

Post World War Two Changes and Ethnic Politics in the Nso Native Area of the Bamenda Grassland of Cameroon, the Nso-Noni Experience, 1939-1961

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Abstract: What is known as the Bamenda Grassfield is a multi-ethnic area with cultural differences between its component ethnic groups. This diversity has resulted into two major problems namely: problems arising between the larger and smaller ethnic groups, and the hostility that derives from competition between the peoples. The Second World War gave birth to a number of factors, which compelled Britain to modify her colonial policies, especially with regard to the political future of the colonies and other aspects of development. It also dramatically influenced the elites and other local actors who increasingly questioned the *modus operandi* of the British, and their subordinates. This article examines the changes and how these changes influenced the conduct of politics among the Nso and Noni Ethnic groups in the Bamenda Grassland of Cameroon. Basing our findings on the analysis of existent secondary and primary sources, the paper reveals that the Second World War acted as an incubator which produced local politicians who vigorously questioned the status quo that visibly tended to favour the bigger ethnic groups. However, this new politics of ethnic identities was at variance with the Colonial machinery already set-up. Consequently, throughout the colonial era, the smaller ethnic groups argued in vain for a change in the status quo. The colonial periods therefore ended with huge ethnic problems for the future.

Key words: World War two, Ethnic politics, Grassland,

I. Introduction

Nso, Oku and Noni which constitute Bui Division in the North West Region, formed part of the Southern Cameroons' territory and were also administered as part of the Eastern Region of Nigeria by the British. As a consequence, the new system of administration, which was introduced when Southern Cameroons was already officially an integral part of the Southern Provinces of Nigeria (later, of the Eastern Region of Nigeria) several years after the decision was taken, was named Native Administration.¹ The British, rather than destroy, chose to preserve and exploit the political and cultural institutions of the people for their own ends and as a means of penetrating the area for the purpose of effective governance.² In 1923 the British administration just like the Germans concluded that the Nso *Fondom* (Kingship) was vast and homogeneous and could function as a Native Authority Area. Hawkesworth's³ report even claimed that "the loyalty of the "sub-chiefs" was extraordinary and in many cases their attitude was even more Banso than that of the Bansas."⁴

Based on the Banso (Nsaw Nso)⁵ District Assessment Report, and in line with the British Policy of securing the confidence and loyalty of prominent groups, the Banso Native Authority Area was created to

¹Victor Julius Ngoh, *Cameroon 1884-1985: A Hundred years of History*, (Limbe: Navi Group Publications, 1987), 12-30.

²Ibid.

³ He was in charge of the assessments in the Nso Area.

⁴E.G. Hawkesworth, 851 Ab/11: AN Assessment Report of the Banso District 1922, 44.

⁵ The word Banso and Nsaw was used interchangeably right up to 1966 when the Nso Division was created.

include the Noni and Oku *Fondoms*⁶ with the *Fon* (King) of Nso as the sole Native Authority.⁷ As a result, the *Fon* of Nso was mandated to administer Oku and Noni on behalf of the British. He therefore, benefited from the mandate given him and continued to administer Oku, Noni and the other constituents in his *Fondom* in a structured federal pattern. In essence, the Germans and later the British facilitated the Nso pre-colonial hegemony over the Oku and Noni areas. This subsequently affected the conduct of politics by these ethnic groups.⁸

The Second World War brought in many fundamental changes and acted as an eye-opener to many Africans and the Oku and Noni extractions in particular. The Oku and Noni ethnic groups started to assert their separate identities and fruitlessly struggled to convince the British that they were different from Nso in terms of history, culture, language and institutions. They even argued that as tax payers their villages were supposed to be considered and also benefit from tax rebates. During this period, while Oku and Noni engaged in what Yenshu, Ngwa⁹ and Nfi¹⁰ describe as the politics of identity, Nso continued on her path of maintaining and integrating Oku and Noni into her traditional framework with the help of the colonial administration. The processes set in motion by colonialism evidently influenced post-colonial visions and political practices, especially in terms of inter-community relations and local charter.¹¹ This study examines Post World Two Changes and how it influence political activities amongst the Nso and Noni ethnic groups in the Nso Native Authority, all part of what constituted British Southern Cameroons.

II. Post War Changes and Implications

The Second World War seriously affected the World and set in motion a series of changes. These changes drastically affected the international community and also the local communities. The following segment peruses through these changes and their repercussions on politics at the local level.

III. The Establishment of the UNO

One of the most important factors was the establishment of the United Nations Organisation (UNO), which replaced the League of Nations (LN). The Trusteeship Council replaced the Mandate Commission and the mandated territories were renamed "Trusteeship territories".¹² Unlike the LN, which was dominated by imperial powers, some members of the UNO, the Soviet Union for example, had no colonies, while others such as India were once colonies. These countries were against colonialism and wished to see its speedy liquidation.¹³ It was therefore thanks to these countries that the basic instruments of the UNO facilitated the move towards decolonisation and at that same time, privileged avenues for petitions.

The shift from the mandate to the trusteeship marked a milestone in the political and administrative development of Cameroon. During the Mandate period, there was no provision for the League of Nations (LN) to supervise the administration of Cameroon by the mandated powers. Secondly, there were no provisions for the political advancement or the eventual emergence of either mandated territory as an independent unit in its own right. Thirdly, there were no provisions in the mandates for the local inhabitants of the mandated territories to petition the LN against obnoxious policies of the mandated powers. The LN had neither the legal nor the practical instrument to penalize any of the powers whose administration of the mandated territories fell short of expectations. Furthermore, the mandate commission never visited any of the territories to have first hand information, on the extent to which the ideals of a sacred trust of civilization were being translated into practical

⁶ It is essential to note that, after the assessment report the Noni , and other conquered *Fondoms* were styled as sub-villages and their rulers as sub-chiefs.

