

The Culturo-Linguistic Factor as a Facilitator of Peace in Present-Day Nigeria – Cameroun Border Relations

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Abstract

The violent clashes between the security and armed forces of Nigeria and Cameroun which marked the border relations between both countries appear to have disappeared following the 2006 final implementation of the 2002 ICJ judgment on the border dispute between these countries. It is therefore generally believed that this judgment and its implementation had brought peace to the border regions and to the general relations of the countries in question. This study has however pointed out and agrees with the view that the said judgment and its implementation are capable of renewing friction, first among the local peoples of both countries living along the border, and ultimately in the general relations between both countries. It has also pointed out the call arising from the above view, for continued search, beyond the ICJ judgment and its implementation, for ways to bring about a permanent and sustainable peace along the border of these countries, and ultimately in the relations between both countries. Contributing to this search, this paper submits that the culturo-linguistic affinities between the peoples across the border could be exploited to facilitate this peace. To demonstrate this thesis, the paper has carried out a detailed examination of the Nigeria – Cameroun border relations before and after the ICJ judgment, and on the basis of findings from this, has proposed concrete measures for exploiting the culture-linguistic affinities of the peoples of the two countries living across the borders for sustainable peace.

1. Introduction

The international boundary between Nigeria and Cameroun has been a major cause of friction in the overall relations between these two neighbouring African countries. Their troubled border relations have brought about many unfortunate incidents, some of which, like those of 1981, 1994, and 1996, had threatened to degenerate to full scale war. In 1994, Cameroun filed a suit against Nigeria at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) at The Hague, covering the totality of the disputes over their land and maritime boundaries. While the proceedings of the suit lasted, armed hostilities as well as diplomatic manoeuvres continued, apparently to raise each party's stakes and advance its cause in the legal struggle. The case was decided on 10 October 2002, to the very great satisfaction and joy of Cameroun on the one hand, and the great outrage of, and protest, by Nigeria on the other. Nevertheless, with Nigeria's formal handing over of Bakassi (the most contentious of the disputed territories) to Cameroun on 14 August 2006, the terms of the ICJ judgment had been fully implemented and complied with by both countries, and peacefully too, in spite of initial difficulties and temporary face-offs. Since then, no more clashes, of the kind that used to occur before the ICJ judgment, have been reported between the officials of both countries along the borders.

Today, given the peace that appears to have prevailed at the official level of the Nigeria – Cameroun border relations since the full implementation of the ICJ judgment via the instrumentalities of the Cameroun – Nigeria Mixed Commission and the Green Tree Accord, it is tempting to think that all is well, and like the authors of the 2002 judgement of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) had thought, that compliance with the terms of that judgement has helped to engender cordial relations along the border in particular, and generally between these two countries. But in reality, that judgment has tended to create a situation which

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could renew friction along the borders, first at the level of the local people, and ultimately in the bilateral relations between these two countries, if matters are not carefully handled. This then has spelt the need for a continued search, beyond the ICJ judgment and the subsequent Green Tree Accord, for ways and means that can bring about permanent and sustainable peace along the borders, and ultimately in the general relations between these two countries. The present essay is a contribution to this search.

Studies in the search for sustainable peace and cordiality in Nigeria – Cameroun border relations have made several findings and propositions before and after the ICJ judgement. One of these, and which is the focus of the present study, is that the cultural, ethnic, and linguistic affiliations between the indigenous peoples of the Nigeria – Cameroun border regions could be a potent tool in bringing about such peace and cordiality. Three notable studies which advocated this view are Barkindo (1984), Bonchuk (2003a) and Bonchuk (2003b). Barkindo's study of the case of the Mandara people as one of the culturally homogenous peoples which the Nigeria – Cameroun boundary has divided into the two countries, ended its concluding paragraph with the following suggestions:

What the two governments in Nigeria and the Republic of Cameroon need to do now is attempt a true understanding of the history of all peoples in the border areas. Educational and cultural exchanges between the communities on both sides and joint developments should be encouraged. Above all, we should explore the areas which unite us as Africans, and one of the best ways of achieving this must be to study and encourage cultural links across political boundaries – which should be emphasized as points of contact and not of separation. The case of the Mandara appears typical of the several cases of ethnographical and cultural links between Nigeria and Cameroon. The potential of these links as a major factor in the bi-national relations between Nigeria and Cameroun has yet to be fully realized and explored. (in Asiwaju, 1984:46).

Bonchuk's (2003a) study of the "Cultural diffusion and movements in the Nigeria – Cameroun border zone before the imposition of the Nigeria – Cameroun border" suggests that [present-day] Nigeria – Cameroun trans-boundary cooperation could be based on a realization of the grass-roots realities of cross-border historical, socio-cultural, economic and environmental linkages which have survived the imposition of the colonial boundary.

And for its part, Bonchuk (2003b), in its examination of "language, culture and ethno-linguistic parameters as tools for conflict resolution along and astride the Nigeria – Cameroun borders", ended its conclusion with the following propositions:

Language being an important psychological component of communication would always dominate in either conflict or its resolution. Thus cross-border communication remains an important consideration and the successful harnessing of the factors of language, culture and ethno-linguistic core values prevalent in the border region at the transnational level would to a large extent accentuate cooperation and conflict resolution at the state-centric level if the two states are willing to utilize same.

But as we shall see in the course of this discussion, these propositions were not made in the same situations as at today with specific regard to the feelings of the local peoples of the Nigeria – Cameroun border regions, and to the attitude of the officialdom of the countries concerned to the issue of their common border. It is our view that the ICJ judgment and its implementation have reshaped the situation of things in the above-mentioned feelings and attitude, in a way that would significantly influence the ways and manner of exploiting the ethno-cultural and linguistic factors to enhance sustainable cordial and peaceful relations along the Nigerian – Cameroun border in particular, and between these two countries in general. It is for this reason and in this perspective, that we are here re-examining the culturo-linguistic factor in the present-day Nigeria – Cameroun border relations. The ICJ judgment on the Cameroun – Nigeria Boundary Dispute is therefore in our view a watershed in the ethno-cultural relations along the Nigerian – Cameroun border, and a consideration of these relations before and after it should reveal its effect(s) on these relations.

