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THE ANGLOPHONE CAMEROON-NIGERIA BOUNDARY: OPPORTUNITIES AND CONFLICTS

PIET KONINGS

ABSTRACT

Recent studies of African boundaries have tended to focus either on the growing number of border disputes between states or on frontier regions that are said to offer local inhabitants a wide range of economic opportunities. This article attempts to combine both approaches and to demonstrate the ambiguous nature of the Anglophone Cameroon-Nigeria border. On the one hand, the border has been subject to regular skirmishes between Cameroon and Nigeria, culminating in a protracted war over the sovereignty of the Bakassi peninsula — an area rich in oil reserves. On the other hand, it has for historical and economic reasons never constituted a real barrier to cross-border movements of labour and goods. The large Nigerian migrant community in Anglophone Cameroon, in particular, has been able to benefit from formal and informal cross-border trade for a long time. Unsurprisingly, its dominant position in the host community's commercial sector has been a continuous source of conflict.

OF LATE, AFRICANISTS HAVE DEVELOPED A RENEWED INTEREST in the study of colonially negotiated borders,¹ and the remarkable increase in boundary disputes between and within African states has been the focus of several recent studies. For a long time after independence border skirmishes and wars between African states were relatively rare, and governments more or less adhered to the sacrosanct nature of the boundaries inherited from colonial times (the principle of *uti possedetis jus*), as laid down in the 1963 charter of the Organization of African Unity (OAU). At present, however, African states are involved in numerous boundary disputes, such as those

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1. See, for instance, P. Nugent and A. I. Asiwaju (eds), *African Boundaries: Barriers, conduits and opportunities* (Frances Pinter, London, 1996); D. C. Bach (ed.), *Regionalisation in Africa: Integration and disintegration* (James Currey, Oxford, 1999); A. Mbembe, 'At the edge of the world: territoriality and sovereignty in Africa', *Codesria Bulletin* 3–4 (1999), pp. 4–16; J. Herbst, *States and Power in Africa: Comparative lessons in authority and control* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 2000); P. Nugent, *Smugglers, Secessionists and Loyal Citizens on the Ghana-Togo Frontier* (James Currey, Oxford, 2002); K. Bennafla, *Le Commerce Frontalier en Afrique Centrale: Acteurs, espaces, pratiques* (Karthala, Paris, 2002).

between Ethiopia and its neighbours in the Horn of Africa,² between Nigeria and its neighbours, and between the Democratic Republic of Congo and its neighbours. According to Mbembe,³ most of these disputes have their origins 'not in the desire to make an ethno-cultural space coincide with the space of the state, but rather in the struggle to control resources considered to be vital'. Moreover, the recent political liberalization process has created more space for separatist and irredentist movements within African states, as evidenced in Senegal (Casamance), in Cameroon (the Anglophone region), in Angola (the Cabinda enclave) and in Namibia (the Caprivi Strip).⁴

Other studies focus on African border regions. They maintain that African boundaries are essentially permeable, constituting no significant barrier to the cross-border movement of labour and goods. They even claim that African boundaries stimulate formal and informal cross-border trade, representing zones of opportunity for capital accumulation.⁵ Nonetheless, they point out that relations between host and migrant communities in these areas are seldom without conflict. Severe confrontations may even occur when the 'autochthonous' or 'national' population sees 'strangers' and 'foreigners' as a threat in demographic, economic and political terms. Such confrontations are often instigated or fanned by political entrepreneurs.⁶

This article focuses on the Anglophone Cameroon-Nigeria boundary, a study of which enables the two approaches outlined above to be combined. On the one hand, this border has become a continuous bone of contention between the Cameroonian and Nigerian states since soon after independence. Regular border skirmishes raised international attention in the 1990s when the two sides became involved in a protracted war over the sovereignty of the Bakassi peninsula — an area rich in oil reserves. On the other hand, this border has never hindered the large-scale circulation of people and goods in the borderlands. The focus in the article is on the massive Nigerian migrant community in Anglophone Cameroon and its exploitation of the economic opportunities offered by its host region and cross-border trade.

2. J. Abbink, 'Briefing: the Eritrean-Ethiopian border dispute', *African Affairs* 97, 389 (1998), pp. 551–65; J. Abbink, 'Ethiopia-Eritrea: proxy wars and prospects of peace in the Horn of Africa', *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 21, 3 (2003), pp. 407–25.

3. Mbembe, 'At the edge of the world', p. 9.

4. P. Konings and F. B. Nyamnjoh, *Negotiating an Anglophone Identity: A study of the politics of recognition and representation in Cameroon*, Afrika-Studiecentrum Series, Vol. 1 (Brill, Leiden, 2003).

5. Cf. V. G. Fanso, 'Traditional and colonial African boundaries: concepts and functions in inter-group relations', *Présence Africaine* 139, 3 (1986), pp. 58–75; Nugent and Asiwaju, *African Boundaries*; and Bennafla, *Le Commerce frontalier*.

6. P. Konings, 'Mobility and exclusion: conflicts between autochthons and allochthons during political liberalization in Cameroon', in M. de Bruijn, R. van Dijk and D. Foeken (eds), *Mobile Africa: Changing patterns of movement in Africa and beyond* (Brill, African Dynamics, Vol. 1, Leiden, 2001), pp. 169–94.

The article is divided into three sections. In the first section, I argue that there was no real boundary between Anglophone Cameroon and Nigeria during the British mandate and trust eras when Anglophone Cameroon was administered as an integral part of Nigeria. This resulted in the large-scale migration of Nigerians, in particular those originating from the densely populated Igbo region, to Anglophone Cameroon. Due to their higher level of education and business acumen, Igbo migrants soon came to dominate the local public service and economy. It is beyond doubt that local resentment of Igbo dominance, fuelled by Anglophone Cameroonian nationalist leaders, was one of the principal reasons for the majority vote in the so-called Southern Cameroons for reunification with Francophone Cameroon rather than for integration into Nigeria during the 1961 plebiscite organized by the United Nations.

In the second section, I show that the reunification of Anglophone and Francophone Cameroon created a real border between Anglophone Cameroon and Nigeria, leading to a dramatic change in the identity and economic opportunities of the Nigerian migrants. Henceforth, they were not only transformed from citizens into foreigners but were also excluded from a wide range of employment activities. Unexpectedly, these profound changes have neither stopped nor reduced Nigerian migration. On the contrary, the flow of Nigerians to Anglophone Cameroon even appears to have increased. Nigerian migrants seem to be taking advantage of the different monetary systems on both sides of the border and the extremely favourable exchange rate of the CFA franc compared with the Nigerian naira to specialize in formal and informal cross-border trade. Employing their ethnic networks that stretch from Anglophone Cameroon to Nigeria, they have acquired a dominant position and, in some cases, even a monopoly in the Anglophone Cameroonian commercial sector. They have also devised certain strategies to cope with repeated harassment by the local authorities and the forces of law and order and with their status as a foreign, but economically dominant, minority group in Anglophone Cameroonian society.

In the third section, I first outline some of the underlying reasons for the frequent border disputes between the Cameroonian and Nigerian states since independence, culminating in the Bakassi conflict in the 1990s, and then explore their impact on relations between the Anglophone Cameroonian and Nigerian immigrant populations. Subsequently, I explain why the 2002 verdict of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) on the Bakassi conflict in favour of Cameroon has been hotly contested by both the Nigerian inhabitants of the Bakassi peninsula and Anglophone secessionist movements.

