

The Mongo River in Cameroon: A Multi-dimensional River

By

Agbor Charles Nda, Ph.D.

History of International Relations
Holder of a diploma in the administration of Social security and
human resources from IRESS-Yaounde.
Lecturer and social science researcher
University of Bamenda-Cameroon
Email; agborndacharles@gmail.com
Tel: + 237 677040512

Abstract

The Mongo River in Cameroon is one of the rivers that needs to be venerated both at the national and international levels. Many authors, especially after the collapsed of the Mongo bridge on July 1st 2004, pay much interest but to the bridge over this river, ignoring the fact that this bridge is a consequence of the existence of the river. Therefore, this research is aimed at demonstrating the multipurpose role the river play in influencing the socio-economic development of the area and the history of Cameroon as a whole. From its sources at the Bakossi Mountains (Mount Rumpi, Mount Kupe and the Muanengouba massif) down to the mangrove at the Wouri estuary, this river is exerting enormous influence on its 4200 square kilometers natural environment. Its abundant water, soil fertility, fauna and flora have had a great impact on human existence. Besides, political attributes of the colonial administration has render this river a political monument. The use of the Mongo River as a boundary reference between West Cameroon and East Cameroon has made the river very worthy. Between 1916 and 1961, this river was an instrument of partition but today, it is becoming an umbilical cord linking these two people, thus, one of the lungs of Cameroon.

Key words: *Mongo River, Mongo Bridge, the Mongo, British Southern Cameroons/West Cameroon, East Cameroon, partition, reunification*

Introduction

The Mongo River in Cameroon is found between the Littoral and the Southwest regions of Cameroon. This almost 150 kilometers (93 miles) long river is not like any ordinary river. The Mongo River has contributed enormously in shaping the history of Cameroon. Besides, its natural endowments are exerting grate influence on the lives of Cameroonians. But this river is much unnoticed; meanwhile the role of this river goes beyond the national frontiers. It is against this background that this research came in to verify the contribution of this river to the evolution of this country. Results of these findings have proven that the river entails a lot of potentials and is a socio-cultural, economic and political

instrument in the development of Cameroon. To get there, it is important to take a snap shot of the geography of this river.

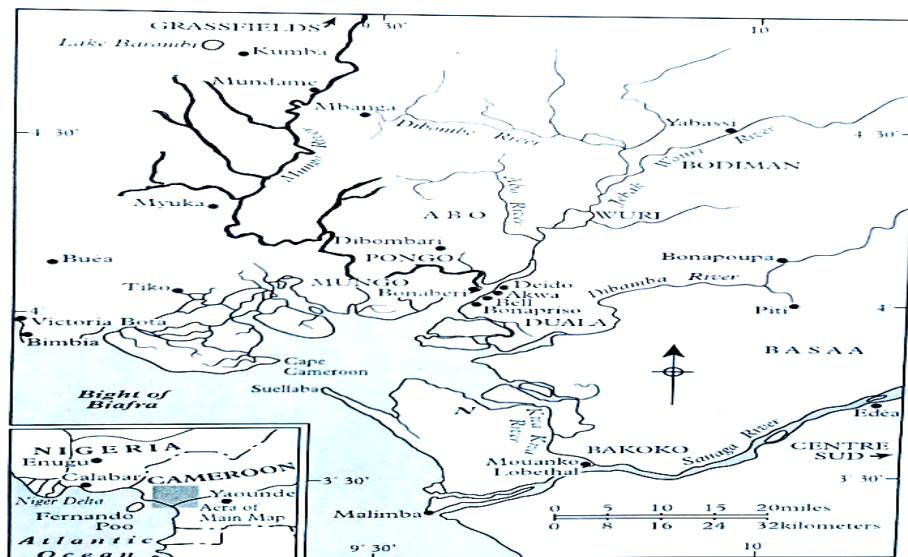
I. Geography

I.1. Site, situation and physical endowments

I.1.1. Site and situation

The Mongo River is situated between latitude $4^{\circ}10'$ and $5^{\circ}25'$ North and longitude $9^{\circ}23'$ and $10^{\circ}6'$ east of the Greenwich meridian. Its sources are from the Bakossi Mountains, with tributaries from Mount Rumpi, Mount Kupe and the Muanengouba massif in an altitude of about 1755 meters. From here, this river drains for about 200 kilometers into the Mangrove of the Wouri estuary⁴. The map below can better throw more light on the source of this river.

