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# **Gouvernance et préservation de la cohésion sociale dans les aires culturelles du Cameroun**

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*The opinions expressed in this journal are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of the National Centre for Education.*





## Éditorial

Confronté à un environnement conflictuel qui semble s'auto-reproduire, le Cameroun a le défi de réaliser et/ou préserver la cohésion sociale via un processus fécond de manifestation et d'incarnation de valeurs socio-identitaires constructives. Au regard du paysage socio-culturel camerounais, il existe un foisonnement étonnant de pratiques et de vécus liés à l'expression des identités humaines. L'on en vient parfois à se demander si cette pluralité insaisissable de mœurs, de par leur nature et leur ampleur ne contribuerait pas à transformer fondamentalement les relations interhumaines. À partir du lien qui existe entre la gouvernance locale et la stabilité des institutions socio-traditionnelles, il importe de retracer la dynamique qui se trouve à la base de la construction d'une identité nationale en contexte multiculturel. Dans chacune des quatre aires culturelles que compte le Cameroun (les Soudano-sahéliens, les Sawa, les Fang-Beti-Bulu et les Grassfields), de nombreux mécanismes institutionnels assurant à la fois la redistribution équitable et la gestion transparente du bien communautaire ont toujours été à l'avant-garde de la stabilité et de la cohésion sociale entre les peuples. Ce numéro spécial de la Revue Internationale des Sciences Humaines et Sociales, marque un point d'orgue sur l'analyse de ces mécanismes institutionnels en évoquant les différentes mutations qu'ils ont connus à travers le temps. Bien plus, il contribue à éclairer la lanterne de l'opinion sur les risques liés à une mauvaise appropriation des attributs identitaires communs dans un contexte de préservation de la cohésion sociale.

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# **Identity Crisis in the Bamenda Grassland of Cameroon: Oku in the Nsaw Native Authority and Bui Division 1922-1992**

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## **Abstract**

This paper examines the distinctive identity of the Oku people within the heterogeneous *Nsaw* Native Authority administrative unit created in 1922. The administrative unit is today called Bui Division and have been considered as a homogeneous entity with the Nso' as the only ethnic group. It also analyses the causes, manifestation and consequences of the identity crises that came up within this administrative unit following political representation and administrative reorganization. For the purposes of effective governance, the British in 1922 under the colonial policy of indirect rule identified what they believed to be homogenous identity groups as Native Authority Units in Southern Cameroons during the Mandate and Trusteeship periods. Nso joined Oku' and Noni to form the *Nsaw* Native Authority unit which later became *Nsaw* division in 1966 and Bui division in 1968 after Cameroon's independence and reunification. Consequently, most people mistake the polity for a homogenous identity group. We used the qualitative research approach because the study was carried out in its natural setting where human behaviour and events occurred. Data collection procedure involved qualitative observation and in-depth interviews. We made use of primary archival materials like minutes of meetings, political reports administrative notes and documented literature. Using the chronological and analytical approaches, the data collection was interpreted and inductively analyzed. The study reveals that the *Nsaw* Native Authority unit today Bui division was composed of three identity groups; Nso, Oku and Noni communities with the dominant group being the Nso community.

The paper argues that the erroneous consideration of this polity for a homogenous entity by the colonial and local administrations in administrative organization, council and parliamentary representation created serious identity crisis. The study suggests that public policies in a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural context should always take into consideration the identity groups and socio-cultural component of the people in order to avoid conflicts of identity. The study finally concludes that, as a minority group, the Oku *Fondom* played a major role in the politics of Bui Division between 1922 and 1992.

**Key Words: Bamenda, Grassfields, Indirect Rule, Nsaw, Oku, Identity Crisis.**

### Résumé

Cet article examine l'identité distinctive du peuple Oku au sein de l'unité administrative hétérogène de la Nsaw Native Authority créée en 1922. L'unité administrative est aujourd'hui appelée Département de Bui et pourrait avoir été considérée à tort comme une entité homogène avec les Nso' comme seul groupe ethnique. Il analyse également les causes, les manifestations et les conséquences des crises identitaires survenues au sein de cette unité administrative suite à la représentation politique et à la réorganisation administrative. Aux fins d'une gouvernance efficace, les Britanniques, en 1922, dans le cadre de la politique d'Administration Indirecte, ont identifié ce qu'ils croyaient être des groupes identitaires homogènes en tant qu'unités administratives autochtones dans le Cameroun britannique pendant les périodes de mandat et de tutelle. Nso a rejoint Oku et Noni pour former l'unité d'autorité indigène de Nsaw, qui est devenue plus tard le Département de Nsaw en 1966 et le Département de Bui en 1968 après l'indépendance et la réunification du Cameroun. Par conséquent, la plupart des gens confondent l'entité politique avec un groupe identitaire homogène. Nous avons utilisé l'approche de recherche qualitative car l'étude a été menée dans son cadre naturel où la méthode de collecte des données a impliqué des techniques d'observation et des entretiens approfondis. En utilisant des sources orales, des documents d'archives primaires et de la littérature documentée, et en adoptant des approches chronologiques et analytiques, la collecte de données a été interprétée et analysée de manière inductive. L'étude révèle que l'unité de l'autorité autochtone de Nsaw, Aujourd'hui le Département de Bui, était

composée de trois groupes identitaires : les communautés Nso, Oku et Noni, le groupe dominant étant la communauté Nso. L'article soutient que la considération erronée de ce régime politique pour une entité homogène par les administrations coloniales et locales dans l'organisation de l'administration, le conseil et la représentation parlementaire a créé une grave crise d'identité.

**Mots clés :** Bamenda, Grassfields, Administration indirecte, Nsaw, Oku, Crise identitaire.

### **Introduction**

Cameroon is a country with diverse ethnicities brought together by the Germans in the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. The consequence was that conflicting peoples and cultures were grouped together to foster peace, welfare, national identity and political representation especially after independence and reunification in 1961. After World War One in 1916, Cameroon was partitioned between Britain and France. This partition was approved by the League of Nations in 1920 and in 1922, Britain officially took control of British Southern Cameroons as a Mandate B territory of the League. As a result, the British introduced the colonial policy of Indirect Rule in this part of the territory. Under this policy, the British colonial administration through historical and cultural links, identified what they believed to have been homogenous ethnic or identity groups as Native Authority Units (NA) during the Mandate and Trusteeship periods (1922-1961) for the purposes of effective governance<sup>140</sup> as stated by BATEY (2015).

