



Migrations across International Boundaries and the Nationality and Citizenship Question in South West Cameroon

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ABSTRACT

The Nigeria-Cameroon boundary from the Atlantic ocean to Lake Chad lack precise demarcation on the ground; its instability in time and the limited means for its policing from colonial times to date and the disregard of the borders by the vivisected but related ethnic groups, have overtime generated and maintained a variable fluidity of migrations across it by citizens of both countries to and fro the other. Currently, Nigerian migrants to Cameroon - particularly South West Cameroon - constitute by far the largest number of foreign residents in that country and they are referred to as “Cam-Gerians”. These migrations vary in size, character, motivation, destination and pre-occupation. It is indicated that these migrations were influenced by the changing political, economic security and demographic impact on both countries across their common borders; from the colonial era to date. These trans-border migrations, their trend, character including the British policy of encouraging immigration to south west Cameroon actuated the nationality and citizenship question in south west Cameroon. The paper suggests that since these “Cam-Gerians” are denied Cameroonian nationality and citizenship and exploited by their host, both countries should put in place institutional mechanisms that would guarantee the lives, properties and investments of the “Cam-Gerians”. The lessons of European trans-boundary regionalism are highlighted as policy options for both countries.

INTRODUCTION

International boundaries are known more in their barrier functions against aliens than as zones of contact between splintered groups and cultures. The Nigeria – Cameroon boundary from the Atlantic ocean to Lake Chad lack precise demarcation on the ground, its instability in time and the limited means for its policing from colonial times to date and the disregard of the borders by the divided and related ethnic groups – the Boki, Ejagham,

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Akwaya (in the Cross River Region and South West Cameroon), have over time generated and maintained a variable fluidity of movements across it by citizens of both countries to and fro the other.

The creators of the boundary, Britain – Germany and (later France), expected that it would function to include and exclude the nationals of their respective colonial spheres. Currently, Nigerian migrants to Cameroon, particularly South West Cameroon constitutes by far the largest number of foreign residents in that country. These migrations vary in size, character, motivation, destination and pre-occupation. These have also been influenced by the changing political, economic, security and demographic impact on both countries across their common borders. Most Nigerians migrated to Southern Cameroon during the Anglo-French condominium. Their host communities refer to them as “Cam-Gerians”. A term which implies that they are Cameroonians and Nigerians at the same time.

These trans-border flow from Nigeria to Cameroon, their trend, character including British policy of encouraging immigration that has led to the nationality and citizenship question in South West Cameroon is examined in the paper. It is suggested that since these “Cam-Gerians” are denied Cameroonian nationality and citizenship in spite of their long stay in that country and their enormous contributions to the development of their host communities, both countries should put in place institutional mechanisms that would guarantee the lives and properties of the “Cam-Gerians”. The lessons of European trans-boundary regionalism are high-lighted as imaginative policy options for both countries to draw from and to predicate African regional co-operation and integration on the realities of African history.

Colonial Partition And Migrations Across Borders

The arbitrarily drawn borders in the Cross River region and South Western Cameroon emerged from the interest creative will of the British and Germans during the partition of the African continent at the turn of the nineteenth century. From 1884 the Anglo German boundary in the Cross River Region divided, - the Boki, Ejagham and Becheve Akwaya, a culturally coherent area and the sea bed into two antagonistic systems. The establishment of the inter-colonial boundaries created obstacles to the free movement of peoples and goods. The colonial governments adopted policies both physical and fiscal to prevent the flow of goods and interactions among the divided but related kinship groups. Bonchuk (1977:180).

The currency used as a mean of exchange in the area also changed. Both the cowries, brass, and “Ogoja rods” which were used as a medium of exchange were replaced by British coins in 1900. Thus, one of the dire consequences of the establishment of the international boundary is the development of border markets at Ekang, Ikang, Biajua, Danare, Ekock, Ajassor, etc. The existence of distinct market conditions on both sides of the boundary and price differentials actuated a healthy smuggling business across

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boarders. Bonchuk (1997:230). The international migration to and from the two colonial spheres was occasioned by what Dioka referred to as “the push and pull” factors, which from colonial times to date have brought Nigerians to aggregate their survival instincts in the trade and settlement across borders. Dioka: (1993:40).