Figure 1: Drainage system of the Mongo River from source to the Wouri estuary.



Source: Ralph. A. Austen and Jonathan Derick; *Middlemen of the Cameroons Rivers: The Douala and their hinterland*, c. 16 00- c. 1960, Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. xii.

To better apprehend the role of this river, it is important for us to x-ray its physical and human endowments.

⁴Jean Claude Olivry; *Fleuves et Rivières du Cameroun*, MESRES-ORSTOM, Paris, 1986, p 226.

I.1.2. Physical Endowments

The Mongo River has exerted a lot of influence on its 4200 square kilometres natural environment. This is on the soil fertility, abundant aquatic life and a conducive climate which in return is a source of attraction to man in this region. The Mongo region is one of the richest in terms of soil fertility in Cameroon, characterized by sedimentary alluvial soils of decomposed derbies from floods of the river and volcanic soils from Mount Rumpi, Mount Kupe and the famous Mount Cameroon. These, and its humid equatorial climate provoked by annual precipitation of about 2900 millimeters and abundant forest is a booster to the rich natural biodiversity. The natural advantages offered by this river are a caused for many ethnic groups to settle in this region.

I.2. Settlement

Human implantation in the Mongo region was preceded by two predominant groups; the Mongo South and Mongo North and later foreigners.

I.2.1. The Mongo South

The first occupants of Mongo South were the Bantu groups of the Duala, east of the river. Their ancestor was Nkon, a brother to Ewale, the Duala ancestor and Mokuri (Mokule), the ancestor of the Bakweri. (Children of Mbedi, who separated at Pitti). It was descendants of these people that constituted villages of the Mongo, Pongo, Bakoko, Abo South, Bakweri, Isubu, Wovea, Modeka, Misselele to name just these few. According to Ardener and colleagues, settlement at the banks of this river began in the 18th century, with about 600 people on the west of the river and 2893 on the East⁵.

I.2.2. The Mongo North

On the other hand, the population of Mongo North is commonly called the Mbo, Bafaw, Balong and Abo North. History holds that these people migrated from the Barombi Lake in West Cameroon. The Abo North crossed the volcanic mountains and the Mongo valley and settle at Mangamba before constituting villages like Mandouka, Bassoukang, Bangseng, Miang, Souza, Penda-boko, Mbonjo and Bwapaki⁶. The Bafaw on their part settled in Kumba, Laduma, Mundame, Etam, Ediki, and Barombi. The Bakossi clan of Mbo settled in villages like Bouba, Mombo, Tombel, Ebounji and many others⁷. From Barombi, the ancestor of the Balong; Elongue Nakoumba moved to Mouanyo. But following family misunderstanding with his seven younger brothers, this boat digger migrated to Mundame⁸. Some of his brothers migrated to the

⁵ Edwine Ardener, Shirly Ardener & W.A. Warmington; *Plantations and villages in the Cameroons; some economic and social studies*, Oxford University Press, 1960, p. 271.

⁶ Gustave Tandja; « *Les Missions Chrétiennes et l'évangélisation de la région du Mungo* », *Mémoire de maîtrise en histoire, Université de Yaoundé, 1991*, p. 12.

⁷ Interview with Pa Tchona Abraham, farmer, Mombo village on 23/07/2019 at 12:5pm.

⁸ Jules Kouosseu; « *Populations autochtones – population Alloenes et Administration coloniale dans le Mungo sous Administration Française 1916-1960* », *Mémoire de maîtrise en histoire, Université de Yaoundé, 1989*, p. 22.

Mbanga sub-division, Yoke, Muyuka, Mpundu, Malende etc in West Cameroon, Maleke, Mujuka Kombe, Mundeck, Ndoh, in East Cameroon⁹. It is important to note that most of these villages were named after their ancestors¹⁰. They were later followed by foreigners.

