives Harvester, Bielefeld Academic Search Engine, Elektronische Zeitschriftenbibliothek EZB, Open J-Gate, OCLC WorldCat, Universe Digital Library, NewJour, Google Scholar

