

Nigeria – Cameroon Border Relations: An Analysis of the Conflict and Cooperation (1970-2004)

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Abstract

The object of this paper is an examination of Nigeria – Cameroon border relations with special emphasis on the areas of conflict and co-operation from 1970 – 2004. The paper defines some key concepts like boundary, conflict, and cooperation. The paper traces the origin of the border conflict to the colonial period. The paper examines further the boarder situation before, during and after independence. The paper identifies the factors that were responsible for the boundary problems between the two countries and why amicable resolution was difficult to achieve. The paper made use of historical and descriptive method in analysing issues raised. The paper suggests means to achieve a level of understanding and good relations among the two countries.

Key words: Border, conflict, cooperation.

1. Conceptual Clarification

1.1. Boundary & Border

The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines boundary as a line that marks a limit, a dividing line and territorial claim, land or an area of land under the control of a country or ruler, or an area claimed as belonging to one person, group, or animal and defended against others who try to enter it¹ A Border, on the other hand is the part or edge of a surface or area that forms its outer part; it is the divide between two contiguous territorial units.² Geographically, borders and boundaries both denote lines of demarcation between areas or spheres of jurisdiction of defined authorities whether of individuals or groups, but while the former generally refers to lines of divide between sovereign entities, the latter may also apply to internal demarcations.³

International boundaries or borders comprise all the boundaries between any two nation States. They may be defined from point to point in a treaty, an arbitral award, or a boundary Commission report. The very important role of international boundaries in the recent times is underlined by prolonged negotiation and hard bargaining which often precede their settlement and also by the promptness with which states react against the violation of their territorial sovereignty.⁴

1.2. Conflict

Conflict is endemic in human society. It is a reality, which all societies from the pre- historic times till the present have witnessed at one time or the other. Conflict is a struggle over values and claims to scarce status, power and resources in which the aim of the opponent is to neutralise, injure or eliminate their rivals.⁵

Oxford advanced learner's Dictionary defines conflict as a situation in which people, groups or countries are involved in a serious disagreement or argument.⁶ When Nation – States in the international system distance on issues that concerns their national interest, conflict normally ensues; which if not properly managed can lead to war. Otite opined that conflict arises from the pursuit of divergent interests, goals, and aspirations by individuals and groups in defined social and physical environment.⁷ Simon; in his works "Crisis and conflict awaiting the state Actor" sees conflict as a common phenomenon in international politics, that nations are prone to enter into conflict, and crisis, especially when issues that concern their National interest are involved.⁸

Obiozor opined that conflict is an integral part of nature, which is usually expressed by human being and nations.⁹ He observed that conflict is usually hidden, but only manifest, when individual or collective interest is at stake. Conflict is functional and plays significant role in human and state affairs. Part of the roles conflict plays is to test the will of nation and the extent to which state actors can go in protecting the national interest in time of crisis. Bolaji Akinyemi in his study "Conflict, Peace and Security among the states" argued that conflict is structural in origin, inevitable and endemic to the modern organisation.¹⁰ The need to resolve conflictual cases in the international system led to the foundation of United Nations as International Organisation meant to foster peace and security. This suggests that state actors acknowledge the primary role of conflict in their relationship with one another.

Butros Butros Ghali in his treatise views conflict as disagreement between two Nations or groups of people. It is an expression of national disaffection over an issue at stake. Conflict according to him is a powerful process having potential for desirable and undesirable consequences. In the history of modern world, conflict at several times has led to war while wars had brought about profound changes.¹¹ Jide Osuntokun regarded the Nigeria – Cameroon relations as that of occasional friction, which is not permanent. That the diplomatic relation between Nigeria and Cameroon will continue irrespective of discord between the two states. This according to him was due to the commercial interaction that had long existed between the two countries before independence and which still existed to the present time. That the historical, cultural and trade relations between the two countries over ride occasional friction at the boarder.¹²

Bassay Atte, while examining the issue of political and boarder relations between Nigeria and Cameroon attributed the conflict between them to mutual distrust.¹³ that the government of the two states need to remove the seed of discord in order to actualise the goals and aspiration of ECOWAS.

