

## Colonialism, Ethnic Disintegration and Clan-Based Politics, among the Mbum of the Bamenda Grasslands-Cameroon, 1916-1961

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**Abstract:** This paper argues that colonialism bred the phenomenon of ethnic disintegration among the Mbum leading to mutual suspicion among the various clans. The Mbum constitutes one of the major ethnic identities of the Bamenda Grassland of Cameroon. Historical narratives aver that the people claim disparate origins and migration in three identifiable groups including the Warr, the Yaa and the Tang Clans. Upon their settlement in the Nkambe Plateau, geography, history and culture conspired to knit them together into an ethnic identity. However, colonial encounter with the Germans in 1902 and the British in 1916 led to the implementation of policies that estranged this ethnic identity causing disintegration. Notably, the German divide-and-rule policy sowed the seed for disintegration while the British reorganization of 1935 re-emphasized the Clan lines which forced the people to retrocede into perpetual disintegration. The three Clans became particularistic and attached to individual Warr, Yaa and Tang Clan identities making ethnic unity among the Mbum a misapprehension. This situation created a situation where Clan nationalism superseded ethnic cohesion as manifested during the period of party politics in the area with far reaching attendant repercussions. The paper also provides a microcosm for the appreciation of the degree to which colonial rule and strong attachment to individual national pride has ultimately cost Africa the much cherished unity. Oral, archival as well as written documents were used to defend its thesis.

**Keywords:** Colonialism, Ethnicity, (Dis) Integration, Clan-based Politics, Cameroon's Grassland.

## INTRODUCTION

One of the unflinching legacies of colonial rule in Africa was the dismembered nature of the continent after the demise of colonialism. This was because while in the continent, the colonialists created new boundaries to facilitate their administration which was largely unseemly to the Africans. Inevitably,

[The] European colonial boundaries have had profound effects, generally, negative on the history of statehood in Africa as they are generally responsible overtly or covertly for many inter and intra-state conflicts in the continent. This is because many of them were created without due considerations of the traditional state boundaries that pre-colonial African state-builders had made and sanctioned through different types of traditional diplomacy mechanism [1].

In fact, by creating new boundaries in Africa, the colonialists were not only doing so for the purpose of expediting their administrations but also as a means of promoting their unity which was detrimental to Africa. Hazlewood harps on this and captures it succinctly as follows;

In a sense, the unity which appeared once to exist was illusory. It was a unity imposed from outside for the administrative convenience of the colonial power- it was unity of Europe in Africa, reflecting the hegemony of the metropolitan country over its various colonies. It was not to be expected that, with the removal of Europe from the scene, the unity would necessarily continue [2].

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The balkanized nature of Africa can thus be understood from this background. African states have thus tended to be more particularistic, emphasizing micro nationalisms at the expense of continental unity [3]. Ostensibly, this phenomenon is reflected in sub-regional, national and intra-state identities.

In Cameroon (especially in the Grasslands), colonial administration also had a toll on ethnic and clan boundaries and this did not just become potent sources of conflicts but also a wellspring of disunity and disintegration. For the purpose of reducing administrative costs, the colonial administration in many parts of Cameroon created new artificial boundaries which resulted in numerous ethnic conflicts and disintegration in the area [4]. The Grassland region of Cameroon is noted for inter and intra-ethnic conflicts resulting from and in disunity and disintegration in the area. It follows that some major ethnic identities of the region have had numerous conflicts including the Bali, Nso, Ngemba groups, Aghem and the Mbum. Such conflicts have rendered ethnic cohesion difficult and left the peoples largely fragmented and some of them have almost completely lost their sense of ethnic identity.

An examination of the existing literature reveals that this Bamenda Grassland has been a veritable theater of conflicts and disintegration resulting largely from (but not limited to) the impact of colonial rule. In his submission, Sobseh contends that border conflicts (and ethnic disintegration) are numerous in the Grassland of Cameroon because the indigenous people have never accepted the colonial boundaries imposed on them by the colonialists despite the OAU/AU edict that such boundaries be respected [5]. Similarly, Fomin and Ngitir have argued that the new clan boundaries imposed by the colonialists for the purpose of promoting their colonial interests became potent sources of conflicts in Cameroon's Grasslands [4]. Meanwhile, Dze-Ngwa (2011) and Tata highlight areas of conflicts between the autochthones and Fulani (or Mbororo) as well as basis of ethnic disintegration respectively [6]. On their part, Nforba (2006, 2016) and Ali maintain that the hostile inter-Fondom relations among the Mbum as well as clan relations were caused by colonialism [7]. Though these works greatly pollinate the ideas in this paper, the special slant of the present study is on the particularistic nature of Mbum Clans as both a cause and result of ethnic disintegration caused by colonialism.