The Anglophone Cameroon-Nigeria boundary during the British mandate and trust eras

Following the First World War, the erstwhile German Kamerun Protectorate (1884–1916) was partitioned between the British and French victors, first as ‘mandates’ under the League of Nations and later as ‘trusts’ under the United Nations. The British territory was much smaller than the French, comprising about one-fifth of the total area and population of the former German colony. It consisted of two narrow non-contiguous regions bordering Nigeria and stretching from the Atlantic coast to Lake Chad. The southern part, and the focus of this study, was christened Southern Cameroons, and the northern part became known as Northern Cameroons.⁷

In sharp contrast to the French Cameroons which was incorporated into the French colonial empire as a distinct administrative unit separate from neighbouring French Equatorial Africa, the tiny British Cameroons was governed as an integral part of the Eastern Region of Nigeria. There was every indication, particularly in the period preceding reunification, that Britain intended to integrate it fully into Nigeria despite its distinct status as a trust territory.⁸

The British method of administration had important consequences for future political developments. First, it created the appearance that Nigeria, rather than Britain, was the colonial power ruling the Southern Cameroons. It was not, therefore, surprising that the nationalist struggles in the Southern Cameroons after the Second World War had more an anti-Nigeria than an anti-colonial character. Second, it gave rise to the increasing peripheralization of the Southern Cameroons, becoming as it were a ‘colony within a colony’ (Nigeria). Being administered as a mere appendage of Nigeria, the Southern Cameroons was starved of development funds and its economy remained centred on the plantations that had been established under German rule.⁹ There was not even a separate budget for the Southern Cameroons until 1954 when it achieved a quasi-regional status and a limited degree of self-government.¹⁰ Third, and maybe even more significantly, it abolished the existing border between the former German Kamerun Protectorate and Nigeria, resulting in the free movement of goods and labour. The

7. For the history of the Northern Cameroons, see, for instance, V. T. Le Vine, *The Cameroons: From mandate to independence* (University of California Press, Berkeley/Los Angeles, 1964) and C. E. Welch, *Dream of Unity: Pan-Africanism and political unification in West Africa* (Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY, 1966). Northern Cameroons voted in the 1961 UN-organized plebiscite for integration into the Federation of Nigeria.

8. N. F. Awasom, ‘Colonial background to the development of autonomist tendencies in Anglophone Cameroon, 1946–1961’, *Journal of Third World Studies* 15, 1 (1998), pp. 168–83.

9. E. Ardener, S. Ardener and W. A. Warmington, *Plantation and Village in the Cameroons* (Oxford University Press, London, 1960); P. Konings, *Labour Resistance in Cameroon* (James Currey, London, 1993).

10. Le Vine, *The Cameroons*, p. 201; T. E. Mbuagbaw, R. Brain and R. Palmer, *A History of the Cameroon* (Longman, Harlow, 1987), pp. 86–7.

Southern Cameroons-Nigeria connection offered many economic and other opportunities for the inhabitants of the frontier regions, albeit in varying degrees.¹¹

There is considerable evidence that eastern Nigerians benefited more than Southern Cameroonians from the absence of any real border between the two regions.¹² There was a growing migration of eastern Nigerians, in particular the Igbo, to the 'greener pastures' in Southern Cameroons. Migration became instrumental in escaping from widespread land scarcity in their densely populated areas and in providing the necessary manpower and trading circuits in the underdeveloped Southern Cameroons, often encouraged by the colonial authorities. Nigerian migrants could take advantage of the higher level of education in their home region due to earlier christianization.

Migrants started working in the various agro-industrial enterprises in the Southern Cameroons, notably the Cameroon Development Corporation (CDC), a huge parastatal, and Pamol, a subsidiary of Unilever, both of which had inherited the former German plantations in the area.¹³ Since the 1940s there has been a spectacular increase in the Nigerian plantation labour force. In the 1950s Nigerians, especially Igbo, comprised roughly 25–30 percent of the CDC labour force and 80 percent of the Pamol workforce.¹⁴ Many of these workers settled in the Southern Cameroons. They acquired land for food farming and cash cropping, originally on a usufruct basis, by providing village elders with a token payment. Although the transfer of land was not intended to be permanent, Nigerians were able, with the increase in the value of land and the formalization of land tenure, to secure titles and set themselves up as landlords.¹⁵

A growing number of them used their earnings from plantation labour to launch small-scale trading enterprises, selling food and durable goods in the vicinity of the plantations. Gradually, Igbo came to dominate the market trade in local foodstuffs and imported goods, as well as the transport

11. E. M. Chiabi, 'The Nigerian-Cameroonian connection: a study of the historical relationship and its effect on Anglophone Cameroon', *Journal of African Studies* 13, 2 (1986), pp. 59–68; E. M. Chiabi, *The Making of Modern Cameroon: A history of substate nationalism and disparate union, 1914–1961* (University Press of America, Lanham, MD, 1997).

12. V. B. Amazee, 'The "Igbo scare" in the British Cameroons, c. 1945–61', *Journal of African History* 31 (1990), pp. 281–93; T. L. Weiss, 'Migrations et conflits frontaliers: une relation Nigeria-Cameroun contrariée', *Afrique Contemporaine* 180 (1996), pp. 39–51; T. L. Weiss, *Migrants nigériens: La diaspora dans le Sud-Ouest du Cameroun* (L'Harmattan, Paris, 1998).

13. Ardener *et al.*, *Plantation and Village*; Konings, *Labour Resistance*; P. Konings, *Unilever Estates in Crisis and the Power of Organizations in Cameroon* (LIT Verlag, Hamburg, 1998).

14. Konings, *Labour Resistance*; Konings, *Unilever Estates in Crisis*.

15. C. F. Fisiy, *Power and Privilege in the Administration of Law: Land law reforms and social differentiation in Cameroon* (African Studies Centre, Research Report No. 48, Leiden, 1992); G. W. Kleis, 'Network and ethnicity in an Igbo migrant community' (Ph.D. Thesis, East Lansing, MI, Michigan State University, 1975); G. W. Kleis, 'Confrontation and incorporation: Igbo ethnicity in Cameroon', *African Studies Review* 23, 3 (1980), pp. 89–100.

industry and the retail and wholesale distribution of palm oil in an area centred on Kumba, Tiko and Victoria (Limbe). In these towns, large numbers of Nigerians entered the restaurant business or became involved in photography, baking, tailoring, shoemaking, bicycle repairs and a variety of other small enterprises. In the Kumba area, they were the principal buyers of cocoa, which in time became Southern Cameroons' major export crop.¹⁶ And, last but not least, their higher level of Western education enabled them to occupy the majority of the white-collar supervisory and managerial positions on the plantations and in the Southern Cameroons civil service.

The dominant position of the Igbo in the regional economy and administration was deeply resented by the local population, leading to an explosive situation after the Second World War when regional politicians started exploiting the 'Igbo scare' in nationalist struggles.¹⁷ As a result, Igbo became the victims of verbal and physical attacks by frustrated local inhabitants and were told to return home. They were accused, usually fancifully, of every vice under the sun: bribery, corruption, narcotics, adulterating palm wine and medicines, counterfeiting, theft, profiteering, seducing local women, cannibalism, sorcery, disrespect of local customs and authorities, and so on.¹⁸

It would appear that the Ardeners somewhat underestimated the degree of Igbophobia among the Southern Cameroonian population and plantation workers.¹⁹ For example, in February 1948, the Bakweri Native Authority passed the following regulations with the aim of controlling relations between the 'autochthonous' population and the Igbo:

- Nobody is allowed to sell his or her house to an Igbo, neither may anybody give his or her house for rentage to an Igbo.
- No farmland may be sold to an Igbo or rented to an Igbo.
- Nobody may allow an Igbo to enter any native farm or forest for purpose of finding sticks for building or for any other purpose.
- Houses or farms already sold to an Igbo man shall be purchased by the Native Authority, which will afterwards resell same to some suitable person.
- Nobody shall trade with Igbos for anything of value or not.
- All landlords must ask their Igbo tenants to quit before 15 March 1948.
- No Cameroonian woman is allowed to communicate with the Igbos in any form.²⁰

16. Kleis, 'Network and ethnicity'; Kleis, 'Confrontation and incorporation'.

17. V. B. Amazee and F. M. Oben, 'The Igbo (Ibo) menace in Mamfe (Manyu) Division, 1916 to 1961', *Revue Science and Technology, Social Sciences Series* 6, 3-4 (1989), pp. 63-89; and Amazee, 'The "Igbo scare"'.
 18. Amazee, 'The "Igbo scare"'; and E. Ardener, *Divorce and Fertility: An African study* (Oxford University Press, London, 1962).