2. Back Ground to the Study

Border conflicts are some of those problems that constitute a grave and permanent factor of dissension among nations¹⁴. Nigeria and Cameroon conflict is one of those cases. Nigeria and Cameroon are located on the West Coast of the Continent of Africa. Both of them shared common political and economic institutions as part of British West Africa. Nigeria with the population of about 150 million covers a land area of 924,630km extending from the Gulf of Guinea in the South to Niger and Chad Republics in the North. It shares common border with the Republic of Benin on the West and the Republic of Cameroon on the East.¹⁵ Cameroon on the other hand is a smaller country both in land mass and in population. The population of Cameroon is estimated at 9.7 million, occupying an area of 475,442km. Cameroon shares borders with the Chad Republic on the North, with the Central African Republic on the North-West, with the Republic of Gabon and the People's Republic of Congo on the South and with Nigeria on the West.¹⁶

The boundary dispute between Nigeria and Cameroon Republic which was engendered by the long but not clearly defined border (1680 kilometres or 1050 miles) could be traced to the pre-colonial period when the European imperialist sat at Berlin in the year 1884 to partition the Continent of Africa among themselves. However, the boundary dispute had remained a source of conflict in the bi-lateral relations of the two countries since independence.¹⁷ The line which emerged as the first section of the Eastern International Boundary of Nigeria was the Rio-del Rey – Yola line described in the Anglo –German agreements of 1885 and 1886. This is the Eastern Nigeria – Western Cameroon International boundary. This Zone includes the territory watered by the Cross River and its tributaries issuing from the Cameroon Mountains and the Plateau of Bemanda.¹⁸ The region near the Coast is a low –lying plain, swampy, encumbered with mangrove trees.

Further to the East, the massive bulk of the Cameroon Mountains rises to a height of 13,350 feet. Its lower slope to the West is also covered with dense forest, to the North; it falls away into thickly wooded country which gradually gives way to the grasslands of the Bemanda Plateau and North Ogoja.¹⁹ The first Anglo-German agreement in respect of the Nigerian-Cameroon boundary was signed in 1885. The 1885 agreement only provided a map – based description from a point between Longitude 89° 42' and 80° 46' East at which Rio del Rey entered the sea to the Cross River Rapids.²⁰ This line was extended North-eastwards to Yola by a convention of July-August, 1886. In an agreement signed on the first of July 1890, a slight modification was made on the line from the coast to the Cross River when it was discovered that there was no river named 'Rio del Rey'.²¹ Thus the starting point was adjusted to the head of Rio del Rey Creek. Following the Berlin Convention of November 1893 between Britain and Germany, an agreement was signed that defines the Nigeria –Cameroon boundary from Yola to Lake Chad. In all, the boundary between Nigeria and Cameroon by 1893 had been defined to a point on the Southern Shore of Lake Chad 35 minutes east of the Meridian of the centre of the town of Kuka.²² The boundary line gave no consideration for physical features or the ethnic boundaries. The Borno kingdom was split into two. Similarly, Adamawa and Marghi were each divided between Germany and Great Britain.²³

In 1903, the Anglo-German demarcation Commission surveyed the Yola region and the area to the North. They attempted to locate the Yola arc but latter abandoned it and substituted it with a line through the confluence of the Benue and Fao River. to Bayere.. This boundary eventually formed the basis of the final Anglo-German agreement in respect of a definitive boundary²⁴. On October, 1910, another agreement was signed between Britain and Germany on the demarcation of Yola sea boundary, which according to Anene proved to be the most difficult and intractable boundary to be drawn in the Cross River Akpayafe estuary area²⁵ Moreover, Article 19 and 20 of the 1909 Anglo-German agreement states inter alia that: “should the talweg of the lower Akwayafe upstream from the line Bakassi point – King point change its position, in such a way as to affect the relative position of the Talweg and the Mangrove Island, a new adjustment of the boundary shall be made. On the basis of the new positions as determined by a map to be made for the purpose. (And), should the lower course of Akwayafe so change its mouth as to transfer it to Rio del Rey, it is agreed that the area now known as the Bakassi Peninsula shall still remain German territory. The same condition applies to any portion of territory now agreed to as being British which may be cut off in similar way.²⁶