The paper thus spotlights the migratory origin of ethnic disintegration among the Mbum, the role of colonialism on ethnic disintegration beginning with the German and then the British administrations, and the manifestation of ethnic disintegration in Mbumland through Clan-based political development between 1916 and 1961. It's however important to begin by giving an understanding of the Mbum which constitutes the study area of this paper.

### **Origin of Ethnic Disintegration in Mbum Land**

The Mbum formerly referred to as the Nsungli [<sup>1</sup>] occupy the Donga-Mantung (formerly the Nkambe Division) of the North West Region of Cameroon [8]. The Mbum form part of the larger Tikar country of Semi Bantu origin. They speak the *Limbum* language which is derived from two words *Li* meaning "language" and "Mbum" referring to the people. *Limbum* therefore refers to the "language of the Mbum". *Limbum* is a related language to the Bamum, Ngemba and Bamileke languages of the Western Grasslands of Cameroon [9]. The Mbum is made up of three family groups or village areas called Clans. They include the Tang Clan, the Warr Clan and the Ya Clan. [8] Each Clan is made up of a number of villages and fall under the sovereignty of Clan Heads [<sup>2</sup>]. These Clans were a result of their migrations in disparate ranks from Kimi in the present-day Adamawa Region of Cameroon to the Nkambe Plateau.

The origin of the Mbum ethnic group is shrouded in much controversy partly because the historical past of the people have not been fully documented and secondly, because the area was seriously disturbed by the Fulani raids [9]. As a result, historical accounts on the origin of the Mbum contradict each other. One account maintains that the Mbum originated from the North Eastern part Cameroon as part of the Semi Bantu group which migrated southwards as a result of the Fulani raids [8]. The group eventually settled in Kimi, Upper Mbam Region in Tikar found in the vicinity of modern Bankim in the present-day Adamawa Region of the country and eventually lapsed into disintegration [9]. Among the Tikar groups besides the Mbum are Kom, Nso, Bum, Babungo, Ndop Chiefdoms, Nkwen and Bafut among others

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<sup>1</sup> The appellation "Nsungli is of Nso origin meaning "talkatives". The Nso used this appellation to refer to the Mbum as talkatives probably during the period from 1922 to 1924 when the British administration chose to attach Mbum to Nso for administrative convenience. The British administration later adopted this appellation to refer to the Mbum. It should however be noted that the appellation "Nsungli" is pejorative and rejected by the people. Other appellations such as "Wimbum" and "Kambu" also have exogenous origins and are being seen to be pejorative as well. Thus, the appellation "Mbum" remains the most appropriate because it links the people to their ancestral origin in present-day Adamawa Region where there is a large Mbum community.

<sup>2</sup> The Tang Clan is composed of Talla (Clan Head), Binka, Bih, Kup, Ntundip, Ngarum, Sinna, Taku and Tabenken. The Warr Clan is made up of Mbot (Clan Head), Binshua, Bogom, Bihnjeng, Chup, Mbaah, Njap, Njirong, Ntumbaw, Nkambe, Nwangri, Saah, Sop and Wat. Meanwhile the Ya Clan villages include Ndu (Clan Head), Konchep, Luh, Mbipgo, Nseh Makop, Njimnkang, Njilah, Ngvulu, Sehn and Wowo.

[10]. These groups' common origin can further be seen in the socio-political institutions which features they share in common. Some of these institutions include princely societies like the *Ngirri* and regulatory societies like *Kwifo*, *Nggwerong* or *Nggumba* [10]. These groups generally migrated from the Tikar country southwards and westwards into the grasslands in waves. Among them were the Mbum groups whose movements too were long and wavy and in the course of which they disintegrated into three Mbum Clans.

The history of Mbum stay in Kimi prior to the disintegration has not been fully uncovered. However, it is reported that three Chief's sons due to disagreements broke away at Kimi and began moving from there in separate ranks through Ntem from where they were driven by the Fulani raids to the mountainous area where they are now settled. These three family groups included the Mbwat (Warr), Ya and Tang who led separate lives after their dispersion from Kimi. According to Nkwi they were only later reunited by the Fulani and Nso attacks as well as the geography of the area they occupied in the Nkambe Plateau [10]. From this background, it can be clearly seen that the Clan system was an inevitable bi-product of the long and wavy migrations of the Mbum from the north and more precisely from Kimi to their present site. The three Clans of Warr, Ya and Tang were therefore established by migratory circumstances, Fulani attacks as well as succession quarrels and was never a colonial design. In the course of their migration, the Mbum also risked losing their sense of ethnic unity but circumstances once more drove them to the present site where the three family groups reunited.

