



## THE CREATION OF BORDER ZONES AND THE RISE OF PETTY TRADING AMONG IMMIGRANTS ON THE SOUTHERN CRESCENT OF THE CAMEROON-NIGERIA BOUNDARY 1965 TO 2015

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**Abstract:** This study examines immigrants' economic activities on the southern crescent of the Cameroon-Nigeria border after the creation of border zones in 1965. It looks at the emergence of petty trading as the most predominant economic activity among settlers along the Cameroon-Nigeria borders. The study argues that, the creation of a border zone on the southern part of the Cameroon-Nigeria boundary led to a rise in petty trading among immigrants in this area. In a nut shell, the institution of the border zone gradually transformed these border communities into semi urban centres that attracted an array of immigrants from neighbouring Nigeria, Benin, Ghana, Togo and Chad. The zone abetted in transforming the area from its unique agricultural nature into an excellent business habitat. It led to the establishment of border markets in Ekok and Otu thereby producing a good number of petty trading activities like warehousing, currency exchange, smuggling, trans-border transport, pottering and hawking. The study follows the topical approach and makes use of primary and secondary sources.

**Keywords:** Border Zone, Economic Activities, Immigrants, Petty Trading

*Résumé : La frontière méridionale partagée par le Cameroun et le Nigéria connaît depuis 1960 un afflux de migrants originaires majoritairement du Nigeria voisin et de bien d'autres pays Africains tels que le Niger, Togo, Benin, Ghana et Burkina Faso. Si certains migrent juste par aventure, d'autres plus nombreux y résident pour saisir des opportunités économiques. Afin d'améliorer leur vie, ces migrants se livrent à une diversité d'activités génératrices de revenus au sein des communautés frontalières que sont les Ekok et les Otu. Parmi les nombreuses activités économiques exercées le long de la frontière Cameroun-Nigéria, les plus pratiquées sont : le petit commerce, l'échange des devises, la contrebande, le transport, le colportage, la poterie, les travaux champêtres, la pêche, la médecine traditionnelle et les réparateurs de chaussures. Cette pluralité d'activités tient compte des clivages ou spécificités ethnologiques. À titre illustratif, les Igbo du Nigéria excellent dans le petit commerce, le colportage et à l'échange des devises, les*

*Ibibio pratiquent l'agriculture et la contrebande. Quant aux Haoussas, ils sont habitués à la restauration alors que les Efiks et les Ijaw excellent dans la pêche qu'ils effectuent le long de la Cross River. Par ailleurs, les Ghanéens font dans le transport et la poterie au moment où Béninois et Nigériens sont médecins traditionnels et savetiers.*

**Mot clés :** *Immigrants, activités économiques, Frontière, Cameroun, Nigéria.*

## **Introduction**

When Cameroon and Nigeria eventually gained independence in early 1960s, both countries consensually established friendly relations to cohere in the areas of development, education and economic growth. The cooperation was to boost trans-border interchange between the two countries. Furthermore, a trade agreement signed between both countries designed a border zone along the frontiers in 1965 to permit for the free flow of people, goods and services.<sup>1</sup>The creation of a border zone slowly converted the main border communities of Ikom and Akor on the Nigerian side and Ekok and Otu on the Cameroonian side from villages to semi urban centres by attracting a number of immigrants. On the Cameroonian side around Ekok, Otu and Eyumojock, the border zone portrayed an area for interactivity and exchange amongst indigenous Ejagham people from both sides of the divide. The area experienced the establishment of border markets in Ekok and Otu and therefore abetted in transforming this area from its unique agricultural nature into an excellent business habitat. Consequently, it produced a good number of petty trading opportunities.<sup>2</sup>At a long run, these opportunities captivated an array of migrants from neighbouring Nigeria and other African countries like Ghana, Benin, Niger and Togo. As these border communities moderately developed into complex heterogeneous societies, each community of immigrants from a particular ethnic group or country was vested in a specific petty trade as a source of livelihood.

Numerous researchers have tried to examine petty trading and its implications on the livelihood of African communities, while others concentrated on borders and their economic activities. Eyong<sup>3</sup> discusses the history of hidden trade along the Manyu trade axis on the Cameroon-Nigeria boundary. In his view, border creations did not deter trade among people astride this frontier because of the continuous existence and practice of traditional trade systems. He argues that, by the time Cameroon and Nigeria had independence, illicit trade multiplied owing to state negligence on illegal routes to concentrate on formal border crossings. However, irrespective of the fact that, the trade was neglected by the state, it had enormous impacts on both the local and state economy. Eyong's work is of great interest to this

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<sup>1</sup> NAB, File, No.O.1545 Co-operation between Nigeria and Cameroon, October, 1965.

<sup>2</sup> V. N. Atom, (2020), "Intra-Ethnic Conflicts among the Ejagham in Cameroon and Nigeria, 1885-2015: A Historical Assessment", The University of Yaoundé, 1: PhD Thesis in History, p.151.

<sup>3</sup> E. C. Eyong, (2009), "The Cameroon-Nigeria Parallel Trade along the Manyu Trade Axis in Cameroon, 1961-2005", The University of Yaoundé 1 (ENS): DIPES II Dissertation in History, p. 7.

study as, it will serve as an eye opener to the origins and evolution of petty trading in the area. However, he concentrated more on smuggling as the only petty trading activity. Our study will incorporate other forms of petty trading among immigrants on the southern part of the Cameroon-Nigeria border.