Furthermore, the agreement equally allows both the Germans and the British ships to make use of the most navigable course between the open sea and the Akwayafe River. It was further agreed that the marking or dredging of the navigable waterways of the Akwayafe River from three miles limit “landward” could be carried out either by the German or British Government or both based on agreement between the two powers. It was equally stated in the agreement that the fishing rights of the native population of the Bakassi Peninsula in the estuary of the Cross River shall remain as they were before the demarcation.²⁷ Generally, the delimitation of Nigeria Cameroon boundary was very slow; as a result, the Germans were reported to have crossed the boundary frequently to take over some important towns in the British territories. The West African Association of Liverpool had to show concern in 1900, imploring the British Government to find solution to the boundary problem quickly, so as to prevent further encroachment.²⁸

The people occupying the Nigeria- Cameroon boundary zone falls into two categories- the Bantu and the semi Bantu²⁹. The Zone is considered to be the borderland between the Bantu and the Semi-Bantu speaking peoples. It is however difficult to establish a clear cut demarcation between the two linguistic groups. The Bantu-speaking peoples include the Abaw, the Bakundu, the Balundu, and the Balung. They could also be found around the Western area of the Cameroon Mountains. The Semi-Bantu have been categorised to include the Efik, the Ibiobio, the Ekoi, the Boki, and many heterogeneous elements found along the Cross River. Others such as the Iyala, the Yache and small intrusive groups from the Benue valley found around the North of the Cross River Bend also belong to the Semi-Bantu.³⁰ Prior to colonialism, the Nigerian-Cameroon relationships at the beginning flourished due to shared geographical boundary, commercial contacts and social relations among the people and their local chiefs. It was on record that the chiefs of Calabar in Nigeria had diplomatic relations with their neighbours in Western Cameroon³¹ For instance, the Negroid, the Bantu and Fulani ethnic groups who falls within 'Niger –Congo' have contacts with the Bantu that occupy part of the Cross River State of Nigeria, from where they extend to the Southern forest region of Cameroon. The colonial powers partitioned Africa without any recourse to existing political and ethnic structures. That is why one finds people of the same language, culture, tribe and ancestral affinities separated into different countries.

For instance, ethnic groups such as Egun, Yoruba, Ibariba, Ewe, Mende, Hausa, Fulani etc are found in different sides of international boundaries.³² Hence, the origin of the International boundary dispute in Africa in general and that of Nigeria-Cameroon border dispute in particular could be traced to the forceful alignment of ethnic nationalities of different cultures, tradition and languages. Ironically, the colonial officers who never knew most part of Africa resorted to drawing lines on maps, giving away lands, mountains, Rivers and lakes to one another without the consent of the indigenous people. The cordial relations and the peaceful co-existence between Nigeria and Cameroon however continued during the early days of colonialism when Western Cameroon became a British Protectorate in the aftermath of World War 1. Thus, Nigeria and Western Cameroon were governed by Britain as a single colonial possession. This development however further strengthened the friendly relations between the two countries.