19. Ardener *et al.*, *Plantation and Village*.

20. Letter from Bakweri Native Authority, Buea, to Senior Divisional Officer, Victoria, dated 21 February 1948, in: Buea National Archives, Cameroon. File PC/h (1948)1, 'Conditions of Settlement'.

Similarly, during the 1947–60 period, Southern Cameroonian workers at the CDC and Pamol undertook a series of informal and collective actions aimed at removing Igbo and Ibibio supervisory and managerial staff.²¹

Compared to the massive Nigerian migration to the Southern Cameroons, relatively few Southern Cameroonians found their way to Nigeria. They were usually students, teachers, journalists, petty traders, businessmen or employees in Nigerian firms. While they rarely rose to positions of influence in Nigeria, the Nigerian experience had a significant effect on the emergence of Southern Cameroonian nationalism. Prominent Southern Cameroonian nationalist leaders like Emmanuel Endeley, Paul Kale, John Ngu Foncha, Nerius Mbile and Samson George received part or all of their political education in Nigeria.²²

Southern Cameroonian nationalists soon began to exploit the problems caused by both the British Cameroons-Nigeria boundary and the British-French Cameroons boundary. They attacked the subordinate position of the Southern Cameroons in the British-Nigerian colonial system and the dominant position of the Igbo in the Southern Cameroons. They initially claimed a larger representation of the Southern Cameroonian elite in the Nigerian administration and, later, regional autonomy. In response to their pressure, the British authorities gradually increased Southern Cameroonian representation in the Nigerian administration after the Second World War; following successive constitutional changes, they granted the Southern Cameroons a quasi-regional status and a limited degree of self-government in 1954, and in 1958 full regional status within the Federation of Nigeria.²³ For part of the Southern Cameroonian elite this was the reason to shift from an anti-Nigerian stance towards a more positive view of Nigeria. From their perspective, regional status seemed a satisfactory answer to the problem of Nigerian domination, the lack of Southern Cameroonian participation in the Nigerian political system, and economic stagnation.

Interestingly, from the late 1940s onwards the question of reunification cropped up in the programmes of the various Southern Cameroonian pressure groups and newly created parties, raising the possibility of an alternative political option for the Southern Cameroons to escape from its subordinate position in the colonial system and from Igbo domination. A number of factors underpinned their reunification campaign. There was the emergence of the 'Kamerun idea' among some members of the Southern

21. Konings, *Labour Resistance*, p. 69; Konings, *Unilever Estates in Crisis*, p. 80.

22. Cf. J. B. Ebune, *The Growth of Political Parties in Southern Cameroons 1916–1960* (Centre d'Édition et de Production pour l'Enseignement et la Recherche, Yaoundé, 1992); Chiabi, *The Making of Modern Cameroon*; V. J. Ngoh, *History of Cameroon since 1800* (Presbook, Limbe, 1996); V. J. Ngoh, *Southern Cameroons, 1922–1961: A constitutional history* (Ashgate, Aldershot, 2001).

23. Awasom, 'Colonial background'; Ngoh, *Southern Cameroons*; Konings and Nyamnjoh, *Negotiating an Anglophone Identity*.

Cameroonian elite — the belief that the period of German rule had created a Cameroon identity or nation.²⁴ Some authors have pointed out that this idea hardly corresponded with reality, since German colonial rule had been too short to create a Cameroonian identity among the multiplicity of ethnic groups on its territory.²⁵ Kofele-Kale, however, argued that it was not the reality of the German experience but rather the memories (factual or otherwise) or myths that inspired the Southern Cameroonian elite to start advocating reunification.²⁶ To strengthen their arguments, the elite often referred to the close relationship that existed between ethnic groups on both sides of the British-French Cameroons border. This boundary, they stressed, was regarded as an unnecessary inconvenience by the frontier people in the area because it restricted the free movement of people belonging to the same ethnic group.

The idea of reunification appears to have been much more popular among Francophones than among Anglophones.²⁷ Its devoted and consistent flag-bearers were loyalists of the *Union des Populations du Cameroun* (UPC), the radical nationalist party in French Cameroon,²⁸ and Francophone immigrants in the Southern Cameroons who saw reunification principally as a way of eradicating discrimination by the British Administering Authority and removing their second-class citizenship in the Southern Cameroons.²⁹ Significantly, the Southern Cameroons elite largely regarded the reunification idea in the first instance as an effective means of bringing pressure to bear upon the British trusteeship administration to grant their territory either a larger measure of autonomy within the Nigerian Federation or separation from Nigeria altogether. Although the Southern Cameroonian population ultimately voted by a majority of seven to three in favour of union with the former French Cameroons during the 1961 plebiscite organized by the UN, there is overwhelming evidence to suggest that if a third

24. Welch, *Dream of Unity*, pp. 158–88; W. R. Johnson, *The Cameroon Federation: Political integration in a fragmentary society* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 1970), p. 42.

25. E. Ardener, 'The nature of reunification of Cameroon', in A. Hazlewood (ed.), *African Integration and Disintegration: Case studies in economic and political union* (Oxford University Press, London, 1967); B. Chem-Langhëë and M. Z. Njeuma, 'The Pan-Kamerun movement, 1949–1961', in N. Kofele-Kale (ed.), *An African Experiment in Nation-Building: The bilingual Cameroon Republic since reunification* (Westview Press, Boulder, CO, 1980), pp. 25–64.

26. N. Kofele-Kale, 'Reconciling the dual heritage: reflections on the "Kamerun idea"', in Kofele-Kale, *An African Experiment*, pp. 3–23.

27. N. F. Awasom, 'The reunification question in Cameroon history: was the bride an enthusiastic or a reluctant one?', *Africa Today* 47, 2 (2000), pp. 91–111; Konings and Nyamnjoh, *Negotiating an Anglophone Identity*.

28. R. A. Joseph, *Radical Nationalism in Cameroon: Social origins of the U.P.C. rebellion* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1977); and A. Mbembe, *La Naissance du maquis dans le Sud-Cameroun, 1920–1960* (Karthala, Paris, 1996).

29. V. B. Amazee, 'The role of the French Cameroonians in the unification of Cameroon, 1916–1961', *Transafrican Journal of History* 23 (1994), pp. 195–234; M. Z. Njeuma, 'Reunification and political opportunism in the making of Cameroon's independence', *Paideuma* 41 (1995), pp. 27–37; Awasom, 'The reunification question'.

option of either independence or continued trusteeship had been put forward, it would have been considered in a favourable light.³⁰

Being deprived of this preferred option by the United Nations with the complicity of the British, the Southern Cameroonian population was given what amounted to Hobson's choice: independence by joining Nigeria or reunification with the then independent Republic of Cameroon. The eventual vote in favour of reunification appeared to be more of a rejection of continuous ties with Nigeria than a vote for union with Francophone Cameroon. While most Southern Cameroonians dismissed outright integration into Nigeria because of the territory's previous neglect and domination by the Igbo under Nigerian colonial administration, they were also reluctant to join Francophone Cameroon, fearing that reunification might result in domination by the Francophone majority and loss of their cultural heritage and identity. In the end, the majority of Anglophones opted for the lesser of the two evils because the ruling party in the Southern Cameroons, the Kamerun National Democratic Party (KNDP), had assured them that the constitutional provisions for a reunified Cameroon, namely, the creation of a loose federation, would guarantee the equality of both partners and the preservation of their cultural legacies.³¹

The Anglophone Cameroon-Nigeria boundary after reunification

The reunification of Anglophone and Francophone Cameroon in 1961 created an international boundary between Anglophone Cameroon and Nigeria. One of the immediate consequences of this was a dramatic change in the legal status and economic opportunities of the substantial number of Igbo and other Nigerian migrants residing in Anglophone Cameroon.³²