In spite of their apparent division along Clan lines, the Mbum were generally noted for their strong sense of ethnic unity. This sense of ethnic unity was recognized by the British Assistant District Officer (ADO), E. G. Hawkesworth who described the people as "undoubtedly possessed of a corporate spirit" [8]. It thus followed that after their settlement in the Nkambe Plateau, cultural affinities, geography and their history conspired to knit them together. The Mbum thus began forging an ethnic identity marked by cohesion and coexistence before the advent of colonialism. This corporate spirit was imposed on them by the Fulani, Nso and Bali Chamba invasions [8]. Colonial policies of the Germans and the British, however, caused the people to retrocede into disintegration.

### **Perspectives on Mbum Colonial Encounter**

The actual formal contacts between the Germans and the Mbum is subject of controversy with two opposing stance standing out. According to the British administration,

The first penetration of Nsungli by the Germans appears to have taken place in Ndu shortly after the completion of the Bansa Campaign. Eight Europeans with a large following approached the Ntaw (*Ntoh* or Palace) and received a friendly greeting from the chief. Food and shelter were supplied to them and on the following day, they replaced all the spears of the Chief's followers with sticks, as a sign that all wars had finished. They then demanded guides to Banyo and the chief of Ndu himself conducted them as far as to Ntem [8].

Accordingly, the Germans were received in Ndu without any form of resistance because of the brutal suppression of the neighboring Nso Resistance by the Germans in 1906. Besides, the Mbum especially of Ndu, welcomed German administration because they wanted protection against the Fulani and Nso raids on their villages that had been recurrent in the years preceding German arrival. The arrival of the Germans with a large following could be understood as the Germans had always regarded the Mbum as a "troubled people and never visited them without a large escort" [8]. It would appear the Germans were surprised at the friendly reception given them by the Chief of Ndu. Their request for guides on their way to Banyo was also indicative of the fact that they feared being attacked along their way. Hawkesworth's version of the first German encounter with the Mbum through Ndu is however disputed.

The second version that attempts an explanation of the Germans penetration in Mbumland holds that the Germans entered the area passing through Bafut, Kom, Nso and Bum to Chup and to Mbot [11]. This argument is substantiated by the fact that between 1902 and 1910 when the Bamenda-Sop-Banyo Road was completed, the Mbum went to Bamenda through Bum. According to the proponents of this version, while in Mbot, the Germans forcibly captured Chief Tohnji and made demands for his release. These demands included food, goats, women, wine, taxes and labor for the German plantations at the coast [11] and for the construction of the Bamenda-Sop-Banyo Road. After considering an attack on the Germans with the aid of Tabenken, the Mbot people decided to submit to German demands when they realized that they could not stand the German forces. They supplied all the German demands except women who had been lost to the Chamba and Fulani raids in their numbers. As a result, Chief Tohnji was released. By this thesis, the Germans arrival in Mbumland was within the framework of the Pavel Expedition to Banyo in 1902.

While the second version of German penetration in Ndu seems more tenable, the two positions when juxtaposed are complementary. It should be remembered that the Pavel Expedition of 1902 which saw the march of German forces through Bafut, Kom, Babungo, Bansa and Nsungli (Mbumland) to Banyo on December 22, 1902 [12]. By this argument, the Pavel expedition invariably passed through Mbumland. It is most likely that this was the first encounter the Germans had with the Mbum of Nkambe Plateau. Besides, since the expedition was well-armed, it could seize the Chief of Mbot

and make demands the way it did. From Mbot, the expedition then passed through Ndu to Sop and then to Banyo where it was scheduled to meet with the detachment of Major Hans Dominik.

The foregoing therefore illustrates that the first German-Mbum encounter took place in 1902 within the framework of the Pavel provocative expedition, during which the Germans first landed on Mbot with much brutality, a second visit took place after the conquest of Nso (after 1906). This second visit definitely took place after the completion of the Bamenda-Sop-Banyo Road which passed through Nso land or at least the completion of the stretch from Kumbo (Nso) to Ndu (Mbum). The visit was more pacific and cordial and the first stop was at Ndu. Thus while Mangoh records the first visit of the Germans to Mbumland, Hawkesworth focuses on the second visit. However, German administration in Mbumland was characterized by the policy of divide-and-rule which sowed the seed of ethnic disintegration in among the people.