2. Nigeria – Cameroun Border Relations before the ICJ Judgment

It is now an established fact that the Nigeria – Cameroun border disputes are a product of the 1884/85 Berlin West Africa Conference which partitioned Africa among the then European powers of Britain, France and Germany, who in turn, through bilateral agreements with one another, created borders to define their areas of influence. These borders, very often ill-defined, ran in most cases through villages, towns and communities of one and the same people (with a common language, cultural and economic heritage, and traditional and customary political administration), separating such a people into different territories administered by different and sometimes opposing European colonial powers, and later into the different sovereign African States that succeeded these European colonies. The affected African peoples certainly resisted, sometimes with their blood, such balkanization of their peoples and territories; but in the end such resistance always gave way in the face of the deployment by these European powers, of a combination of superior arms, better trained armies, and peaceful and often dubious negotiation of treaties for trade and for military assistance and protection against invasion from other African powers. Nevertheless, the partitioned African peoples kept their traditional affiliations and allegiances across the artificial borders created by the Europeans, since, in many cases, these divides separated people not only from community and even family relations and inheritances, and traditional and cultural heritage of various kinds (ancestral and religious shrines, palaces, places of political and social meetings, etc.), but also from age-old, traditionally recognized and long exploited resources as farmlands, fishing territories, grazing fields, commodity markets, and even community sources of water supply. Barkindo (1984), Bonchuk (1997), (2001), (2002), (2003a), and (2003b), Njeuma (1992), Odiong (2008), and Tijani (1980) are some of the detailed studies of the situation just presented above with respect to such peoples as the Kenem –Bornu, the Boki, the Ejaghama, the peoples on the Adamawa Plateau, the Mandara, the Efik, the Efut (Balondo), the Fulani, all along the Nigeria – Cameroun border. For instance, citing a colonial British Intelligence Report on the Tiv people of the River Benue region in Nigeria, Bonchuk (2003a) notes that:

The site of the Tiv ancestral land or shrines is in Swem, north of Akwaya in Cameroon, a place they still regard as sacred. The Tiv had social and economic ties with the Essimbi. The Tiv resisted islamization and remained for a long time attached to their traditional religion and culture. Till date, the Tiv still maintain socio-cultural religious institutions with their kith and kin in the Cameroons across Kwande area. For instance, the Tiv still look with anticipation at (sic) the time when they will cross over to Cameroon to worship at Swem.

Studying the case of the Mandara people, Barkindo (1984) reports that:

The towns of Kerawa, Ashigashiya, Bakarise and Gakara refused to see themselves as divided between the British and the French. People still attended each other's markets and ceremonies to mark births and deaths. By 1940, there were still about forty families in the town of British Kerawa who gained their livelihood through farms which were on the French side of the border. Equally, the divided Bornoans and Shuwa Arabs had more in common with each other than with groups more distantly related to them in the Dikwa Division with whom they were now linked administratively.

Believing that allowing the people living in their territory to freely interact with their kith and kin living in the territory of the other colonial power on the other side of the boundary, was not in their own best interest, each colonial power began to put in place measures to systematically alienate the peoples in her territory from their kin in the other territory. One of these measures was the re-naming of people, their languages, and their towns and villages. An instance of this can be seen in Barkindo's (1984) study of the Mandara people divided into the French and the British Cameroun:

Mandara and other smaller states and peoples were the principal victims of the new dispensation. People who belonged to the same cultural groups or societies were indiscriminately separated and usually given different names in order to justify their separation. The new border, for example, separated the Gude people into two, and to justify that action those on the French side were called Djimi. The Higi, who were separated from their kinsmen now in Nigeria, were named Kapsiki and the Matakam now found on the Anglophone side were named Wula to differentiate them from their kinsmen in French Cameroon.

Still as part of the alienation measure, both colonial powers, Britain and France, actively discouraged the use of the indigenous languages of these divided cultural areas in official business such as school instruction and governmental administration, in preference to the language of the colonial master, France doing this much more actively than Britain. In time, this resulted in apathy for indigenous languages and increasing use and better mastery of the languages of the colonial masters now decreed the official languages of the emerging nations. This alienation measure was all the more promoted by a forceful condemnation of indigenous cultural practices and beliefs, these being labelled superstitious or outright satanic, primitive or outright barbaric or savage, just as the adoption of European cultural beliefs and practices and manners, which were labelled “civilized”, was zealously encouraged, and pursued and sometimes even rewarded, by the authorities. In time, this linguo-cultural alienation would produce a situation in which kinsmen on either side of the international boundary would see one another as strangers, speaking different languages and having different ways of life.

The setting up of control posts at the borders and other places to regulate the movement of persons (immigrations) and goods (customs) added to the alienation of culturally-related peoples on either side of the border from the other: travel authorization documents, officially issued by the authorities of each territory, were required before citizens of one territory could pass to pay a visit to family relations, let alone exploit economic resources, on the other side of the border, while crops and other goods from communal resources beyond the frontier attracted customs duties. The various security services of the colonial administrations in both countries – police, customs, immigration, health, etc. executed with maximum zeal their assigned duty of restricting as much as possible the movements of people and of commodities across the border. And so, what used to be a perfectly normal journey to visit a relation, or to attend a cultural festival, or to perform a religious rite, or to carry out an economic activity to earn a living – to work on a farm, to fish, to sell or buy goods, etc. – before the imposition of this artificial boundary by the Europeans, was now a criminal offence if carried out without the consent and authorization of the colonial authorities, formally expressed in the form of duly obtained travel documents. Expectedly, there certainly was resistance to all of this at the beginning. But years of forced compliance had turned it all to a routine, and in time, to a normal way of life, quite as normal as the former. One consequence of this was that kinsmen on one side of the border began to rival and to clash with those on the other side over hitherto commonly held resources that lay across the international border. Barkindo’s (1984) study on the Mandara people astride the border reports that:

...gradually, as the people came to accept the division, border incidents especially over farmlands became a regular feature of the area. The Kerawa was the frontier; but by 1945 the river had so altered its course that except where it divided actual towns and villages, it had changed the border agreed in the Anglo–French convention of 1920. Now there were various clashes and disputes about farmlands especially among the Matakam and their Wula kinsmen or between Gude and the Djimi – people formerly united but now differentiated by the border.