3. The Origin of the Border Conflict

The origin of the border conflict between Nigeria and the Republic of Cameroon could be traced to the colonial period. On August 6th 1861, an agreement was concluded between King Dosumu and the British Crown in which the latter agreed to cede Lagos to the British Crown and by 1862, Lagos was proclaimed a colony³³. In the same vein, on September 10, 1884, similar agreement was signed between the kings and chiefs of old Calabar and the British government. In this agreement, the British government agreed to protect all the territories controlled by the Obong of Calabar, and true enough, Bakassi was one of these territories. The Bakassi was under the jurisdiction of the Efik Kingdom as at the time the September 10, 1884 agreement was signed.³⁴ The political and commercial hegemony enjoyed by Britain in the West African Coast soon came to an end as the Germans on July 14th, 1884 under the German Consul General, Dr. Nachtigal entered into treaty agreement with two Douala chiefs.³⁵ This was followed by hoisting of German flags in Douala and Bimba which belonged to Cameroon. Although Germany by 1880 has had contacts with the Cameroonian people, one could say that Cameroon as a political entity came into existence by virtue of the treaty mentioned above. Thus, the identification of Cameroon as a political unit in this area brought to the fore the question of demarcation of spheres of influence between Britain and Germany, thus leading to the establishment of boundaries.³⁶

This development marked the beginning of rivalry and conflict between Britain and Germany over their colonial possessions and which was eventually inherited by the two West African Countries even after independence. The British authorities made series of attempts to keep the German's away from the West Coast of Africa but to no avail. The Germans made it difficult for Britain to enjoy a free maritime passage from Lagos to Victoria. It was only after the Berlin West African Conference in 1885, where Britain accepted to pay compensation to Germany did Germany allow Britain to have uninterrupted passage from Lagos to the Niger Delta.³⁷ While the rivalry was between Britain and Germany in the Southern Nigeria, the struggle in the North was complicated by France. This was more pronounced in Muri and Yola regions of Northern Nigeria. In an attempt to put an end to French activities in this part of Africa, both the British and the Germans decided to put aside their differences and cooperate to fight a common enemy, i.e. France.³⁸

Consequent upon the First World War and the eventual ejection of the Germans by the allied powers, all German overseas territories including Cameroon were taken away from her. Hence, the Nigerian- Cameroon international boundary was no more a matter of Anglo-German concern, but rather between Britain and France.³⁹ On February, 1916, Britain and France met in London with the aim of drawing a temporary line to demarcate their respective administrative areas. Consequently, a line known as 'Picot line' was named after the French chief delegate was agreed upon. As its former colonial master, France had always supported Cameroon in her struggle for the ownership of Bakassi Peninsula. France had always given serious backing to Cameroon in order to further her political and economic interests in the sub-region.⁴⁰ By 1919, a formal agreement was signed between Britain and France on a new boundary line. Following the splitting of Cameroon between Britain and France under the League of Nations mandate⁴¹, the International boundary became virtually a regional boundary between Eastern Nigeria and Southern Cameroon. The same situation was applicable to the Northern portions of both countries.

4. The Nature of the Relationship after Independence

After independence, the relationship between the two Neighbours – Nigeria and Cameroon- have been beneficial to the government and individual citizens of both countries.

In the Northern sections of the two Countries, grazing lands are commonly used in some areas, for example, around Adamawa and Mandara Hills, grazers gain from this cooperation, and the government of both countries equally derive revenue from tax payer's money. The fishermen from both sides jointly use the local rivers for fishing and other domestic purposes.⁴² The trend of Nigeria-Cameroon Relationship underwent some changes in the middle 1960s. It was characterised by disharmony and inherently conflict prone. This was partly due to the influence exerted by France and the leadership role of Nigeria in the sub-region; although, the rulers of these respective countries in the sub-region often attempted to portray an impression of cordiality in their official relationship. On a serious note, Nigeria relations with Cameroon from 1970-1980 have been characterised by mutual suspicion, distrust and alienation.⁴³