### **German Administration and Disintegration of the Mbum**

In order to enforce the principle of divide-and-rule among the Mbum, the Germans arbitrarily appointed some chieftains whom they placed in authority over others. The chiefs who possessed dominant characteristics were selected as the German representatives without any reference to real statue [8]. As a result, Mbwat (Warr) Clan Head, Chief Tohnji who found favor in the sight of the Germans was appointed the traditional authority to lord over the rulers of Mbaa, Wat, Njap, Binshua, Nkambe, Kwangi (Kungi) and Saah who were reduced to sub-chiefs by the Germans. [8 and 13] After the death of Tohnji in 1906, Tokop I took over from him and was recognized by the Germans in the capacity of his predecessor and he ruled over the aforementioned villages of Mbumland with much brutality [11, 13]. Similarly, Chief Jibirr of Tangmuken (Tabenken) was selected to rule over the villages of Bi, Taku, Konchep, Kup, Ngarum and Ntundip. Later on however, Tangarum was elevated and Tangntundip as well as Tangtakum were placed under Tangarum to whom they paid taxes. The Chief of Ndu was given Nkwinyan (Mbipgo) while Sensen (Sehn), Ngulum and Sinna were placed under the authority of Nsob (Sop) [8].

In most of these cases, the Germans promised protection of the chiefs that they had appointed to rule over others. In any case where a selected chief complained about a sub-chief's unwillingness to pay taxes, the German administration immediately reacted by placing about six native soldiers at his disposal. In some cases, the use of these soldiers was abused especially by the Chiefs of Mbwat (Warr) and Tangmuken (Tabenken). In fact, these appointed chiefs were used to perpetuate German atrocities in Mbum. It was reported that Mbwat (Mbot) was instrumental in burning Wat, Nkambe and Binshua villages, while the Chief of Mbaa died in prison under him. German soldiers under the authority of the Chief of Mbwat also flogged to death the Chief of Binshua and drowned yet another. The Mbum were thus victims of the German brutal rule in Cameroon which was perpetuated by Mbum rulers. In some cases, the German soldiers themselves were involved in this brutality by binding and arresting chiefs of recalcitrant villages each time they arrived and only released them when their demands of food, women, goats and fowls were met. In all, the German divide-and-rule policy enhanced ethnic disintegration in Mbumland by estranging the villages and the various Clans.

Another aspect that marked German administration in Mbumland was in the economic domain. Against their expectations, the Germans did not find valuable resources in the area to satisfy their voracious economic appetite. Chilver says the areas in the grassland including Mbumland;

Were a disappointment to the German coast-based trading firms since they were devoid of easily reachable surpluses of palm oil, not more greatly blessed with resources of ivory and wile rubber than more conveniently situated regions, nor endowed with any natural products except kola which repaid the heavy costs of collection and transport to the coast [14].

Since the basic commodities required satisfying the German economic interest were not available, "their most easily exploitable commodity was manpower" [14]. This manpower stemmed from the fact that the Mbum were naturally "wiry and very active" people [8]. Consequently, they provided labor for the construction of the Banyo-Kumbo Road. The completion of this road was quintessential to effective German administration in Adamawa. For this very purpose, the Germans had launched the Zintgraff explorations to the Grassland. Many Mbum however died due to brutalities in the course of working on this road. Hawkesworth, himself a British administrator reports that;

The making of the Banyo-Kumbo Road also entailed great hardships and many Nsunglis [Mbum] died from the brutalities committed by the German soldiers in charge of the labour gangs while the blasting operations also seem to have caused many casualties [8].

In all these, the Germans depended on the appointed chieftains for the supply of labor and for tax collection. The manner in which these chiefs carried out these tasks were generally brutal and further strained inter-Fondom as well as inter-village and inter-Clan relations in Mbumland. The German administration was succeeded by the British administration who apparently continued with policies that contributed in disintegrating the Mbum ethnic identity.

### **British Administration and Disintegration of the Mbum**

British administration in Mbumland effectively began in 1922 following the League of Nations' recognition of the Anglo-French partition of the former German *Kamerun* territory in 1916. Before British effective administration in Mbumland, they placed the Mbum under the administrative and judicial jurisdiction of the Nso Native Court Area in 1921 and in 1922, the *Fon* of Nso was appointed District Head of the Nso and Mbum spheres on a salary of 120 pounds per annum [8]. Though this was meant to serve only temporarily, the *Fon* of Nso actually never exercised any real authority over the Mbum due to the longstanding enmities that existed between the two groups [7]. It should be noted that between 1890 and 1901, the Mbum had been at war with the Nso and hostilities between them were only halted with the advent of German administration in the area. During their numerous attacks, the Nso never succeeded to occupy the Mbum villages of Luh, Taku and Ntundip which adjoined her northern boundary [11]. Apart from existing antagonism, the treatment of Mbum Chiefs who attended the Nso Court was dire and outrageous which further infuriated the Mbum. The Mbum chiefs who attended the Nso Court were requested by the Messengers to remove their Royal Hats (*Ntoshi*) while the Nso Chiefs could be found in the same Court with their caps on [7]. This administrative arrangement was therefore ephemeral and forced the British in 1924 to carry out a study of the Mbum area with the view of reorganizing its local administration.