Being redefined as *de jure* foreigners, Nigerian migrants no longer enjoyed equal rights and opportunities as Anglophone Cameroonian citizens, which seriously weakened their socio-political position in society. Even second- or third-generation Nigerian migrants were now obliged to obtain a residence permit, the cost of which had increased considerably over the course of time. Official government charges rose from FCFA10,000 in the 1960s to FCFA83,000 in 2002, but the actual costs were much higher since local officials demand substantial bribes before they will issue a permit.³³ Understandably, Nigerian migrants have been inclined to interpret this sharp rise in price as one of the government's ways of stopping the flow of migrants from Nigeria to Cameroon and as a method of chasing out the existing

30. Konings and Nyamnjoh, *Negotiating an Anglophone Identity*.

31. Awasom, 'The reunification question'; Konings and Nyamnjoh, *Negotiating an Anglophone Identity*.

32. Kleis, 'Network and ethnicity'; Kleis, 'Confrontation and incorporation'; Weiss, *Migrants nigériens*.

33. See *The Post*, 7 October 2002, p. 6.

Nigerian migrant community living in Cameroon. Indeed, a growing number of them appear to be unable to meet the rising costs of a residence permit. In a recent communiqué, Cameroonian immigration officers claimed that less than 50 percent of Nigerian migrants are in possession of the required documents.³⁴ Inevitably, this has made them subject to frequent police controls and extortion. They maintain, with some justification, that they are more liable to police harassment and intimidation than Cameroonians and that this is depriving them of their normal mobility. To avoid such humiliating treatment, some have become engaged in either producing fake documents or purchasing Cameroonian identity cards from the relevant authorities.

At the economic level, the redefinition of Nigerians as foreigners has meant a drastic reduction in previously available opportunities. The post-reunification government has acted to restrict the activities of Nigerians in a number of ways. They have been almost entirely phased out of state corporations, including the huge agro-industrial parastatal, the CDC, and the civil service, while private enterprises have been responding to government pressure to 'Cameroonize' their labour force.³⁵ State authorities have also banned Nigerians from participating in certain lucrative trading activities, such as playing the role of middlemen in the cocoa trade or engaging in the wholesale trade of palm oil, and from operating inter-urban taxis.

Faced with the gradual disappearance of such activities, the majority of Nigerian migrants have begun to concentrate on trade and business in Anglophone Cameroon. Since the mid-1960s, they have strengthened their already dominant position in the commercial sector in the major towns of Anglophone Cameroon: their share in this sector varies from 85 percent in Tiko to 75 percent in Kumba and 70 percent in Mamfe and Victoria (Limbe).³⁶ They also dominate the fish industry: the majority of the fish sold in Anglophone Cameroon are caught by Nigerians living in the region's coastal areas, including the Bakassi peninsula. Some Nigerians have continued to excel in the production of foodstuffs and cash crops, especially cocoa and coffee.

Remarkably, the introduction of an international boundary between Anglophone Cameroon and Nigeria appears not to have reduced but instead to have promoted the flow of labour and goods from Nigeria to Anglophone Cameroon in spite of the change in the legal status and employment opportunities of Nigerian migrants. The influx of Nigerians has increased because of the favourable exchange rate between the naira and the CFA franc: the coexistence of a fluctuating and a quasi-permanently falling naira and a stable and convertible CFA franc has tended to stimulate

34. *The Herald*, World Edition, 5 April 2003.

35. Konings, *Labour Resistance*; Konings, *Unilever Estates in Crisis*.

36. Weiss, 'Migrations et conflits frontaliers', p. 45.

Nigerians to work in Anglophone Cameroon and to engage in formal and informal cross-border trading activities.³⁷ The development of extensive contraband activities was encouraged by the absence of efficient border controls and the complicity of customs officers and other state authorities in such lucrative activities.³⁸ The smuggling of highly subsidized Nigerian petrol (known as *fédéral*, *funge* or *zoua-zoua* in Cameroon) was undoubtedly one of the most financially rewarding activities in the 1980s and the early 1990s.³⁹

There appears to be a striking difference between Cameroonian citizens and Nigerian migrants in the organization of formal and informal cross-border trade. Cameroonians, like the entrepreneurial Bamileke, tend to operate largely on an individual basis.⁴⁰ In sharp contrast, Nigerians, and particularly the Igbo, tend to cooperate along ethnic lines, making full use of their extensive ethnic networks on both sides of the border. They group together on a village or clan basis in order to control the entire trading circuit: the provision, transportation, declaration,⁴¹ and distribution of goods. Evidently, collective enterprise enables them to take advantage of economies of scale, to incur lower costs than their Cameroonian counterparts, to set competitive prices for their goods, and to dominate or monopolize the trade in certain goods including cloth, cosmetics and pharmaceutical products, spare parts for cars, ironware and household utensils.

Since reunification, Anglophone Cameroonians appear to have adopted a rather ambivalent attitude towards the increased flow of Nigerian migrants and their commercial success. On the one hand, they point to their common colonial heritage and language and the existing ethnic ties between some of the border peoples which have created a special bond between Anglophone Cameroonians and Nigerians. As one of them said: 'We are like brothers and sisters and are bound to live in peace and harmony.' Indeed, at the individual level, one can observe the development of long-standing friendships and cordial relations. Members of both groups often participate in the same institutions and associations such as churches and social, sports and youth clubs, and they apparently mix well. Anglophone Cameroonians also tend to acknowledge that the extensive Nigerian

37. Weiss, *Migrants nigériens*; Bennafla, *Le Commerce frontalier*.

38. K. Fodouop, 'La contrebande entre le Cameroun et le Nigeria', *Cahiers d'Outre-Mer* 41, 161 (1988), pp. 5–25; Bennafla, *Le Commerce frontalier*.

39. J. Herrera, 'Du "fédéral" et des "Koweïtiens": la fraude de l'essence nigérienne au Cameroun', *Autrepart* 6 (1998), pp. 181–202.

40. P. Geschiere and P. Konings (eds), *Itinéraires d'accumulation au Cameroun* (Karthala, Paris, 1993); J.-P. Warnier, *L'Esprit d'entreprise au Cameroun* (Karthala, Paris, 1993); M. Niger-Thomas, '“Buying futures”: The upsurge of female entrepreneurship crossing the formal/informal divide in South West Cameroon' (Ph.D. thesis, University of Leiden, 2000).

41. They often tend to bribe custom officers to sign official documents that provide them with legal coverage for under-valued goods and, in some cases, even for goods other than those declared.

commercial presence gives them access to a large variety of goods at competitive prices, which is obviously advantageous in the current situation of economic crisis and low purchasing power.

On the other hand, Anglophone Cameroonians do not consider Nigerians as having equal rights in their country. Following the redefinition of Nigerians as *de jure* foreigners after reunification, they feel empowered towards the Nigerian minority, being convinced that, if necessary, Nigerians can always be brought into line by reminding them of their alien status or by calling on the authorities.⁴² In response, Nigerians now usually prefer to keep a lower profile in society than in the colonial era so as to avoid attracting the attention of the local population and the authorities. Anglophone Cameroonians also strongly resent the renewed Nigerian domination of the commercial sector in their region and envy their commercial success, being in favour of an extension of the government's policy of Cameroonization into the commercial sector. This widespread resentment was manifest in 1988 when the central market in Kumba, where approximately two-thirds of trading stalls are occupied by Nigerians, was twice set on fire. Stereotypes of Nigerians and Igbophobia are commonplace. Nigerians are still often looked upon as exploiters, crooks and sorcerers. One of the glaring manifestations of persistent Igbophobia in Anglophone Cameroon was the spreading of rumours and accusations in the 1990s of Igbo involvement in the disappearance or theft of sex organs, sometimes even leading to mob molestations of the accused.⁴³