⁷ This was an endorsement of the eminent position that the Nso had established for themselves. The Germans and later the British therefore met Nso with very solid institutions and a vast territory under her control.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Emmanuel Yenshu Vubo, George A. Ngwa, "*Changing Intercommunity Relations and the Politics of Identity*" (Yaounde: Éditions de l'Ehess, 2001), 46.

¹⁰ Joseph Nfi Lon, Noni and Nso, (Yaounde: 1987),67.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Emmanuel Aloagamo Aka, *The British Southern Cameroons 1922-191: A Study in Colonialism and Underdevelopment* (Platteville-Madison: Nkemnji Global Tech, 2002), 34.

¹³ Ibid, 35.

reality.¹⁴ Any information on the administration of the respective territories was sent to the LN by the administering authorities in the form of Annual Reports, which were often inaccurate and misleading.¹⁵

The UN Charter and the Trusteeship agreement laid down basic guidelines for the post-war administrative, political, economic and social developments in the trust territories. Article 75 lists among the four basic political objectives of the trusteeship system. It insists on the promotion of the progressive development of the inhabitants of the trust territory towards self government or independence, as may be appropriate to the particular circumstances of each territory and the freely expressed wishes of the people concerned.¹⁶ This transformation was far more than just a change of name. This is captured by Eyongetah et al in the following:

The trusteeship system of the United Nations introduced greater dynamism to the concept of international supervision first established by the League of Nations. The UN Charter, for example, stipulated that trusteeship was intended to promote the political, economic, social and educational advancement of the people of Cameroon and their progress towards self-government. The system brought effective pressure to bear on the trustees in the form of annual reports and on-the spot investigations. UN missions were sent to Cameroon....These missions received petitions from individuals and political parties....¹⁷

These provisions of the trusteeship agreement greatly fostered the emergence of nationalist sentiments among the Southern Cameroonians. While compelling the European colonialists to send annual reports to the Trusteeship Council on the developments in their territories, it also offered Africans the platform to present their grievances against the colonialists. That is why Cottrell maintains that: "Oral hearings and petitions [were] equally important in affording a mission and the Trusteeship Council, the means of ascertaining the aspirations, requests and grievances of the people of the territories."¹⁸ The WWII was thus as bloody and destructive as it was instrumental in the transformation of Africa's political history.¹⁹

Article 87 states that, the functions and powers of the Trusteeship Council, include consideration of reports submitted by the administering authority, acceptance and examination of petitions, provision of periodic visits to the respective trust territories, and the formulation of a questionnaire which would be the basis of an annual report by the administering authority to the general assembly.²⁰ The Noni people therefore, exploited these opportunities, and vent out their grievances through petitions to the UN visiting missions. For example, Noni Group Council led by Calixtus Che presented a petition to the UN Visiting Mission in November 1955 appealing for the demarcation of Noni.²¹ In most instances, their grievances and resistances were directed against Nso because of their direct influence on them.²²

IV. The Return of Ex-Service men

The outbreak of WWII in 1939 and the active participation of Southern Cameroonians in general and Bui ethnic groups in particular, was determinant in the pace and form of political evolution of the territory. Hundreds of Southern Cameroonians fought in the war in defence of the British and her allies. Many indigenous

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Victor J. Ngoh, *Southern Cameroons, 1922-196*,19. See also Article 76(b) of the UN Charter.

¹⁸ W.F. Cottrell, "*The United Nations and Africa*".(Annals of American Academy of Political and Social Science, 1956): 55-61. Found Online at <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1030734>. Cited in Myrice, "The Impact of the Second World War on the Decolonization of Africa". 7.

¹⁹ Myrice, "*The Impact of the Second World War on the Decolonization of Africa*", 8.

²⁰ V.G. Fanson, *Cameroon History For Secondary schools and Colleges: The Colonial and Post-Colonial Periods*, Vol.2 (London; Macmillan Publishers Ltd.,1989),89

²¹ Joseph Kwi, "Harnessing the Horse for Noni and Nso, Local Government," (Masters Thesis, University of Yaounde, 1968),43.

²² In 1948 Bamenda Division became Bamenda Province, comprising Bamenda, Wum, and Nkambe divisions. Victoria, Kumba, and Mamfe divisions became Cameroons Province, a name formerly applied to all of Southern Cameroons.

people volunteered to fight with the RWAFF while others contributed financially. Thousands from the British Cameroons literally trekked to recruitment centres in the Eastern and Northern Nigeria, to be enrolled into the RWAFF while many others took active service in Palestine and Burma.²³ They took active part at the war fronts in Africa, Asia and Europe, in the course of which they gathered much experience that was to become an asset for the nationalist movement. While fighting for the Allies, “their horizons were widened, and the post-1945 world was one in which anti-colonial nationalism was becoming widespread”.²⁴ WWII thus had a radically transforming effect on the whole of the African continent especially in the political domain.²⁵ Like their counterparts elsewhere in the Continent, Southern Cameroonians gathered much from the war experience. This is concisely captured by Myrice in this submission:

While some would claim that WWII was not Africa’s war, they fought regardless. If they had not participated, many lessons would have been lost. The Second World War was instrumental in arming Africans with the military knowledge and leadership skills they would utilize when fighting for their own independence. An important military skill that Africans learned throughout the world wars was that of communication and the ability to work together... This bondage formed a common goal to fight for freedom... and this helped tear down European colonialism in Africa.²⁶

Kengran²⁷ maintains that; the end of the Second World War witnessed the return of ex-servicemen such as Joseph Kengran, Ambroise Yumbi, and John Tatah from Noni, etc. These ex-servicemen, who had travelled abroad, brought to their native communities acquired knowledge, breadth of mind enterprise and initiative.²⁸ Their experiences removed them from conservatism and made them more receptive to novel ideas and innovations. It is very important to note that most of the soldiers received considerable education during the war, bordering on the weaknesses of the Europeans and exposure to outside experiences. Their exposure to these societies made them open to demanding their rights and privileges, even at the local levels. In this way, their contributions to the development of local politics became prominent.