The *Nsaw* Kingdom became one of the areas identified by the British as a Native Authority unit. This Kingdom was made up of three distinct identity groups. The Nso *Fondom*, the fraternal and closely allied autonomous *Fondom* of Oku with a different but allied language, the fraternal *Fondom* of Mbiame, the refuge *Fondom* of Nseh which joined the Kingdom in exchange for protection against Bani, Wiya and Fulani raids. We equally had the *Fondom* of Nkar, an integral part of a much larger polity of the Nso' *Fondom* conquered alongside the smaller Chiefdoms and *Fondoms* of Djottin, Dom,

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<sup>140</sup> Batey G.E (2015), *Effective Modern History For Colleges*, Fifth edition, Bmenda, NAB Ventures, p. 97

Mbinon, Lassin, Nkor and Din<sup>141</sup> (Noni) BONFEN (1996). These conquered *Fondoms* of the *Nsaw*' Kingdom recognizing the paramountcy of the *Fon* of Nso', remained in their original sites, retained their hereditary dynasties and were allowed autonomy or the management of their local affairs except in the matters of war and capital punishment<sup>142</sup>. These *Fondoms* and Chiefdoms as the case may be, had highly centralized polities with well-organized political institutions with the palace as the central place of authority with the *Fon* at the head<sup>143</sup>.

When the Germans arrived the Nso land by 1904, they discovered this powerful and flourishing “*Nsaw* Kingdom” or the “Old *Nsaw* State” as it was traditionally called in the eastern part of the western Grasslands of Cameroon. These colonial administrators; rather than destroy, chose to preserve and exploit some of the strong political and cultural institutions of this people for their own ends as a means of penetrating the area. This explains why the British by 1922 under indirect rule colonial administration bundled these heterogeneous polity with three key identity groups and governed it as a homogenous polity called the *Nsaw* Native Authority (NNA)<sup>144</sup>. Because of their cultural affinities the colonial administration in this area gave the impression that it was a homogenous entity with a single identity group.

After the 11<sup>th</sup> of February 1961 plebiscite in British Southern Cameroons and reunification with La Republic du Cameroun, the local administration renamed the NNA, *Nsaw* Division and later Bui Division in 1966, 1968 respectively in course of administrative reforms. Consequently, the composite or heterogeneous nature of this area laid the foundation for identity crisis between the three ethnic communities (Nso, Oku, Noni) especially with the advent of party politics of council and parliamentary representations. It exposed the complexity and importance of identity groups in democratic politics. This identity crisis hindered the smooth functioning of government action, party politics in this division and

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<sup>141</sup> Bonfen Chem-Langhee, (1996) “The transfer of Power and Authority in Nto Nkar”, in Chem-Langhee and Fanso (eds), *Nso' and its Neighbors, Massachusetts*, Amherst. College, p.310.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid*, p.312.

<sup>143</sup> Ngoh V.J (1996), *History of Cameroon since 1800*, Limbe, Pressbook, p.7.

<sup>144</sup> Lantum D.N (2010) , *Vincent Thomas Lainjo 1910-2010: A Luminary, A Politician, A Statesman*, Kumbo, Nso' History Society Publication, p.9.

equally destroyed the quest and consolidation of unity and living together in this division. The identity crisis was only reduced by 1992 with the creation of autonomous councils and new sub divisions by presidential decree N° 92/207 of 5<sup>th</sup> October 1992 code N° E26/05<sup>145</sup> making Oku, Noni, and Mbven (Nkum/Mbiame) sub divisions which recognized or respected to some extent the different ethnic identity groups that made up this division.

This research presents the results of an investigation and attempts an answer to the following questions. Who were the people of the *Nsam* Kingdom or Old *Nsam* State today Bui division? How were they administered before the creation of the NNA? How did the creation of the NNA lead to an identity crisis? How did the identity crisis manifest and what were the effects? What measures were taken by the Cameroon administration to resolve the crisis? In answering these questions, the authors investigated the causes of identity crisis that emerged as a result of identity groups during political representation and administrative organization starting from the *Nsam* Native Authority to Bui division. It presents how public policies provoked this identity crisis, its manifestation, consequences and the measures taken by the administration to resolve the crisis. Thus the paper focuses on the place of identity groups on political representation, the struggle for power, domination and autonomy between the ethnic groups that make up this division.

## 1. Concepts Used

### 1. 1. Bamenda Grasslands

It is a geographical as well as a cultural entity which occupies the Western quadrant of Cameroon. It is a woodland type savannah which has been greatly degraded in most parts today due to pressure from its teeming population. This area covers West and North West Regions of Cameroon from the plateau of the Bambutus Mountain range and its climate has hardly had extremes. The soils are rich and good for farming and grazing. The various people who inhabit the sub-region are enterprising in both economic and state building cultures<sup>146</sup>. Another major feature in

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<sup>145</sup> Oku Sub-Divisional Office Library

<sup>146</sup> Warnier, (1996) « The History of the Peopling of Western Cameroon and the Genesis of its Landscapes » in Bonfen Chem-Langhee, V.G Fanso (eds), *Nso' and its Neighbors, Massachusetts*, Amherst.College, p. 2-18.

this area is the presence of powerful Chiefs or *Fons* in centralized polities whose authorities can not be displaced or replaced. Indirect Rule was a Colonial Policy used by Britain in her colonies in Africa in which she governed the African people through their local or traditional rulers. Since Britain administered British Southern Cameroons as an integral part of Nigeria, the policy was extended to Southern Cameroons by 1922. The policy put in place a local government or local administrative organ called Native Authority (NA). The main actors in the implementation of this policy were District Officers, the Native Authorities (*Fons*, Chiefs and Lamidos)<sup>147</sup>. The British authorities avoided intervening in the direct running of local affairs, so they acted behind the scene. The Native Authorities were made of prominent *Fons* and Chiefs and an advisory council that had a native police force for this purpose. The NA dispensed justice, collected taxes, recruited labour and were in charge of the elementary education and health of their people. This policy was suitable for the Bamenda Grassland because of the presence of influential Chiefs.

**1. 2. The Nsaw Native Authority (NNA)** is one of the 15 NA created by the British in Southern Cameroons. It was the largest within the South Eastern Federation<sup>148</sup>. It was composed of three distinct ethnic groups with different languages and slightly different cultural heritage (the Nso' Oku and Noni communities). This area before the arrival of the colonialists was also called *The Old Nsaw State or Nsaw Kingdom*. It is important to note that the name *Nsaw* gradually change in spelling as administration evolved after independence to Nso. So the two spellings as used in this work represent the same community. The NNA administrative unit was dominated by the Central Nso' *Fondom* in the political, economic, socio-cultural and religious domains. This is because after the migration and settlement of these peoples, the Nso' went into a kind of expansionist policy in which they conquered and controlled some of these neighboring *Fondoms*. This domination was also due to her numerical strength.

### **1. 3. Identity Groups**

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<sup>147</sup> Tazifor J.Tand Tabi J.N, (2009) *Cameroon History in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, Revised Edition 2009, Buea, Education Book Centre, pp. 90.

<sup>148</sup> Lantum, *Vincent Thomas Lainjo 1910-2010: A Luminary, A Politician, A Statesman*. p.12.