It is perhaps important to mention the fact that the cross-border clashes actually began with the officials of the colonial territories as a result of their desire and greater economic gains, for them and for their principals back home. At times, taking advantage of the imprecisely demarcated or totally un-demarcated boundaries, the officials of one colonial authority would invade and attempt to take over communities and economic resources actually or supposedly administered by the other colonial authority, and the reason for such action would be different interpretations of whatever boundary demarcation there could have been by the officials of the two colonial authorities. One instance of this is reported by Odiong (2008:62) to have occurred on 17th October, 1894 when:

The Germans invaded Ekanem Esin Town, uprooted the Union Jack and tried to assume authority over the place, an action which prompted Sir Claude Maxwell Macdonald, the British Consul General in Old Calabar to send a letter to the German Governor of Kamerun. (Odiong, 2008:62).

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An extract from the said British Consul General's letter as cited by Odiong (2008:62-64), may serve to give a clear picture of the situation.

HBM Consulate General

Old Calabar

18th December 1894

His Excellency

The Governor

Kamerun

Excellency,

I have the honour to inform you that, complaints having been made to me concerning the actions of German officials stationed in the Rio del Rey with regards to natives in the vicinity.

Of Akpayafe River, I sent my Vice Consul Moor to make enquiry and the following matters have been brought under his notice.

On 17th October Herr Klauss sent to Chief Ekanem Esin whose town is situated on a tributary of the Akpayafe River, a present of three bottles of beer together with some custom forms of the Kamerun Colony, one of which was filled on a specimen. On or about the same time a party of four armed men were (sic) stationed at Ekanem's Town by Herr Klauss with directions to report anything that went on.

On the 10th December Herr Klauss with two other European officers and a force of 17 armed men entered the territories of this protectorate and preceeded (sic) to Ekanem's Town. On arrival they put up the German Flag, injuring two of the chief (sic) boys by blows with guns whilst so doing and they preceeded (sic) to the house where they beat a third boy cutting his head and leaving marks of blows on his back, which mark Mr. Moor saw. Here Herr Klauss seized from the chief a Union Jack Flag and a document which I had given him authorizing him to enquire into and settle disputes in the locality. Herr Klauss further compelled the chief to pay duty on all goods dutiable under the Kamerun tariff and brought into his town from Old Calabar by himself and people since 25th September last.

I therefore consider it an improper act on the part of Herr Klauss to have brought an armed body of men and levied duty by force in a territory practically in a dispute and the possession of which by mutual consent of the two powers had been left to future delimitation. ..

Ekanem Esin is a British protected subject and as such I hold myself responsible for his action should he have been wrong I will have him punished but again I beg to protest most vigorously against the action of Mr. Claus. I enclose for your Excellency's information a copy of which I have received no official intimation from the imperial German Government of the establishment of a custom station at Ekanem Esin's Town, and I cannot in any way recognize the existence of such a station until the delimitation which I believe is shortly to be taken in hand as laid down where the boundary is to be.

I have the honour to be

Your Excellency's Most Obedient Humble Servant

Sgd.....

Claud M. Macdonald

Consul General

The point to make here is that as the local peoples grew in the socio-economic and politico-administrative systems of the colonial territory to which they now belonged, and conceived of their interests as more attached to the fortunes of that territory than to those of a disappearing ethno-cultural entity to which they were now more of strangers, they could only but support such territorial and economic expansionist claims of their territory, even as these led to the cross-border clashes with their with kith and kin on the other side. It then becomes understandable that these claims and clashes continued under independent states of Nigeria and Cameroun under native leadership, which includes peoples of the border regions in question in this study.

A further point to make here is that with all the disputes and the resultant violent raids and clashes from the colonial period to the political independence period, and up to the final legal clash at the ICJ, including all the attendant political and diplomatic manoeuvres, the diverse culturally related peoples along and astride the border were still communicating and interacting with one another on the basis of their ethno-cultural affiliations or affinities, be such communication and interaction in support of or in opposition to the border dispute and related matters, for personal or for collective interests, for good or for bad. Barkindo's (2004) study of the Mandara people astride the border in question here, has presented a phenomenon that underscores the validity of this point:

A murderer or robber would simply walk a few kilometres across the border and be among his kith and kin who would give him all the protection he needed. Goods stolen in one section were quickly carried over the border to be disposed of ... smuggling and the buying of smuggled or stolen goods became very profitable trades.

The point that has been made here brings us to the very useful analysis which Bonchuk (2003b) has made of the situation in the Nigeria – Cameroun border region (and in similar border situations generally). This analysis revealed the state-centric and transnational levels in the approach to trans-border relations.