Besides, the psychological impact of the war on the ex-servicemen was far reaching. This was inarguably more profound than the physical impact of the war on them. The revolution that occurred in their consciousness, was invariably transformed on the ground, and acted as a catalyst to the political development of their community. In the course of fighting alongside their European counterparts, these soldiers “noticed that in war, the white man bled, cried, was scared, and, when shot, died just like anyone else. It dawned on them that beneath the skin, there was no difference between [them] and the Europeans. This almost completely shattered the age old myth of European racial superiority and colonial insuperability and engendered in the ex-servicemen, the temerity to engage activities (directly and indirectly), that were to end European rule in their community.²⁹ This increased hope among the local people as the freedom became feasible.

Once the ex-servicemen came to this realization, they decided to put behind them the pain and memory of being “forgotten” and to engage the liberation program. They had realized that the war was indeed a blessing in disguise and brought about great lessons to be learned. The Ex-service men from Noni in particular became even more annoyed in that theirs was about black on black domination.³⁰ Consequently, the ex-service men and the new Noni elites were at the forefront in the formation of Noni Improvement Union, and other associations to fight their case.

²³Eyongetah, et al. A History of the Cameroon. 258-9.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Erin Myrice, “The Impact of the Second World War on the Decolonization of Africa”,3-4.

²⁸Kengran fought alongside the British during the WW 2 and actively fought against Nso hegemony.

²⁹Interview with Ambroise Yumbi a veteran soldier from Djottin, 23/5/95 fought alongside the British during WW11

³⁰Ibid

V. The Federal Experiment

During the period, 1945-1947, the British called the attention of the modern leaders to the problem of Native Administration; until then, they had paid little or no attention to Native administration, concentrating mainly on larger political issues and on who had been excluded from office in the Native Administration. In 1946, Mayne, Senior District Officer (SDO) for Bamenda Division, suggested that, because Bamenda Division was too large and communication was very difficult, the Division should be carved up into four administrative sub-units.³¹

Mayne began negotiations with the NAs for the federation of the Native Administrative Authorities [NAA] in order to put his proposal into effect. Mayne's proposal was supported by Brayne-Baker the acting Resident for the Cameroon Province, who argued that it was in line with future changes and then requested the higher authorities to give it serious consideration.³² In early 1947, the Colonial Office itself indicated that it was moving away from the policy of native administration to one of elective local government. These ideas received more serious considerations in 1948. In that year, F. R. Kay, Mayne's successor, strongly supported Mayne's idea but suggested that Bamenda Division be made a province with three divisions.³³

That same year, M. Milne, Assistant District Officer (ADO) for Bamenda Division, pressed for the approval of the Mayne-Kay proposals. He argued that under the existing conditions, the burden of administration fell too heavily on the Native Administrations who themselves lacked proper administrative guidance and had not even the benefit of well trained staff. In order to have the support of the traditional leaders for their proposals, some of these British local administrators' organized divisional meetings of the NAs and, by the end of 1948; there was a general consensus among the British authorities that the native administration in Southern Cameroons and elsewhere needed drastic reforms.³⁴

Consequently, the NAAs were merged into Federations in 1948. The NAAs, particularly if they were in the same vicinity and their people believed to have some ethnological connections, were amalgamated into larger administrative sub-units in form of federations. For example, the new Bamenda Province now had only five such sub-units: the North Western Federation (Wum Division); the North Eastern Federation (Nkambe Division); the South Western Federation (Widekum), the South Eastern Federation (Tikari), and the Bali Nyonga Clan Area, all of them in Bamenda Division.³⁵

The South Eastern Federation was the first to be reorganised, between 19 and 24 April 1948. SDO for Bamenda Division presided over a joint meeting of the Native Authorities of Bafut, Ndop and Nso in Ndop. By the time the meeting ended, the councillors' agreed upon details for the federation of their three Native Authorities. These proposals received the approval of the Secretary for the Eastern provinces within the year but took effect on 1 April 1949. According to the provisions of the proposals the Federated Native Authority Council comprised thirty-eight members with the *Fons* of Bafut, and Nso having permanent seats, the remaining thirty-six members being elected twelve from each clan and with one-third of the members retiring each year.³⁶

Fon Ngam of Djottin was the lone representative from Noni in this federation in the land tribunal.³⁷ When elections were introduced in 1952, *Fon* Ngam lost his seat to Michael Wamey and Philip Nfi who were his subjects. *Fon* Ngum II from Elak-Oku and *Fai* Mbuh Yang Ugieh from Jikijem and Pa Lucas Jick represented the Oku *Fondom*.³⁸ At the council at Ndop, voting was done by the show of hand and elections into the executive of the Native Authority were done without taking into consideration that the Nso Native Authority

³¹Ibid.

³² Bongfen Chem-Langhee, *The Origin of the Southern Cameroons House of Chiefs*, Vol. 16, No. 4 (Boston University African Studies Center Stable, 1983, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/218271> Accessed: 17/04/2009 09:32), 661.

³³Ibid.

³⁴Ibid., 662.

³⁵Ibid., 663

³⁶ Walters Che-Mbombong, Bamenda Division, 232

³⁷ Philip N. Ngam was the *Fon* of Djottin-Fonti in Noni, he was enthroned in 1945-2008, Interview in Djottin in 2007.

³⁸ Interview with *Fon* Philip Ntangrih Ngam.

was heterogeneous. This increased the frustration of the Noni and Oku people who were consistently sidelined and this led to agitations.³⁹

In this *Fon* dominated South Eastern Federation, the *Fons* of Nso and Bafut still wielded considerable power both within the council and in their societies at large. The decision of the council could only be implemented if the two *Fons* agreed with them. Even when the council took decisions; only the *Fons* could permit its enforcement in their areas. This implies that the council had no authority over the subjects of each *Fon*. As a result of the considerable influence of the *Fon*, the educated and more enlightened councillors spent more time of the council wooing the *Fons*. The Federation therefore increased the anger of the Noni people who were obliged to succumb to the strong presence and power of the *Fon* of Nso. This anger was vented out through petitions, protest and even boycotts.