A lot of scholarly works have been done on identity groups. Identity groups occupy an uneasy place in a democracy. According to GUTMANN (1991)<sup>149</sup>, people identify themselves with others by ethnicity, race, nationality, culture, religion, gender, class, disability, age, ideology and other social makers. But no single group identity or even all group identities taken together comprehend the whole of a person, yet a commonly shared identification around any of the above characteristics of a person often leads to a group identity. Group identities are as abundant in democracies as they are controversial. Four kinds of identity groups have been identified by GUTMANN (1991). They are Cultural, voluntary, Ascriptive, and Religious. Each highlights a different set of ethical issues raised by the presence of identity groups in democracies and the ways in which they can either aid or impede democratic justice. He points out that mutual identification is basic to human existence though it is neglected in democratic theory where the language of interest and interest groups, rather than identity and identity groups, is far more common. Identity groups are an inevitable byproduct of giving individual freedoms of association. As long as individuals are free to associate, identity groups of many kinds will exist because people mutually identified in many politically relevant ways.

Identity groups may be organized or unorganized and may be inside or outside the official organs of government. They are politically significant associations of people who are identified by or identify with one or more shared social maker like gender, race, class, ethnicity, nationality and religion. What distinguishes social makers of group identity is that they carry social expectations about how a person of the particular group is expected to think, act and even appear. Social makers therefore contribute to the creation of collective identities of both individuals and groups. Even though collective identities can change over time, and they are also open to varying interpretations. They may be very difficult for individuals who are so identified to because these identities are collective. When individuals organize together around a recognizable social maker on the basis of their own mutual identification, they are a paradigmatic identity group. This is the case with the Nso', Oku and Noni communities as analyzed in this paper. So the cultural identity groups are the focus of this study with the social maker being

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<sup>149</sup> Amy Gutmann, (1991) *Identity in Democracy*, Princeton University Press, p 2-5.



ethnicity. A cultural group in this context refers to a group that represents a way of life that is comprehensive. They are united by distinctive features when compared to other groups. Political theorist of culture Margalit and Raz<sup>150</sup> argue that culture provides a comprehensive context within which its members make choices. Cultural groups can also give their members a sense of security and belonging.

#### 1. 4. Identity Crisis

History is a social necessity because it is to the community as memory is to an individual. It enables the society to have a memory, take its bearing, place itself in relation to its own party, and in relation to other societies, and thus to establish a sense of its identity<sup>151</sup>. Political discourse in this paper will stem from Hans J. Morgenthau and Kenneth W. Thompson's view on politics which is the struggle for power and sometimes peace which is seen in interest<sup>152</sup>. Here, power meant man's control over the minds and actions of other men and mutual relations of control among the holders of public authority and between the latter and the people at large. In this line, the drives to live, propagate and to dominate are common to all men. To Hans and Kenneth, social clubs, fraternities are scenes of continuous struggle for power between groups that either want to keep what power they already have or seek to attain greater power. Thus tendency to dominate in particular is an element of all human associations from family through fraternal as well as professional associations and local political organizations.

The whole political life of a people from the local to the national level is a continuous struggle for power. Men try to maintain or to establish their power over other men in periodic elects, in voting in legislative assemblies, in lawsuits before courts, in administrative decisions and executive measures. Consequently, all politics be it local, national or international, reveal three basic patterns: A political policy seeks to keep, increase, or to demonstrate power. Thus political power is a psychological relation between those who exercise it and those on whom it is exercised. Thus the identity crisis

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<sup>150</sup> Amaazee V,B (2001), *Historiography and Historical Method*, Bamenda, Patron Publishing House, p.26.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.* p.27.

<sup>152</sup> Morgenthau H and Thompson W,(1985) *Politics Among Nations: the struggle for power and peace*(Sixth Edition), New York, Alfred. A. Knoff .inc, p.31 -32.

discussed in this paper refers to the struggles between the Nso, Oku and Noni identity groups in order to control political power in this area. This was seen through open attachment to a particular identity group. This demonstrates the politics of struggle for power and identity as explained by Morgenthau and Thompson in *Politics Among Nations*.<sup>153</sup>

## 2. Origin and Evolution of the Identity Crisis

The area traditionally called the Old Nso' State or *Nsaw* Kingdom during the pre-colonial and colonial eras, which has been since 1968 coterminous with the administrative division of Bui, is the area of study. These people are said to have been one of the Tikar groups that migrated from North Cameroon and settled in the Western Grasslands of Cameroon. These migrations were in successions. Tikar tradition holds that their dynastic ethnic forefathers originated in the North around Tibati, Banyo, Ndobbo, Kimi, Rifem and Bankim<sup>154</sup>. They migrated down South because of the advancing Saharan desert, population pressure, search for new lands, Fulani raids, famine and dynastic squabbles. Some scholars such as FANSO<sup>155</sup>(1989) and KOLOSS<sup>156</sup> (2000) opine that these movements could not be dated with any certainty but were likely to have begun sometime around the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century that is 300 years ago. In course of the migration, Nso and Oku people split into different *Fondoms*. These *Fondoms* as the case may be, settled and established highly centralized polities with well-organized political institutions. The palace became central place of authority with the *Fon* at the head.<sup>157</sup>

In this light, the Nso' and Oku people trace their origin, migration and settlement from *Rifem* present day *Bankim* as one united family with *Nchare Yen* and *Mfoombam* the founders of the

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<sup>153</sup> Ibid, p.32.

<sup>154</sup> W. Jean Pierre and N. N. Paul, (1996) "The History of the peopling of Western Cameroon and the Genesis of its landscapes" in Chem-Langhèè and Falso (eds), *Nso' and its Neighbors*, Massachusetts, Amherst. College, p.1.

<sup>155</sup> Verkijika. G. Falso, (1989) *Cameroon History for Secondary Schools and Colleges*, Volume I, from pre-colonial times to 19th century, London, Macmillan, pp34-35.

<sup>156</sup> Koloss H.J, (2000) *World-View and Society in Oku* (Cameroon), Berlin, Dietrich Reimer verlag, p.14.

<sup>157</sup> Ngho, (1996) *History of Cameroon Since 1800*. p.7.

*Bamum* and Mbam *Fondoms*<sup>158</sup>. They later split as a result of a succession dispute. This split caused the Nso' and their Oku brothers to migrate down south in which they finally settled at *Mbo-Nso*, *Tavisa* and *Kovvijem*. Thus Oral tradition holds that one of the families, the Mbele, which became the royal family in Oku, migrated from *Tikari* with the Nso people as a family all belonging to the *Kovvijem* dynasty<sup>159</sup>. So it was the split between the two brothers at *Kovvijem* due to succession dispute that led to the emergence of the Oku *Fondom* by the wandering hunting Tatah. The rest of the family groups each in Oku have a legend which narrates their adventure and migratory histories before they came to settle preeminently where they are now in the Oku *Fondom*. The Noni people trace the origin of their many groups to some princes from *Tikari* who split and migrated in several groups and settled in their different areas. Maimo<sup>160</sup> holds that the first Noni settlers originated from the family of the Njokuns in the Wukari Division Benue province of Northern Nigeria and moved down South to settle in their present site.