That such hostile feelings towards the Nigerian migrant community are not simply motivated by ethno-regional sentiments towards an alien community but rather by economic considerations, in particular resentment of economic dominance, is clearly demonstrated by the attitude of Anglophone Cameroonians towards the Igbo during the Nigerian civil war. When the Igbo became involved in an armed struggle with the Gowon regime for the establishment of an independent Biafran state, the outpouring of public sympathy for their cause was surprisingly large in Anglophone Cameroon. It is remarkable that the Anglophone Cameroonians who had continued to revile Igbo domination in their midst now embraced their cause, even when such support was against the official policy of the Ahidjo government, which was unswervingly pro-Gowon. Undoubtedly, the plight of the Igbo, their persecution under Hausa/Fulani hegemony, and their pursuit of an independent state elicited powerful human feelings of brotherhood among Anglophone Cameroonians who themselves had started to

42. Kleis, 'Network and ethnicity', p. 287.

43. See, for instance, *Le Messager*, 1 November 1996.

regret their reunification with the Francophone majority and their increasing marginalization under another Fulani leader, Ahmadou Ahidjo.⁴⁴

The press and the regime have often exhibited hostile sentiments towards the Nigerian migrant community. They have claimed that the number of Nigerian migrants amounts to 3 or 4 million — a figure that they consider a threat to national security, when taking into account Cameroon's total population of an estimated 12 million.⁴⁵ A more realistic figure for the Nigerian migrant community is provided by some Cameroonian demographers with their estimate of about 1 million.⁴⁶

The regime has exacerbated existing tensions in various ways. It is inclined to indict Nigerian migrants as 'economic saboteurs' and 'political subversives'. During the economic crisis, it has frequently made the Nigerian 'exploiters' scapegoats for the country's economic ills. Since the outbreak of the Bakassi conflict, it has attempted to turn the local population against Nigerian 'invaders', despite the fact that Nigerian migrants mostly refuse to express their opinions in public. Following the emergence of the Anglophone secessionist movements in the 1990s, the regime has often presented the Nigerian 'Anglos' as the 'natural allies' of the Anglophone 'Biafrans'.⁴⁷ As a result, it has increased its intimidating and extortionist tactics against the Nigerian migrant community. Nigerian migrants, for their part, have displayed a large measure of flexibility and dynamism, proving themselves capable of reacting rapidly and efficaciously to changes in their economic and political environment.

Beginning in the mid-1960s, the Ahidjo regime took a number of steps aimed at disrupting the Igbo framework of socio-political organization and expressions of ethnic solidarity. Legislation was brought in that banned ethnic organizations, including the powerful Igbo Union which functioned as an exceptionally effective instrument in regulating the activities of its members, undertaking self-help projects, and lobbying for Igbo interests within the territory. The authorities also outlawed the celebration of Igbo Day, an event that glorified the ethnic identity and achievements of the Igbo people and inconvenienced Anglophone Cameroonians by bringing commerce to a virtual standstill. Finally, the security forces demolished Igbo Union Hall in Kumba, which had long served as a centre for Igbo

44. N. Kofele-Kale, *Tribesmen and Patriots: Political culture in a poly-ethnic African state* (University Press of America, Washington, DC, 1981), pp. 39–42; Konings and Nyamnjoh, *Negotiating an Anglophone Identity*.

45. B.-J. Nkene, 'Les immigrants Nigériens à Douala: problèmes et stratégies des étrangers en milieu urbain', *Law and Politics in Africa, Asia and Latin America* 33, 1 (2000), pp. 43–59; B.-J. Nkene, 'Les étrangers, acteurs de la vie politique Camerounaise: l'expérience des immigrants Nigériens dans la ville de Douala', *Polis: Cameroonian Political Science Review* 8 (2001), pp. 87–121; L. Sindjoun, *Sociologie des Relations Internationales Africaines* (Karthala, Paris, 2002).

46. See *The Post*, 12 December 1999.

47. Nkene, 'Les immigrants Nigériens à Douala'.

activities — an action that Anglophone Cameroonians applauded as symbolizing the dismantling of Igbo hegemony in their territory.⁴⁸

Following the Biafran civil war, the Igbo increasingly joined the Nigerian Union in Cameroon, which is legally recognized. This association does not exist in Nigeria and can be regarded as a typical diaspora phenomenon. The association has become a powerful pressure group in the defence of Nigerian interests against the Cameroonian authorities,⁴⁹ and it serves as a vehicle for integrating Nigerians more fully into Anglophone Cameroonian society. Conscious of the fact that local authorities are unlikely to resist bribes, the ‘big men’ and elected chiefs among the Nigerian migrant community are in the habit of offering them substantial amounts of money to maintain mutual cordial relationships and to protect themselves and other members of the migrant community against police harassment. Since the introduction of multipartyism in the early 1990s, they also sponsor the major parties during elections in order to gain their support once they are in power. In the last instance, and having suffered severe maltreatment at the hands of either the local population or the police, Nigerian migrants have resorted to public protests such as demonstrations or closing their businesses for a period.⁵⁰

Confronted with an increasingly hostile political environment and a dramatic change in economic opportunities in the wake of the 50 percent devaluation of the CFA franc in 1994, many Nigerian migrants have been considering returning home. The precarious political and economic situation in Nigeria, however, has prevented most of them from doing so. Instead they prefer to seek new ways to adjust to the changed conditions in their host country and, if necessary, to rely on the traditional survival strategies offered by the continued strong ethnic networks, solidarity and mutual support among Nigerian migrants in Anglophone Cameroon.

The Anglophone Cameroon-Nigeria boundary: contesting sovereignty over Bakassi

The Anglophone Cameroon-Nigeria border has been a regular source of conflict between the Cameroonian and Nigerian states since reunification.⁵¹ Similar to other colonially negotiated boundaries, this border, and

48. Kleis, ‘Network and ethnicity’; Kleis, ‘Confrontation and incorporation’.

49. Weiss, *Migrants nigériens*; Nkene, ‘Les immigrés nigériens à Douala’.

50. Nkene, ‘Les immigrés nigériens à Douala’; Nkene, ‘Les étrangers’.

51. Cf. J. C. Anene, ‘The Nigeria-Southern Cameroons boundary’, *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 2, 2 (1961), pp. 186–95; C. Weladji, ‘The Cameroon-Nigeria border’, *Abbia* 27–28 (1974–5), pp. 157–72, and 29–30 (1974–5), pp. 163–94; E. Nwokedi, ‘The politics of inter-African boundary conflicts: a study of Nigeria and her Francophone neighbours’, *The Quarterly Journal of Administration* 19, 1–2 (1984–5), pp. 45–60; A. O. Owlabi, ‘Nigeria and Cameroon: boundary disputes and the problem of border security’, *African Notes* 15, 1–2 (1991), pp. 39–47; and Ngoh, *History of Cameroon*.

especially the maritime border, has been neither entirely unambiguously defined nor satisfactorily demarcated.⁵² Undoubtedly, sovereignty over the Bakassi peninsula has been the major bone of contention in the long history of Anglophone Cameroon-Nigeria boundary disputes.

The Bakassi peninsula covers a territory of approximately 1,800 square kilometres and is part of the Ndian Division of the South West Province in Anglophone Cameroon. It is an underdeveloped and not easily accessible area and can only be reached by boat. Moreover, cultivation is extremely difficult because most of the area is marshy. The latest Cameroon census in 1987 estimated its population at 8,563; recent estimates, however, suggest a considerably higher population of between 200,000 and 300,000.⁵³ Although existing reports differ as to its population density, they all agree that the vast majority are Nigerian, eking out an existence as fishermen. Not unexpectedly, the peninsula also used to be a haven for informal cross-border trade.

In the 1990s, the Bakassi peninsula suddenly became hot news in the international media when the long-standing dispute between the Cameroonian and Nigerian states over territorial sovereignty erupted into a war. Remarkably, all the existing studies tend to focus solely on the two major stakeholders in the conflict, the Cameroonian and Nigerian states, their violent confrontations, and the subsequent international attempts at mediation.⁵⁴ They completely overlook the stakes of other parties in the conflict, in particular the Nigerian migrant community and the Anglophone Cameroon secessionist movements.