I.2.3. Foreigners

By foreigners here, we mean Africans and Europeans that later joined the first Cameroonians occupants of the banks of this river. Foreigners began to move into the Mungo region at the end of the 19th century. The first being European missionaries like Spellenberg, Autenrieth, Walker Scholten and Wiltwer. There were also explorers like Knut Knutson and Polish Stefan Szolc-Rogozinski from Sweden and Poland respectively who settled there in 1883.

Figure 2: Two white settlers and local children and men on the Mungo River, Christmas 1901



Source: E.J. Embola, <https://en.wikiedia.org/w/index.php?tittle=Mungo-River-Cameroon&Oldid=825551922>, p. 2, 26/06/2019.

Beside these missionaries, came other Cameroonians like the Duala, Bassa, Fang-Beti, the Ibos and the Bamileke¹¹. It should be noted that settlement along this river bed was as a result of its natural splendor as seen in the following description:

'The banks of the Mungo are magnificently covered with forests ... and everything here teems with life. One can see sea eagles, herons, snakes and monkeys, as well as multicolored parrots on the trees, while on the surface of the water there dance butterflies and dragonflies the size of sparrows. Now and then one hears the trumpeting of elephants, the cry of predators, and the melancholy and monotonous honking of the iguana... about 35 kilometers

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹E.J.Embola,

<https://en.wikiedia.org/w/index.php?tittle=Mungo-River-Cameroon&Oldid=825551922>,p.1, 26/06/2019.

(22 mi) from the mouth of the river the forest began to be cleared for cultivation of plantains, cocoyam, maize and sugar cane'¹².

All these opportunities made the river very indispensable for man.

II. The Mongo River as a source of life.

The Mongo River and its basin in many ways have proven to be a source of livelihood to Cameroonians, especially to the different human groups present at the banks. This river was and is still a guarantee to the socio-cultural and economic wellbeing of this people.

II.1. The Mongo River and its influence on the socio-cultural life of the Mongo.

Generally, water plays an unavoidable role in the socio-cultural life of the people of the Mongo especially those of the Duala and the Bakweri tribes, commonly called the Sawa. That is one of the reasons for which these people settled around the river¹³.

The Mongo River is a meeting and communication point between the Mongo and their ancestors. This river is a sacred ground where rituals are performed in honour of their gods (Jengu and Ngondo) and ancestors. Sons and daughters in this region converge at the banks of the river annually or when need be, to commune and worship their gods. During this feast, fowls, goats and other animals are slaughtered in the river and all the children of the Mongo washed by traditional custodians who serves as a link between the ancestors and the people¹⁴.

According to Bongue Njoh Thomas, “no Mongo River, no life for the Mongo”. The partition of Cameroon by the British and French in 1916 separated the people from ritual practices since this river was under control, he said. Thus, the Jengu and Ngondo traditional festivals witnessed crisis because traditional priest were found on opposite sides of the river and could not perform their rituals without water. Failure to pay tribute to these gods led to violent floods of the river in 1923 which ended up with the destruction of food and cash crops along the river basin. The end result was very low harvest, poor catch and the prevalence of many diseases¹⁵. This goes to confirm the importance of this river to the life of this people.

II.1.2. The Mongo Basin, a Pool for Economic Prosperity

The economic potentials of the Mongo attracted human implantation at the banks of this river. According to Ralph A. Austen and Jonathan Derick, the magnitude of economic activities in this region has been progressive, following the progressive migration and settlement in the area. In 1885, just one year after

¹²ibid.

¹³ Interview with Thomas Bongue Njoh; on 23/04/2019, at 11:30, Mulanga.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid

the German annexation of Cameroon, the population stood at about 600 people, mostly autochthons and some few missionaries. The most common activity in the coast at the time was trade across the river, masterminded by the Duala.

Some of the common items bought and sold were cloths, mirrors, guns and gun powder, cowry and cowry shells, fish and many other items that were foreign to the forest people of Cameroon¹⁶.

On their part, forest people brought goods like palm kernel, rubber, slaves and many other items to exchange with those from the coastal people. Some of the people that masterminded the trade west of the river were the Bayang, the Bakweri, the Bakossi, the Balong, the Bafaw and many others. The Bayang specialized in the selling of palm kernel while the Bakossi, the Bafaw and the Bakweri specialized in the selling of cocoyam, plantains, bananas and yams. The most common means of exchange was batter (the exchange of goods for goods)¹⁷.