In addition, the Federated Councils lacked corporate spirit as councillors were believed to only push their ethnic agenda and did not regard the development of other areas. Matters of interest to the Federation were often relegated to the background. Noni, felt cheated and sidelined and started boycotting council sessions as early as 1957 and initiated moves towards separating to join Nkambe.⁴⁰ The reason for this was that delegates from Noni had demanded some social amenities from the Federated Native Authority through the Banso Clan council. Unfortunately, the Federal Council turned down the request.⁴¹ Most importantly, it should be noted that, all the Executive members of the Nso Native Authority came from Nso and Oku while Noni was only represented at the level of the Native Courts.⁴²

The Federations paved the way for national consciousness among the traditional leaders. It provided them with an opportunity to make decisions involving larger administrative sub-units. Unfortunately this benefitted only the influential and powerful *Fondoms* because Noni *Fondoms* instead perceived increase dominance by the *Fon* of Nso. This perceived negligence of the British colonial administration to the legitimate aspirations of Noni increased the desire of these ethnic constituents in the Banso Native Authority to fight for visibility.

VI. The Inclusion of the Western-Educated Elites in the Administration

Just after the Second World War, a British officer expressed the opinion that “we shall not disappear tomorrow, or the day after tomorrow, but the governor of each British colony is in fact presiding over the liquidation of the colony...”⁴³ The flaw in British colonial policies was the denial of scope for the political abilities and ambitions of the educated elite. In the British territories Indirect Rule gave status and often considerable power to hereditary chiefs and other members of the traditional ethnic aristocracies. But it left the new educated professional class without political influence and social recognition.⁴⁴

The educated elite questioned the continuance of the native authority system which debarred them from taking part in the government of their areas. They argued that any government which was not accountable to the electorate was not likely to be predisposed to change a system in which it was accustomed.⁴⁵ In their opinion the maintenance of chiefly authority by the British colonial authorities was a denial of human rights. John Hatch described the growing tensions arising from the situation described above as follows;

All classes had reason to be discontent in the immediate post-war years. Traditional rulers felt they were in danger of losing their authority, farmers were getting high prices for their produce but found themselves unable to buy because of shortage of imports; the professionals felt the frustrations of discrimination as expatriates with no higher qualification maintained their

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid

⁴¹ Interview with *Fon* Philip Ngam, He was a member of the South East federation, and the *Fon* of *Fonti-Djottin* in 2008. I interviewed him on a wide variety of subjects from 1994 until his passing away to glory. I also wrote his biography titled “The *Fonship* of *Fon* Philip Ngam 1945-2008”

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Oliver and Atmore, *Africa*, 190.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Walter Che Mbonbong, *Bamenda Division*, 179.

privileges; all the lower classes suffered from rising costs arising out of inflation and from the slow provision of social provision of social improvements due to war-time shortages.⁴⁶

In view of these tensions, it became obvious that, the British colonial policy had to change if Britain was to maintain her hold over the African peoples. It was perhaps, in the light of these facts that the British secretary of State for the colonies, in a despatch of 25 February 1947, to the African colonial Governors, called for the re-examination of local government. In November 1947, the African Governors conference endorsed the secretary of State policy of local government. Essentially the new policy advocated a democratic system of local government which would speed up the political, social, and economic development of the British tropical dependencies. Constitutionally, the secretary explained that, African representation on the legislative councils would be largely based on the selection of representatives through local government.⁴⁷

In the West African colonies a start had been made in the Africanisation of the central institutions of the colonial governments. A handful of Africans were being recruited as administrative officers and some African members were included in the legislative councils and assemblies which advised the governors. In 1949, major re-organizations were made to consider the Western-educated elite whom British colonialism had produced but ignored in the development of native administration (NA).⁴⁸

Consequently, the power predominance of the traditional elites in the Council and Courts were being diluted. Though some of the most important natural rulers as perceived by the British such as the *Fons* of Bali, Bafut, Bikom, Bum and Nso were allowed permanent seats in the new councils and courts as ex-officio members, some traditional rulers lost their seats in the council and courts due to the reduction of membership and the inclusion of westernised elites.⁴⁹ This was particularly so with *Fon* Philip Ngam of Fonti-Djottin who lost his seat to Michael Wamey and Philip Nfi Tar⁵⁰ who were his subjects in the 1952 elections. *Fon* Ngum II from Elak-Oku and *Fai* Mbuh Yang Ugieh from Jikijem and Pa Lucas Jick represented the Oku *Fondom*.⁵¹

The Inclusion of these Western Educated elites gave them the opportunity to contribute in the discussions and issues of their Native Authority. This was an opportunity to the Noni ethnic group to present their grievances. To them, the coloniser was the Nso traditional elites, who continued to insist that, their rulers were not "*Fons*" and therefore not allowed enjoy the privileges and responsibilities attached to the title. They felt frustrated because they paid taxes but when it came to development, little or no attention was paid to them.⁵²

VII. Nso-Noni Politics

Politics in Noni was led by the *Fons* and the western-educated elites who were mostly primary school teachers. They actively participated in the struggle to assert their identity, and to make their opinions heard. Unfortunately as it will be demonstrated, the British were very reluctant to listen to these grievances and pleas from Noni. Most often, they insisted on the payment of taxes before tabling complaints. Even though post World War Two changes is the focal point, it is important to note that, these cannot be examined without some flashback on pre-colonial grievances which visibly gain momentum after World War Two. The Second World War was therefore, and eye opener as already stated, to the Noni.