The situation of rivalry and disharmony had perhaps been more pronounced in Nigeria-Cameroon border more than any others. This was not unconnected with some actions and decisions taken by Nigerian government which Cameroon regarded as out of place. Cameroon accused Nigerian government on the following grounds That Nigeria used her influence through Lake Chad Basin Commission⁴⁴ to get Niger and Chad on her side. Secondly, that Nigerian fishermen have been fishing on their own side of the Lake to the detriment of the Cameroonians, that Nigerian fishing boats plunder their waters with the support of Nigerian Navy using Cameroon as a dumping ground, whereas the trading activities should be on mutual considerations between the two countries. On the boundary issue, the Cameroonians regarded Nigeria as carving out an expansionist policy to grab more land from small and weak Cameroon. In fact, the Cameroonian authority is of the opinion that Nigerian government masterminded the result of the referendum in 1959 in the former Northern section of the British controlled Cameroon, that Nigerian government sent in thousands of Nigerians to vote against the idea of uniting with Cameroon.⁴⁵

Furthermore, the Cameroonian authority regarded Nigerian claim to the ownership of Bakassi Peninsula as an attempt by the Nigerian government to grab more territories from Cameroon. This according to the Cameroonians was regarded as unacceptable and would not be allowed to take place. Hence they were prepared to use all diplomatic means available to block what they regarded as Nigeria's territorial expansionist policy.⁴⁶

5. Nigeria Foreign Policy

Nigeria became an independent Nation in October 1960. Having become a sovereign Nation, Nigeria set before it foreign policy goals and objectives. Among these are: Peaceful coexistence with other sovereign Nations; Respect for the territorial integrity of other states. The protection of her National territorial integrity.⁴⁷ In order to actualise the above objectives, the Federal government established and maintained diplomatic relations with her immediate neighbours⁴⁸. Of all the countries that shares border with Nigeria, Cameroon has given Nigeria probably the most difficult time. This arose from the border which spans about 1030 kilometres right from the Lake Chad in the North to the Atlantic Ocean. Although, about 1000 kilometres of the border have been demarcated, between 1884 and 1975, the last 50 kilometres towards the sea have generated quite a lot of controversies which at times had almost degenerated to a full scale war.⁴⁹ The Cameroonian authorities had always contended that the Bakassi Peninsula belonged to them. They had always referred to Article 20 of the 1913 Anglo-German agreement.⁵⁰ About 18 villages are affected, and Cameroon has gone ahead to rename and effectively occupy some of them. Their security forces have consistently harassed Nigerian border towns and villages.

Perhaps one major reason that heightened the conflict in the Southern part is the mineral (oil) potential of the area.⁵¹ Over 90% of Cameroon oil deposit is in this area. Cameroon gendarmes have in recent past killed Nigerian soldiers at the border post. The Cameroonian authorities have at different times detained and beat Nigerian business men, while genuine Nigerian traders have been deported home. Nigeria's relations with Cameroon did not experience significant improvement in the 1990s. It was marked by dichotomy between political and economic relations at the bilateral level. Political relations have not been allowed to develop and on general note, it could be described as uneasy relations. The existence of this dichotomy created the impression that Nigeria – Cameroon is not likely to reach any positive bi-lateral compromise. As pointed out earlier, the influence exerted by France made things difficult for Nigerian government in their external relations with Cameroon. The French international stature and hegemony with her former colonial possession served as a stumbling block to ideal Nigeria – Cameroon relations.

6. The Bakassi Peninsula

The issue as to the ownership of Bakkassi has for a long time become a contending issue in Nigeria –Cameroon relationship. It has led to boundary diplomatic intrigues and conflicts between the two countries.⁵² Bakassi Peninsula is a strategic territory located in the South Eastern part of Nigeria, and Western part of Cameroon. It is adjacent to the border between Cameroon and Nigeria. The swampy Peninsula cut by a series of channels, covers an area of 50sq km. In 1884, Britain signed a treaty of protection with indigenous rulers that gave Britain control over the Peninsula. Subsequently however, the area was included in German colony as a result of the 1913 agreement between Germany and Britain. From the end of the First World War to the independence of Cameroon in 1960, the Bakkassi Peninsula and present day South Western Cameroon were administered by Britain as part of Nigeria.⁵³