After migration and settlement, the *Fondoms* of Nso, Oku and Noni do not only constitute a geographical continuum but they had dynastic, cultural, and political connections with alleged historical links. While the *Fon* of Mbiame and the ruling family of Oku are brotherly offshoots of Nso', the rest have each a legend which narrates their adventures and migratory histories before each came to settle permanently where they are now in the territory. There were the original settlers, the autochthons, probably the *Ntul* in Oku and Noni who arrived in the area much earlier. Other clans from Nso, Oku, Mbiame and Nse *Fondoms* joined much later. As time went on, the Nso' became the dominant *Fondom* due to their numerical strength. As a result they had to absorb the weaker neighbouring ethnic group of Noni through wars to pay tribute to their leader. Also the *Nse Fondom* due to fear of attacks by Chamber raiders, sought and signed a friendship pact with the Nso' central *Fondom* and was given land to live under the Nso' *Fondom* as their leader for protection. They had similar traditional institutions like

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<sup>158</sup> Banadzelm. J, (2002) "The History of origin as related by oral tradition" in ,*The Nso' Went to Mvem 16-18 December 1994*, Lantum (eds), Kumbo, Nso History Society, p.64-65.

<sup>159</sup> Mzeka. N. Paul, (1980) *The core culture of Nso*, U.S.A, Co-Agawa, p.13.

<sup>160</sup> Maimo, D.S, (1997) "An Approach to the Enteh Family History as from the 18<sup>th</sup> century", Bamenda, p.4.

the *Ngerong* and *Ngiri* in Nso, *Kwifon* and *Ngele* in Oku and *Kwifon* and in Noni. However, these cultural and political institutions had glaring differences especially in their names and way of functioning.

Information gathered considerably by some early German missionaries including Hans Glauning, Max Moisel, and Kurt Hassert, as asserted by KOLOSS (2000)<sup>161</sup> in his findings, says that *the highland groups of the Grasslands, to which they assigned that Kom, Nso' and Oku, formed politically united strong states under the rule of powerful chiefs.* He mentioned in his descriptions that they absorbed weaker neighbouring ethnic groups. Evident was the case of Nso' that conquered *Nkor*, *Djottin* and *Nseb*. Thus it underscores the fact that Oku was not dependent upon Nso'. GLAUNING (2000) further mentions that "Oku lies between *Liakom* and *Banso'* (Nso') and was on friendly relations with both Fondoms, which it surpasses by far in size"<sup>162</sup>.

Inter-*Fondom* politics became a part of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century life in the Kingdoms and *Fondoms* of the Western Grasslands in general and in the *Nsan'* Kingdom in particular. Inter-marriages, trading activities, the establishment of conventions and alliances and native colonial administration proved that continuous exchange was the hallmarks of traditional diplomacy in inter *Fondom* relations between Nso', Oku and Noni *Fondoms*<sup>163</sup>. The presence of a number of small and medium sized parties within a small area led to the development of a network of diplomatic relations and economic exchanges in this area. Fulfilling the obligation to honor the death of other kings was also a clear demonstration of friendly relations with other *Fondoms*. Distinctions were made between "brother", "friend", and "children"<sup>164</sup>. In the same line the burial ceremonies for the deceased kings which were celebrated together with the neighboring *Fondoms* varied according to whether the respective partner is a brother, friend, or child. With the influence of diplomatic and trade relations, Oku *Fondom* had established connections with all *Fondoms* of the area and even the neighboring communities out of the area. Nso' and

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<sup>161</sup> Koloss, *World-View and Society in Oku*, p. 34

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid*, p.36.

<sup>163</sup> Nkwi, "Traditional Diplomacy, (1996) Trade and Warfare in the nineteenth-century Western Grassfields", in Chang-Langee and Fanso (eds), *Nso and its Neighbors*, Massachusetts, Amherst Collage, p.19.

<sup>164</sup> Interview with Fon Sentie II, (2013) 63years, Fon of Oku, Elak-Oku, 28 December.

Noni continually engaged in rivalry marked by wars of trial of strength, conquest and domination. Oku willingly entered into oral accord of friendship with Nso' and Noni.

The introduction of Native Authority administration by the British by 1922, after the partition of Cameroon further strengthened political relation between Oku, Nso and Noni communities and subsequently identity crisis. By 1949, the NNA was regrouped into the South Eastern Federal Native Authority, whose seat was at Ndop as the administration evolved with the advent of party politics and reclassification of the administrative units. In 1960, the *Nsaw* Area Council was created covering the entire NNA with six traditional council areas (*Kumbo* Centre, *Jakiri*, Oku, Noni, Nkum, and Mbiame). In 1977 the presidential decree N° 77/203 of 29<sup>th</sup> June, 1977<sup>165</sup>, replaced the *Nsaw* Council Area with four autonomous councils (*Kumbo* Urban Council, *Kumbo* Rural Council, *Jakiri* Rural Council and *Elak* Rural Council). In 1992 two new councils were created in this area breaking *Elak* Council into two (*Elak* and Noni council) and also breaking Nkum council into two, (Nkum and Mbiame councils). That is, six autonomous councils representing the six traditional council areas by 1992.

In the course of local administrative reforms after the independence and reunification of Cameroon in 1961, the NNA was renamed *Nsaw'* Sub-Division under the Big Bamenda Division by a presidential decree N° 63/DF/250 of July 1963<sup>166</sup>. In 1966, the jurisdiction became the *Nsaw* Division by a presidential decree N° 66-DF-432 of 26<sup>th</sup> August 1966<sup>167</sup>. In 1968, the division was re-baptized Bui Division. Two Sub-Divisions were later on created in the Division by another presidential decree N° 69/DF/579 of 29<sup>th</sup> December 1969, *Kumbo* Sub Division and *Jakiri* Sub Division. In 1992, Oku, Noni, and Mbven (Nkum/Mbiame) Sub Divisions created by a presidential decree N° 92/207 of 5<sup>th</sup> October 1992 code N° E26/05<sup>168</sup>. Thus, today's Bui division lies at the eastern zone of the North West Region of Cameroon located between latitude 5°6 and 6°.24 North of the equator and longitude 10°.20 and 11°.05

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<sup>165</sup> *Ibi*, p11.

<sup>166</sup> National Archives Yaounde (NAY 1963) "Official Gazette of the Federal Republic of Cameroon" 30<sup>th</sup> July, p.310.

<sup>167</sup> NAY,(1966) "Official Gazette of the Federal Republic of Cameroon", 1<sup>st</sup> September, p.1244-1245.

<sup>168</sup> Oku Sub-Divisional Office

East of the Green Which Meridian (see map 1). It is one of the seven divisions of the North West region. It has a total surface area of about 2.300 square kilometers<sup>169</sup> and a total population of over 320.869 inhabitants according to the general census of 2005<sup>170</sup>. *Kumbo* is the headquarters and is the second largest town after Bamenda. It is located some 109km from Bamenda North West Regional headquarters and about 500km from Yaounde national capital of Cameroon. Bui Division takes its name from river Bui<sup>171</sup>. It is bounded to the North by Donga and Mantum Division, to the West by Boyo Division, to the East by the Noun Division and to the South by Ngo-Kitungia Division.