From 1907, plantation agriculture and fishing in the basin attracted the presence of the Bantu and Semi Bantu people of Cameroon, the Ibos of Nigeria and even the white man as they came to discover the fertile soil and favourable climate as seen in the following quotation;

‘Dans la région du Mungo, les sols volcaniques et le climat offrent de nombreuses potentialités agricoles, de grandes concessions et de grandes plantations sont développées par les colons : plantation de palmier à huile à Bomono, de cacao et de tabac à Njombe’¹⁸.

This urged the Germans to develop mechanised agriculture in this region. Some of these plantations were the Wesafrikanische, Pflanzungsgesellschaft, African Fruit Company, Likumba Plantations, Kamerun Kautschukgesellschaft and many others. It is important to note that after the defeat of the Germans in Cameroon in 1916 during the First World War of 1914-1918, these plantations were merged to form the Cameroon Development Corporation (CDC). Indeed the Mongo River and its basin offered many advantages to humanity and today, the region is the economic backbone of not only the South West and Littoral regions but the entire nation and even beyond. The concentration of many plantations like oil palm plantation of Mondoni in Souza, banana and rubber plantations in Tiko, rubber plantations in Muyuka, Misselele, banana plantations in Mbanga, Loum, Victoria (Limbe) and many others has transformed the Mongo to an agricultural and industrial heaven¹⁹.

¹⁶ Ralph A. Austen and Jonathan Derick; *Middlemen of the Cameroon Rivers: the Duala and their hinterlands*, C. 1600-C: 1960, Cambridge University Press, 1999, p.10.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Victor Julius Ngoh; *History of Cameroon since 1800*, Pressbook, Limbe, 1996, p.138.

¹⁹ Victor Julius Ngoh; “Anglo-French rivalry over the Misselele plantations 1916-1920: The case study in the economic motives for the partition of Africa”, *Off-prints of Journal of third world studies Americus*, Georgia fall, vol. XII, No.2, 1995 p. 283.

III. The Mongo River; an Instrument of Partition and Unification of Cameroon.

Besides the above natural potentials of the Mongo River, the British and French colonial administration attributed a political role to this river; that of partition and later of unification of Cameroon.

III.1. The Mongo River; a Boundary Pillar for the Partition of Cameroon (1916-1961)

The Mongo River played a great role in the partition of Cameroon. After the defeat of the Germans in Cameroon in 1916, the British and French forces in the territory failed to agree on the terms of a joint administration over this former German protectorate. Thus, after a series of accords, without the consent of Cameroonians, these two colonial powers decided to put an end to the condominium, splitting Cameroon into two. The first accord was between the British and French diplomats Georges Picot and Lancelot Oliphant respectively. The second was on March 4th 1916 in Douala between Major General Mcpherson Charles Dobell, the British military chief in the area and General Aymerich, the commander of French Equatorial troops in Africa. The third and last accord was the Simon-Milner agreement of 11th January 1919, between British Secretary of State for colonies, Lord Alfred Milner and the French minister of colonies, Henry Simon²⁰.

The fruit of this agreement was the “Picot line”, dividing the country into two, with France taking 5/6 or 166,800 square miles (431,845 square kilometers) of the territory east of the Mongo as against 1/6 or 34,081 square miles (88,036 square kilometers) for Britain in the west²¹. What is important here is the fact that the Mongo River was used as part of the Picot line dividing Cameroon.

The reasons for the choice of the Mongo River as a boundary pillar were double fold. The first reason was the fact that the demarcation was so difficult because of the remote nature of the terrain and the limited number of surveyors. Thus the use of this river facilitated this task²².

Secondly, the choice of this river was the choice of Great Britain. British administrative authorities in the territory did not want to take much of Cameroon because Nigeria was too vast for them to control. Thus they choose just the slopes of Mount Cameroon, Benue, Adamawa, Bornu and its people who were already used to the British indirect rule system in Nigeria.²³

It is very important to note that the boundary did not follow the river from source to where it empties its water. With respect to our case, boundary commission number 16 of 1938-1940 was charged with boundary demarcation at the Mongo. This commission was to plant pillars from about latitude 4°12'22"^{II}

²⁰ Ibid. p. 291.