Migrations could be both temporary and permanent. During the colonial period attempts were made by the British to encourage migrations. When the First World War (1939-1945) broke out, Anglo-French forces captured “German Kamerun”. The British captured the area housing the German plantations and one of the challenges faced by British officials, was labour supply, and they adopted policies that favoured immigrations to Southern Cameroon.

As a British under Secretary pointed out in early 1915:

The immediate need is to reach an agreement for institution of an administrative system in the Cameroon’s capable of conserving the resources of the territory which appear to be in great danger of irreparable wastage. C.S.O. (1914:27).

The partition of German “Kamerun” was endorsed by the League of Nations in 1922 and each of the occupying powers was authorized to administer its portion of the former “Kamerun” as the League of Nations Mandate. France administered French Cameroon as an integral part of its central African possessions. Similarly, Britain administered the British Cameroon’s which was sub-divided into Southern and Northern Cameroon’s jointly with Nigeria.

The Mandate Agreement did help to regularize the practice of administering British Cameroon’s as part of Nigeria and provided for the proper administration of the territory. Britain was allowed to constitute adjacent possession under its sovereignty provided that measures adopted did not infringe on the provisions of the mandate. Osuntokun: (1975:47).

The supply of Cameroonian labour was insufficient to meet the demands of the plantations and in response to the irregular supply of labour, the British discussed but ultimately rejected the adoption of legally forced labour. However, British officials were unanimous in their opinion that the prosperity of the plantations depended on the availability of large amounts of cheap labour provided by immigrants from Nigeria and French Cameroon who were foreign to the ethnic communities of the plantation zone. Goodridge: (1987:16).

Since Buea and Victoria fell to the British forces it was necessary that Nigeria spare some of its staff in an effort to salvage the enormous capital invested in Cameroon particularly in the plantations. Labourers who were left on the estates after the German had been deported lacked the capacity to run the estates and the Nigerian Colonial government feared that the labourers would loot the estates. Goodridge: (1987:116).

Despite these measures, the question of labour remained the major problem of the plantations. In British Southern Cameroon’s the response to

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the depression (1929 – 1933) was crucial as agriculture formed the backbone of the colonial economy. The case for an agricultural sector dominated by plantations was led by the Administration Officer for the nation who suggested that a review of H. Clifford's land policy was essential. His contention was that the plantations were more likely to effect a speedier economic recovery than peasant production. He resorted to moral arguments to impress his views upon his superiors:

The question remains as to whether the sloth and lack of initiative of a small native population living in a large and potentially productive area is to be allowed to bar the opening up of a country and stand in the way of commercial enterprise which would demonstrate the advantages of improved method of cultivation. It is submitted that the answer to this question is in the negative. C.S.O. (1924:68).

While advocating a scheme of immigration to provide cheap labour for the plantations he claimed that the peoples of Kumba Division except the Balondo (Efut) were so inherently lazy as to be practically unemployable. The policy of encouraging immigration to the area, particularly after 1929, aggravated the "Stranger" question in British Southern Cameroon. Bunchuk (2000:84). Though the influence of "Strangers" in Victoria, Buea, Kumba etc acted as a major catalyst to administrative economic and social changes in the area, the presence of strangers became a problem to the natives of that province. For instance, "strangers" from Nigeria were attracted to Victoria and Kumba Divisions, and the commercial development of cocoa provided another incentive for immigrants especially from the Yoruba in Nigeria, the Bakkossi from French Cameroon and the various groups from the Bamenda Gross fields. Branye: (1933:160). British officials frequently argued that the people of Kumba and Victoria should not be allowed to retard the expansion of the colonial system and that "Strangers" are an "asset" to Southern Cameroon. See p. When at the Second World War, the League of Nations metamorphosed into the United Nations Organization, the status of the mandated territories was transmuted to that of the United Nations Trusteeship. The British in 1946 decided to settle "strangers" in enclaves especially the demobilized soldiers from Eastern Nigeria Roling. (1948:212).

This was a ploy to evict French Cameroonians, who, according to the official were not the right type of strangers; and that "the more French Cameroonian settlers we get, the fewer the vacancies for the surplus of Owerri, Onitsha and Calabar provinces which is not the least of our objectives in encouraging settlement in the Cameroons". The establishment of the Cameroon Development Corporation was to arrest the level of decay and attention was turned to Nigerians to fill the vacancies: Crozier: (1949:140).