According to Bonchuk, the state-centric approach to trans-border relations and to the management of such relations derives from the nineteenth century notions of sovereignty, power politics, the sanctity of boundaries, national interest, and national security, which is synonymous with the State apparatus. Given these determinants, partisans of the state-centric approach to border matters see borders as barriers which are rigidly inviolable. On the other hand, the transnational level of border relations derives from "the pre-colonial linkages of language and cultural relations". As Bonchuk explains, boundaries did exist in pre-colonial Africa, but they did not mar or strain relations between ethnic groups. Rather, they enabled the geographical definition of kinship groups and marked a growth in human organisation and its major utility value in pre-colonial African society was its ability to promote inter-ethnic harmony. Networks of relations which endure and oblige loyalty are seen as superior to boundary lines which are in any case seen "not as dividing lines but as 'osmotic points' of contact to be crossed at will as cultural, social, economic, political or other types of intercourse and interests demand".

Colonial officers in Cameroun and Nigeria obviously took the state-centric approach to boundary matters. Motivated as it were by the economic interests of their homelands, they targeted those territories and resources that could boost the revenue-yielding capacity of the colonial territories they administered and ultimately the economic fortunes of their homelands. Excepts when it advanced their economic interests, the colonial administrators never bothered with how the boundaries they created between their colonial territories and those of their colonial rivals affected the native populations. One can then understand the origin of the conflict that characterized the Nigeria-Cameroun border regions even from the early colonial days as exemplified by the 10 December 1894 raid of Chief Ekanem Esin Town in what was considered British –administered Nigerian territory by German colonial officers and their men as reported earlier in this essay. It is also understandable that the indigenous leaders that took over the administration of these countries at the attainment of political independence naturally continued with the state-centred approach to the boundary matters, resulting in the "conflict-infested" relations, so to say, between independent Nigeria and Cameroun, until the Green Tree Accord came to seem to put an end to all that.

But what Bonchuk (2003b) has called the trans-national level of border relations between these two countries has witnessed more of peaceful interaction and relationship than of conflict along and astride the border, drawing from the age-old ethnic, cultural, linguistic and other forms of affinities and affiliations among and between the peoples living along and astride the Nigeria-Cameroun “international boundary”, many of whom are people of one and the same linguistico-cultural and even traditional political entities that were separated into the two modern nation-states of Nigeria and Cameroun, while others were different but neighbouring communities and peoples who had maintained various types of relationships with one another over the ages – cultural, political, commercial, social, etc. – before they were separated into the two countries. One can then understand the difficulty that the colonial and later the post-colonial state machinery of these two countries have experienced all along in trying to put a stop to the various types of transactions, mainly economic, and which has come to be seen as illegal and criminal in state-centric terms, as evidenced in the thriving “smuggling”, “robbery”, “fugitive offender” cases which exploit trans-border ethnic affiliations to beat the law enforcing agents of the state.

Bonchuk (2003b) had concluded that the picture of conflict presented by the border was erroneous as the history of the border revealed an admixture of conflict at the state-centric level and cooperation at the transnational level:

It is a truism that there is the conflictual aspect of the boundary, but this should not blur its true nature which in historical perspective exhibits an ambivalence of conflict and cooperation ... conflict is witnessed more at the state-centric level. At the transnational (or grassroots) level there is much more cooperation between the divided ethnic groups which in some instances run counter to the core of their States’ national interests.

Bonchuk (2003b) concluded and recommended that the dynamics of these ethno-cultural and linguistic affinities and affiliations at the trans-national level of the border relations between Nigeria and Cameroun are viable tools, and should indeed be exploited for the resolution of what appeared at the time to be an intractable problem of serial border conflict. Bonchuk deposed as follows *inter alia*:

Nigeria-Cameroun share a common boundary and partitioned cultural groups divided and placed along and astride their borders. Their positions therefore compel them to take positive political steps to resolving their intractable border conflicts. Recently, scholarly studies have emphasized and demonstrated the natural, irrepressible attraction between splintered but ethno-linguistically homogenous groups to re-integrate... Thus, it has become imperative to underscore the fact that it is in the cultural (language is a core value of culture) field that the concept of border cooperation, integration and conflict resolution would be easiest to realize and acceptable to all countries. The transnational perspective, as evidenced by the pre-colonial linkages, the probability of realizing effective communication at the more formal conflictual level, and the intensity of informal interaction or micro-diplomatic relations are raised. In these borderlands understanding and accepting the other point of view is dictated by kinship relations and less by the intransigent political attitudes of the elites at their core centres and more by the will be understand the other position through language and other socio cultural norms or practices. Conflict is dictated far less as a breakdown in ethno-cultural relations but in the divergent political and diplomatic levels and intentions. The ethno-linguistic relationships that exist along and astride the borders are yet to be galvanized and harnessed for trans-border management and conflict resolution.

Such conclusions and recommendations as these were made and were pertinent in those days of heated disputes and clashes between the citizen and security agents of the two countries in question here. As things stand today, one would think that those dark days of the Nigeria-Cameroun border disputes and the attendant violent attacks and clashes are over. If anything else should come up, it should be days of cordiality, harmony and good neighbor liness between these two African brother countries, as can reasonably be deduced from the almost unexpectedly peaceful implementation of the terms of the ICJ judgment with the instrumentality of the Green Tree Accord. Today, every metre, so to say, of the Nigeria –Cameroun international boundary has been precisely, unambiguously and definitely demarcated by institutions and instruments that were freely put in place and consented to by both countries before respected and credible

witnesses, just as the handing-over and taking-over of territories and populations arising from the territorial demarcations were equally freely carried out. So there should be no cause or reason for any new or renewed friction over the boundary of these two countries. In the circumstances, such efforts as have been suggested by Bonchuk (2003b), and similar studies before it, (Barkindo (1984) and Bonchuk (2003a) to mention but these here), could simply be left alone for things to take their natural course, without active efforts deployed to put them into effect. But as we had hinted in the introductory part of this essay, the reality of present-day Nigeria – Cameroun border relations, i.e. following the “peaceful” implementation of the ICJ judgment, is not what has been presented above. With specific regard to ethno-cultural issues, the present-day situation along the Nigeria – Cameroun boundary is a potentially explosive one that still calls for a well-planned programme of measures to put such explosions in check, including those suggested by Bonchuk and others.