²¹ Tambi Eyongetah & Robert Brain; *A History of the Cameroon*, Longman, London, 1974, pp. 95-96.

²² BNA Qfta 1940/1 ; Anglo-French Cameroons boundary commission of 18th May, 1940.

²³ Ibid.

North and longitude 9°31'54" East up to Mundek at the confluence of river Edimindjo and river Mongo. The Mongo River served a distance of about 27 pillars up to the confluence of the Edimindjo River²⁴. This river played a key role as it remained a boundary pillar separating Cameroon into two, under new appellations like British Cameroon and French Cameroon.

However, the consequences of this partition were fatal. The Mongo River that has been a source of life for all Cameroonians now became an instrument of separation of the people. Cameroonians, especially those at the mouth of the river like the Mongo themselves, the Balong, the Duala and the Abo with a common ancestral origin and culture were tore apart as indicated by Daniel Abwa in the following except;

*'Les Mungo se trouvaient sur le cours inférieur du fleuve du même nom et à l'époque coloniale, ils étaient fixes de part et d'autre de la frontière du Cameroun anglaise et du Cameroun française. Les Balong quant à eux sont aujourd'hui installés au centre de Mbanga. Ils venaient de la zone anglaise et ils avaient traversé la fleuve Mongo pour mettre fin aux querelles de famille...'*²⁵.

It is important to note that the Bakweri of Tiko, Limbe and Buea clans that were found by Douala fisherman; Priso, Mokuri (Mokule) and Eyea Njie respectively in about 1811²⁶ were brothers to Ewale, all of whom were sons of Mbedi, the Duala ancestor²⁷. From the above situation, the partition of Cameroon really kept families apart. The Mongo, Balong, Duala and Bakweri families were separated. About 933 Cameroonians East of the Mongo were cut out and join to British Cameroon²⁸. Indeed traffic between these people after the partition was very difficult as seen in the following words of Tambi Eyongetah and Robert Brain;

*'In fact, border restrictions constituted a problem. Although anyone entering the British Cameroons from the east needed no travel documents, he had to pay custom duties on any goods brought in from French Cameroon. On the other hand, anyone going into or returning from French Cameroon had to meet up with a lot of formalities. British Cameroonians had to arm themselves with a Laissez-passer, an identity card, and a tax ticket. Small tradesmen and exporters of agricultural produce felt that frontier regulations were too stringent. Border restrictions were increased when the Vichy regime was established in France: individuals with homes on one side of the frontiers and fields on the other, experienced many inconveniences as did members of tribes whose relatives or chiefs lived on the other side'*²⁹.

²⁴ BNA Qfla 1940/I, *Anglo-French boundary commission-Register of boundary pillars 1940, No 4 59*

²⁵ Daniel Abwa; « *Commandement Européen* » *Commandement indigène au Cameroun sous administration Française de 1916 à 1960, Tome 1. Doctorat d'Etat en Histoire ed. Njeuma Martin Zachary, Yaoundé Cameroun, Université de Yaoundé, Département d'Histoire, 1994, p. 695.*

²⁶ Interview with Mbella Sonne Dipoko; 07/02/2010, Tiko.

²⁷ Victor Julius Ngoh ; *History of Cameroon since 1800*, p. 27.

²⁸ Ralph A. Austen & Derick Jonathan, *Middlemen of the Cameroons River, The Duala and their hinterland*, p. 142.

²⁹ Tambi Eyongetah and Robert Brain; *A History of the Cameroon*, p. 151.

Farther in the north, some immediate victims of this partition were the Balong, between Mbanga and Muyuka Sub-Divisions, with villages like Muyuka, Yoke, including Mundame in West Cameroon and Mujuka, Maleke, Mundeck, Kake, Compina, Mbanga and many others in East Cameroon. Following statistics from the above author, about 2.734 of the Balong from British Cameroon were found in French Cameroon in 1938.³⁰

The Abo were not left out, with villages of Abo north like Mangamba, Mandouka, Basoukang, Bangseng, Miang, Souza from Lake Barombi thrown to French Cameroon and those of Abo south from Douala, constituting Bakweri villages like Bonamboule, Mpobo, Mamba and Bonangalo were thrown to the West³¹.