## **2. 1. The *Nsaw* Native Authority (NNA) and Identity Crisis**

The first cause of identity crisis between the Nso, Oku and Noni communities was seen in the creation of *Nsaw* Native Authority (NNA). Established in 1923, the NNA became the first colonial administrative and political unit that brought together Oku, Nso and Noni under one administrative unit. Under the policy of Indirect Rule, the British established this NA for the purposes of effective governance and it existed from the Mandate and Trusteeship periods in British Southern Cameroons 1922-1961. Oku joined Nso' and Noni to form the *Nsaw* Native Authority (NA)<sup>172</sup> ruled by the paramount *Fon* of Nso' that was answerable to the Divisional Officer (DO) for Bamenda Division which later became the Bamenda Province as administration evolved. The Native Authorities, which had originated from *Tikari* in the most recent wave of migration stream, and were located in the Bamenda Province, were regrouped in to the South Eastern Federation with headquarters at Mbinkar{ Ndop or Bamunka} as previously the Native Court<sup>173</sup>. By 1949, Nso' Oku and Noni were further regrouped into the South Eastern Federal Native Authority, whose

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<sup>169</sup> Mzeka, *Four Fons of Nso'*, p.5.

<sup>170</sup> MINAT Kumbo, (2005) "Third General Population and Housing Census", MINAT Kumbo, November, p.51.

<sup>171</sup> Kumbo Council Archives, (1991), File no Kuc 76," Six Year Development Plan and Provincial Draft Committee Meeting", Kumbo, 06/05/, p.231.

<sup>172</sup> Lantum, *Vincent Thomas Lainjo 1910-2010: A Luminary, A Politician, A Statesman.* p.9.

<sup>173</sup> Lantum, *Vincent Thomas Lainjo 1910-2010*, p.11.

seat was at Ndop as the administration evolved with the advent of party politics and reclassification of the administrative units.

The NNA became the largest and as a result, the *Fon* of Nso 'was appointed president of the Federation. This was because heavy tax payers were given greater opportunities. It is recounted that each ethnic group at the level of the Native Authority selected their natives to represent their area at the *Tikari* Council in Ndop. *Fon Ngum* II, Fai Mbuh Yang Ugieh and Pa Lucas Jick represented the Oku *Fondom*<sup>174</sup>. The Federation also had a Native Court sitting at Ndop where the different NA areas settled their problems. Information gathered from the field shows that *Fon* Ngum II of Oku died in 1956 from a fall from a horse, on his way back from the court in Ndop where he went for a court case concerning a tax clerk who wrote on a tax ticket that Oku was a village in Nso and not an independent identity group in the then Nso division<sup>175</sup>. This demonstrates that there was identity crisis within this Native Authority Unit. The South Eastern Federation broke out by 1960 because ethnic minority issues and identity crisis came up on the political plank and caused fragmentation within the NNA and Court Area as a result of the political evolution and the creation of many political parties.

## 2.2. The *Nsaw* Area Council and Identity Crisis

This second area of identity crisis identified between the Nso, Oku and Noni identity groups was with the creation of the *Nsaw* area council 1960-1977. With the administrative policy of bringing services nearer to the people, the *Nsaw* Area Council was created in 1960 comprising the Nso 'Oku and Noni communities<sup>176</sup> replacing the NNA. The *Nsaw* area council was partitioned into six traditional council areas (*Kumbo* Centre, Oku, Noni, Nkum, and Mbiame). The council was to be composed of elected councilors and special members appointed. Elections into the council were organized and 30 councilors elected from the 28 electoral units in the area under the banners of the Kamerun National Democratic Party (KNDP)

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<sup>174</sup> Interview with Mbuh Yang Daniel, ( Dec 2013) 81years, Formal Member of Parliament Oku/Noni Special Constituency, Jikijem-Oku.

<sup>175</sup> Ndishangong T.T, (1986) "A Historical Study of Self Reliant Development in Rural Societies: The Case of Oku", DIPS II Dissertation in History, E. N.S Yaounde, p.17.

<sup>176</sup> Lantum, *Vincent Thomas Lainjo 1910-2010*, p.15.

and Cameroon People National Congress (CPNC) parties. Seven Special Members were appointed following the recommendation of the committee of the *Nsaw* local council drafted based on Southern Cameroons Local N 36 of 1959.

Information gathered from the National archives in Buea, a draft specification on how the *Nsaw* Area Council was going to look like was carried out by a committee in Nso' and forwarded by the DO of Bamenda division to the permanent secretary, ministry of local government and survey in the then Southern Cameroons in Buea. According to the first proposal, the *Fon* of Nso' was supposed to be appointed as president and the two *Nformis* of the two clans in *Nsaw* appointed as 1<sup>st</sup> vice and 2<sup>nd</sup> vice presidents. The composition of this first proposal provoked identity crisis because it did not make provisions for all the ethnic groups of the council area to be represented. We can see it from the DO's quotation below.

I had a private conversation with the Oku representative and he stated that the Chief of Oku in his opinion should be appointed a member of the District council. I pointed out that it was the intension as far as possible to make the council a democratic body, and that the appointment of the chief of Oku would inevitably lead to other chiefs advancing claims to be appointed without elections like the Oku member. My point of view, but nevertheless asked that you be advised of his request. While supporting the appointment of the *Fon* and *Mformis*, I do not believe that further appointment would be in the best interest of the council<sup>177</sup>.

As a result, the D.O had to come up with another proposal saying that the specification of composition should be respected. When the proposal was forwarded to the Southern Cameroons prime minister J.N *Foncha*, he approved by appointing *Fon* of Nso president, *Fon* of Oku 1<sup>st</sup> vice president and *Fon* of Mbiame 2<sup>nd</sup> vice president. It was also stated that two traditional members, one woman and one Ardor be appointed by the commissioner of the Cameroons to represent the interest of the women and the Fulani respectively. It is important to note here that *Foncha*'s decision solved a problem of ethnic identity within this council area by appointing the *Fon* of Oku first Vice President of the council.

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<sup>177</sup> NAB, File No Ja/1960/5, "Nso Council 1960, Specification of Composition", p.1.



**Table I : Special Members of the Nso ' District Council 1960-1977**

1	<i>Fon</i> of Nso'	President
2	<i>Fon</i> of Oku	2 <sup>nd</sup> Vice
3	<i>Fon</i> of Mbiame	3 <sup>rd</sup> Vice
4	Yaa woo Nso la'	Women member
5	Chief of Djottin Noni	Traditional member
6	Chief of Nse'	Traditional member
7	ArdoGidado	Fulani member

**Source:** Lantum, *Fon Nso' Sehm Ataar*, p.63.

Further information from the Buea archives revealed that elections in to the different council committees were also characterized by identity crisis. A case in point is the elections of July 12, 1965. During the council annual meeting, councilor John Ngum from Oku contested for the position of the chairperson in a controversial election and failed. Serious disagreements broke out between the councilors because of ethnic representation in which some even staged a walk out of the council session for the first time since it was created. One of the councilor Venantius Shalla of Djottin Buh decried it when he stood up to move a vote of thanks "*What had happened today was very deplorable and such a thing had never happened*"<sup>178</sup>. This was a manifestation of identity crisis. However, during the next council session on the 20<sup>th</sup> of October 1966 councilor John Ngum was elected as the chairperson of the council. Even though not fairly represented, Oku made sure that she had representatives in the executive committees of the council every year.