In 1954, Southern Cameroon was accorded regional status and the original Anglo-German boundary became an inter-provincial boundary between Eastern Nigeria provinces of Ogoja and Calabar and South West

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Cameroon. The Eastern Nigerian boundary with South West Cameroon did not function at this period as a barrier against Nigerians. Thus, with favourable immigration policy Eastern Nigerians migrated in their thousands to take advantage of the lucrative smuggling across borders or to work in the colonial firms, civil service or to engage in petty trading, etc. Weladji (1981:30).

In 1961, the United Nations, at the behest of Britain organized plebiscites in the British Southern and Northern Cameroons. The electorate was asked to choose between independence by joining Nigeria (integration) or Cameroon (unification). Northern Cameroon opted for integration with Nigeria, while Southern Cameroon, partially influenced by the “Strangers” question went for re-unification. After 1961, and in spite of President A. Ahidjo’s Cameroonisation policy, and the Nigerian Civil War, (1967-1970), Nigerians, particularly of Igbo extraction migrated to South West Cameroon where they dominate the local economy. Weladji: (1930:150).

Nationality – Citizenship

Nationality can be described as the quality of character which arises from the fact of a person belonging to a nation. It is nationality that determines the political status of the individual especially with reference to allegiance, while domicile determines his civil status. Nationality arises by birth or nationalization, while citizenship refers to one who under the constitution and laws of a country is a member of a political community owing allegiance and being entitled to the enjoyment of all civil rights. Adigun: (1988:271).

An important distinguishing feature of nationality is that it deals mainly with the international aspects of the membership of a state while citizenship, deals with the municipal perspective of the same issue. In some contexts these terms nationality and citizenship are interchangeable. For example, nationality has both domestic and international jurisdiction of a state, it serves to determine the person upon whom it is conferred and who enjoys rights and is bound by obligations which the law of the state grants or imposes on its nationals.

In its international setting, it is the principal link between an individual and the subject of international law giving the individual the benefits of international law. Nationality therefore plays functional roles in matters that relate to treaty, rights and obligations, diplomatic action, immigration and deportation.

The concept of nationality is also capable of being used in relation to non-natural persons or objects such as corporations, ships, air-craft, etc. that possess a nationality of registration or to members of specific groups, example, a race or a nation. The constitutional definition of nationality places premium of formal membership of states.

In the scheme of Aristotle, he who has power to take part in the deliberations or judicial administration of any state is said to be a citizen, while the ancient Greeks distinguished citizens from aliens (barbarians).

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Arising from the above therefore, citizenship connotes a belonging to a political community and the status, rights and privileges including the degree of freedom enjoyed by the citizens of a particular rule. The political history of ancient Rome reveal that to be a citizen was the highest honour, this according to Aquinas could be in absolute or restricted sense. Citizenship status could also be extended to people based either on the principles of descent or by naturalization. Adigun: (1978:271).

After independence, African states began to distinguish citizens from aliens in order to exclude them in the competition for scarce resources needed for the development of their nascent states and this led to the sharpening of their borders.

Nationality, Citizenship And The “Camgerians” In South West Cameroon

Most Nigerians in South West Cameroon have lived there from colonial times when they migrated to work in the abandoned German plantations after 1913, while others were employees of the colonial civil service, trading firms, or as smugglers, petty traders, fishermen, cultivators of cash, crops etc. They are referred to as “Cam-Gerians” by their host communities, meaning that they are both Cameroonians and Nigerians. The “Cam – Gerians” are denied Cameroonian nationality and citizenship and treated inhumanly by the Cameroonian officials. Atem: (1981:130) “Neglected” by their country Nigeria, they live on a daily basis on constant fear of harassment, deportation and administrative levies.

These Nigerians control the informal economy in South West province up to the littoral area of Duala. Some of them operate as traders in the markets of Duala, others as fish mongers in the creeks of Ekondo Titi, while others are cultivators of coffee, yam, banana and plantain in Mamfe, Muyuka and Mbonge. In Buea and Molyko, they are experts in the hawking of fish and a native bean cake “ndolo” made from cassava. These “ndolo” vendors choose the evenings when the “Makossa” and “pantanga” music invade the air Jimoh (2001:12).