The 1924 study of the Mbum local territorial set up revealed that the Mbum Clans did not constitute a geographical continuum. The villages that made up the Warr, Ya and Tang Clans were geographically intermixed. In describing the intermixed nature of the Mbum clans, Kay succinctly captures it in these words;

The Mbwat Clan occupies two areas, one in the South West and the other in the North East. Ndu lies between, and a thin wedge of the Tang Clan; but the Tang lands are mainly in the North West. Ndu has two isolated villages- Konchep in the extreme North and Lu in the West. Thus geography and history conspire to promote- and to maintain despite reorganization- the common Nsungli interest [15].

Similarly, Carpenter in his Report on the Nsungli Area in 1934 also captures this intermix configuration of the Mbum clans. He says;

...Konchep (Ya Clan) ... is to be found on the opposite side of Nsungli to the rest of the Ndu Federated Group; Sa is out off from the rest of Mbwat Area by a portion of Bi (Tang). The villages of Ntumbaw and Nsob (belonging to Warr Clan) form an "island" in the South East of the Ndu Federated Area, while Lu also of the Ndu Federated Area, occupies land between Tang and Mbwat territory on the Banso boundary [16].

From this background, Hawkesworth in his Report on Nsungli (Mbum) Clans recommended that "the Native Authority should be vested in the three village area heads, the Chiefs of Mbwat, of Tangtala and of Ndu and they should each receive a salary of 12 pounds per annum" [8]. On the strength of Hawkesworth's recommendation, a collective Native Authority was created in Mbumland in 1924 with power vested in the three (3) Clan Heads as joint Native Authorities (NA). It followed that the Chiefs of Mbwat, Tangtala and Ndu were made joint NA of the Wimbum NA area until 1924 [15]. Though this arrangement had the potential of uniting the Mbum ethnic identity, Clan loyalties were still rife. However, it was further revised in 1935 when each Clan was raised to an independent NA and this marked a turning point in Clan relations in Mbumland.

Following an intelligence report presented by F.W. Carpenter who was a British Administrative Officer in the Bamenda Division, a number of facts were uncovered that necessitated the reorganization of the Wimbum NA in 1935. Outstandingly, the Report recalled that the three Clans of Mbum had different origins emanating from their migratory histories. Accordingly, the 1935 reorganization of the Wimbum NA respected Clan lines. The three Clans were raised to NAs including the Mbwat Clan NA, the Tang Clan NA and the Ndu Federated Group NA area [11]. As such, authority was vested in the Chiefs of Mbwat, Talla and Ndu who henceforth served as heads of the respective NA areas and presided over their respective Native-Authority-in-Councils and Courts. Each of these NAs ran Councils (administrative/legislative arm) and Courts (Judiciary) independently in their respective areas. In fact, the 1935 reorganization of the Mbum Native Authority formed the basis of ethnic disintegration among the Mbum of Cameroon's Grasslands. This reinforced Clan system made politics as well as socio-cultural and economic development to run along Clan lines which situation had spillover effects into the post-colonial period.

### **Clan-Based Political Development in Mbumland**

The British administration in Mbumland invariably made the people retrocede into Clan partisanship which obliterated their sense of ethnic identity. This hindered a united action among the people who generally felt, “particularistic and tribalistic and did not have any sense of unity in issues of national interest” [11]. This particularism manifested most overtly in the political domain. In actual fact, Mangoh maintains that;

The divisive seed sown among Wimbun in 1935 featured in the political process and this was going to continue for many decades. It was no more going to be qualification in academics and understanding in all Wimbun politics, but who sponsors you into it [11].

This tendency made the three Clan Heads of Mbumland to fight for political positions in times of elections for clan members. Clan interests had superseded ethnic interest and this led to the division and disintegration of the Mbum. This tendency was most evidently manifested in the 1957 and 1959 General Elections and also the 1961 Plebiscite in Southern Cameroons.