On the other hand, Okoro et al.<sup>4</sup> also has a reflection on the effects of women petty trading on household livelihood in Eastern Nigeria. They hold that the informal sector has become one of the major sources of income among rural women in Eastern Nigeria and has been used as a means not only to supplement men's income but, also for self-actualisation, self-reliance and fulfilment among women in rural communities. However, despite its lucrative nature, women as actors in petty trading experienced various constraints in the course of this activity. Such were, low income, disturbing husbands and motherhood engagements. This wonderful piece of work gives us an overview of what petty trading is all about. It helped in broadening my scope on the effects of petty trading on livelihood. That notwithstanding, Okoro et al. focused more on women around Eastern Nigeria. I shall differ here in that I will attempt to give an appraisal of the evolution and increase in petty trading among immigrants on the southern part of the Cameroon-Nigeria boundary. This study examines the implications of a border zone on petty trading by immigrants in the southern part of the Cameroon-Nigeria boundary. It elucidates on the rise of petty trading among immigrants on Cameroonian border communities as a result of the border zone that was created after the 1965 protocol between the two countries. In order to give lucidity to the study, we venture to provide answers to questions like, who are immigrants and how did the creation of a border zone in the southern part of the Cameroon-Nigeria border speed up or led to the rise of petty trading among them? But, before we probe into providing answers to these questions, it will be imperative to examine some important concepts related to the study.

### **Conceptualization**

An immigrant is a person who is settled in a country other than his own. The word immigrant is derived from the word immigration. Immigration depicts the movement of people or persons from one destination to another for permanent or temporal settlement. The word immigrant has gone through different scholarly interpretations and definitions. Bolter<sup>5</sup> sees immigrants as those people living in a country other than their country of birth. They are categorised into, naturalised citizens, permanent residents and refugees. Within the framework of the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), a migrant is perceived as, one who moves away from his usual place of residence to another. In the southern crescent of the Cameroon-Nigeria border, immigrants are people who migrated from other areas into

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<sup>4</sup> D. Okoro et al., (2020), "Women Petty Trading and Household Livelihood in Rural Communities in South Eastern Nigeria", *International Journal of Managerial Studies and Research (IJMSR)*, Vol.8 no 2, Doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.2043/2349.0349>, p.12.

<sup>5</sup> J. Bolter, (2019), "Explainer: Who is an Immigrant?", *MPI, Migration Policy Institute*, retrieved from <http://www.migrationpolicy.org>, 12/11/2021, at 01:00.

these border communities and they came largely from Nigeria with a few from Ghana, Benin, Togo, Niger and Chad.

Frontiers are zones between one country and another. Many scholars look at the concept of frontier depending on the community. Prescott<sup>6</sup> view frontiers in the western context as an area with a dividing line between communities. He understands frontiers as areas that distinct a state or country from the other. Conversely, Fanso<sup>7</sup> and Bonchucks<sup>8</sup> refer to frontiers in an African context as uniting points. The Cameroon-Nigeria boundary was a product of western colonisation meant to sunder the German colonial entity from the British entity in Africa. Although, initially the boundary was conveyed to ensure this distinction, it instead served as a frontier (uniting zone) for the divided Ejagham and other people of African descent. It aggregated different people for economic and socio-cultural motives. Frontier communities are the different villages and/or towns that were found, grew and developed along the boundary.

Economic activities are the various activities that were aimed at the production, purchase and sale of goods and services. It might be any activity that involves money or the exchange of products and services. They are categorised into primary, secondary and tertiary. Primary sector is basically agriculture; the secondary sector is entrenched on industries and transformation while the tertiary sector was mainly services like trade and transport. Handerson, Squires, Storeygard and Weil<sup>9</sup> hold that, economic activities are money making activities.<sup>10</sup> According to Okoro et al. petty trading refers to small scale businesses that generate little income to help sustain family livelihood.<sup>11</sup> In the context of our study, we will define petty trading in line with Okoro et al. as any minimal economic activity performed by immigrants to support household needs and does not involve huge income investment. It is characterised by its small nature and the low income involve. Along the southern part of the Cameroon-Nigeria boundary, petty trading involves small scale businesses like warehousing, currency exchange, smuggling, trans-border transport, hawking, pottering, traditional healing, shoe mending, retailing and food vending.

## **Historical Background of Cameroon Border Communities on the Southern Crescent**

The southern crescent of the Cameroon Nigeria boundary on the Cameroon side is basically inhabited by the Boki, Ejagham, Ngolo, Isangele, Balondo, Efik and

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<sup>6</sup> J.R.V Prescott, (1965), *The Geography of Frontiers and Boundaries*, London: Hutchinson and Co. Ltd., p.33.

<sup>7</sup> V.G. Fanso, (1982), "Trans Frontier Relations and Resistance to Cameroon Nigeria Colonial Boundaries 1916-1965, The University of Yaoundé: *Doctoratd'Etat* Thesis in History, p.7.

<sup>8</sup> O.M. Bonchucks, (1999), "International Boundaries and Divided People: The Case Study of the Boki and Ejagham Communities in the Cross River Area 1884-1994", University of Calabar: PhD Thesis in History, p.1.

<sup>9</sup> J.V. Handerson, Jim Squires, Adam Storeygard and David Wiel, (2018), "The Global Distinction of Economic Activity: Nature, History and the Role of Trade, *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, Volume 133, Issue 1, retrieved from <http://doi.org/10.1093/qje/qjx030>, 12/11/2021, at 01:00, p.358.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid

<sup>11</sup> Okoro et al., "Women Petty Trading", p.2.