In effect, the British put in place a preventive system of 300 miles along the coast. It comprises of police and customs that diverted and conducted all boats to and from Douala to the beaches for supervision and control of goods. The British authorities were bend to put a stop to the inflow of goods like tobacco and cigarette from French Cameroon that competed with their own on the market. For example, in 1939, they seized about 12022 heads of tobacco, 54734 packets of cigarettes, “*Nationale*” from French Cameroon. To do this, the British authorities set up import and export preventive stations in Tiko, Mpundu, Mundame and Mbonzie . With the use of local boats and launches in the above check points, the British were able to patrol the Mongo River to control illegal movements across³².

Figure 3: Local boats used for patrol and transportation at the Mongo



Source: Picture realized by the author; 23/07/2019.

The Mongo River in Cameroon

³⁰ Jules Kouosseu, *Populations autochtones – Populations Allogènes et Administration Coloniale dans le Moungo*, p.21.

³¹ *Ibid*, p. 22.

³² BNA/pe/a (1939)1/549; Eastern Frontier preventive service, Quarterly report 1939.

As indicated in the following letter from the Resident in the Cameroon province to the controller of customs in Lagos; "...there is one other improvement which would greatly add to the efficiency of the Eastern preventive service via the provision of a light motor launch for patrol work on the river Mongo..."³³. Goods crossing from one Cameroon to another were considered as contraband and launches were put on the river to check the infiltration of such commodities. Some of these launches include Irish Maria, Wouri, Lungassi and many others. These launches were given special assignments as Noupinbong noted in the following quotation.

*'Pour parer à la contrebande, les autorités Britanniques mirent sur pied un service préventif... Il comprenait des postes de police et douane ... Les agents avaient le devoir d'obliger toutes les piroques et tous les bateaux ouverts venant de Douala et les côtes du Cameroun Français à déclarer les marchandises...'*³⁴.

Despite these measures, the French also witnessed mass migration of Cameroonians from its territory to British Cameroon. Out of the 12.065 agricultural workers employed in plantations in Southern Cameroon in 1925, 6330 came from French Cameroon. Consequently, the French were forced to institute the use of a passed "*laisser-passer*" to cross to British Cameroon. Defaulters were to pay penalties ranging between 1000 and 2000 francs cfa and or a prison term from three months to one year or even exile³⁵. They also created a certificate of transit which indicated the origin of the goods as seen in the following quotation;

*'Des mesures avaient été également prises pour limiter la contrebande des produits de rente. C'est ainsi qu'il avait été prévu que, pour éviter la confusion qui régnait au niveau du Mongo entre les produits du Cameroun français et ceux provenant de la zone Britannique, un certificat de transit devait être délivré pour les produits laissés libres de transiter par le Cameroun français'*³⁶.

The above preventive measures yielded the following fruits. About 210, 480, 244 and 90 defaulters or traffickers fell into the trap nets of the French colonial authorities in 1934, 1935, 1939 and 1940 respectively. From the above statistics, this research discovered that the number of traffickers increased from 210 in 1934 to 480 in 1935 and one would have expected this number to increase in subsequent years as the French authorities discovered more strategies and tracks to combat illegal movements. But this was not the case as the number drops to 244 and 90 in 1939 and 1940 respectively. This was as a result of the start of the First World War in Europe which forced the French to neglect the frontiers, relaxed customs control over the Mongo to persuade

³³ Ibid

³⁴ Gilbert Noupinbong Tonpoba ; *Les Relations entre le Cameroun sous mandat Français et le Cameroun sous mandat Britanique (1919 – 1939), Mémoire de maîtrise en Histoire, Université de Yaoundé I, 1993.* P. 40.

³⁵ Jean- Claude Wouri; *Les relations entre les deux Camerouns 1916-1963, projet de thèse de doctorat de troisième cycle, Université de Yaoundé, 1990, p.11.*

³⁶ Gilbert Noupinbong Tonpoba; « *Les relations entre le Cameroun sous Mandat Français et le Cameroun sous mandat Britannique (1919 – 1939)* », p. 43.

Cameroonians to supply raw materials and man power to the Allied for the war. Besides the French also neglected the frontiers and concentrated on the war³⁷.