The formation of the Kamerun National Democratic Party (KNDP) in 1955 by JN Foncha and AN Jua signaled the beginning of division among the Mbum politicians. While some politicians like JT Ndze (Tang Clan) and AT Ngala (Ya Clan) were loyal to the Kamerun National Congress (KNC), the formation of the KNDP offered a platform for other politicians of Mbum extraction to seek membership to propel the interests of their Clans against politicians from other Clans. This was the case with the Warr Clan whose Chief welcomed and committed himself and all the indigenes of Warr Clan to the KNDP [11]. He felt that he had to propel a member of his own Clan into politics within the KNDP since according to him, the Tang and Ya Clans already had JT Ndze and AT Ngala respectively “representing” their Clans in politics within the KNC. This action was going to greatly affect the conduct of politics, elections and Clan relations in Mbumland even after 1961. No doubt, in a report written by the Nkambe Divisional Union to the Chief Electoral Officer in Buea after the 1957 Elections, they stated that; “Some Chiefs when installed think more of promoting discrimination, and [...] certain civil servants [...] only [...] teach people more discrimination than creating a mutual goodwill among races and clans” [17]. This was the feature of political activities in Mbumland during the 1950s. It was characterized by the siege mentality to defend Clan interest at the expense of the broader Mbum Community. This had its direct implication on local development as well as on Clan relations with spillover effects into the post-independent period.

Outstandingly, the Chiefs of Mbum also became partisan and militated in political parties during the period. While the Chief of Mbot, AT Tokop, Warr Clan Head supported and rallied support for the KNDP of Foncha, the Chief of Ndu, Chief William Nformi, Ya Clan Head was an ardent supporter of the KNC party. The political affiliations of these Chiefs were influenced by and also influenced their subjects’ affiliations. It may be worth recalling here that AT Ngala who was of the KNC party was from Ya Clan. Though JT Ndze from Tang Clan belonged to the KNC party, he was seen by a cross section of the Mbum as a unifying force and an advocate of a united Mbumland [11]. He had championed the struggle for the creation of the Nkambe Divisional Native Authority in 1949 which united all the Mbum Clans as a single Subordinate Native Authority. Thus, the Chief of Talla, the Tang Clan Head was not too partisan in his political involvement. However, Tang Clan remained loyal to the KNC party up to the 1961 plebiscite and beyond.

The manner in which the elections were carried out in Mbumland raised important concerns that is worthy of consideration at this point. Since his accession to the throne in Mbot as Warr Clan Head in 1956, Chief AT Tokop rallied the entire Clan in support of the KNDP. In view of the 1957 elections, the Chief presented Peter N. Nsakwa as Candidate on the KNDP platform. This was because according to him, JT Ndze and AT Ngala of the KNC party were respectively “representing” the Tang and Ya Clan in politics. Besides, the Chief of Ndu, Ya Clan Head was a supporter of the KNC party. The entire Nkambe Division was divided into two (2) Electoral Constituencies during the 1957 elections composed of Nkambe North East and Nkambe South East. The Mbum made up the Nkambe South East Constituency. After heated political activities, the following results were attained in the elections; Peter N. Nsakwa of the KNDP won 1149 votes, John N. Ndze of the KNC got 1087 votes while John Nsame and AT Ngala who went in as Independent Candidates got 492 and 290 votes respectively [17]. Consequently, Peter N. Nsakwa of Kungi Village in Warr Clan emerged victorious. On the other hand, the Native Authority Representative of the Nkambe Division was Chief William Nformi of Ndu in Ya Clan who went into the elections on the KNC ticket.

The elections exposed real political maneuvers among the Mbum which largely ran along Clan lines. Arguably, the general feeling among the Tang and Ya Clans was that of dissatisfaction because a Warr indigene had won the elections. This was the height of Clan-based politics in Mbumland during that period. The feeling of dissatisfaction was exposed in a letter written by the Nkambe Divisional Union to the Chief Electoral Officer in Buea. In this letter, the Union raised a number of issues that showed that the general atmosphere in which the elections took place among the Mbum was unfriendly and characterized by gimmicks. Among the issues raised were;

We are of the opinion that our Division is badly represented as results of the recent elections have shown. No true-blooded Nkambe youth feels that this had been justly done even if it means a matter of going to the

International Court of Justice....In the past years only men from the Tang and Wiya Clans have [re]presented the Division in the House of Assembly and this time [it is] only a "Warr Man" [...] this Mr. Peter Ngi Nsakwa, whose ability to represent Nkambe is questionable by every thinking and reasonable Nkambe Citizen.

As Public Servant, [Peter Nsakwa] should on no pretext whatever take an active part in public politics as he has done, and created now in Nkambe, the Clan discrimination which now results to bitterness and distrust amongst the people. [...] As far as we are aware, everyone in this Division reposed confidence in Mr. JT Ndze....But the irritating and heartbreaking discrimination caused by Nsakwa and the Chief of Mbot was implanted in many a Wat man's mind and, although they would have been consistent with the true (sic) the VH [Village Head] of Mbot resorted to another means by making everybody from Warr Clan to take an oath not to vote for any person but for Mr. Peter N. Nsakwa, who comes from their Clan.