The struggle for fair political representation also surface in the 1968 council election in to the Nso area council as the number of councilors were increased from 25 to 35. Oku traditional council area felt cheated by the Nso people because their number of councilors remained the same despite an increase of additional five councilors as *Fon* Sentih of Oku puts it:

I know one thing that the Nso people will like to keep members of Parliament in for many years but will want to see that no Oku man ever goes into Parliament the second time. Do you think that these Nso Parliamentarians have no faults? Have they not cheated and claimed

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<sup>178</sup> NAB, File No Ja/1964/15, Minutes of Meetings Nsaw Council, p. 226.

many things for themselves. Why was Oku area given only five councilors last council elections and only one member in Executive Committee? Is this not dividing the Division?<sup>179</sup>

This was a clear manifestation of identity crisis. The efforts put forth by the Oku people in this council area for fair representation gave the minority Noni people the strength and courage to struggle for their own fair representation and interest within the council. To solve this crisis, in 1977 a presidential decree No77/203 of 29<sup>th</sup> June 1977<sup>180</sup> was issued creating four autonomous Cameroon National Union (CNU) councils out of the dissolution of the Nso' Area Council. According to the decree, the Nso' Area Council was to be replaced by four autonomous councils. This separation helped solved the identity crisis that had existed within the *Nsaw* Area Council. It is important to note that this political struggle within the division strengthened the political relations between Oku and Noni traditional council areas. This can explain why Oku and Noni were grouped under *Elak*-Rural Council with headquarter in *Elak*-Oku.<sup>181</sup>

**Table II. Autonomous Councils in Bui between 1977 and 1992**

Council	Number of councilors	Status
<i>Kumbo</i> urban council	30	Mayoral
<i>Kumbo</i> Rural council	30	Rural
<i>Elak</i> Rural Council	35	Rural
<i>Jakiri</i> Rural Council	25	Rural

*Source: Nforme John's Library "Munities of Annual Meeting Nso' Area Council" 1977, p.3.*

### 2.3. Parliamentary Representation and Identity Crisis

The third area where identity crisis surfaced and manifested itself between the identity groups of Bui division was with parliamentary representation, 1961-1988. When Southern Cameroons got her

<sup>179</sup> Letter by Fon Sentieh of Oku to Mr S.K Kilo president of Nso C.N.U section, 4<sup>th</sup> March 1969, John Tatah's privet archives Elak-Oku.

<sup>180</sup> John Tatah's Private Library "Address by the Nso Rural Council Chairman Mr. F.K Mbuntum to the General Council Marking the 17<sup>th</sup> years for the Existence of one Council for Bui", 1977, p.2.

<sup>181</sup> Mbuntum F, Nsaw Area Council Chairman, An address to the General Council to mark 17<sup>th</sup> years of existence of one council for the whole Bui Division, 29 September 1977, p.3.

independence and Re-unification with *La Republic du Cameroun* in 1961, Cameroon became a federal state with three Houses of Assembly. The West Cameroon House of Assembly (WCHA), East Cameroon House of Assembly and a National Assembly. The WCHA was created 37 parliamentary seats. The newly created *Nsaw* Division was given three seats distributed as follows: *Nsaw* North West, *Nsaw* North East and *Nsaw* South. Oku and Noni areas were carved out to form the *Nsaw* North West Constituency<sup>182</sup>. During the 1961 legislative elections, *Nforme* John Tatah became the first indigene of Oku to represent Oku/Noni (*Nsaw* North West) in the West Cameroon House of Assembly<sup>183</sup> together with B.T Sakah and M.A *LaFon* who represented *Nsaw* North East and *Nsaw* South respectively under the banner of the KNDP.

In 1972, President Ahidjo discarded the federal system of government in favor of a unitary system through referendum that was organized on May 20<sup>th</sup>, 1972. One of the main features of the unitary constitution became the formation of a single National Assembly with an increased membership or seats from 100-120<sup>184</sup>. Consequently, one new parliamentary seat was added to Bui division moving the number from three to four. But the fact that this parliamentary seat went but to Nkum and Mbiame areas in Nso land provoked identity crisis. The Oku and Noni people accused the Nso 'of grapping everything for themselves there by giving room for divisive appellations of the Nso Man, Oku Man and Noni Man<sup>185</sup>. Thus during the 1973 Legislative elections in to the newly created National Assembly in Yaounde Hon Yang Daniel for Oku/Noni area, Hon B.T Sakah for *Kumbo* centre, Hon *Fonka* Shang Lawerance for *Dzɛkwa* area and Hon *Lemlon* Bridget *Nsaver* for Nkum and *Mbaim* areas<sup>186</sup> were elected to represent Bui under the banner of CNU.

Before the 1988 legislative elections, President Biya increased the number of seats in the National Assembly from 120-180. This

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<sup>182</sup> Mbile N.N (1999), *Cameroon Political Story: Memories of an Authentic Eye Witness*, Limbe, Pressbook, p.181.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid* p.180.

<sup>184</sup> Ngoh, *Cameroon 1884-1985: A Hundred Years of History*, p.268.

<sup>185</sup> Interview with Koyen Koyen Nying, YCNU and YCPDM president Oku sub section and Bui section executive member from 1976-1990, age 62, Elak-Oku, Friday 18, April, 2014.

<sup>186</sup> Interview with Mbuh Yang Daniel

increment was happily received by Cameroonians but it did not affect the Bui for their number of seats remained the same. However, the people of Bui in general and Oku in particular were not satisfied with the fact that they still had to share a parliamentary seat with the Noni area despite their population.<sup>187</sup> That is Oku/Noni special constituency. This election once again provoked identity crisis. This is because at the end of the elections Oku/Noni special constituency did not have a representative to represent the constituency in the National House of Assembly in Yaounde for<sup>188</sup> the first time since 1961. This was because of the introduction of a lists system by the newly created Cameroons People Democratic Movement (CPDM). The composition of each list of candidates running for parliament took into consideration each sub-division not ethnicity. Two lists were presented from the two sub divisions of Bui division. Consequently, the list that won the elections had no candidate from Oku and Noni. This situation created social unrest, caused bitterness within the division, destroyed the quest for consolidation of unity and national integration which the party held dear, and also brought in segregation according to the CPDM section president for Bui Nforme John Tatah<sup>189</sup>. He made this revelation in a petition addressed to the national president of the CPDM in 1988.

Now that list A has won the elections, Oku and Noni components in Oku/Noni sub section and in *Elak* Rural Council have been left without a representative,,,,,, What then shall be the fate of the Oku/Noni sub Section inhabitants for five years without a representative, through no fault of theirs? This is what the militants were asking.