3. Nigeria – Cameroun Border Relations after the ICJ Judgment

As earlier hinted in this discussion, the present-day dynamics of Nigeria – Cameroun border relations are obviously circumscribed by the fall out of the 2002 ICJ judgment on the Cameroun –Nigeria boundary dispute, and the consequent efforts and activities that sought to smooth the rough ends of the practical implementation of the terms of the judgment, including in particular the Green Tree Accord. A considerable number of studies and commentaries have been done from diverse perspectives – legal, political, diplomatic, strategic, economic, historical cultural, etc. – on the ICJ suit ever since it was filed by Cameroun at The Hague on 29 March 1994; on the judgement over this suit ever since it was delivered on 10 October 2002; and on the various steps and measures that have been taken by various parties to give effect to the terms of the judgment. The reader of the present essay may avail himself/herself of these studies and commentaries in order to properly appreciate this discussion. So only a cursory review of very few relevant issues in the judgement and in the efforts to implement its terms, including the Green Tree Accord, as they affect the present day Nigeria – Cameroun border relations shall be undertaken here.

One may begin by pointing to the fact that the ICJ included Gilbert Guillaume from France as President, Carl-August Fleishauer from Germany, and Rosalyn Higgins from Great Britain as judges, all citizens of countries who, as colonial powers, had authored treaties Nigeria had vehemently contested before the court, but which Cameroun had relied so much upon to make her case. There was little surprise that, as stated *inter alia* by the President of the Court in Paragraph 2 of his Press Statement after the Judgment:

The Court first decided that the land boundary between the two countries had been fixed by treaties entered into during the colonial period and it upheld the validity of those treaties.

This study is not interested in imputing motives to the judges over the judgment they arrived at, but in the consequences of the judgment on the native populations concerned and on the ultimate effect of that on the future relations between the two countries, which the judgement, as we shall soon see, claims to be interested in helping to enhance. In this respect, it must be pointed out that the European judges and others of their clan on the Court’s panel would not ordinarily have discredited treaties that were entered into by their home nations in the interest of their economy. And just as their colonial forebears who swooped on African did not care what could ever be the effect of the boundaries that those treaties created on the native populations, the judges of the ICJ never cared that their judgment would tear apart people with thousands of years of history of ethnic, linguistic and other types of socio-cultural links, including even family ties. And so, as the President of the Court proceeds to say in the paragraph 2 of the Press Statement cited above:

It (the court) moreover rejected the theory of historical consolidation put forward by Nigeria and accordingly refused to take into account the effectivities relied upon by Nigeria. It ruled that in the absence of acquiescence by Cameroun, these effectivities could not prevail over Cameroun’s conventional titles. Accordingly, the Court decided that, pursuant to the Anglo-German Agreement of 11 March 1913, sovereignty over Bakassi lies with Cameroun. Similarly, the Court fixed the boundary in the Lake Chad area in accordance with the Henderson-Fleuriat Exchange of Notes of 9 a January 1931 between France and Great Britain and rejected Nigeria’s claims to the Darak area and the neighbouring villages.

Other interesting provisions of the ICJ judgment for our purposes here are to be found in paragraph 5 of the Press Statement issued by the president of the Court.

5 Drawing the consequences of its determination on the land boundary, the Court first held that Nigeria is under an obligation expeditiously and without condition to withdraw its administration and its military and police forces from the Bakassi Peninsula, and from the Lake Chad area falling within the sovereignty of Cameroun. The Court further decided that Cameroun, for its part, is under an obligation expeditiously and without condition to withdraw any administration or military or police forces which may be present on Nigeria territory along the land boundary between Lake Chad and Bakassi. Nigeria bears the same obligation in respect of any territory in this sector which falls under the sovereignty of Cameroun. (ICJ Press Release 2002/26 of 10 October, 2002).

The above-cited terms of the ICJ Judgement held and still hold dire consequences for the affected peoples. In December 2003, Nigeria handed over thirty-three (33) villages in the Lake Chad to Cameroun, with the latter handing over the village of Dambore to Nigeria. On the Land boundary these countries handed over one or two villages to each other in June 2004. And following the signing of the Green Tree Accord in the United States on 12 June 2006, Nigeria ceded to Cameroun the Bakassi Peninsula with a landmass of 1,000 square kilometres harbouring 323 villages (according to the Cross River State of Nigeria (Clans and Villages Creation) Edict of 1996). (cf. Odiong, 2008:95). In all, the implementation of these handing-over of territories implied the mass movement of hundreds of thousands of people. For fear of ill-treatment in the hands of Cameroun authorities who are now to be their political rulers, and who, going by past experiences of brutality, have never been friendly to them, these people have now been forced by the ICJ judgment, to leave “their age-long ancestral lands”. (cf. Odiong, 2008:152). In all these cases of handing-over of territories, with the resultant forced movement of peoples to areas where they feel a sense of belonging and kinship, and the attendant sense of grieve, loss, and injustice in such movement, the most traumatic is the case of the people of the Bakassi Peninsula, and this can be deduced from the reaction of the affected people to the claims of Cameroun in the latter’s suit at the ICJ, right from the outset of the suit, or indeed, right from the outset of such claims. This reaction has been a combination of outrage, strenuous rebuttal of such claims, an equally strenuous statement of their historical title and right to the territory in question and of their historically demonstrable ethnic links to, and common cultural heritage with the peoples of the adjoining territories in Nigeria, as well as frustration and disillusionment over Cameroun’s choice, and following it the choice of the ICJ to unjustifiably ignore these facts. This reaction of the people of Bakassi has also included physical representations by them on their case at many different national and international fora. To our knowledge, a good documentation of this people’s reaction to Cameroun’s initial claims on Bakassi, of Cameroun’s acts of violent intimidation on them over the years on the basis on such claims, of their outrage and cries over such claims and acts of intimidation, and of their legal and other forms of representation at different national and international fora over all this and over the ICJ judgment and of its consequences on them, can be seen in Odiong (2008), which in itself also contains a copious citation of other such documents. The follow-up volume to Odiong (2008) and which has been promised on page 145 of this first volume, also promises to be a good documentation in this regard when it is finally published.