From South West province to the eastern portion of the Anglo French divide, Nigerian home movies (or home videos) dominate and invariably promote a culture of smuggling across borders, thus, contravening the Nigerian copy right and intellectual property laws and the loss of revenue to both governments is enormous.

For the Cam – Gerian cultivators in South West Cameroon, the land is super fertile and agricultural produce has a ready market locally and abroad, particularly Cameroonian bananas. From the coastal areas the shrimps are of high nutritional quality, while the native salad “okazi or afang” “ashi osse” (hot leaves and seeds) and other vegetables are usually destined for the Nigerian market through Boki, Ikom, Obudu, Ekock to Calabar, the Eastern states and even to Lagos and abroad. Politically, the Cam – Gerians are marginalized by the semi illiterate, over zealous Cameroonian Gendarmes.

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The question which arises is whether these Nigerians should remain “strangers” after over sixty years of their domicile in that country, and most of them have not visited their home country since they were born. Bonchuk: (2001:34).

A recent survey indicated that they are required to pay for Resident Permit and exit visas and are treated inhumanly. Some of them have acquired enormous wealth, have become landlords and local leaders. They are approximately over four million in the South West province alone and Cameroonian laws require that they pay 80,000CFA, excluding 20,000CFA administrative cost every four months.

Furthermore, even when these amounts are paid the same authorities still raid and arrest the Cam – Gerians on very flimsy excuses. Thus, whether they are domiciled in Kumba, Tiko, Buea, Eyummojock, and Ekok sub-divisions the Resident Permit has remained problematic and in most instances the population of the Cam – Gerians is above sixty percent of the entire population of such communities. From the oldest to the youngest child, they face harassment and most of them cannot afford these high rates, and are often more than not thrown into jail Jimoh (2001:12).

During the colonial period, these “strangers” contributed enormously to the development of these areas. These Cam – Gerians, offsprings of these “strangers”, whether they are merchants in Kumba, landlords in Limbe, poor fishermen operating at Ekondo – Titi or cultivators of cash crops at Muyuka have continued to control the local economy and contributing to the socio economic development of their host communities in spite of threats from the Cameroonian authorities.

It is a truism that some Cam – Gerians are involved in anti-social behaviour especially those in the creeks who are illiterates and cannot seek for protection from the Nigerian community. The Gendarmes take advantage of this scenario and dump them in detention camps most especially anytime the Bakassi issue assumes nationalistic fervent.

Policy Options

As managers of economic, social and cultural affairs, governments in Europe have become increasingly sensitive to pressures as well as to lures of global and regional interdependence. Also, non central governments and institutions have appeared in the international scene as co-actors in trans-border relations. They complement their central governments in matters of economic, social, ecological, labour migrations, human rights and the security of their nationals through trans-border regionalism. A trans-border regime is a set of rules and institutions formal and informal that aim at and succeed in regularizing neighbourhood behaviour, a set of procedures around which actors expectations converge. The aim of such regimes is an inter-sovereignty co-operation without an intention to dissolve the basic links with and political allegiance to the respective national systems, in the process transforming physical proximity to political intimacy. Asiwaju: (2000:37).

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Since Nigeria – Cameroon share political proximity, a common history with related ethnic groups along and astride their borders in the Cross River State of Nigeria and the South West Province of Cameroon, the two countries ought to evolve policies that would protect the safety and security of these discriminated and marginalized Nigerians in that country. This should find convergence with the notion of African integration which is predicated on the realities of African history, and premised on peoples.

Though both counties have diplomatic representations at the state centric level and have concluded various co-operation agreements in virtually all fields of human endeavour, much effort is still required by both states to utilize the micro-integration going on along and astride their borders to achieve the much desired macro integration. For example, in Western Europe conflicts arising from labour migration have been submerged in favour of mutual economic development and co-operative efforts to promote international mobility of peoples, goods services and information through the various channels provided by the European Union with the result that international boundaries have become increasingly permeable. Accompanying these developments, the right of foreigners including their investments are secured by legislation including the right to citizenship, freedom of expression, privileges and equal opportunity. In Africa, the concept of citizenship is based on colonial experience. Citizenship in the west is based on unique analysis of rights and duties. Until African states begin to negate the barrier functions of boundaries integration of their economics and the associated benefits cannot be attained.