We foresee the spirit of provocation, intimidation, and superiority complex in the militants whose components have representatives. In the same vein we foresee the spirit of lamentation, inferiority complex, disgust and the attitude of feeling neglected, in the militants whose components have no representatives through no fault of theirs. It is only this time that they have lost it, as a result of the poor distribution of seats in this Division; at a time when the president is all out for social justice.

There is already this bitterness that exist in the Division as a result of the investiture- the majority group, saying that it is a battle between the Nso people and Oku people. The other sections of

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<sup>187</sup> Interview with Koyen Mary Nying.

<sup>188</sup> Letter of Petition by Nforme John Tatah and Fon Evaristus Nsambam to Paul Biya, 3th June, 1988, Nforme John Tatah's private files Elak-Oku.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid*

the Division being called by the Nso as “Vitum” that is strangers. Others say that if List B was to be elected, the Nso ethnic group and their paramount *Fon* will be subjected to the Oku people because the Central Committee invested three candidates from Oku/Noni Sub Section, which forms just one-third of the population.

However, despite the election’s upheavals, the Bui population under the section still massively turned out to welcome the son of the soil or an illustrious son of the division Hon Fonka Shang Lawrence who was elected President of the National Assembly during his maiden visit to Bui on 23<sup>rd</sup> May 1988. This was proof of the political maturity of the people. In a welcome address presented by Hon Nforme Jonh Tatah, Bui CPDM Section president, he said Bui division shall not expect gold and silver from the speaker but they shall expect selfless service to heal the wounds inflicted on them by the elections for in him Bui people see an emblem of unity that sees every Bui citizen as a brother and sister. Irrespective of ethnic group the Bui citizens will regard him not only as their representative, but as the second father of the nation. In his address, while thanking the government for projects undertaken in the Division he also requested on behalf of the Bui people for more administrative units.

#### **2.4. Administrative Organization and Identity Crisis**

In 1966, Nso’ Division was created and in 1968, the division was re-baptized Bui Division. Two Sub-Divisions were later created in the division by a presidential decree N° 69/DF/579 of 29<sup>th</sup> December 1969<sup>190</sup>. Oku, Noni, and *Dzekwa* traditional council areas were carved out as *Jakiri* Sub-Division while *Kumbo* centre, Nkum and Mbiame formed the *Kumbo* Central Sub-Division. Identity crisis came up as a result of the sitting of the headquarters of the *Jakiri* sub-division which Oku and Noni was part. The news of the creation of the sub divisions was welcomed with so much joy in the division, but problems came up at the level of the setting of the *Jakiri* sub-division. When it was announced that *Jakiri* will serve as the headquarters of the *Jakiri* sub-division, delegations upon delegations from Oku and Noni travelled to Yaounde and wrote letters of petition agitating and protesting against the setting of the sub division in *Jakiri* in Nso land. In their letters of petition they put

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<sup>190</sup> *Ibid*, p.1245

forth a number of reasons why *Jakiri* should not serve as the headquarters of the sub Division<sup>191</sup>.

From information gotten from the participants through interviews, the Oku people (politicians that were involved) argued that, the Yaounde CNU organizing term promised that *Elak-Oku* will make the headquarters of the anticipated sub-division, whose headquarters was later surveyed by the then Senior Divisional Officer Mr. Ngole<sup>192</sup>. They said recommendations were even made by the influential politicians of the area notably S.L. Kilo, Hon Lafon, and Hon John Tatah wherein *Elak-Oku* was pointed out as a good site for the sitting of the sub-divisional headquarters. In 1968, the same recommendation was made in an address delivered by S.K Kilo the Bui section president of the CNU to J.N. Foncha the vice president of the then Federal Republic of Cameroon, on behalf of the people of Bui in general and Oku in particular during the presidential Campaign tour or visit to Bui. Also, during the visit of Ayisi Mvodo the Minister Delegate in the Presidency to open the post office in *Kumbo* Bui, S.K Kilo indicated the importance and need for a sub section as well as a sub division to be created in the Oku area.

Political reports of the SDO for Bui from the archives in Buea confirmed that, while progress was in an upward trend in other parts of the division particularly Nso, the Oku area was being neglected. Thus according to the Oku and Noni people, it was proper if the sitting of the newly created *Jakiri* sub division be located either in *Elak-Oku* or *Nkor* Noni for it will come alongside a lot of development. Furthermore, they argued that because of the distance from Noni and Oku to *Jakiri*, the party and the administration was carried not only further away from them. They had to travel about 24\_kilometers to *Kumbo* before doing another 22\_kilometers to *Jakiri*<sup>193</sup> a situation which was contrary to government's policy of bringing the administration closer to the people.

Consequently, as recounted by the participants, the Oku and Noni people boycotted official ceremonies in the division, CNU political activities like party conferences, executive meeting, party

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<sup>191</sup> NAB, File N° cb/1969/1, "The 1971 Quarterly Political Report on the Nso' Division", p. 27.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid*, p.8.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid*, p.11.

anniversaries both at the sub section and section levels. A case in point is the boycott of the special Bah sub-section meeting summoned by the President to plan for the celebration of the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Cameroon's reunification and the reunification celebrations on the 1<sup>st</sup> of October 1971 at *Jakiri*, the sub section and section meetings which were called to plan for the construction of the party secretariat and the 12<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations of Cameroon's independence on the 1<sup>st</sup> of January 1972 in *Jakiri*. They equally boycotted administrative activities in *Jakiri* that was acting as the headquarters of the sub division. The people stopped the customary court from operating, prevented the collection of council revenue in Oku and threatened and even cut off from the Nso co-operative union which comprised of Nso, Oku and Noni areas<sup>194</sup>.

The crisis also affected the Bah sub section of the CNU which was one of the sub sections of the Bui CNU section. As ways to move out of the Bah CNU sub section and *Jakiri* sub-division, during the Bah sub section conference of the CNU held at *Jakiri* on 13<sup>th</sup> August, 1971, the 17 branches of the Oku area came up with a number of resolutions which were forwarded to the political bureau in Yaounde. The resolutions were presented as follows.

We the C. N. U. branches registered in accordance with the C. N. U. Rules and Regulations, after observing the bitterness of the population against what is unjust treatment of us in our Fatherland and under the canopy of our own party, HERE Ask THE Bah Sub-Section Conference holding this 18<sup>th</sup> day of August to Resolve that:-

- a) President Ahidjo be thanked for the *Jakiri* Sub-Division given *Dzɛkwa*,
- b) Because of the Handicap of distance and for the good running of party Oku branches be allowed the status of a subsection so as to better the administration of the party for the good of the whole division and the party. This will bring peace and unity between Oku and Nso.
- c) The party be reminded that the People of Oku still wait for the promise made by the organizers that

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<sup>194</sup> Interview with Ndifon Noah Ndifon, Retired Teacher, Elak-Oku, 66years, Monday 25/04/2014

*Elak*, Oku would be the headquarters of anticipated Sub-Division that was going to be carved from the Bah Sub-Division<sup>195</sup>.