VIII. The Causes of Nso-Noni Animosities

The Noni people nursed many grievances against the Nso which were mostly existentialist in character and form. This was based on the ambition of the Nso people to maintain a vast homogeneously Nso territory ruled by the *Fon* of Nso and the permanent subordination of Noni. These grievances were as follows;

⁴⁶ John Hatch, *History of Post War Africa* (Worcester and London: The Trinity Press, 1965), 53

⁴⁷ Walters Che-Mbombong, Bamenda Division, 179.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid

⁵⁰ Ibid

⁵¹ Interview with *Fon* Philip Ntangrih Ngam.

⁵² Ibid.

IX. Colonial Policies and Practices

One of the fundamental grievances was the British endorsement, and legitimisation of the Nso agenda. This agenda hinged on creating a vast territory that was homogeneously Nso with *Lamso* as the sole language and the *Fon* of Nso as the sole leader.⁵³ The Germans, and later the British recognition of the *Fon* of Nso as the paramount ruler of what was known as the Nso *Fondom*, cemented this agenda. After the defeat, submission and compromise of Noni villages, in the early 19th century, pacification pacts were conducted wherein the two ethnic groups agreed to cooperate against future enemies and to live peacefully as ‘brothers’⁵⁴

These pacification pacts meant different things to the two parties; to the Nso, this meant the total insertion of Noni as part and parcel of Nso, and that no boundary existed between them.⁵⁵ To the Noni, it meant an end to war and the acceptance of co-existence between the two peoples.⁵⁶ Consequently, they jointly fought with the Nso during the Nso-Bamum, and the German-Nso wars. The Germans after the 1906 war consolidated the hegemony of the *Fon* of Nso over the Noni communities and Noni *Fons* were fused with Nso. Consequently, they had to recruit labour for German plantations and serve the *Fon* and his German allies as tax collectors. Labour recruitment and tax collection⁵⁷ under the *Fon* of Nso over-worked the Noni *Fons* who had to move from quarter to quarter to convince their subjects to pay. Noni *Fons* who could not meet up with the tax money were persecuted. This was the case with *Fon* Lambi of Djottin who was jailed in 1912 for alleged embezzlement of tax money and this continued even after the Second World War.⁵⁸

Even though, all these took place before World War Two, nationalist feelings and the desire to be freed from all these, was activated after the war by returning soldiers and a cream of western educated elites who no longer wanted to be under Nso. The war experience had opened their eyes, and they came to the conclusion that, all these amounted to colonialism, and the denial of the right of their people to exist.

X. Conflicts in Customs and Traditions

Conflicts in customs and traditions also strained Nso-Noni relations during the colonial period. Noni spoke the Noni language described as the Mesaje group of languages which was radically different from ‘*Lamso*’ spoken in Nso. In Noni, for example, bride-price was part of the marriage culture and in Nso it was not permitted.⁵⁹ In spite of these differences, the *Fon* of Nso administered Noni imposing Nso customs and traditions while ‘*Lamso*’ was used as a means of communication. Noni regarded this as an attempt to annihilate her culture because the Nso had previously done same, with the Nkar people to the extent that; their language was abandoned for *Lamso*.⁶⁰

Due to these differences in customs and language, very little attention was paid to cases from Noni. Such cases accumulated pending trial because the chief-judge (*Fon* of Nso) did not understand the Noni language, and also because Noni customs were different. For these reasons, the Noni Improvement Union petitioned the UN Visiting Mission in 1949 asking for the creation of a Noni Clan Area separated from Nso and federated to the Ndop South East Federation. The British thus sowed the seeds of Noni discontent and Nso-Noni discord.⁶¹

This was because the Noni minority within Nso was not identified and the *Fon* of Nso consistently behaved like the colonial master to the dismay and disapproval of Noni. Despite Bridges findings’ in 1935 indicating that, the Noni ethnic group was different from Nso with a different history of origin, and migration, language and culture, the British went ahead to consolidate Nso domination over the Noni *Fondoms*.⁶² This was because the paramount role of the *Fon* of Nso suited the British colonial administrative requirements. The British were constrained by the absence of large state structures, and therefore decided to secure the confidence,

⁵³ Nkar is an example of the group that was defeated, displaced and their language gave way to *Lamso*

⁵⁴ Ivo Budji, *Folk Songs*, 56.

⁵⁵ They had successfully done so with Nkar to the level of diluting their language to Nso,.

⁵⁶ Aloysius Mbuh Ndiyun, *The Fonship of Ntangrih Ngam 1945-2008* (Bamenda: Unique Printers, 2008), 45.

⁵⁷ Tax was introduced in Nso in 1908 at 6 marks and increased to 10 marks in 1913

⁵⁸ Nfi Joseph Lon, *Intercommunity Relations*, 65.

⁵⁹ A.E.T. Ngam, *Approach to the Study of the history of Djottin* (London, MS, 1960), 55.

⁶⁰ Aloysius Mbuh Ndiyun, *Fonship Disunity in Noni 1913-2002* (Yaounde: University of Yaounde, 2003), 78.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

loyalty and support of the most influential and powerful chiefs,⁶³ such as the *Fon* of Nso and constructed the system of Indirect Rule around them. Consequently, the complaints of Noni were not taken into consideration because it questioned the very essence of the British administrative set-up. The Noni people did not receive this kindly as they concluded that this was a way of assimilating and annihilating Noni customs and traditions. As a result Noni *Fons* boycotted most of the sessions of this court to vent their disapproval.⁶⁴ All these grievances simmered on until after the second World when a new generation of educated *Fons* rose up and actively asserted their identity. After the Second World War, a new generation of Noni *Fons* and Western-educated elites started to agitate against all these. Their exposure to different people and practices had completely changed their World view. Consequently, they fought for the separate identity of Noni through petitions, protest and boycotts.⁶⁵