Batanga. Amongst these, the Ejagham were the dominant ethnic group. Studies from different authors like Andah<sup>12</sup>, Ita<sup>13</sup> and Onor<sup>14</sup> have proven that, the area occupied today by these people was inhabited by humans more than two centuries ago. Certainly, by the time Europeans ventured into these areas for the partition, they met already settled people whom they arbitrarily divided into British Nigeria and German Kamerun (present day Cameroon). After the informal partition of Africa in 1884, German expeditions and conquest of the southern crescent of the Cameroon-Nigeria border began in 1898, a few years after she had annexed the Douala coast and following the theory of effective occupation, she decided to expand her territory through expeditions in all directions. These expeditions led to the opening of stations at Ekok in 1898<sup>15</sup>, Nsanakang in 1898 also dubbed the *Zollstation*,<sup>16</sup> (Africa East Trading Company) AETC and Agborkim Ossindinge in 1900.<sup>17</sup> German limits around this area were guided by the course of the Cross River and the Awa River. Along the banks of these rivers, they established trading posts in the divergent villages including Ekok in 1898, Otu in 1899, Agborkim in 1900 and Nsanakang in 1901.<sup>18</sup>

Meanwhile, after the British conquest of Okuni, Ikom, Yakur and Etung in 1900<sup>19</sup>, they established a business station at Okuni in 1903 and in 1906. It was moved to Ikom near the Cross River to monitor German activities on the Cameroon side. Another station was also set up in Agborkem on the Nigerian side of the Cross River facing the German station of Agborkem on the Cameroon side.<sup>20</sup> These various stations were aimed at checking their activities in the area. However, through a series of negotiations between the two European powers, a boundary to delimit British Nigeria from German Kamerun gradually came into existence through the Anglo/German agreement of 11<sup>th</sup> March 1913.<sup>21</sup> The international boundary separating Cameroon from Nigeria in the southern crescent mainly cuts across the Ejagham nation dividing it into Cameroon and Nigeria. It separated Ikom, Agborkim, Ajassor and Mfum on the Nigerian side from Ekok, Nsanakang, Nsanarakati, Agborkim Ossindinge and Esagem on the Cameroon side in the north. In the southern part, it separated Ekang, Mfaminyen, Nkame, Akor on the Nigerian side from Otu, Mbinda and Okuri on the Cameroon side.<sup>22</sup> Along this boundary, each station established by the Germans and the British on either side

<sup>12</sup> B.W Andah, "Pre-History of the Upper Cross River People", in S.O Jaja, E.O Erim and B.W Andah (eds), (1990), *History and Culture of the Upper Cross River*, Enugu: Harris Publishers Ltd., p. 29.

<sup>13</sup> E. I. Ayuk, (1981), "A survey of the Pre-Colonial History of the Ejagham People in Cameroon and Nigeria up to 1914", University of Nigeria, Nsuka: BA Thesis in History, p. 22.

<sup>14</sup> S.O. Onor, (1994), *The Ejagham Nation in the Cross River Region of Nigeria*, Ibadan: Kraft Books, Limited, p.17.

<sup>15</sup> NAB, File No. Af117/1920, Notes on Ossindenge District

<sup>16</sup> A.P Temgoua (2014)., *Le Cameroun à l'Epoque des Allemands 1884-1916*, Paris : Harmattan, p. 179

<sup>17</sup> NAB, File No. Af.28/3364, Keaka Assessment Report.

<sup>18</sup> Atom, "Intra-Ethnic Conflicts", p.65

<sup>19</sup> O.A., Ubi, "The Cross River Expedition of 1899: The Loss of Yakurr Political Independence" in Jaja, et al., (eds), *History and Culture*, p.76.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> [www.icj.cij.org](http://www.icj.cij.org), consulted on 11/12/2021 at 00:50.

<sup>22</sup> Atom, "Intra-Ethnic Conflicts", p.100.

became a border crossing and a major point for police, customs and immigration checks and controls.

These border crossings were reinforced by the construction of roads linking Cameroon and Nigeria like the Mamfe/Calabar road in 1947 through Otu and the Bamenda/Mamfe/Ikom road in 1957 through Ekok.<sup>23</sup> After the independence of both countries, four border crossings were recognised on the Cameroonian side. These were, Agborkim, Ekok, Otu and Okuri. Respect for these border crossings was ensured through the institution of police, customs and immigration and other administrative officials. As time went on, two of these border communities (Ekok and Otu) grew into complex heterogeneous communities due to the construction of motorable roads linking both countries and the institution of a border zone. The idea of a border zone came in 1965 when both governments agreed on a series of accords to ensure the fluidity of the boundary and facilitate interactions between the two countries. The zone in this area linked the main border commercial centres of Ikom and Akor on the Nigerian side and Ekok and Otu on the Cameroonian side. As per the 1965 agreement<sup>24</sup>, it stipulated that, indigenous people occupying these border areas had the right to move to and from either side of the border for a short period of time to visit their kith and kins. This was to be done by the presentation of a border pass.<sup>25</sup> In such a way, movements within the border zone did not require the rigorous process of presenting and stamping of passports. Its limits on the Cameroonian side whether from Ekok, Otu or Okuri ended at Eyumojock, while on the Nigerian side from Ekok, it ended at Ikom and from Otu and Okuri it ended at Akor in Nigeria.<sup>26</sup> Such an idea exposed the area to different socio-economic developments that facilitated the entry and exit into the area and presented exceptional business opportunities for both indigenes and immigrants. Consequently, these opportunities attracted a number of immigrants from neighbouring Nigeria, Ghana, Chad, Benin and Togo with a majority of them coming from Nigeria as far back as the late 1967. Generally, more than one thousand five hundred immigrants entered these areas annually with about a thousand settling temporally or permanently. As of 2015, there were more than one thousand one hundred immigrants in the different Cameroonian border communities on the southern crescent.<sup>27</sup>

**Table 1: Border Communities and Number of Immigrants as of 2015**

Border community	Number of Immigrants	Nigeria	Ghana	Burkina Faso	Tanzania	Benin	Togo
Ekok	458	436	08	00	00	12	02

<sup>23</sup> NAB, File No. 7464/2/9/37, Calabar-Mamfe Road, p.3.