The two major stakeholders base their territorial claims on various arguments; here only the most important ones are outlined. The territorial claims of the Cameroonian state are largely founded on the Anglo-German agreement of 11 March 1913, which defined the Bakassi peninsula as part of the German Kamerun Protectorate. Cameroonian claims have been given added weight by the 1975 Maroua Declaration signed by President Ahidjo and General Gowon. This declaration, though never ratified by

52. A. I. Asiwaju, 'The Bakassi peninsula crisis: an alternative to war and litigation', in G. H. Blake, M. A. Pratt and C. H. Schofield (eds), *Boundaries and Energy: Problems and prospects* (Kluwer Law International, Dordrecht, 1998), p. 254.

53. See *Mutations*, 25 February 2001, pp. 7–10; and *The Post*, 17 November 2003, pp. 1 and 3.

54. Cf. J. E. Essombo, 'Considérations juridiques sur le différend frontalier de la péninsule de Bakassi', *African Journal of International and Comparative Law* 7, 1 (1995), pp. 98–128; F. X. Mbome, 'Les relations entre le Cameroun et le Nigeria: l'affaire Bakassi', *Afrique 2000* 25 (1996), pp. 45–60; Weiss, 'Migrations et conflits frontaliers'; Ngoh, *History of Cameroon*; N. J. Bekong, 'International dispute settlement: land and maritime boundary between Cameroon and Nigeria — origin of the dispute and provisional measures', *African Journal of International and Comparative Law* 9, 2 (1997), pp. 287–310; Asiwaju, 'The Bakassi peninsula crisis'; M. H. Mgbale, 'La Politique camerounaise de résolution pacifique de la crise de Bakassi: Une approche réaliste et transnationaliste' (Thèse du Doctorat de Troisième Cycle, Institut des Relations Internationales du Cameroun, Yaoundé, 2001).

Nigeria, clearly recognized Cameroonian sovereignty over Bakassi.⁵⁵ Moreover, there is ample evidence that there was a certain measure of Nigerian acceptance of Cameroonian claims in the period preceding the outbreak of violent conflict in the 1990s. In that period, various Nigerian scholars and authorities publicly confirmed Cameroonian sovereignty over the disputed territory, and Nigerian maps tended to locate the Bakassi peninsula within Cameroonian territory.⁵⁶

The territorial claims of the Nigerian state are based on historical consolidation and the actual exercise of sovereignty after independence, with the acquiescence of Cameroon.⁵⁷ The Nigerian government has often declared that subjects of the chiefs of Old Calabar have been occupying the peninsula from pre-colonial times.⁵⁸ It claims that, following independence, these chiefs have transferred their title to the peninsula to the Nigerian state which has exercised sovereignty over Bakassi ever since, without any sign of protest from Cameroon. As proof of its postcolonial exercise of sovereignty, it refers to a number of practices on the peninsula, including the collection of taxes, the widespread use of Nigerian currency, the possession of Nigerian passports by Bakassi residents, and the presence of schools and health centres subsidized by the Nigerian state.

From the mid-1960s onwards, the Joint Cameroon-Nigeria Border Commission tried to help resolve the Bakassi conflict and other boundary disputes, but very little was achieved. Agreements concluded by the two governments were either contested or denounced outright and the failure to resolve their border differences brought the two states to the brink of war in 1981.⁵⁹ Two factors appear to have hampered any peaceful solution.

The first factor was the frequent mutual mistrust shown by the leaders of both states, going back to pre-reunification days. The territorial losses suffered during the 1961 plebiscite in the British Cameroons created deep and long-lasting bitterness in relations. Against the expectations of the Francophone Cameroonian and Nigerian leaders, the Southern Cameroons then voted for reunification with Francophone Cameroon, and the Northern Cameroons for integration into Nigeria. Ahidjo, in particular, was aggrieved by the loss of the British Northern Cameroons that was of the same ethnic and religious extraction as his home region, the northern part of Francophone Cameroon. Instead of strengthening his position, the plebiscite results appeared to weaken it. He strongly suspected that the vote of the Southern Cameroons for reunification would cement an alliance

55. International Court of Justice, *Case Concerning the Land and Maritime Boundary between Cameroon and Nigeria* (International Court of Justice, General List no. 94, The Hague, 2002).

56. Essombo, 'Considérations juridiques sur le différend frontalier'.

57. International Court of Justice, *Case Concerning the Land and Maritime Boundary*.

58. E. O. Akak, *Who Owns Bakassi?* (Edigraph Communications, Calabar, 1999).

59. Nwokedi, 'The politics of inter-African boundary conflicts'; Owolabi, 'Nigeria and Cameroon'; Bekong, 'International dispute settlement'.

between the Southern Cameroonian elite and the ethnically related opposition in the southwestern part of Francophone Cameroon.⁶⁰ He accused the British-Nigerian colonial administration of having manipulated the elections in the British Northern Cameroons to its own advantage and took the matter to the International Court of Justice in The Hague and to the United Nations, but lost his case. For several years, he declared the anniversary of that verdict a day of mourning, to the displeasure of Nigerian leaders. Ahidjo was also reluctant to improve relations with his neighbour because he was inclined to perceive the close cultural and historical connections between Nigeria and Anglophone Cameroon as a potential threat to reunification and his pursuit of a strong central state and national unity. He was particularly worried that the connection might encourage secession among the Anglophone Cameroonian population, all the more so because there was a growing dissatisfaction among the Anglophone minority with the Francophone hegemonic tendencies following reunification.⁶¹

Nevertheless, Ahidjo's support of the Gowon regime during the Biafran civil war did bring about a temporary improvement in bilateral relations. This led to an intensification of border talks, eventually resulting in the 1975 Maroua Declaration which delimited the maritime boundary between Anglophone Cameroon and Nigeria and recognized Cameroonian sovereignty over Bakassi.⁶² The overthrow of the Gowon regime in a military coup five weeks after concluding this accord was clearly connected with the terms of this agreement, since the new military leader, Mohammed Murtala, immediately blamed Gowon for allowing Nigerian territory to pass to Cameroon and refused to ratify the agreement. This new stance infuriated Ahidjo who accused Nigeria of acting in bad faith, and subsequently declined to enter into any further negotiations with the Nigerian authorities as long as he remained the head of state of Cameroon. It is reported that General Murtala 'threatened that, rather than accept the outrageous 1975 award, Nigeria would go to war if the Cameroonians refused to negotiate'.⁶³ Bilateral relations barely improved under Ahidjo's successor, Paul Biya, mainly because of continuing border problems.

A second, and even more important, factor that continued to thwart a peaceful solution of the Bakassi conflict was the geo-strategic and economic importance of the peninsula. Bakassi is not only of vital interest for controlling access to the port of Calabar, which is currently being developed as Nigeria's Export-Processing Zone and the Eastern Command Headquarters of the Nigerian Navy, but it also has rich hydrocarbon and fish resources.⁶⁴

60. Konings and Nyamnjoh, *Negotiating an Anglophone Identity*, p. 40.

61. *Ibid.*, pp. 51–75.

62. Owolabi, 'Nigeria and Cameroon'; Mbome, 'Les relations entre le Cameroun et le Nigeria'.

63. Nwokedi, 'The politics of inter-African boundary conflicts', p. 51.

64. Asiwaju, 'The Bakassi peninsula crisis', p. 254.

After the repeated failures to resolve the Bakassi conflict peacefully, the Nigerian government eventually sought a military solution. In the early 1990s, the Nigerian army had already undertaken a few temporary infiltrations into the Bakassi peninsula,⁶⁵ but on 21 December 1993 it occupied some parts under the pretext of protecting the Nigerian population from harassment and maltreatment at the hands of the Cameroonian gendarmerie.⁶⁶ In reaction, Cameroonian troops attacked the Nigerian occupation force, which resulted in several deaths and large-scale destruction of property. The fighting continued intermittently as both sides increased the quantity and quality of their weapons in the disputed zone. Ngniman made a detailed report of all the military events that took place between 1993 and 1996.⁶⁷ In February 1996, the Nigerian occupation forces clashed again with Cameroonian troops.