XI. The Disrespect and Maltreatment of Noni Fons

Another torny issue was that Noni *Fons* felt disrespected and maltreated by the *Fon* of Nso and his subjects. The actions in Nso and the social classification of the Nso *Fondom* was a clear signal that, Noni *Fons* were not recognized in their own right as *Fons*. According to this classification, Noni villages were regarded as 'sub-villages' and their *Fons* as 'sub-chiefs.' Subsequently, Noni *Fons* were obliged to greet the *Fon* of Nso through the traditional Tikar method of hand clapping,⁶⁶ and while in the Nso palace, they were not allowed to sit on their royal stool but on stones. Noni *Fons* were not also allowed to wear royal symbols such as bangles.⁶⁷

The Noni *Fons* also surrendered all big games caught in a village hunt to the *Fon* of Nso. Annual hunting expeditions were therefore organized and all leopards, lions, tigers and hyena (predators) caught were taken to Kumbo. Since the *Fon* of Nso regarded, and treated Noni *Fons* as 'Sub-chiefs', they therefore, had no right to leopard or tiger skin, because these were royal monopolies in Tikar custom. Apart from tributes in commodities, Noni *Fons* were expected to link with the headquarters of the state through marital alliances. Each village community provided the *Fon* of Nso with a wife if at all the *Fon* had not recruited one by force. In return, the *Fon* handed some princesses to the Noni *Fons* who had proven their loyalty and submission to him.⁶⁸

In addition, Nso state counsellors (*A-Shufai*) refused to greet Noni *Fons* in the same manner they greeted the *Fon* of Nso claiming that they were their equals in state protocol. All these were embarrassing to Noni *Fons* who back in their various villages were respected accordingly. Conflict started in 1922 when the *Fon* of Nso seized the *Fonship* bangle of *Fon* Ndikingang of Nkor and sued him in the Nso Native Court for the unlawful possession of royal property. A series of court cases on this very issue went on between these *Fondoms* right in to the 1970s. This was because the *Fon* of Nso was against Noni *Fons* wearing royal regalia. According to him, these were royal monopolies of the *Fon* of Nso, and Noni *Fons* had to surrender such to him. *Fons* Nforyah of Nkor and Philip Ntangrih Ngam of Djottin-Fonti vigorously resisted, and refused to acknowledge the paramount position of the *Fon* of Nso by refusing to greet him by hand clapping.⁶⁹

XII. The Payment of Taxes

Taxation also strained relations between Noni *Fons* and the *Fon* of Nso. When the Germans and later the British introduced taxes in the Nso state, the *Fon* of Nso was placed on 10% tax rebate and 5% jangali tax dash as the father of the 'nation' and the owner of the grazing land. Bridges remarked that from 1934, the *Fon* of Nso stopped paying 5% tax rebate due the Noni *Fons* who carried out tax collection on the field. From 1938, the *Fon* of Nso got all the 5% jangali tax dash alone neglecting the ten Noni *Fons*.⁷⁰ This demonstrated how the British allowed the *Fon* of Nso to administer Noni as a colony of Nso. Subsequently, the Noni people started resisting paying these taxes and sought to know how their tax money was used. Since the first sitting of the re-organized court on 20 May 1935 and right after the Second World War, the Noni *Fons* were not satisfied with

⁶³ Emmanuel Yenshu V. "Changing Intercommunity Relations and the Politics of Identity in the Northern Mezam Area, (Buea: University of Buea, 2001), 45.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 52

⁶⁵ This will be developed later in the work.

⁶⁶ This was reserved for the subjects of the *Fon*.

⁶⁷ Joseph Nfi, Noni in the Nso Fondom, 1987, 43.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Interview with Thomas Ndiyun, age 63, farmer, Djottin, on the 06-5-2016.

⁷⁰ Assessment Reports Bansa District File No. E.P.4461, vol.2, Ab 14, 1934, 52.

the constitution and proceedings of the court. As a result, many Noni *Fons* boycotted the sessions of the court to vent out their frustration and anger on the system. Out of the thirty five sessions that the court sat, the highest attendance from a Noni *Fon* was six times. Some Noni *Fons* did not attend at all and the court was therefore basically left to handle cases from Nso.⁷¹

XIII. The Reactions of Noni and the Responses of the Colonial Administrators

Frank Stark has pointed out that generally a subordinate status in any given circumstance is discomfoting and that 'when a group perceives itself down the hierarchy in the federal relationship, its main purpose will be to attain more power, that is, free itself from the control of the dominant group'.⁷² Nso was more concerned in maintaining the status quo and Noni leaders developed a sense of insecurity and dissatisfaction and questioned the rationale of continuous servitude, humiliation, and exploitation that were the benchmark of Nso administration. The fight against the British policy which was seen as the imposition of Nso lordship over Noni was championed by the *Fons* and the elites. This was done through disobedience, threats, and petitions to the UN, and to the British Government as seen from the role of the *Fons* and Noni elites in the following discussion.

After the 1947 reorganization, Noni was administered as part of the South Eastern Federation Native Council with headquarters at Ndop. During this period, the Noni people were gradually nursing the desire to have their own separate native court and even to break away and join Nkambe. On 20 September 1952 the *Fons* of Nkor, Lassin, and Mbinon wrote to the DO, K. C. Shaddock in charge of the South East Federation Native Authority (SEF). Their petition centred on the fact that Noni *Fons* were not allowed to sit on chairs in the Nso palace, no roads constructed to reach the Noni villages, and no hospital nor dispensary in Noni. They insisted that, the Noni *Fons* were looked down upon by every Nso person, and that dry season *jangali* dash enjoyed by the *Fon* of Nso was not extended to the Noni *Fons*. They concluded that this was complete enslavement under Nso and consequently, they threatened that taxes would not be paid until the Noni grievances were redressed.⁷³