<sup>24</sup> NAB, File No. O.1545 Co-operation between Nigeria and Cameroon, October 1965.

<sup>25</sup> A border pass is a one-page document signed by the chief of frontier police either on the Cameroonian or Nigerian side upon presentation of an identity card that shows that the said person was born and resides within the border zone. It is mostly issued for a duration of between one to two days.

<sup>26</sup> NAB, File No. O.1545 Co-operation between Nigeria and Cameroon, October 1965.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, p.129.

Otu	318	309	03	01	02	01	02
Nsanakang	80	80	00	00	00	00	00
Agborkim	123	123	00	00	00	00	00
Okuri	157	157	00	00	00	00	00
Nsanarakati	52	52	00	00	00	00	00
Total	1188	1157	11	01	02	13	04

Source: Author's field work, March 2015.

According to the table, out of one thousand one hundred and eighty-eight immigrants, one thousand one hundred and fifty-seven were coming from Nigeria and settled mostly in the two most functioning borders of Otu and Ekok. Meanwhile, out of the remaining thirty-one immigrants eleven came from Ghana, one from Burkina Faso, two from Tanzania, twelve from Benin and four from Togo. The reasons for Nigerians constituting a huge percentage of immigrants within these border communities were eminent. One of them was the Nigerian civil war. When the war broke out in mid-1966, many immigrants from Nigeria fled from military and Biafran secessionist incursions into these areas with a bulk of them coming from the south eastern region of Nigeria<sup>28</sup>. Displaced persons were mainly Igbo, Ibibio Ugep, Ogbudu, Efik, Ijaw and people from Calabar. After the war, some of them remained and engaged in various types of small-scale businesses to sustain their lives. They were also influenced by the hospitable nature of the Ejagham on both sides as they were provided with houses and farmlands to start their lives. On the other hand, their closeness to Cameroon in terms of boundary sharing and the numerous opportunities presented by the institution of a border zone within this area made them to intermarry with the Ejagham so as to grab the opportunity of constantly crossing the border for different economic motives.<sup>29</sup>

### Economic Activities of Immigrants on the Southern Crescent

Economic activities around the southern part of the Cameroon-Nigerian boundary ranged from agriculture to petty trading. Agricultural activities were farming, hunting, fishing, animal rearing and sale of forest resources. Petty trading which rose considerably after 1965 was mostly centred on retailing of goods, sale of petrol, warehousing, hawking, currency exchange, food vending, smuggling, traditional healing, trans-border transport and prostitution.

### Agricultural Activities

Agrarian economies are the oldest economies that had characterised areas of the sub-Saharan Africa<sup>30</sup> especially the southern crescent even before European intrusion.

<sup>28</sup> E.A., Ayandele, A.E, Afigbo, R.J., Garvin and J.D., Omer-Cooper, (1971), *THE GROWTH OF AFRICAN CIVILISATION, THE MAKING OF MODERN AFRICA, Volume 2: The Late Nineteenth Century to the Present*, London: Longman Group Limited, p. 387.

<sup>29</sup> Atom, "Intra-Ethnic Conflicts", p.135.

<sup>30</sup> G. F. Kum, (2018), Economic Factors Antedating the Cameroon-German Technical Cooperation in Menchum Division 1922-1965, in Virginie Wanyaka B.O. et al., (eds) *Le Cameroun, l'Afrique et Le Monde (XX-XXI siècles): Des Historiennes Rencontrent*, Mélanges en Hommage à M. Le Professeur Daniel Abwa, Togo, Lome : Presses de l'UL, p.366.

These economies were predominated by farming (cash crop and subsistence) and hunting. Farming was the most dominant especially with the introduction of cash crops like cocoa and banana.<sup>31</sup> Although it previously dominated the economy of the area, the creation of a border zone speeded up agriculture as it opened the market for agricultural produce through the institution of a border market on both sides of the divide. On the Cameroonian side, it led to the creation of the marketing board as far back as the 1970 to facilitate the sale of cash crops in the area. This directly influenced immigrants in these areas to venture into farming and the buying and selling of agricultural produce like cocoa, banana, casava, yams and varied types of vegetables. Generally, farming amongst immigrants was prevalent in areas like Otu, Ayaoke, Ekoneman Awa, Nsanakang, Agborkim, Nsanarakati, Esagem and partly Ekok. These areas presented the opportunity for the cultivation of an array of food crops like cocoyams, yams, plantain, melon, cassava, pumpkin, and maize due to their varied soil types. Immigrants invested in the cultivation of considerable quantities of cassava, yams, cocoyams, plantain and maize. Around villages like Otu, Ayaoke, Ekoneman Awa and Okuri they invested in crops like bananas, plantains, selected species of yams and cassava due to the black soil type.<sup>32</sup> Crops like yams, plantains, cocoyams and maize were not only used for subsistence but also to boost household incomes. Due to the high demand for food as a result of the uncontrollable increase in the Nigerian population, many immigrants took advantage of the large market size and the free flow of goods across the border to cultivate huge quantities of cassava, yams and maize and transformed them to either *fufu* and *garri* or white starch and crossed the border to sell in semi urban centres of Ikom, Ekok, Otu, Eyumojock and Mamfe.<sup>33</sup> Such expansion gradually drifted the ideas of these settlers from concentrating on purely subsistence to petty trading in harvested food crops. Immigrants who found it difficult to acquire land for such extensive farming got involved in the retail of perishable food crops across the borders.