The reaction of the Bakassi people in particular to the ICJ judgement, with specific regard to its implication on the Nigeria – Cameroon border relations, shows that these relations still present today, as it did before the ICJ judgment, an admixture of conflict and cooperation. The judgment has so far only succeeded in bringing about a reversal of the levels at which we experience conflict and cooperation in the said border relations. The way the Nigerian and Camerounian governments cooperated to bring about a final total and peaceful compliance with the terms of the ICJ judgment reveals that these border relations now experience cooperation at the state-centric level. On the other hand, the actions and reactions of the affected populations, at least going by the specific case of the Bakassi people, have shown that at the trans-national level of the Nigeria – Cameroun border relations, the ICJ judgment has tended to change the situation from one that tended towards cooperation to one that tends towards conflict, at least at some points along the border. So much has been the grievance and sense of injustice against the Bakassi people that some self-determination groups has sprang up, such as the Bakassi Movement for Self –Determination (BAMOSD).

Writing in his chapter 5 titled “World Court’s Judgment”, and specifically in the section titled “Formation of Bakassi Self Determination Front”, Odiong (2008:177) explains that:

Article 20 of the African Charter on Human and People’s Right makes provisions for right to Self-Determination. Some of these provisions are that “All people shall have rights to existence. They shall have the unquestionable and inalienable right to self-determination. They shall have the right to freely determine their political status and shall pursue their economic and social development according to the policy they have freely chosen. Colonial and oppressed people shall have the right to free themselves from the bond of domination by resorting to any means recognized by the international community”. It was therefore in compliance with this article that Bakassi Self-Determination Front was formed. Having perceived that the ICJ’s judgment on Bakassi was a denial of their political, social, and economic status in the Peninsula and that this might lead to their oppression, colonization, or even outright extinction, it was envisaged that the front should be the major platform through which Bakassi people would stand to carry out any reasonable action recognized by the international community to free themselves from the impending bond of oppression, colonization and extinction and also determine their political, economic and social status in the Peninsula.

The above extract represents but one, and perhaps an earlier position of the Bakassi people on the situation in which they have come to find themselves. Another position, and which very much appears to be the more popular and current one can be seen in the following extract from an article written by another Bakassi indigene, E. E. Okon, and published in the Nigeria news magazine *Tell* of 28 October, 2002, page 28:

Well, it was Winston Churchill who said, “if you cannot fight for your right when you can win easily without bloodshed, it comes to a time when you have to fight with all the odds against you, with precarious chance of survival. But we will still have to fight”.

Commenting on Okon’s views in the above-mentioned article, Adams (2009:194) has observed that

... since after the June 12, 2006 signing of the Green Tree Agreement, the Bakassi people have been divided over the issue of secession. The elderly ones, from our findings, settled for resettlement in Nigeria, but the youth objected, saying that the elders must have lost their sense of reason. The youths under the auspices of the Bakassi Movement for Self-determination (BAMOSD) have sworn to fight for their right with their last breath. The militant part of this group, known as Action Committee, claims that they have the support of the Niger Delta militants.

For anyone who is familiar with the violent attacks and actions of the Niger Delta militants in Nigeria, comments such as these, and the actions they foretell, are certainly signs of deadly future conflicts in the Bakassi region of the Nigeria – Cameroun boundary.

It is also pertinent to note here that the volume of the current verbal war in the national and international press media over the ICJ judgement on the Nigeria – Cameroun boundary dispute is a sign that the stakes are really high and the vested interests powerful. The palpable emotion and passion in the article by Ned Nwoko in the March 26 1995 issue of *West Africa* magazine, which was subsequently placed on the net, the equally passionate reactions to it, and other such articles and rejoinders, as well as chats on face book, twitter and blog by both Nigerians and Cameroonians, all indicate nothing less. (cf. for instance http://www.postnewsline.com/2006/08/bakassi_nigeria.html#tp, as well as <http://www.cameroon-info.net/stories/0.17737@greentree.acrod>. to mention just these two). And what is happening in the Bakassi case may well show the way to other aggrieved peoples or groups at other points along the border in question.

Another dimension of this matter is that aggrieved people and groups on one side of the border have a tendency to join forces with other aggrieved people and groups on the other side of the border. For instance, the Bakassi people (who feel rejected and abandoned by the Nigeria State to be colonized and oppressed by the Cameroonian State) and the Ambazonia people of South West Cameroun (who feel marginalized oppressed, and exploited by the Cameroonian State) have been talking about joining forces to fight for their respective sovereignty. (see for instance Ned Nwoko’s article in *West Africa Magazine* issue of March 26,

1995, extract of which has also been posted on the internet – see <http://www.postnewslines.com/2006/08/bakassi-nigeria.html#tp>). And in the event of such joint forces launching attacks on State apparatus in Cameroun which is more or less their common enemy, there is bound to be friction in the overall Nigeria-Cameroun relations, as Cameroun may accuse Nigeria of allowing its territory to be used for subversive activities against it.