However, according to Mabongue Ives, the end result of this partition was conflicts over the exploitation of the rich aquatic and soil of the Mongo River. Some villages and groups of people started claiming ownership of land west of the Mongo River. For example between 1937 and 1945, the Bomono, Mulanga, and the Mongo Francophone were constantly conflicting with the people of Bonakoh and Mongo Anglophone over the cultivation and exploitation of food crops at the coast of the river. The Bonakoh and Mongo Anglophone would not want their brothers from French Cameroon to harvest even the crops cultivated before the partition. This rivalry led to mysterious loss of two lives; Njoh Mbongo Simon and Kottor Pierre in 1945³⁸.

These conflicts were not only between indigenes but also between the British and French authorities in Cameroon and at another time between these authorities and the indigenes. Clashes between colonial authorities after the partition of Cameroon were over German plantations along the Mongo. The British and French rivalry over the Misselele plantations is the case in point. These plantations are situated on the western bank of this river. But during the March 1916 partition, the area fell east of the "Picot line", that is in French Cameroon. This meant that the British plantations on the slopes of Mount Cameroon did not have access to the sea. With this, the British were forced to call for the London Agreement of March 4th 1916. Article VI of this agreement allowed both Britain and France the possibility of slightly modifying the partition lines so that plantations on the slopes of Mount Cameroon should be guaranteed access to the sea³⁹.

Following the above agreement, on March 17, 1916, Major-General Charles Dobell issued proclamation No. 10 which fixed the boundary between the British and French zones in Cameroon. This proclamation which went into effect on March 31, 1916, slightly modified the "Picot line" in favour of Britain. In effect, all the Misselele plantations went to Britain since the new boundary became the Mongo River⁴⁰.

The British action antagonized the French who could not afford to lose their 15000 hectares of Misselele land of which 6 000 were German plantations (Prinz Alfred Pflanzung) of cocoa, rubber, tobacco and banana plantations⁴¹. The French condemned the British action on July 13, 1917 through a letter from Lucien Fourneau, the Commissioner for French Cameroon to the British Resident in Buea, requesting the handing over of the French Misselele plantations to the appropriate French services. The British colonial office

³⁷ BNA/Ba/1940/8 *League of Nations Report*

³⁸ Interview with Ives Mabongue, on 23/04/09 at 30pm. at the mouth of the southern Mongo bridge.

³⁹ Victor Julius Ngoh, *Anglo-French rivalry over the Misselele plantations*, p. 277.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.* p 280.

responded by advising the Nigerian authorities in Cameroon to turn down the request⁴².

However, on January 11, 1919, Lugard referred this controversy to his home government in London. Thus the British and French delegations led by Lord Alfred Milner, secretary of state for the colonies and Henri Simon, Minister of colonies met and discussed as part of the overall settlement of the Anglo-French boundary differences in former German Kamerun. As a resolution of the Anglo-French differences over the Misselele, the French asked and was given British concessions in the north of former German Kamerun, particularly Chang (Dschang) in compensation of Misselele. On July 10, 1919, armistice was reached⁴³. If rivalry was not between colonial authorities, it was between the colonial authorities and the indigenes

One of the root causes of clashes between colonial authorities and indigenes at the mouth of Mongo South was over farm land. About 600 Douala natives commonly called the Mongo, and their banana, oil palm and cocoa farms containing about 450 000 trees belonging to the Bell, Akwa and Deido planters fell to the West of the Mongo River which now formed the frontier between the two mandated territories. The Duala attempt to cross the river to the west to harvest their crops met with stiff resistance from the French⁴⁴.

Besides the above consequences, was the abolition of the Duala middleman role in trade with the people west of the Mongo. The French implemented serious restrictions against movements across the Mongo. Defaulters were tried, convicted, imprisoned and goods and canoes confiscated for smuggling. This situation antagonized the Duala who addressed a number of petitions to international bodies. The first one was on August 1919, when the Bell, the Akwa and Deido chiefs wrote to the Versailles Peace Conference on the issue of free trade along the coast with Cameroon hinterland. On December 22, 1926, another letter was addressed to the Commissioner in Yaounde on taxation, trade licenses and police harassments and confiscation of plantations in the Mongo⁴⁵. An apercu of this part of work brought us to realize that the use of the Mongo River to partition Cameroon brought untold negative consequences on Cameroonians. It sowed the seed of discord amongst the people. That is why shortly after independence, this river was attributed a new function, that of reunification.