These *Fons* were invited to state their case during a sub-committee meeting aimed at examining proposals for the reorganization of the SEF Council held at Ndop, SEF headquarters, on 4 December 1956. Unfortunately this committee did not have the mandate to solve problems but to listen and make recommendations to the high commissioner. In reaction to the grievances raised, the DO toured Noni and concluded that, after a detailed visit to the villages concerned; he saw no reason to alter his predecessor's reply.⁷⁴ He continued that, the villages themselves admitted that they were not harshly treated and that, they had adequate representation in all Nso institutions. According to him only a small minority of the Noni people wished to be transferred and a transfer of the minority would split them between two Divisions, and in the case of Nkor, would split up an entire village.⁷⁵ This was the manner in which most petitions from Noni were treated without serious investigation on the matter. This was partly due to the fact that the Noni *Fons* were not united, and some of these *Fons* even supported Nso as earlier indicated. More so, the Noni *Fons* were not considered as *Fons* but mere representatives of Nso and any opposition was down-played by the British.⁷⁶

In order to down-play the petition the Divisional Officer pointed out that, there was no Native Administration school in the whole of Nso area and therefore not a peculiarity of Noni, That the village head of Djottin was a member of the South Eastern Federation Native Authority, that the chief of Mbin-Nkor village and *Fai* Ndiyimukong of Lassin were members of the local council at Nso. The British consistently argued that based on the above reasons Noni did not have sufficient reasons to protest. The Noni *Fons* were not pleased with the response of the DO and on 30 September 1956, the *Fons* and Councilors of Nkor, Lassin and Mbinon wrote through the Local Banso Council, to the President of the SEF, Council, Ndop-Bamenda complaining that,

⁷¹Ibid

⁷²Quoted in Emmanuel, *The British Southern Cameroons*, 183.

⁷³The Secretary of the Noni Improvement Union Nkor-Noni Banso, Letter No. N.A. 2502/155 Central N.A. Office, Memorandum of Bamenda 20th September 1952.

⁷⁴Letter, No 2502/136 of the 12th July 1952.

⁷⁵Ibid.

⁷⁶Thomas Banvikuy (Lineage head of the Bunti family and third in command in Djottin-Noni), Djottin, 15-07-16.

... We the above *Fons* and Councilors of the above named villages wish to call your attention to our letter of 25 June 1956 in which a statement was made in accordance with taxation for the current year 1956 to 1957. Our citizens ... claim a commission of enquiry be appointed to check and know how the Noni man's tax has been used in the Federation of Ndop which claims a right over us... explain to us properly without which don't expect our tax money... knowing that we form part of the Southern Cameroons and it is a Trust Territory, we feel that we have a right or concern in the administering authority. We (Noni), are entirely a different group of people from Nso [emphasis added]... The Noni man is not a Nso man and he is entirely different in language and culture. Without consideration we are not prepared to pay any tax too.⁷⁷

The petition of 25 June 1956 may be regarded as failing in two parts according to the A.D.O. Firstly, an expression of dissatisfaction with the present constitution of the Native Authority and a request for the establishment of a Noni Local Council. Secondly, they threatened not to pay taxes unless their demands were positively looked into. With regard to the question of the constitution of the Native Authority, the ADO informed that SEF had recently agreed in principle to the reorganization and had appointed a committee to ensure these proposals. The British authorities in response to this petition insisted that, Noni people had a duty to pay their taxes in spite of their reservation. They even threatened punitive sanctions to those who did not pay taxes. However, they promised to visit Noni and evaluate the situation. After the SDO (Ndop South Eastern Federation) visit on 16th January 1957, to Lassin, Mbinon and Nkor, another petition was addressed to him on behalf of the Noni Group Council on 6 February 1957 as follows,

Dear Sir,

We are sorry to tell you that, our meeting at Ndop on December 4th 1956 was very pleasing to us not because we were not victimized but we heard you promising us after so many years of suffering... We will like to have answers to the following questions, 1. What do you say about Jangali dry and wet season grassing dash? 2. How many years of arrears are we entitled to? 3. What do you plan for our progress...?⁷⁸

The SDO Bamenda Division in charge of the SEF replied this letter stating that, he was aware of their letter dated the 9 February 1957 and that, he had not lost sight of their complaints. He went on that, they may recollect, however that, when he discussed this matter with them at Ndop on the 4 December 1956, he pointed out that any rectification was necessarily contingent upon the full participation of the people and payment of tax. He went on to say that;

During my last visit to Kumbo, just over one week ago, I was pleased to note that you would reconcile your errors to ensure that payment is shortly completed. With regards to certain of the specific points raised in your letter I would advise you as follows. The question of jangali dash is under consideration. There cannot, obviously however be any question of the payment of arrears...⁷⁹

The first meeting of the reorganization committee was held during which it was agreed that special consideration should be given to the representations made by the 'breakaway group' (Join Nchanti Movement) and to this end, a letter, was addressed to the village heads concerned requesting them to appear before the committee to state their case. The ADO observed that, it was unlikely that the Nonis will achieve their objective of a separate Local Council, but he assured them that, they will be accorded an increased representation in the Nso Local Council. This according to him, could in part, modify their present aspirations and bring them into closer harmony with the Nso.

⁷⁷Letter Ref No. N.A 2502/155, Central N.A Office Bamenda of 2nd July 1953.

⁷⁸Memorandum to the SDO SEF to Ref. No. B/ 2156/108 on 26th February 1957.

⁷⁹SDO Bamenda Division in charge of the SEF, letter to Noni Chiefs, collected from *Fon Ntangrih Ngam*.

DO Shaddock, in charge of SEF Ndop wrote to the village heads of Mbinon, Lassin, and Nkor, in which he stated that The SEF Native Authority has recently decided to consider proposals for the reorganization of the Native Authority and, to this end, has formed a committee to investigate and make recommendations to the council. In due course proposals will then be submitted to the Commissioner of the Cameroons for his consideration and approval.⁸⁰ He reassured Noni that, as earlier pointed out in his letter to the tax collectors; the Native Authority was not unmindful of their complaints. Consequently he invited the *Fons* to attend the reorganization committee meeting at Ndop on 4 of December 1956 to discuss the problems.