Geographically, the Bakassi Peninsula is bounded to the East by Rio-de-Rey, to the North-West by Akpayafe, to the West by estuary of Cross River and to the South by the Atlantic Ocean. It is an extension of old Calabar territory in terms of language, culture and ancestral affinity. It covers about 1000 square kilometres or 400 square miles. Located around the forest zone of South Eastern Nigeria, the Weather is wet with an annual rainfall of about 2800mm. It has about 47 villages. The population is about 600,000. The primary occupation of the people is fishing and it is inhabited by the Efiks from Cross River State, the Ibibios, Annags, Orons and Andionis from Akwa-Ibom state as well as the Ijaws and Itshekiri from Rivers, Bayelsa and Delta States.⁵⁴ Apart from crude oil, the presence of the deep Sea which was claimed to have been very rich in living creatures such as fish, shrimps, prawns and lobsters. The Sea was acknowledged to have the largest concentration of shrimps and fishes in the world.⁵⁵ The Bakassi Peninsula is important to the extent that many European and Asian Countries, especially Japanese have industrial vessels which catches fish in the area. The Bakassi Peninsula, before it became a subject at all was Nigeria. Article1 of the treaty between the Kings and Chiefs of Old Calabar and Britain signed on Sept. 10, 1884 attests to this fact. In the agreement, the British Government agreed to protect all the territories controlled by the Obong of Calabar, the Bakassi was one of the territories.

In 1991, the Nigerian government claimed that the Peninsula was still legally part of Nigeria. Cameroon countered the claim with an agreement signed during the Nigerian civil war (1967-1970) by Nigerian military ruler, Yakubu Gowon, which ceded the territory to Cameroon. Nigeria disputed the agreement and in early1994, invaded the Peninsula. Fighting ensued but latter gave way to diplomacy by the end of the year.¹⁷ but armed clashes resumed in 1996. Cameroon requested that the matter be taken to the International Court of Justice for arbitration. ICJ ordered both countries to cease hostilities. In October, 2002, the ICJ ruled that the Peninsula belonged to Cameroon on the basis of 1913 agreement, and ordered Nigerian forces to leave the area; however, they continued to occupy the region until the dispute was finally resolved in favour of Cameroon in 2006. In view of its geographical location, Bakassi Peninsula is strategically important to Nigeria. The area constitutes an external environment for defence. From Nigerian experience during the civil war of 1967-1970, it was clearly revealed that Nigeria political stability could be undermined by foreign enemy who could use the place as a base to destabilise the country. The proximity of Bakassi to Nigeria made it mandatory for the Federal government.

Nigeria and Cameroon need each other to survive. This is because of the fact that both of them are members of the same International Organisations and agencies, the most important of which are the African Union (AU) formerly known as the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), and the Economic Community of West African States. The expected role of these International Organisations to fostering peace and unity among the two countries is worthy of further analysis.

7. The African Union.

The Organisation of African Unity, (now called African Union) was formed in May, 1963. A charter establishing the all-African Organisation under the heading ‘Organisation of African Unity’ was signed by 32 Heads of States and Government by1999, the membership of the Organisation had grown to ⁵⁵. The objective of the Organisation is:

- a. To achieve greater unity and solidarity in Africa.
- b. To defend the Sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of member states.

- c. To accelerate the political and socio-economic integration of the Continent
- d. To promote and defend African common position on issues of interest to the continent.
- e. To encourage international cooperation and promote peace, security and stability of the Continent.
- f. To promote democratic principles and institutions, popular participation and good governance.
- g. To promote sustainable development at the economic, social and cultural levels;
- h. To promote cooperation in all fields of human activity and raise the living standards of African people.
- i. To coordinate and harmonise the policies between the existing and future regional economic communities.
- j. To promote Research in all fields particularly in the area of Science and Technology.
- g. To work with relevant international partners in the eradication of preventable diseases and promote good health in the Continent.