The Chief of Mbot caused every voter to take an oath before him as he sat in the Polling Office, before going to cast a vote. At Wat Town which was one of the Polling Stations, he had passed the instruction through the VH of Wat and as there was no Police Constable all the people came, pointing at one particular box only, which bore the symbol of an Umbrella and Calabash.

If Nkambe is badly represented...it is because some Chief when installed, think more of promoting discrimination, and because certain Civil Servants (like Peter Tamfu) were only employed to teach people more discrimination, than of creation of mutual goodwill among races and clans [17].

Though the foregoing portions of the Letter seem emotional and arguably written by indigenes from the Clans whose preferred Candidates failed to win in the elections or at least their supporters and/sympathizers, it however points to serious electoral gimmicks that took place among the Mbum during the 1957 Elections. This Clan politics that apparently had been implanted among the Mbum became evident even in subsequent polls. On the basis of such insinuations, the KNDP became unpopular in the Nkambe Division and particularly among the Mbum and this was determinant to its performances in the January 1959 General Elections and the 1961 Plebiscites.

The January 1959 election was crucial in the political evolution of the Southern Cameroons territory. Though the general picture given above indicates that the Reunification option had gradually become popular <sup>3</sup>, the situation in Nkambe Division and particularly among the Mbum was different from what obtained elsewhere in the Southern Cameroons. In this election, the Mbum voted massively for Integration with Nigeria, the political opinion of EML Endeley. Prior to the election, both the KNC-KPP (Kamerun National Congress-Kamerun People's Party) Alliance and the KNDP platforms were sold to the Mbum. These included the options of remaining part of Nigeria upon independence and seceding from Nigeria and then reunifying with French Cameroon led by EML Endeley and JN Foncha respectively. However, the Mbum chose to rally forces behind Endeley's KNC-KPP option of Integration with Nigeria. The Nkambe Division as a whole was divided into four (4) Electoral Constituencies including the Nkambe North, Nkambe East, Nkambe Central and Nkambe South. However, the Mbum Community made up the Nkambe Central and the Nkambe South Constituencies while Ako-Misaje and Nwa constituted the Nkambe North and Nkambe East respectively [18]. As far as the results were concerned, the KNC-KPP Candidates won in all Electoral Constituencies in the whole of Nkambe Division. In Nkambe North, S. Ando Seh emerged victorious while in Nkambe East, Central and South, DY Nyanganji, SN Tamfu and J. Nsame respectively won the Elections on the KNC-KPP Alliance ticket. On the whole, the KNC-KPP had 8065 votes sum while the KNDP and the OK (One Kamerun) got 4782 and 81 votes respectively.

The KNC-KPP Candidates that emerged victorious in Mbumland included SN Tamfu of Tang Clan and J. Nsame of Ya Clan. In fact, the KNC-KPP won a total of 4737 votes as against the KNDP which had a total of 3338 votes in the election. By a margin of 1399 votes, the KNC-KPP Alliance which was led by Endeley had won among the Mbum. The elections alone did not only demonstrate that the Mbum had an allure for Integration with Nigeria but it also brought to fore the entrenched Clan-based politics among them. In fact, Clan sentiments were visible in this election in Mbumland. The Ya and Tang stood strongly in favor of the KNC-KPP platform and voted massively for it while the Warr Clan that had declared its loyalty for the KNDP also voted for the party during this election but lost [11]. However, beyond the allure for Integration with Nigeria, the various Clans were particular about their candidates. The Tang Clan rallied behind SN Tamfu to promote their Clan interest while Ya Clan was strongly in support of J. Nsame both of whom being KNC-KPP Candidates. On the other hand the Warr Clan rallied support for PN Nsakwa who went into the election

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<sup>3</sup> This was because the KNDP party had charmed the traditional rulers especially of the Grassland who called on their subjects to vote massively for the party. For instance, on January 28, 1958, the Chief of Bali made it public to all the chiefs of the Bamenda Grassland to vote for the KNDP. This was because according to him, the KNC had no respect for traditional institutions and its key leaders were not from the Grassland. See Mangoh, 1986. 163.

on the KNDP platform. Thus, Clan sentiments were conspicuously visible in the 1959 Elections in Nkambe and particularly among the Mbum and this was determinant to the outcome of the election. Clan-based political sentiments were still manifested during the 1961 plebiscite in Southern Cameroons.