Besides, these border communities harboured vast plantations of cash crops like cocoa, palms, banana and bush mango. Owing to the existence of an expanded and flexible border market, immigrants who choose to venture into cash crop sales began by the buying and selling of cocoa or banana from Cameroon to sell in Nigeria or other buyers coming into the area from afar. With little incomes, they bought these cash crops and sold on either side of the frontier depending on the direction of high profits. Although profits from the sale of cocoa were seasonal, they were fast and easier to come by owing to high demand by traders from Nigeria and Cameroon. The border zone facilitated the sale of these produce as immigrants had easy access to and from either side. After their first few years, they became conversant with the area and the functioning of the zone. Consequently, some of them further dared into other petty trading activities like retailing of used clothes, petrol or food vending.<sup>34</sup> Within these border communities, there were seven hundred and fifteen immigrants who practiced both subsistence and cash crop farming.

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<sup>31</sup> B.W. Andah, "Pre-History of the Upper Cross River People" in Jaja et al., (eds), *History and Culture*, p.31.

<sup>32</sup> Atom, "Intra-Ethnic Conflicts", p.140.

<sup>33</sup> Interview with Imelda Akpan, age 48, Farmer, Eakang, 10th March 2015.

<sup>34</sup> Idem.

Table 2 shows the number of immigrants involved in farming activities in the southern crescent of the Cameroon-Nigeria boundary. Out of one thousand one hundred and eighty-eight, there were seven hundred and fifteen immigrant farmers around these frontiers with a lesser number found in Ekok and Nsanarakati. Ekok had only forty-six farmers, Nsanarakati had fifty-two and Nsanakang had eighty.

**Table 2: Villages and Number of Immigrant Farmers**

Village	Number of Immigrants	Number of Immigrant Farmers
Ekok	458	46
Otu	318	257
Nsanakang	80	80
Agborkim	123	123
Okuri	157	157
Nsanarakati	52	52
Total	1188	715

Source: Author's field work, March 2015

These lesser number in these areas was because they were along the main border crossings that presented excellent centres for off-farm activities like retailing and trans-border transport. On the contrary, a majority of them were settled in areas where cash crop farming was mostly practiced like in Otu, Agborkim and Okuri in order to have easy access to ready produce. Otu had the highest with two hundred and fifty-seven, Okuri had one hundred and fifty-seven and Agborkim had one hundred and twenty-three.

On the other hand, immigrants who came into these areas exploited the numerous opportunities offered to the indigenous people by the institution of a border zone within this area. Since the indigenous Ejagham people were only required to prove through their identity cards or birth certificates that, they were border dwellers before crossing into either side, it influenced many immigrants to intermarry with the Ejagham in order to easily acquire such rights. They used these opportunities to learn the language so as to become part of the people to enable them move freely along this border. Interestingly, such acts also gave them the opportunity to acquire the rights to exploit forest resources like *eru*, *njansang*, chewing sticks and timber for profit making ventures. The exploitation of forest products like *eru*, *njansang*, chewing sticks, and bush mango was a lucrative small scale trading activity in these areas. While some immigrants bought rights from the chiefs to enable them exploit any resources from the forest, others preferred to intermarry in order to have such rights.<sup>35</sup> Forest products like *eru* and bush mango were constantly on high demand in Nigeria, and they were harvested at very cheap prices along these frontiers on the Cameroonian side to be sold at exorbitant prices in Nigerian cities like Ikom, Ogoja Makurdi and Calabar.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Idem.

<sup>36</sup> V. M. Agbor, (1999), "The Management and Conservation of the Ejagham Forest Reserve (Cameroon)", The University of Yaoundé 1: DIPESS II Dissertation in Geography, p.52.

Additionally, the border zone also led to the opening of maritime water ways for free navigation to the border dwellers for fishing and other quarry activities. This gave the opportunity for many Ijaw and Efik immigrants from Nigeria to improve and increase their fishing ventures in the area. Fishing was generally carried out along the Cross River and the Awa River. Since navigating these rivers was free for the indigenous people, many immigrants joined the natives involved in fishing to navigate the rivers without much worry of drowning or attacks from sea totems. Immigrants generally had great catch during the dry season due to low volumes of water.<sup>37</sup> While some was bought by cold stores' operators to be consumed along these areas, much of it was dried and carried to the semi urban centres of Ikom and Calabar to be sold in the border markets. Meanwhile on the Cameroonian side, it was transported to places like Eyumojock, Mamfe, Kumba and Douala.<sup>38</sup> The above activity was mostly on a low scale due to poor means and tools. The tools involved local nets, baskets and speers making production very low. Consequently, income yielded was also very low and standards of living were negatively affected. In a bid to improve on livelihood, many of them resorted to other forms of petty trading alongside agricultural activities to supplement household income.

### **Petty Trading Among Immigrants**

The institution of the border zone abetted to a multiplication of petty trading activities among settlers in this area by guaranteeing for the free movement of people, free flow of goods, the institution of border markets and the construction of roads. These developments attracted the attention of a good number of immigrants to rush into varying petty trading ventures like warehousing, currency exchange, hawking, retailing, food vending and sale of used clothes, pottering, traditional healing, trans-border transportation, smuggling, shoe mending and prostitution. The market opportunities presented by the border zone through the institution of a border market compounded by the construction of the trans-African high way linking Ekok on the Cameroonian side and Ikom on the Nigerian side led to a high increase in retailing among immigrants along this border. Among others, retailing became the most predominant petty trading activity of the people. Retailing occurred mainly around the border markets in Ekok and Otu. Basic commodities were household needs (soap, salt, washing powder, cubes, pots, spoons, plates, kerosene, lamps, bags, shoes, dresses), food items like (garri, beans, vegetable and palm oil) and farm equipment (machetes, files, rain boots and waterproofs).<sup>39</sup> There were also building materials like cement, shovel, diggers, nails and zinc. The goods were bought from both countries and supplied on either side depending on the prices. Generally, businessmen along these frontiers calculated their gains based on the exchange values of the Cameroon Franc CFA and the Nigerian Naira. Since the prices of basic commodities in Nigeria were not affected by currency exchange, many of them bought goods from Nigeria at

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<sup>37</sup> Interview with Ernest Tanyi.