All in all, the ICJ judgment is fraught with serious negative consequences for Nigeria – Cameroun border relations, at the trans- national level first, and secondly and ultimately at the state-centric level. It has therefore not been the architect of the end to the Nigeria – Cameroun protracted boundary dispute which it has widely been reputed to be and applauded for. In the circumstances, it is still as expedient and indeed urgent today as it was before the ICJ judgement, to find real, effective, and enduring solutions to this dispute. And in our opinion, such solutions can still be found in the suggestions of Barkindo (1984) and Bonchuk (2003a) and (2003b) in particular, i.e. in exploiting the culturo-linguistic affinities that nevertheless continue to exist among and between the peoples living along and astride the boundary between these two countries. In our opinion, the suggestion has been made in its general outlines. It remains yet to know the concrete ways or measures by which such affinities could or would be exploited to attain peace on a permanent or sustainable basis, especially in the context of the present-day realities as highlighted above.

4. Measures for Exploiting Culturo-Linguistic Affinities for Sustainable Peace in Nigeria – Cameroun Border Relations

We recall here Bonchuk's (2003b) suggestion that the successful harnessing of the factors of language, culture, and the ethno-linguistic core values prevalent in the border region at the trans-national level would to a large extent accentuate cooperation and conflict resolution at the state-centric level. Barkindo (1984), on his part, had suggested to governments of both countries that educational and cultural exchanges can promote cultural links across the political boundary. And we strongly endorse Barkindo's measures by reason of their practicality. But we are of the considered opinion that if the measures of educational and cultural exchanges suggested by Barkindo, and others that we shall suggest must yield better border and general relations between these two countries, such implementation must be entrusted to a specific governmental institution or agency in each of the two countries, while the programmes and activities of such national institution or agency will be coordinated by a specific and specified bilateral agency established on the basis of an accord by the governments of both countries.

The governmental institution or agency suggested above for each of the two countries should function at two levels – a national office and local offices. The national office should be manned by persons highly trained and knowledgeable in such relevant fields as sociology and anthropology, linguistics, literary studies, history, international relations, intercultural studies, and education. The programmes of activities mapped out by this national office in each country, will receive input from the local offices. The local offices, located appropriately in the local communities, should also be manned by persons who are knowledgeable in the languages, cultures, history and the socio-economic life of the individual or related people of their locality and who have their kith and kin on the other side of the border between the two countries.

The bilateral agency composed of experts from the two countries, will then be the supra-national office, which shall be charged with the coordination of the programme of activities mapped out by the national offices, for the purpose of the smooth execution of such practical bilateral activities as educational, economic, scientific, agricultural, and cultural studies, exchanges, visits, expositions, festivals, etc. involving kindred people in the two countries, with a view to ensuring the suggested ethno-cultural contacts and understanding between the culturally homogenous or related peoples on both sides of the international political boundary dividing them.

The institution we are proposing here is therefore a large and an elaborate one. It is the more so when one considers the large number of people of same or closely related cultures and languages that have been separated into the two countries by the so-called Nigeria-Cameroun international boundary, and who are now

living as natives on both sides of the boundary. The 2005 (15th) edition of *Ethnologue: Language of the World* edited by Raymond G. Gordon Jr. has identified over thirty languages that are spoken both in Nigeria and in Cameroun. These are Afade, Alege, Bata, Bitare, Dzodinka, Efai (Afai or Effiat), Ejagham (or Ekin Kwa, Qua, Aqua, Abakpa), Evant, Fulfude, Fum, Glavda, Gude, Gvoko, Hausa, Hide, Holma, Jilbe, Kamwe, Kanuri, Koma, Korop, Kutep, Mbongno, Mom Jango, Ndoola, Nzanyi, Olulumo, Samba Leko, Tiv, Yukuben, and Zizilivaken. (see <http://www.ethnologue.com/show-country.asp?name-nigeria>) Nwoko's article in *West Africa Magazine* (26 March 1995, p.413) also tell us that Ejagham and Boki are spoken in in the two countries. And of course, by the ceding of Bakassi to Cameroun, Efik is now also spoken in Nigeria and in Cameroun. Indeed, a number of the above ethno-linguistic groups are very small ones, sometimes counting just a few thousands in population, yet to the extent that the grievance or discontent of these few thousands can produce sinister consequences that can jeopardize peace and stability in immense proportions, these smaller people also have to be carried along with the large groups. The institution or agency that has the responsibility of implementing the measures to exploit the cultural and linguistic affinities of these many peoples to generate peace and understanding between them and between their countries, certainly has an enormous task, and must be an elaborate and well-articulated one, composed necessarily of highly trained, knowledgeable and resourceful persons.

At this point, the Cameroun-Nigeria Mixed Commission readily comes to mind as an agency that can easily function as the supra-national office proposed above. The Cameroun – Nigeria Mixed Commission (CNMC) was formed in a meeting in Geneva between the Presidents of Cameroun and Nigeria and the Secretary-General of the United Nations on 15 November 2002, following the ICJ judgment on 10 October 2002. According to the Communiqué of that meeting, the CNMC was established to:

Consider all the implications of the decision, including the need to protect the right of the Affected Populations in both countries. The Commission shall inter alia be entrusted with the task of demarcating the land boundary between the two countries. It will also make recommendations on additional confidence building measures; the holding, on a regular basis, of meetings between local authorities, Government officials and Heads of State; developing projects to promote joint economic ventures and cross-border cooperation; the avoidance of inflammatory statements or declarations on Bakassi by either side; troop withdrawal from relevant areas along the land boundary; eventual demilitarization of Bakassi Peninsula with possibility of International Personnel to observe the withdrawal, and the reactivation of the Lake Chad Commission.

Meetings of the Commission had been held and with worthwhile results; the boundary demarcation had been completed; troops had been withdrawn from all the contested territories; and on 14th August 2006, the last and the most contested of the territories – the Bakassi Peninsula – had been handed over by Nigeria, and placed under Cameroun sovereignty, on the solid foundation of the Green Tree Agreement signed on 12th June 2006 by the Presidents of Nigeria and Cameroun and witnessed to by representatives of the United Nations, France, Germany, and the United Kingdom. “Peace” had returned to Nigeria- Cameroun relations. Indeed, August 2008 had seen the end of the transitional period prescribed in article 2 (a) of Annex 1 of the Green Tree Agreement according to which Cameroun shall allow Nigeria to keep its civil administration and a police force necessary for the maintenance of law and order in the zone for a non-renewable period of two years. At the end of this period, Nigeria shall withdraw its administration and its police force and Cameroun shall take over the administration of the zone.