During the 1961 plebiscite<sup>4</sup>, as far as the Nkambe Division was concerned, it was divided into four (4) plebiscite Districts more or less conterminous to the Electoral Constituencies of 1959. These included the Nkambe North, East, Central and South Districts. However, Mbumland made up the Nkambe Central and the Nkambe South Constituencies while Ako-Misaje and Nwa constituted the Nkambe North and Nkambe East respectively. By this token, majority of the electors in Nkambe Division were the Mbum. They made up 9727 for Nkambe Central and 14,860 for Nkambe South giving a total of 24,587 Mbum out of 44,233 electors in the entire Nkambe Division. In relative terms, the Mbum alone constituted 55.59% of the electors in the whole of Nkambe Division which was made up of other ethnic identities including the Mbem, Mbembe, Mfumte, Yamba among others. The massive mobilization of the Mbum for the plebiscite was not just because they were politically savvy but also because of the personal commitments of the Clan and Village Heads to mobilize their subjects to register in order to rally behind their respective Candidates [19].

After the vote on February 11, 1961, all the two plebiscite Districts that covered Mbumland including Nkambe Center and Nkambe South voted in favor of Nigeria by 54% and 71% respectively while Nkambe North which covered the Ako-Misaje area voted for Nigeria by 76%. The reasons could be easily identified in the proximity of the area with Nigeria. The Mbum of Ndu and Nkambe Center were exposed to Clan-based politics which was largely responsible for the outcome of the plebiscite in the area. Out of the total number of 44,233 registered voters in Nkambe Division, 36,939 people voted giving an impressive percentage participation rate of 83.5%. The ethnic disintegration fostered by the British reorganization of 1935 had bred Clan-based politics in Mbumland which resulted in strange outcomes in the 1957, 1959 and 1961 polls- showing an entrenched allure for integration with Nigeria among the people. Most importantly, the Mbum by the 1961 polls placed themselves in Opposition to the Foncha administration. This inadvertently had some impact on the people and their socio-economic development in the post-independent/reunification era.

## CONCLUSION

European colonialism in Africa left indelible footprints which remained visible in the decades after independence. While in Africa, the colonialists were guided by the siege mentality for administrative cost reduction and convenience. This informed the administrative policies they adopted in the local areas which they administered. The Mbum of the Bamenda Grassland of Cameroon had migrated and settled on the Nkambe Plateau in disparate ranks but began forging an identity due to their common history, geography and culture before falling to the successive administrations of Germany (1902-1916) and British (1916-1961). Arguably, their encounter with the colonial administrations of the Germans and the British caused their retrocession into disintegration which ran along three identifiable Clans including the Tang, Warr and Ya. This was because while the Germans opted for the divide-and-rule policy which estranged Clans and Villages in Mbumland, the British after them carried out local territorial arrangements which emphasized Clan divisions among the people.

The British reorganization of local territorial administration in Mbum 1935 was to almost completely obliterate the sense of ethnic identity among the latter. The various Clans became particularistic and factional at the expense of ethnic cohesion. This became manifest during the era of party politics in Southern Cameroons. Political activities generally ran along Clan lines as the various Clans wrestled to position Clan members in vantage political positions for selfish/clan benefits. During the 1957, 1959 Elections and ultimately, the 1961 plebiscite, Clan interests superseded ethnic benefits. This informed the outcome of results among the Mbum which generally showed the desire among the people for integration with Nigeria. This was opposed to what obtained elsewhere in Southern Cameroons where the Reunification option was greeted with overwhelming enthusiasm. Colonialism had therefore created disunity among the Mbum and this continued to manifest in their socio-economic development in the post-independent/reunification era to

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<sup>4</sup> The 1961 Plebiscite was organized by the United Nations to put to rest the political conundrum that had bedeviled politics in southern Cameroons since the 1950s. Southern Cameroons were divided on the future of their territory. While some wanted the territory to gain independence as part of Nigeria (Integration), others preferred independence as part of French Cameroon (Reunification). Yet, another group felt that Southern Cameroons should gain independence as a separate state in its own right (Secession). However, following several failed attempts to reconcile these political options, the UN decided to organize a plebiscite on the two former options while abandoning completely the third (latter) option. Southern Cameroonians were thus voting on either Integration with Nigeria or reunification with French Cameroon on February 11, 1961.



present-day. The case of the Mbum captures vividly the situation on the entire African Continent that has remained balkanized which balkanization has become a potent source of conflicts that have trapped the entire continent. However, the post-colonial experience among the Mbum has been that of attempts to dilute the divisive tendencies. A representative case has been the creation of the Wimum Cultural and Development Association (WICUDA) by Mbum elite to forge unity among the Mbum Clans.

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