A number of initiatives were taken to prevent the dispute from escalating and to bring both parties to the negotiating table, including pressure from France motivated by its determination to safeguard its various interests in both states,⁶⁸ mediation by the Togolese President Eyadéma, and the adoption of resolutions by the United Nations and the Organization of African Unity, apparently with little success. On 29 March 1994, the Cameroonian government filed an application with the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in The Hague instituting proceedings against Nigeria for violently contesting Cameroon's sovereignty over the Bakassi peninsula. It was not until 10 October 2002 that the court ruled in favour of Cameroon, ordering Nigeria to withdraw expeditiously and without condition its administration and its armed forces and police from the peninsula.⁶⁹ The court, however, reminded the Cameroonian government of its pledge at the hearings that it would 'continue to afford protection to Nigerians living on the Bakassi peninsula'. It also rejected Cameroon's request that Nigeria be held responsible for the damage caused by its occupation of Bakassi.

On 5 September 2002, just a month before the court's verdict, the UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan had met the two heads of state, Olusegun Obasanjo and Paul Biya, in Paris in the presence of the French President Jacques Chirac. On that occasion, the two African leaders pledged to comply with the court's verdict, irrespective of its ruling. After the announcement of the verdict, however, Nigeria initially appeared to reject

65. Mbome, 'Les relations entre le Cameroun et le Nigeria'; Ngoh, *History of Cameroon*.

66. While this action was primarily aimed at establishing control over Bakassi, Nigerian charges of the serious maltreatment of Nigerian residents are not without foundation. There is evidence that Cameroonian gendarmes made their lives unbearable. Several reports mention various threats they received, including threats to throw babies into the sea so as to extort money from their mothers. See *The Post*, 21 October 2002, p. 5.

67. Z. Ngniman, *Nigeria-Cameroun: La guerre permanente* (Éditions Clé, Yaoundé, 1996).

68. Mgbale, *La Politique camerounaise*, p. 175.

69. International Court of Justice, *Case Concerning the Land and Maritime Boundary*.

the ICJ's ruling. It was even reported that it was deploying more troops to Bakassi and taking a head count of Nigerian indigenes on the peninsula.⁷⁰

Concerned about these developments, the UN Secretary-General intervened again, inviting the two leaders to a meeting in Geneva on 15 November 2002 to work out how to comply peacefully with the ICJ verdict. This intervention led to the revival of the Joint Cameroon-Nigeria Border Commission. In a communiqué issued after the summit, it was specifically stated that this commission 'would consider all the implications of the ICJ verdict, including the need to protect the rights of the affected population in both countries'.⁷¹ The commission would, among other things, be entrusted with the task of demarcating the land and maritime boundaries between the two countries. It would also make recommendations on additional confidence-building measures such as the holding of regular meetings between local authorities, government officials and heads of state, and devising projects to promote joint economic ventures and cross-border cooperation, to forestall inflammatory statements or declarations on Bakassi by either side, and to encourage troop withdrawals and the eventual demilitarization of the peninsula.

Since this time, the commission has been meeting every two months in the capitals of both states. After a difficult start, progress has been made, including Nigeria's offer to construct a cross-border road connecting Ikom and Mamfe, and the implementation of the demarcation of the boundary. One of the issues that impeded a major breakthrough was the Nigerian refusal to withdraw troops from Bakassi until the protection of the legitimate rights of the Nigerian population on the peninsula was ensured. Cameroon, however, proved unwilling to accord Nigerian residents in the area special privileges or status.⁷² By the end of 2003, Nigeria announced that it was finally prepared to hand over the Bakassi peninsula to Cameroon in May 2004, but negotiations on the position of Nigerian residents following the transfer are still ongoing.⁷³

Understandably, Nigerian migrants in Anglophone Cameroon have been reluctant to voice their opinion about the ICJ verdict in favour of Cameroon. In a sense, they have even appeared to be happy with the decision, since the Bakassi conflict had tended to intensify anti-Nigerian sentiments among the local population and incite police harassment. Given the deterioration in mutual relations during the conflict, leaders of the Nigerian Union had made several representations to the local authorities to express their concern about the war between the two countries, their

70. *The Herald*, World Edition, 5 April 2003.

71. *BSCNation*, 19 December 2002.

72. *The Herald*, World Edition, 8 August 2003.

73. *The Post*, 3 November 2003, pp. 1 and 3.

commitment to a peaceful solution to the conflict and especially their desire to live in peace with Cameroonians.⁷⁴

In sharp contrast to other Nigerian migrants in Anglophone Cameroon, Nigerian residents in Bakassi were not afraid to express their support for the Nigerian army's occupation of the peninsula, and strongly contested the ICJ verdict. On various occasions, their political leaders and traditional rulers have called upon the Nigerian government to maintain control over Bakassi. They even threatened to secede from Nigeria and create an independent Bakassi state, should the Nigerian government fail to protect their interests.⁷⁵ For example, in November 2003, Mr Joe Atene, the Bakassi representative in the Cross River State House of Assembly, publicly declared that the Nigerian residents of Bakassi would regard a unilateral handing over of the peninsula by the Nigerian government to Cameroon as a serious betrayal:⁷⁶

We have always been Nigerians, and if Nigeria now decides to turn its back to us, we may not have any other option than to pursue self-determination. We will not be part of Cameroon.

There appear to be several reasons for their fierce resistance to Nigeria's handing over of Bakassi to Cameroon. First, they firmly believe that such a transfer would imply 'complete neglect and abandonment' of the peninsula, pointing out that Nigeria rather than Cameroon has been making a significant contribution to territorial development.⁷⁷ Second, they are not prepared 'to subject themselves to the bondage of Cameroonian gendarmes'.⁷⁸ And, above all, they claim ownership of the Bakassi lands — a claim strongly rejected by the Cameroonian residents. For instance, the leader of the Bakassi Indigenes Development and Cultural Association (BIDCA) stressed, following the ICJ verdict, that even the first Nigerian settlers recognized and respected autochthonous control over Bakassi lands:⁷⁹

Ntun-Umor and Prince Asibong (Archibong), being the first settlers representing the present Akwa Ibom and Cross River States in Nigeria respectively, consulted our founding fathers at Isangele town and undertook a blood-oath before being allowed to settle.

74. Mgbale, *La Politique camerounaise*, p. 83.

75. See, for instance, *The Post*, 1 November 2002, p. 11, 17 November 2002, pp. 1 and 3, 3 November 2003, pp. 1 and 3; *The Guardian Post*, 14 November 2002, p. 2; *The Heron*, 6–12 November 2003.

76. *The Post*, 17 November 2003, p. 3.

77. *The Guardian Post*, 14 November 2002, p. 2.

78. *The Post*, 1 November 2002, p. 1.

79. *The Herald*, 15–17 November 2002.

Following the Nigerian government's recent decision to hand over Bakassi in May 2004, President Obasanjo cautioned the Nigerian Bakassi community that he would not tolerate any separatist tendencies.⁸⁰

The ICJ verdict has also been fiercely contested by the various Anglophone movements that emerged during the political liberalization process in Cameroon in the early 1990s.⁸¹ They claim that the nation-state project following reunification has been driven by the firm determination of the Francophone elite to dominate the Anglophone minority in the post-colonial state and to erase all cultural and institutional foundations of Anglophone identity. Most of them initially strove for a return to a federal state, but later, following the Biya government's persistent refusal to enter into any meaningful negotiations, they came to champion the creation of an independent Anglophone state. They have provocatively re-introduced the name of Southern Cameroons to refer to the Anglophone territory so as to 'make it clear that our struggles are neither of an essentially linguistic character nor in defence of an alien colonial culture . . . but are aimed at the restoration of the autonomy of the former Southern Cameroons which has been annexed by the Republic of Cameroon'.⁸² The umbrella organization of all the Anglophone movements was subsequently named the Southern Cameroons National Council (SCNC). Since the violent confrontations between Cameroon and Nigeria over the Bakassi peninsula, the SCNC has constantly emphasized that Bakassi is neither a part of Cameroon nor of Nigeria but instead belongs to the Southern Cameroons.