Early in 1972, the people of Oku formed a new organ in Oku called “The Oku C.N.U Committee”<sup>196</sup> which drafted petitions and forwarded to the hierarchy of the party. This committee starting from the 8<sup>th</sup> of January 1972 obstructed and sabotaged the revision exercise of the electoral register in Oku. They took a firm decision that any orders, instructions, pieces of advice or anything administrative not coming directly from the S.D.O in *Kumbo* or from Yaounde was not to be respected in Oku. They changed the normal party meeting from the customary court Hall to the *Fon*’s Palace. The crisis created one of the greatest setbacks for the smooth running and functioning of the party and administration in the area. It equally posed the greatest headache in the division so much such that the S.D.O urgently requested for a vehicle, police and Gendarmerie for *Jakiri* sub-division so that the D.O could frequent Oku and hold meetings with both traditional and party leaders in order to make an accurate assessment of the problems on the spot and report to the authorities. The Gendarmerie post of *Kumbo* centre sub division was closer to ease its movements to Oku area. The D.O of *Jakiri* even suggested that Oku should be put under the state of emergency for at least six months<sup>197</sup>. These suggestions came from the S.D.O because of the fact that after he invited the *Fon*, members of the *KwiFon* society, Hon Yang and the key politicians to his office in Kimbo so as to try and resolve the problems failed because this Oku delegation refused to turn up.

This deteriorating situation in Oku as revealed by the SOD’s political report was further aggravated by the fact that the traditional authority in Oku with its supreme institution *Kwifon* was thrown into another agonizing confusion because of the introduction of a princes institution; the *Ngiri* society in Oku. Coming from Nso, it also became another platform of conflict between Oku and Nso with the administration. The presence of some Oku politicians like Hon Yang who became part of the *KwiFon* society worked with the

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<sup>195</sup> NAB “Quarterly Political Report for Quarter Ending”, 31<sup>st</sup> March 1971, pp.19-21

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid*, p.21

<sup>197</sup> NAB, File N° Cb 1968/1, “The July 1971 *Jakiri* Sub-Division: Quarterly Political Report”, p.131.



*Fon* of Oku to make sure that this Ngiri society was crushed out of Oku because the Nso word Ngiri to them was just another source of trouble.

In order to weaken the resistance or protest of the people of Oku, it was proposed by the Nso politicians and the Senior Divisional Officer for the Division and later accepted by the government that Noni be carved out from the *Jakiri* sub division and attached to the *Kumbo* Central sub-division. This decision came with the amended decree No 71/DF/4 of 7/01/1971. The *Fon* of Oku was threatened by government officials for spear heading the agitation. So many Oku people were arrested and taken to *Kumbo* to sign an undertaking that they were going to put an end to the protest. Pa Nforme Jack, Ndifon Noah Ndifon, Shey Katu Lot and Ndishangong Tata were some of the people arrested and carried to *Kumbo* and they signed an undertaking promising to end the protest before they were released. Some were even detained in the B.M.M for example, Nforme Ndifon. However, according to information gathered in the field, all these did not stop the agitations for the people were determined to boycott any official or party meetings or all national day celebrations organized at *Jakiri* due to the unfair treatment they received from the Nso people.

However, due to government intervention and crackdown on the Oku area with the massive arrest of people by the Police and Gendames, calm prevailed. The educated elite were arrested and carried to *Kumbo* wherein they were asked to take an undertaken to stop the protest and public disorder. Calm prevailed when it became clear to the people of Oku that government's decision about the headquarters of the sub division will not be changed. The granting of the Oku\Noni sub section of the CNU in 1976 and the *Elak*-Rural Council in 1977 also helped to bring peace in the area. Tension cooled down and the people of Oku started cooperating with the administration. They now requested for their own sub division and autonomous councils which was only granted in 1992.

### **3. A Critical look at the Identity Crisis**

From the above analyses, this paper reveals that in heterogeneous settings like that of the Old *Nsaw* State which later became Bui division, the question of identity crisis is unavoidable. It can be seen in Bui as the colonial administration and local administration tried to administer the area as a unique entity caused

serious identity crisis. Considering the fact that mutual identification is basic to human existence, individuals who mutually identify around a social marker often join together in a politically relevant and socially identifiable group. So our perception about the identity crisis in this area can be explained in many ways. The first point is that, the tendency to dominate in particular is an element of all human associations from family through fraternal as well as professional associations and local political organizations. Man's drives to live, propagate and to dominate is evident here and continuous power struggle between groups that either want to keep the power they already have or seek to attain greater power. Secondly, observing the causes and manifestations of the identity crisis that came up in this area, we can identify political motivated factors wherein politics of struggle for power seen in interest among the identity groups clear manifested itself. Worth noting in this identity crisis, is political scientist Harold Lasswell's definition of politics "*Who gets what, when, and how*"<sup>198</sup>. Finally, in this identity crisis, Morgenthau and Thompson's explanation about the political life of man is also demonstrated.

Defenders of identity group say individuals without group identities are atomistic, not autonomous. To them group identities help individuals have a more secure sense of self and social belonging. Mutual identification is basic to human existence though it is neglected in democratic theory where the language of "interest" and "interest groups", rather than identity and identity groups, is far more common. Identity groups are an inevitable byproduct of giving individuals freedom of association. This research work has also demonstrated that in democratic politics, identity groups are particularly important because numbers count. Identity groups of minorities that resist negative stereotyping are a valuable tool in the arsenal of democratic politics. Identity groups can impede and undermine as well as aid and express the cause for democratic justice. Thus a democratic perspective should not consider identity groups as good or bad in themselves but rather evaluates them according to what they publicly pursue or express. As long as individuals are free to associate, identity groups of many kinds will exist because people mutually identify in many politically relevant ways as the case in Bui division where our research was conducted.

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<sup>198</sup> Morgenthau and Thompson, (1985) *Politics among nations*, p.4.

Government's decision in 1992 to create sub divisions and autonomous councils in Oku and Noni recognizing their group identity or ethnicity went a long way to resolving this identity crisis that manifested itself in this area in many ways. It can be seen that integrated groups would hardly become homogeneous or exactly the same because no matter what form it takes, different identity groups will always come up with new arguments to manifest inter-group differences hence the concept of Unity in diversity especially in a multicultural and multi-ethnic country like Cameroon.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the study presents the composite nature and the people of Bui through its cultural identity groups, the administrative evolution from the *Nsaw* Native Authority to Bui division and the distinctive identity of Oku. The quest for political representation and administrative autonomy became the focus of the political struggle among the different identity groups that make up this division. This political struggle exposed the identity crisis among the different identity groups in this jurisdiction. Considering the fact that identity groups occupy an important place in democracy especially in a multicultural and multi-ethnic context, they must be recognised, accepted and protected by ensuring a fair political representation at local and national levels. Also, considering integration to mean the bringing together of different groups of people into an unrestricted and equal society, it becomes understandable that different groups allow for heterogeneity and cannot therefore be homogeneous. This research paper exposes the importance of identity groups in a democracy

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