After this meeting and a series of meetings that were held, the Noni *Fons* came to the conclusion that it was necessary for them to separate from Nso. On 19 November 1957, the Noni *Fons* wrote a letter to the commissioner of the Southern Cameroons appealing for the separation of Noni from Nso. In a meeting in the Nso palace on the 6 October 1958, Noni *Fons* requested for the demarcation of the Nso-Noni boundary. Unfortunately, Nso was not prepared to hear such discourse from a people they considered as their subjects. According to them, Noni was permanently obliged to be under Nso..⁸¹

After the Second World War, Noni elites vigorously fought against the continuous administration of Noni by the *Fon* of Nso and for Noni to join Nkambe. In some instances they wished that the taxes they were paying should be translated into meaningful developmental projects. Most of the fight was done through series of petitions, threats, and refusal to pay taxes. The elites formed pressure groups to vent out their anger and fight against the policies that undermined Noni's sovereignty in political, economic and social development. Graduates from the Tabenken catholic school nursed and spread the desire to secede from Nso and join Nkambe. This desire to join Nkambe was based on the historical and cultural link between Noni and Nchanti. Rightly speaking, if the anthropological and historical findings were seriously done, it could have been understandable to place Noni under Nkambe if at all it was necessary. Influenced by their stay in Tabenken, the graduates from this school formed the "Join Nchanti movement".

The "Join Nchanti Movement" argued seriously that the majority of Noni people migrated from Dumbun-Kambe and from the Nkambe plateau. According to this Movement, joining Nchanti was just a logical conclusion of what the Catholics had rightfully done to place them under Nchanti. Consequently, the Noni elites formed the Noni Improvement Union (committee) in 1949, led by Shey Langji Paul Ngong. The main aim of this group was to follow a legal and constitutional procedure in seeking a solution to their problems. They informed the colonial administration in Bamenda about their problems within the Bansa Native Authority. These problems were, Noni *Fons* not allowed to sit on chairs in the Nso palace, no roads constructed to reach the Noni villages, no hospitals nor dispensary, Noni *Fons* being despised and undermined, dry season jangali dashes not being enjoyed by the Noni *Fons* etc. They concluded that this was a complete enslavement under the Nso. As a result this movement requested for a separate Noni clan area.⁸²

In 1952, the Noni Group Council sent another petition to the British colonial authorities requesting for emancipation and or separation from the Nso Clan Area. The petitioners, Thaddeus Mabuh, William Kiya, Patrick Kofon, Abanda Jam and Che Calixtus re-echoed earlier complaints by the *Fons* and added that they were poorly represented in the SEF.⁸³ The DO, most often, looked at this issue differently. To him the Noni people were requesting for more development and how their taxes were managed and not to separate from Nso. The British reaction was to assure the Noni people that the problem would be solved and that it was mandatory for them to pay taxes before complaints. The Noni Group Council, Lassin-Noni Area on 18 April 1957 addressed a

⁸⁰Ref. No. 716/6 SEF, of 24th November 1956, South East Federation H/Q Ndop

⁸¹Thomas Ndinaye, (a retired telecommunication engineer and traditional title holder), Bamenda, 02-4-16.

⁸²D.O Office, N°. C28/ Bansa-Noni-Improvement Union Application for Transfer to Nkambe Division.

⁸³NAB, file No.206/146

letter entitled, “Bamenda Machinery Unkind to Noni People” to the DO of Ndop SEF, Bamenda Division.⁸⁴ This letter was written by Paul Langdji Ngong; the Noni spokesman⁸⁵

In this letter, he noted that, in view of the reply given by the ADO to their desires to separate from Nso, it could be concluded that, he was in support of the Noni people being regarded as slaves. He explained that, their aim of seeking a transfer was to have equality in administration and not to reduce the population of the SEF. He went ahead to ask the ADO to tell him who to summon to court for their predicament. Was it the DO of Bamenda, *Fon* of Nso, NA Treasury Nso or Cattle Control Officer Bamenda? He further stated that, the ADOs conclusion on the Noni issue was based on assumptions and not facts because Noni people were different from Nso, and were even firmly settled in the area before the Nso came. He wondered why Noni did not benefit from the taxes they paid and was abandoned in all aspect except when they needed Noni to pay taxes. He concluded by saying that, “... i believe the chief of Nso’s iron hand over us is more than the German and ... Cameroon under United Kingdom’s Trusteeship”.⁸⁶ The British finally left southern Cameroons in 1961 without solving the Noni question. The Foncha government and succeeding governments were slow to come to terms that Noni constituted a distinctive people and therefore had to evolve as such.

XIV. Conclusion

This article examined the Post World War Two changes and how these changes influenced the conduct of politics among the Nso and Noni Ethnic groups in Bui Division of the North West Region in the Bamenda Grassland of Cameroon. It was revealed that the Second World fundamentally changed much aspect of human lives which had a serious bearing on local realities. The war acted as an incubator which produced local politicians who vigorously questioned the status quo that visible tended to favour the bigger ethnic groups like the Nso. Unfortunately, this new politics of ethnic identities was at variance with the Colonial machinery already set-up that focused on tax collection through chieftains. In the case of Nso and Noni, the general narratives were that the area was homogenously Nso ruled by the *Fon* of Nso. Consequently, throughout the colonial era, the Noni ethnic groups argued in vain for a change in the status quo. The colonial periods therefore ended with huge ethnic problems for the future which continue to be a serious problem in Nation building.

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⁸⁴Ibid.,4

⁸⁵This letter drafted by Mr. Paul Langdji Ngong (The Noni Spokeman), was copied to H.E Resident Bamenda, the *Fon* of Bafut, the *Fon* of Nso, Local Council Bansa, the Secretary SEF Ndop, H.E. Commissioner Southern Cameroons.

⁸⁶Ibid.

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