<sup>38</sup> Idem.

<sup>39</sup> Eyong, "The Cameroon-Nigeria", p.59.

very cheap prices to sell in Cameroon and vice versa.<sup>40</sup>For instance, if exchange value of Nigerian Naira rises from 300 Naira to 350Naira per 1000CFA Franc without affecting the price of soap which was originally sold for 50Naira in Ikom, it means that, a trader who buys six cubes of soap for 300Naira (50Naira each) to sell for 500CFA Franc at Eyumojock on the Cameroonian side will obviously make 3000CFA Franc ( $500 \times 6 = 3000$ ). He will then use the 3000CFA Franc to exchange for 350Naira per thousand ( $350 \times 3000 = 1050$ Naira). This means that, the trader had made a profit of 650Naira. On the other hand, when prices of goods were affected by such fluctuations, traders preferred to buy from Cameroon to sell in Nigeria. In that case, Cameroonian products like soap, rice, beer and beans which were admired by Nigerians for their quality and durability were bought from Cameroon to be sold at exorbitant prices in Nigeria.<sup>41</sup>Aside such trans-border trade, many other immigrants opened warehouses to make products readily available for border dwellers and incoming businessmen from both sides of the divide. Warehouses were used for storage of goods and were rented or owned by whole sale suppliers who bought goods and stored in anticipation to sell for gains in the future.

On the other hand, currency exchange also rose as another form of petty trading among immigrants. As the border zone attracted an array of people, it led to the constant movements of people into Nigeria and Cameroon. These movements required constant currency exchanges by traders from Cameroon CFA Frs to Nigerian Naira and vice versa. Although, other currencies like, XAF Francs, US dollar, Euro and British Pound were frequent, the most common exchanges were from Naira to CFA Franc and vice versa. The increase and frequent influx of traders on both side into the border zone for business led to a rise in this activity especially among Igbo immigrants from Nigeria. They operated as an exchange office or *bureau de change* (BDC). Immigrant currency traders monitored carefully the fluctuations in the different currencies to determine the price to buy or sell any currency. In other to make reasonable profits from such businesses, the trader was required to be on alert and to have frequent information from the currency market on the increase and decrease of a particular currency.<sup>42</sup>In such a way, when exchange value for Naira drops as opposed to Franc CFA, the currency trader quickly rushed to buy Franc CFA while estimating that Naira will soon rise again for him to sell the CFA franc and vice versa.

Beside currency exchange, trans-border transport was also on a rise. The completion and passage of the trans-African high way through the border zone facilitated movements along the border zone enabling many traders to make as many trips as possible into Ikom in Nigeria and Mamfe in Cameroon and back. The pressure from eager traders, did not only lead to a shift in transborder transportation from indigenous Ejagham people to immigrants but as well as an increase in this activity on either side. On the one hand, it involved the transportation of people and goods from Otu in Cameroon to Ekok, Akor and even up to Calabar in Nigeria. On

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<sup>40</sup> Interview with Ogar Igwe, age 58, Trader, Ekok, 15th May 2015.

<sup>41</sup> Idem.

<sup>42</sup> Interview with Ekuri Ajom, age 56, Currency Exchange Operator, Ekok, 12<sup>th</sup> May 2015.

the other hand, it was from Ekok on the Cameroonian side to Ikom, Ogoja and Makurdi on the Nigerian side. Since movement was guaranteed by the border zone agreement, drivers created an umbrella association known as the United Brothers Association (UBA) in 1994 to help them in controlling their transport business.<sup>43</sup> The area often received a variety of people from either side on daily basis. The drivers therefore made as many trips as possible irrespective of police, immigration and other technical challenges.<sup>44</sup> Also, despite the low quality of fuel from Nigeria, it was quite cheap as compared to Cameroonian fuel. Border drivers seized this opportunity to invest in the buying of fuel from Nigeria to sell in Cameroon. Irrespective of police restrictions which sometimes made business slow, illegal warehouses for the storage of fuel along Ekok and Otu borders were littered all over. They transported one litre of fuel for 125Naira from Ikom and sold it for 500CFA Franc a litre around Eyumojock and Mamfe. In exchange 500CFA Frs was equivalent to about 400Naira.<sup>45</sup> This gave them a gain of about 275 Naira.