The fact that Nigeria and Cameroon are both members of the African Union did not help matters as far as achieving peaceful relationship was concerned. Rather than employing dialogue and seeking amicable resolution of the conflict, Cameroonian authorities had gone to the United Nations and had despatched series of delegations to several countries within and outside Africa. All these attempts were directed at portraying Nigeria as an aggressor thereby discrediting her among the committee of Nations. The idea was to convince the world that Nigeria lacks any moral or legal claim to all the Nigerian towns and villages on the Bakassi Peninsula.

In furtherance of externalising the border problem which should have been resolved amicably among two sister African countries, Cameroon went ahead to seek for a deployment of a number of French troops, apparently to defend the country against an imagined attack from Nigeria. Thus, a minor misunderstanding between two- sister African countries was being allowed to degenerate into a conflict involving other military powers from outside Africa.

8. Why was Amicable Resolution Difficult?

One major factor that heightened tension between Nigeria and Cameroon was the presence of oil at the disputed region. History has shown that when territorial disputes are directly or indirectly linked with the existence of oil in a particular area, such disputes had always been very difficult to resolve.⁵⁵ The Nigeria –Cameroon border dispute might not have taken the shape and dimension it has taken if not for the presence of petroleum and gas products. Going down the memory lane, the discovery of oil in Nigeria dates back to 1908,⁵⁶ when the initial attempt to find oil in Nigeria was made by a German Company named Nigerian Bitumen Corporation. The initial effort made by this German Company was interrupted by the First World War of 1914. In 1938, another attempt was made by one Anglo-Dutch Consortium called Shell D'Arcy which was latter re-named Shell British Petroleum Development Company of Nigeria.⁵⁷

The search for oil continued throughout 1950s when it was discovered in commercial quantities.

Cameroon on the other hand entered the oil race in 1977; it was then that an estimated 100 million tones of oil reserves was discovered along the basin of Rio del Rey.⁵⁸ By 1987, Cameroon had produced about 9 million tones of oil thereby putting it in a third position among the oil exporting countries in West Africa after Nigeria and Gabon. Apart from oil, gas also had been discovered in commercial quantity in the region of Rio del Rey, Douala, and Kribi.

Consequent upon the discovery of oil wells along the border zone, relations had taken a more contentious dimension as both Nigeria and Cameroon began to clamour for the ownership of the border region which was discovered to be very rich in oil wells. The competition that ensued led to series of skirmishes and conflict as they both laid claim to the oil rich border region. This was a major factor that made the resolution of the border conflict almost difficult if not intractable.⁵⁹ Another factor that complicated the Niger-Cameroon border relations was the maritime importance of Bakassi Peninsula to Cameroon. Cameroon is a country that was bordered by sea but then has no access to international waters.⁶⁰ This was due to the presence of the Island of Equatorial Guinea and Sao-Tome and Principe.

Cameroon wanted to have access to international waters at all cost, and the only option available to her was to possess the ownership of Bakassi. This would give her unrestricted access to International waters.⁶¹

9. Conclusion and Recommendation

This paper has attempted an analysis of Nigeria – Cameroon border relations paying particular attention to the areas of conflict and cooperation from 1970 – 2004. The study identified the various factors that were responsible for the border conflict such as: the unstable border lines between the two nations which was due to boundary adjustment and re-adjustment by the colonialists; the irredentist claims on the part of each others land area; the activities of the citizens living around the border; and the availability of potential economic resources in the South Eastern part of the country where oil is found in commercial quantity.

The study therefore recommended that Nigeria government should set up a permanent Boundary Commission comprising of people from various disciplines, most importantly historians who are experts in the history of that particular area in question to look at the issues of Nigeria's International and intra-national borders; That all demarcations should take place transparently through official Joint Commission in consultation with the local people; that Non-Governmental organisation and community groups be encouraged to engage in dispute mediation and border monitoring; that international donors should be encouraged to develop peace building projects that cut across borders.

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