The decision of the Cameroonian and Nigerian governments to submit their dispute over the Bakassi peninsula to the International Court of Justice for adjudication in 1994 offered Anglophone nationalists an opportunity to access legal space.⁸³ In 2001, the newly founded Ex-British Southern Cameroons Provisional Administration created a new body, the Southern Cameroons People's Organization (SCAPO), for the specific purpose of pursuing all legal avenues to achieve the independence of the Southern Cameroons. In its legal struggles for the recognition of an independent Southern Cameroons state, SCAPO rapidly filed a lawsuit against the Nigerian government in the Nigerian Federal High Court in Abuja. It had two reasons for taking Nigeria to court. First, the trust territory of Southern Cameroons had been administered by Britain as an integral part of Nigeria; consequently, SCAPO was inclined to regard Nigeria as a co-conspirator with Britain in the process that led to the annexation of the

80. *Ibid.*, 21–23 November 2003.

81. P. Konings and F. B. Nyamnjoh, 'The Anglophone problem in Cameroon', *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 35, 2 (1997), pp. 207–29; Konings and Nyamnjoh, *Negotiating an Anglophone Identity*.

82. SCNC press release reprinted in the *Cameroon Post*, 16–23 August 1994, p. 3.

83. N. Jua and P. Konings, 'Occupation of public space: Anglophone nationalism in Cameroon', *Cahiers d'Études Africaines* (forthcoming).

Southern Cameroons by *La République du Cameroun*.⁸⁴ Second, Nigeria had ratified the OAU Banjul Charter of Human Rights that lays down in Article 20 the right of all colonized or oppressed peoples to free themselves from the bonds of domination by resorting to any means recognized by the international community.

In this historic case, the plaintiffs sought the following relief from the Nigerian Federal High Court:

- an order compelling the Nigerian government to place before the ICJ and the UN General Assembly, and ensure diligent prosecution to conclusion, the claim of the peoples of Southern Cameroons to self-determination and their declaration of independence; and
- a perpetual injunction, restraining the Nigerian government from treating the Southern Cameroons and all the peoples of the territory as an integral part of *La République du Cameroun*.

In the end, SCAPO scored a landmark victory when, in March 2002, the Nigerian Federal High Court ruled in its favour on both issues. The court ordered the Nigerian government to submit to the ICJ the question of whether it was the Southern Cameroons and not *La République du Cameroun* that ought to share a maritime boundary with the Federal Republic of Nigeria.⁸⁵ Clearly, the implication is that the ICJ cannot adjudicate in the dispute between Nigeria and Cameroon over the Bakassi peninsula without first clarifying the international status of the Southern Cameroons. It is only after such a clarification that a decision can be made about sovereignty over Bakassi. Regrettably, despite numerous requests by Anglophone secessionist movements, this clarification has not yet materialized. The Nigerian government has not been prepared to execute the Federal High Court's judgment nor has the ICJ been ready to suspend proceedings in the Bakassi case pending determination of the international status of the Southern Cameroons.

It is interesting to observe that the Anglophone leadership, which in the past strongly condemned Nigerian domination of the Southern Cameroons, is tending to support Nigerian opposition to the ICJ verdict. Following press reports that the UN Secretary-General was about to discuss the ICJ

84. In February 1984, President Biya, without warning or consultation, changed the official name of the country from the United Republic of Cameroon to simply the Republic of Cameroon — despite vehement Anglophone protest that this was the name of independent Francophone Cameroon prior to reunification. Anglophone nationalists have argued that, by this action, *La République du Cameroun* had unilaterally seceded from the 1961 union with the Southern Cameroons and thus lacked a constitutional base from which to continue ruling the former Southern Cameroons. They are often inclined to appeal to the United Nations to assist its former trust territory in peacefully separating from what they now continue to call *La République du Cameroun*. See Konings and Nyamnjoh, *Negotiating an Anglophone Identity*, p. 72.

85. Jua and Konings, 'Occupation of public space'.

decisions with the heads of state of Cameroon and Nigeria in Geneva, the chairman of the SCNC and chancellor of the Ex-British Southern Cameroons Provisional Administration wrote to him on 12 November 2002 as follows:⁸⁶

While we share your anxiety for good neighbourliness between Nigeria and *La République du Cameroun*, the people of the Southern Cameroons, under the banner of the SCNC, wish to make their stand on the disputed territory abundantly clear. . . . Our problem is undoubtedly that of preference for the Federal Republic of Nigeria to continue to retain the Bakassi Peninsula until the State of the Southern Cameroons shall be restored. Then we shall ourselves negotiate the retrieval of Bakassi from the hands of Nigeria, in a process we believe shall be very friendly and easy as not to require arbitration. We share a common Anglo-Saxon political culture with Nigeria by virtue of having been governed by Great Britain together as a single entity for half a century. . . . On the other hand, the people of the Southern Cameroons do not want *La République du Cameroun* to lay hands on our Bakassi inheritance.

Since the establishment of the Joint Cameroon-Nigeria Border Commission, the leadership of the Anglophone secessionist movements has made it clear on a regular basis that the independent state of Southern Cameroons will not be bound by any agreements reached by the two states on the maritime border that have ignored the state of Southern Cameroons and its people.⁸⁷ It has also petitioned the United Nations and influential diplomatic missions in the country against its exclusion from the commission.

Conclusion

Unlike most previous research on African boundaries, this study of the Anglophone Cameroon-Nigeria border focuses on both state and local levels. This approach has made it possible not only to highlight the mutual influence of these two levels on socio-economic and political relations in the Anglophone Cameroon border zone but also to demonstrate the ambiguous nature of the boundary itself. Such an ambiguity appears to be characteristic of other African boundaries as well, making them potentially fascinating areas of research.⁸⁸

On the one hand, the Anglophone Cameroon-Nigeria border has served as a zone of opportunities for many years, posing no real barrier to the cross-border movement of goods and people. For historical and economic reasons, Anglophone Cameroon has attracted an increasing flow of Nigerian

86. Letter from Dr Martin Luma, National Chairman of the SCNC, to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Buea, 12 November 2002.

87. *BSCNation*, 1 January 2003, 'End of the year message by Southern Cameroons People's Organization (SCAPO), 31 December 2002'.

88. Cf. Nugent and Asiwaju, *African Boundaries*; and Nugent, *Smugglers, Secessionists and Loyal Citizens*.

migrants, in particular Igbos. Having been largely excluded from other economic activities in the post-reunification era, these migrants have concentrated on the potentially lucrative formal and informal cross-border trade. Capitalizing on their close ethnic networks on both sides of the border, they have achieved a dominant position in Anglophone Cameroon's commercial sector.

The Anglophone Cameroon-Nigeria boundary has, on the other hand, served equally as a source of conflict. First, there have been persistent tensions between the host community and the large Nigerian migrant community. The Anglophone Cameroonian population has always strongly resented Nigerian dominance of local trading circuits, which has led to various forms of Igbophobia and humiliating police harassment. The political elite and local government authorities have fuelled local hostile sentiments for their own ends, such as their attempt to shift responsibility for the present economic and political crisis to Nigerian exploitative and subversive activities. They have even not hesitated to extort huge sums of money from the alien minority group. Tensions between the host and migrant communities have tended to be aggravated when there was a crisis in bilateral relations between Cameroon and Nigeria, such as in the case of grave border disputes. Second, there have been frequent conflicts between the Cameroonian and Nigerian states about the colonially negotiated boundary, culminating in the war over the sovereignty of the oil-rich Bakassi peninsula in the 1990s. The ICJ's verdict in favour of Cameroon has been vehemently contested by the Anglophone secessionist movements, and by the Nigerian residents of Bakassi who make up the vast majority of the peninsula's population. Both claim, for various reasons, ownership of Bakassi.

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