Moreover, the institution of a border zone led to a gradual neglect of inland routes, there by promoting smuggling in the area. Smuggling was a petty trade which entailed the illegal pottering and crossing of goods and people without the notion of police or custom officers across the borders.<sup>46</sup> Previously, the Ejagham who were the ascendant ethnic band in this area had a monopoly over smuggling along this frontier as a result of their mastery of a myriad of inland routes and control over the cross river.<sup>47</sup> Although these inland routes were created as linking paths from one settlement to another and for other economic activities like long distance trade, they later served as smuggling routes after the partition. By 1990, this informal trade has flourished especially around Ikom/Ekok axis and Otu/Ekang axis<sup>48</sup> due to its lucrative nature and the expansions of border markets. It was further compounded by the completion of the trans-African highway in 2010.<sup>49</sup> Various immigrants became interested in smuggling, acting as middlemen who negotiated with traders to ferry their goods on either side. Smuggling along these areas was mostly concerned with contrabands like fuel, cocoa chemicals, second hand wears, drugs and Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW).<sup>50</sup> As many of these goods were refrained from entering into Cameroon or Nigeria, customs, police and immigration officers on either side of the frontier were very strict and severe on their checks and controls. They often seized such goods and burnt or destroyed them. In this regard, businessmen preferred to pay smugglers to illegally ferry them across these frontiers.<sup>51</sup> Though particularly lucrative and profit making to the immigrants, it has been very detrimental to the economies of both

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<sup>43</sup> R. A. Etta, (2013), "The Ejagham of Cameroon and Nigeria 1884-2003: A Historical Assessment of the Impact of European Partition", The University of Yaoundé 1: Doctorat/Ph.D Thesis in History, p.267.

<sup>44</sup> Interview with Ernest Tanyi.

<sup>45</sup> Idem.

<sup>46</sup> Eyong, "The Cameroon-Nigeria", p. 2.

<sup>47</sup> U. Rosenthaler, (2011), *Purchasing Culture, the Dissemination of Associations in the Cross River Region of Cameroon and Nigeria*, New Jersey: Africa World Press, p.134.

<sup>48</sup> Atom, "Intra-Ethnic Conflicts" p.151.

<sup>49</sup> Interview with Clifford Ashu, age 43, Geo-Technical Engineer (BURNS), Yaoundé, 21st May 2017.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Interview with Patrick Edet, age 34, Smuggler, Otu-Ekang Border, 8 March 2015.

countries in terms of leakage. Much of the money that was supposed to be paid as custom duty was swayed into individual pockets while unhealthy goods entered into the economies. On the other hand, illicit traders that dealt with small arms were mostly promoters of trans-border conflicts and other intra-ethnic conflicts in the area. Aside smuggling, other activities like food vending were also on a rise.

Food vending became common in the main border markets of Otu and Ekok on the Cameroonian side due to the high influx of people into the border zone.<sup>52</sup> Aside this, traditional healers also increased in the area. Traditional healing was performed by seers and herbalist who were mostly made up of the Ibibio and Mbororo. They were either passive or stayed temporarily since many came on invitation. They sold various concoctions at exorbitant prices as cure for malaria, epilepsy, low sperm count and prostrate etc. Overall, petty trading among immigrants along these border communities ranged from retailing to currency exchange and food vending etc.

**Table 3: Number of Immigrants in Petty Trading Activities**

Petty Trading Activities	Border Community and Number of Immigrants	
	EKOK	OTU
Retailing and Hawking	250	16
Warehouses	17	2
Currency Exchange	32	4
Sale of Petrol	30	12
Transportation	55	24
Food Vending	28	3
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>412</b>	<b>61</b>

Source: Author's Field Work, March 2015.

According to table 3, there were six predominant petty trading activities in the border communities of Ekok and Otu. These were retailing and hawking, warehousing, currency exchange, sale of petrol, transportation and food vending. In total, there were four hundred and seventy-three immigrants involved in these activities with four hundred and twelve in Ekok and sixty-one in Otu. The figures here show that, immigrants mainly embraced and increased petty trading activities like hawking and retailing, trans-border transport, sale of petrol and currency exchange around these borders due to the creation of border markets, free movements across the borders and access to roads as offered by the 1965 protocol. On the other hand, petty trading ventures like food vending and warehousing acted as service suppliers that were meant to serve the incoming traders with food and goods around the border zone. The opportunities offered by the border zone coupled with the fast turn over due to the constant influx of people into the zone continually attracted and influenced many other immigrants to rush into hawking, retailing, transportation and

<sup>52</sup> Interview with George Otang.

currency exchange. It helped in transforming the area into an international market centre with specific groups of people specialised in a particular activity or activities.

Petty trading activities along Cameroonian border communities of Ekok and Otu were prevalent among Nigerians, Ghanaians, Beninois and Togolese etc. Amongst the Nigerians, the Igbo accounted for about 80 percent in retail, hawking, currency exchange, sale of petrol and warehousing. The mystery behind Igbo dominance in petty trading along these borders was rooted from their history and culture. According to Nnamdi Madichie, lessons in trading amongst the Igbo were learned as far back as the 15<sup>th</sup> century during the Slave Trade. During this period, Igbo slave merchants also traded in commodities like sugar, tobacco, cotton and liquor.<sup>53</sup> Besides, Biko Agozino and Ike Anyanike argue that, during the same period, the Igbo bought and enslaved their fellow brothers for crimes committed and made them prisoners of war and this was where their entrepreneurial skills began.<sup>54</sup> According to them, Europeans only met the Igbos when they were already founded in petty trading, craftsmanship, mercantilism and cottage industrialisation.<sup>55</sup> However, European activities along the West African coast at the time only aided the Igbo to learn new techniques and advancements in business. On the other hand, during the Slave Trade era, the Igbo also traded in cults which they sold to their partners during long distance trade as a means of protection and detecting dangers around them. A good example was the frequent sale of the *Ebhrukpabi*<sup>56</sup> secret cult to the Ejagham and the Cross River people.<sup>57</sup> In due course, they sustained entrepreneurial techniques and maintained trans-generational legacies in business. Such legacies were maintained through succession and cultural structures.