It can justifiably be said therefore that the CNMC had completed its assignment, particularly when one considers the fact that it was established in the course of the efforts and as one of the instruments for the immediate resolution of the Nigeria-Cameroun crisis over the Bakassi Peninsula arising from the ICJ judgment.

But then, in the circumstances of the possibility of renewed crisis along and across the border as we have seen above, it can again be justifiably said that the CNMC still has some work to do with respect to that aspect of its original mandate that has to do with “developing projects to promote joint economic ventures and cross-border cooperation”. The particular aspect of promoting cross-border cooperation has a direct

bearing, in our view, with the issue of the furtherance of understanding, cordial relations, and peace, by harnessing the ethno-cultural and linguistic affinities between the culturally homogenous or related peoples that have been divided into the two countries by the international political boundary. This is therefore why we suggest that an existing bilateral agency like the CNMC, should be given this specific assignment and responsibility for which it can be said to have acquired some practical and useful experience in the course of its earlier work, more or better than any agency that may be newly set up for the purpose. If this responsibility is given to the CNMC, then the members of the Commission from the two countries can then set up the structures that will constitute the national and the local offices of the agency in their respective countries. Since in our view, there is certainly no need for any foreign or United Nations technical or political assistance or supervision in this matter, we suggest that the agency may take the name of the already existent Cameroun-Nigeria Joint Commission (CNJC), or if this agency is still functional, that this responsibility be given to it.

Through the national and the local offices, the agency can identify the different related and identical peoples, cultures and languages in the two countries that need to be brought into contact and interaction with one another. It can then go on to identify knowledgeable persons and institutions in and from such communities in these two countries who will serve as resource persons in such areas as the history, cultures, languages, and the economy of such peoples, and even in the areas of modern agriculture, science and technology, and education, and who could be made to collaborate in studies, research and various other types of activities, including tours and excursions by school and other groups in each other's home territories across the border; cultural and sports festivals; cultural, agricultural, artisanal, and science and technology festivals and expositions involving these peoples, and which could be held periodically and alternately in each other's territories. Indeed, there is no end to the types of joint activities that could be organized for and undertaken by related peoples across the border. The point is that as these related peoples rediscover and get involved in close contact with themselves on the basis of common cultures and using their common languages, no one can reasonably doubt the bond of oneness that will develop to take the place of whatever animosity, anger, and distrust, that earlier disputes could have built up. In this way, the business of taking specific and concrete steps to harness the ethno-cultural and linguistic affinities of the ethno-culturally and linguistically homogenous and related peoples of Nigeria and Cameroun, for the attainment of understanding and peace between these peoples and between their two countries, can be pursued on a permanent basis and in a systematic and well-articulated manner, and with useful results, by people most suited to such work by their training, knowledge, and past experiences.

5. Conclusion

This contribution to the study of Nigeria-Cameroun border relations has necessarily drawn from the acknowledged fact that, like elsewhere in much of Africa, the disputes over the Nigeria-Cameroun boundary have their origins in the fact that this boundary was created with no consideration for traditional cultural entities like ethno-political and ethno-linguistic groups, their territorial titles, or their economic resources and means of livelihood, all of which became sources of dispute right from the colonial days when the two nation states of Nigeria and Cameroun and their component peoples and territories began to evolve into separate sovereign political and socio-economic entities, pursuing their separate interests which often times clashed over the same territorial resources. This contribution has also acknowledged the established fact that while the Nigeria-Cameroun boundary conflict raged mainly at the state-centric level of relations between these two countries, there was palpable evidence of cooperation at the trans-national level of relations between the peoples of the two countries in question, particularly among the culturally related peoples on both sides of the border, who have been building such cooperation on their ethno-cultural and linguistic affiliations. Our study therefore logically endorsed the proposition by such earlier studies as Barkindo (1984) Owhotu (1989), and Bonchuk (2003a) and (2003b) that on the basis of the evidence of such cooperation, these affiliations and affinities could be harnessed as tools for the resolution of the conflict that has bedevilled the border relations in particular, and the general bilateral relations of these two countries for decades.

However, our study revealed that this proposition which was made in days of the heightening of the sour relations between these countries, are still valid today even as the ICJ judgment and the subsequent Green Tree Agreement which were intended to resolve the dispute, have failed to do so in reality, thus making the continued search for resolution very necessary. Indeed, our study has revealed that rather than resolve the Nigeria-Cameroun boundary dispute once and for all times, the ICJ judgment and the Green Tree Agreement have tended to create situations that are likely, in a matter of time, to renew conflict at some points along the border, in which event the general relations between the two countries will again be poisoned. Our study has attempted to show that in the present-day circumstances, the ethno-cultural and linguistic affiliations and affinities between the culturally homogenous and related peoples on both sides of the border can still be usefully exploited as a tool for the promotion of understanding and harmonious relationship, and the spirit of brotherliness between these peoples. And on this platform, joint socio-cultural, economic, and developmental ventures could be undertaken at both the inter-state and private levels by both nations for the attainment of an enduring peace. But beyond the proposal of the use of the culture-linguistic tool as earlier studies had done, the present study has gone a step further to present an institutional structure which could be entrusted with the responsibility of mapping out and implementing activities of various kinds in exploiting these culture-linguistic affinities and affiliations of the culturally related peoples of the Nigeria-Cameroun border regions towards the realization on the desired permanent and sustainable peace. It is only to be hoped that the authorities of the two counties would give attention to the findings and recommendations of such studies as this.

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