III.2. The Mongo Bridge; an instrument of unification in Cameroon

After independent and unification of the two Cameroons on October 1961, there was an urgent need to consolidate the unity of this country. To that effect, President Ahmadou Ahidjo changed the role of the Mongo River from being a boundary pillar to an umbilical cord linking the two territories. Once again this

⁴² Ibid, p. 286

⁴³ Ibid, p. 291.

⁴⁴Ralph A. Austen. & co ; *Middlemen of the Cameroons rivers* pp. 148 – 149.

⁴⁵ Ibid, pp. 148 – 49.

river entered into historical records, this time around as a unifying factor. Bridges were constructed over this river to reunite its people, facilitate their communication and eliminate colonial barriers. It is important to note that at independent in 1961, the lone and easiest means to cross from West to East Cameroon and vice versa was over the bridge constructed by the British in 1956 to link its territories of Etam in Kumba to Ebuji in Tombel. This was because these territories were more attached to Loum in East Cameroon due to difficulties to cross the Mongo River to West Cameroon⁴⁶. After independent, movements were canalized towards the Northern Mongo Bridge at Etam-Kumba in the picture below.

Figure 4: Northern Mongo Bridge at Etam-Kumba



Source: Picture realized by the author; 23/07/2019.

Besides, to ease fluidity of goods and persons between the South West and Littoral regions of West and East Cameroon respectively, the President of the new federal republic of Cameroon urged the CDC to renew the pontoon constructed in 1957, linking Yoke in Muyuka sub-division in the South West region to Penda-boko in the Littoral region. At first crossing to either of these towns was by using wooden boats stationed at the Yoke beach. But this was very risky because the boats could not resist the waves of the river which most often than not caused accidents. The Corporation then decided to construct a more safety and more adapted vessel to facilitate crossing over the river at this point⁴⁷. Below is a picture of the pontoon (ferry) at Yoke constructed in 1957 and renewed in 1969.

⁴⁶ Interview with Victor Nfon Mukete; on 25/07/2019 at 9:00 am Kumba.

⁴⁷ Ibid

Figure 5: Pontoon in the Yoke-Penda-boko beach 1957 and renewed in 1969



Source: Picture realized by the author; 29/04/2019.

The most gigantic project over the Mongo River is the famous Mongo Bridge between Tiko and Douala, linking Buea, the then federal capital of West Cameroon to Douala, the economic capital of East Cameroon. This can be seen in the pictures below;

Figure 6: The first bridge over the Mongo



Source: La Presse du Cameroun No. 5666-42^{me} Année, Samedi 5, Dimanche 6 et Lundi 7, Avril 1969, p. 3.

Besides these bridges was the construction of the rail way from Mbanga in the Littoral region to Kumba in the South West, where a station was build. The construction of this bridge let to the diversion in movements of Cameroonians who before now went round from Victoria and Tiko through Buea, Muyuka and Kumba across the bridge over Mongo north and passing through Tombel, Loum

to Douala. They now cover just 50, 75 and 85 kilometers from Tiko, Buea and Victoria respectively to Douala.

Figure 7: The newly constructed Mongo Bridge after the collapsed of the first bridge in 2004



Source: Picture realized by the author, 27/04/2019.

Conclusion

The role of Mongo River in Cameroon can never be minimized. It is a source of food, a means for spiritual intercession and communication with the gods, a catalyst for favourable weather conditions and fertile soil, a boundary pillar, an umbilical cord to name just these. Looking at the multiple roles of this river, we can affirm with E.J. Embola that without this river, Cameroon can catch cold. Its abundant water, conducive climate and fertile soil are not only a touristic attraction to fishermen, farmers and traders, but its strategic position has given the river international recognition. It became an international boundary pillar dividing British Southern Cameroon and French Cameroon from 1916 to 1961, under the supervision of the League of Nations and later the United Nations Organization. Today, it is the umbilical cord uniting these two entities. This is an indication of the importance of this river in the life of Cameroonians as well as the evolution of the history of this country.

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