Trans-generational succession amongst the Igbo was maintained through the identification and nurturing of first sons. They believed in the procreation of a son who can be properly trained to take over the family business in case the father was no more. In the case of lack of a son by an Igbo man, any son of the family be it a cousin or nephew or a far-off relation, must be adopted and trained to do so and to continue in the same line of business.<sup>58</sup> However, the contemporary era does not longer take into consideration the training of only male children, even female children have become part and parcel to these practices. Among the Igbo on the southern tier both men and women were given the same privileges. Besides, they had a form of apprenticeship whereby they trained their younger ones in a particular craft or trade for a period of time after which they compensated them with money or a branch of the same business to start up.<sup>59</sup> These business structures, created new avenues for

<sup>53</sup> N. Madichie, (2021), "Lessons from Trans-Generational Entrepreneurship: Why it Matters", retrieved from [www.theconversation.com](http://www.theconversation.com), 12/11/2021 at 00:56.

<sup>54</sup> B. Agozino and Ike Anyanike, (2007), "IMU-AHIA: Traditional Igbo Business School and Global Commerce Culture", *Dialectical Anthropology*, p.240.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> The *Ebhrukpabi* sacred cult was a cult that was used for protection and treatment of epidemics amongst the Ejagham in Cameroon and Nigeria. It was a liquid found in a brown clay pot in front of most traditional halls of Ejagham villages.

<sup>57</sup> Roschenthaler, *Purchasing Culture*, p.88.

<sup>58</sup> Agozino and Anyanike, "IMU-AHIA", p.242.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

them and opened new markets that helped to maintain them in business. Along these border communities, the Igbo maintained these structures by migrating into this area with their relatives as sale agents. After a considerable period of time, they were compensated with a shop or money. It enabled them to remain in business and to own the majority of the businesses around this area. This also created networks which gave them the opportunity to control trans-border trade on these frontiers. The inter-relationship among the Igbo brought them together and made things easier for them while, it became difficult for other immigrants to prosper in the same line of businesses.

On the other hand, the Ibibio were experts in farm labour, sale of farm produce and food vending. Although, later joined by other migrant ethnic groups from Nigeria like, Ugep, Ogbudo and others from neighbouring African countries like, Chad, Benin, Togo and Niger, they were masters of farm activities in these areas. Talbot holds that, Ibibio expertise in farm labour was rooted from their migrations and ancestral origin.<sup>60</sup> They migrated and settled mostly around forest areas. Talbot argues that, as far back as the period during colonisation, Ibibio economy was characterised and dominated by agriculture with specific food crops like yams, cocoyam, plantain, maize, cassava, pumpkin, beans and palms.<sup>61</sup> It is no doubt that, with their arrival in these areas, they gladly embraced such practices more than any other group of people.

On their part, the Efik and Ijaw from Nigeria dominated in fishing perhaps, due to their close settlements on riverbanks. They made up about 90% of fishermen along the southern banks of the Cross River.<sup>62</sup> Gray holds that, Efik expertise and craft in fishing began around the 16<sup>th</sup> century when they separated from the Uruan<sup>63</sup> west of the Cross River owing to numerous wars that were triggered by land shortage.<sup>64</sup> During their migrations, they settled along the creeks of the Cross River and began practicing minor farming and fishing. Hence, they constantly interacted with the Ekoi (Ejagham) people, who later introduced them to the buying and selling of salt.<sup>65</sup> Since the Efik were vested in the production of fish, they bought salt from Ejagham country and when they caught their fish, they salted and smoked it before selling. With time, they became experts in the production and sale of salted fish in these areas.<sup>66</sup> Their migratory history and settlement patterns therefore explain the reason for their dominance in this activity.

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<sup>60</sup> P. A. Talbot, (1926), *The People of Southern Nigeria, A Sketch of their History, Ethnology and Languages with an Abstract of the 1921 Census*, vol.4, London: Frank Cass and Company Limited, p.681.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid

<sup>62</sup> Interview with Ernest Tanyi, age 45, Driver, Ekok, 18th May, 2015.

<sup>63</sup> The Uruan were the closest neighbours of Efik in the upper cross river area in the Cross River State of Nigeria.

<sup>64</sup> R. Gray, (eds), (1975), *The Cambridge History of Africa vol.4, from c 1600to c1790*, New York, London: Cambridge University Press, p.258.

<sup>65</sup> Salt was a major economic commodity among the Ekoi (Ejagham) people during the Barter trade and the legitimate trade. Along the southern tier of the Cameroon-Nigeria boundary especially around Ejagham land, there were numerous salt deposits which the people used for the production of salt in exchange for other commodities.

<sup>66</sup> Gray, (eds), *The Cambridge History*, p.259.

However, the fact that, these activities flourished around this area, did not mean that immigrants as actors never had challenges. One major problem emanated from the harassments that came from both the security and indigenous people in the area. Even with the 1965 protocol, most of the settlers were sometimes required to present resident permits despite the agreements that bonded them around the border zone. This made their businesses slow and sometimes regrettable. Moreover, since most of them came to this area without much income, engaging in petty trading was difficult. It required them to first of all start with farm labour before moving into petty trading. Even when they did, income levels were still very low due to the small-scale nature of petty trading.

### Conclusion

This study has examined the rise of petty trading among immigrants in border communities along the southern part of the Cameroon-Nigeria frontier. It has revealed that, the creation of a border zone in 1965 in the southern crescent of the Cameroon-Nigeria border brought about the free movements of people, goods and services along the border. It also brought about the opening of a flexible border market accompanied by other socio-economic developments like roads constructions. This influenced an increase in petty trading not only among the indigenous people but more among immigrants as it led to an influx of people into the area that constituted a good market for varying petty trading activities such as retailing, currency exchange, smuggling, food vending and transportation among immigrants with each group chiefly specialising in a particular trade as rooted from their histories and cultures.

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