The importance of trans-border co-operation between communities, states and regions have been officially recognized in Europe. All of the major governments have signed the European Outline Convention on Trans-frontier Co-operation between territorial Communities or Authorities, wherein they pledged to promote co-operation as far as possible and to contribute in this way to the economic and social progress of frontier regions and to the spirit of fellowship which unite the people of Europe. Chukwurah: (1992:14). The Regio – Basiliensis in the Alase – Baden – Basel region is a credible reference to the advancement of trans-border regionalism where migrant workers from Switzerland – Germany, France cross to and from the other and their investments secured. Bringer: (1986:46).

The principal difference between the Regio Basiliensis and the U. S. A. – Mexico borderlands is the degree of disparity in living standards between neighbouring counties. The relatively great differences in the U. S. A. – Mexico case on doubt contributes to different national and regional perspectives on such issues as international migration and commuting, environmental protection and economic development strategies. Hansen: (1986:35). Each country blames border misfortunes on the presence of “foreigners”. The U. S. is vexed by large numbers of Mexican – Americans living within its territory and seeks through formal means to keep further immigration under control. Mexicans regard their economic misfortunes as resulting from the loss of their claimed lands north of the present border and

from economic dependency on the powerful US. Economic system.

In like manner, the Cameroonians regard the numerical strength of the “Cam – Gerians” in the south west province and their control of the local economy as a vexed issue. The strong Nigerian economy via – a – vis that of Cameroon and the claim by Nigeria of the ownership of the Bakassi peninsula have compounded their relationships across borders particularly in the Cross River region and South West Cameroon Bonchuk. (2002:47). Nevertheless, while Western Europe, and the U.S. Mexico Canada are making conscious efforts to establish entities to engage in Cross border co-operation and problem solving agencies based on the doctrine of “Mutual Necessity” Nigeria – Cameroon are sharpening their borders and have made no meaningful attempts beyond declaratory policy to institutionalize a problem solving approach. Thus, if effective problem solving ventures are instituted, Nigeria – Cameroon can realistically resolve the vexed question of the security of the Cam – Gerians and their valuable investments.

Both counties should be persuaded to drop their conflictual posture and ground African regional integration efforts on the realities of African history. The contemporary history of Western Europe should be instructive enough Nigerian – Cameroon share much in common and in facing the challenges of integration they should be guided by the fact that the divided but related kinship groups in this segment of their common borders – the Boki, Ejagham, Becheve Akwaya, who were divided by the Anglo – German boundary of 1913 are yearning for closer interaction between themselves in spite of the political problems facing the two countries. The micro – integration formations going on along and astride the borders is a credible reminder that those groups disregard and resent the colonial borders. Cameroon in particular would benefit from integration as this would avail that country with Nigerian experts and funds and this would compliment the efforts of the Cam – Gerians who are contributing to the socio-economic development of the south west province. Currently, the Cameroonian constitution has not provided its “Cam – Gerians” an options for nationalization in that country. It is perceived that should nationality be granted them, the “Cam – Gerians” may control the politics of that country like its prdiars and Boors did in South Africa.

CONCLUSION

The paper examined integration across international boundaries and the nationality and citizenship question from colonial times to date in the South West province of Cameroon. British policy encouraged Nigerians and French Cameroonians to migrate to Southern Cameroon to work as plantation labourers in the abandoned German plantations, etc. It was indicated that this gave rise to the “stranger question” in British Southern Cameroon to 1961. The Cam – Gerians, are the offsprings of these “strangers” and particularly those who settled in the area during the Nigerian Civil War.

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These Cam – Gerians are denied Cameroonian nationality and citizenship, also, they are maltreated, marginalized, exploited administratively by their Cameroons overlords, though they control the local economy and contribute enormously to the socio-economic development of the area. At the level of policy, European Trans-boundary regionalism was enunciated as imaginative policy options for both countries. It was suggested that both countries should utilize the realities of African history particularly the micro-integration formations taking place along and astride the borders and ground wider regional integration efforts on these realities. Nigeria – Cameroon should be persuaded to abandon the militarization of their border and adopt problem solving approach, and institute through legislation measures that would safeguard the lives and properties of the Cam-Gerians in that country.

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