

INTERNATIONAL BOUNDARIES OF NIGERIA AND PEACE MANAGEMENT: THE SEARCH FOR POLICY RELEVANCE

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1.1 INTRODUCTION

It was A. Gromyko who submitted that international boundaries in Africa have a father whose name is colonialism. A Gromyko (1983:46) 'colonialisation led to great diversification of boundaries according to the former dominant powers : Britain, France, Portugal, Germany, Spain (and the United States of America in the case of Liberia). It could be said that the colonial masters drew up frontiers which confirmed to their interests and on which they could easily and quickly agree upon" but nevertheless " reflected the knowledge of cartography then.

Generally" problems have arisen principally where the "post-colonial leadership has sought to revise existing borders arguing on the basis of their arbitrariness. The incidence of border conflicts which usually compromise peace, security and economic development of these states has increased in the post-colonial era as sovereign states seek to establish impermeable and viable national territories.

While Africa's international boundaries are defined by treaties, most of them are not demarcated on the ground. Nigeria shares boundaries with five West African neighbours Benin, Chad, Cameroon, Niger and Equatorial Guinea. The nation's borders have either never been demarcated or are having to be re-beaconed and surveyed due to the massive disappearance of the old and extremely few boundary markers put in place by the erstwhile colonial regimes.

The uncertainty in the physical status of these boundaries promotes and presents difficulty in the process of their management. It also poses challenges to the states agencies whose duty is territorial defence and border enforcement, leading more often than not to incidents of border conflicts along and astride the shared borderlands.

Grave incidents such as the Nigeria-Chad armed conflict (1983), the Nigeria-Cameroon Ikrang crisis (1983) when five Nigerian naval ratings were killed by Cameroonian gendarmes, to mention just a few - such instances sharpened the border, promoting an atmosphere of charged nationalist fervency.

The second area of the problematic relate to the development and management of the borderlands. Development cannot take place where there is no peace, and the conflictual profile of these borders is a crucial factor. The restive nature of the borders nourishes the familiar type "fortress mentality" and promotes the archaic view of border regions as "militarily threatened areas unsafe for and unworthy of planning and investment. Asiwaju A.I. (1992):2. The result is the persistent neglect of

these borderland, which, as elsewhere in the wider nation state world has continued to breed "marginal populations" with obvious implications for peace and security that complicates the management of the shared borders.

The focus of this paper is to specifically identify the historical basis for peace and management of Nigeria's shared international boundaries. It is indicated that these shared borders are not "pure borders" as they have divided not only related ethnic groups, cultural coherent areas, common ecological zones, The sea bed etc into two or more units and place them in antagonistic political systems. These political systems now function to exclude the others from the previous pre-colonial setting thereby sharpening the borders and promoting conflicts at the state-centric level. It is argued that the micro-integration potential at the grassroots level is begging for policy relevance. At the grassroots level relationships across boundaries still reflect the pre-colonial setting. These micro-historical integrating percolating realities could be harnessed by the various governments for border management at the macro or state centric level. The lessons of European boundary management is also highlighted as imagination policy options for Nigeria; and her proximate neighbours. The paper concludes that for peace and effective border management regime to be erected Nigeria must locate boundary management on the realities of African history and not to be blinded by the archaic notion of boundaries as barriers.

2.1 Theoretical Framework of Analysis

Until recently, it was customary for scholars interested in the phenomenon of international boundaries to focus mainly on the state-centric perspective in their study of international boundaries. This, perspective locates boundaries in relation to states and their conflictual postures. This is also derived from the well-known role(s) of boundaries as generators of conflicts and wars between states.

For example, Raimondo Strassaldo has explained the border paradox and "ambiguities" in terms of the fact that:-

(Borders) divide and unite, bind the interior and link the interior. (they) are barriers and junctions, walls and doors, organs of defence and attack. Frontier areas (borders) can be managed as to maximize either of such functions. They can be militarized as bulwarks against neighbours, or made into areas of peaceful interchange³. R. Strassaldo (1989:393).

In consonance with the above thinking Lord Curzon was compelled to observe in the course of his famous Roman Lecture at Oxford, November

2, 1907 that:-

"frontiers (i.e. borders) are indeed, the razors edge which hang suspended the modern issues of war or peace, of life or death for nations. L. Curzon (1993:47).,

To Star and Most, the binary view of borders remains a central problematique in international interaction. Both scholars submits that "shared international boundaries" are like coins with one side issuing with "risks" and the other with "opportunities" in international interactions⁵. Star & Most (1978: P .73). In the scheme of Gross, international relations between adjacent sovereign states are as a continuum with conflict at one end and co-operation at the other⁶. (Gross:1973:7) He further argued that this continuum can be stimulated in either direction depending on the extent to which the border in question may be categorized as either "closed" or "open". Zartman, W. has demonstrated that:-

Any African country can have boundary problems if it wants. The newness of African states and the frequent irrelevance of their geographical frames to their economic social and political lives make the continent more potentially susceptible to territorial disputes than any other (1993: 150).

By comparison to the state-centric perspective, the transnational stance is unconventional and understandably less known to existing literature and policy making tradition. Nevertheless, the trans-national perspective has been more responsive in terms of policy relevance to the realities of border management. This paradigm has won adherents in Europe and America where the tempo of trans-boundary management, border co-operation, planning and development is being felt.

This paradigm focuses on particular divided cultural coherent areas where boundaries have been drawn across well established lines of transport and communication including an active sense of community based on traditions concerning common ancestry, strong kinship ties, shared socio-cultural, political, religious institutions, economic resources common customs and practices, and the sea bed, etc. In these cultural coherent areas, people with definite cultural identities have been split into two or more fractions of the pre-existing culture areas into new socio- economic, political systems removed from the original cultural

whole. 8. Bonchuk M.O. (1997: 130).

Empirical data derived from Nigeria's borders with her numerous neighbours at the grassroots level reveal that it is erroneous to contend that boundaries are wholly a western concept unknown to local communities. These communities noted the extent of their territories by agreeing on landmarks, such as trees of very distinct nature -the iroko, mahogany, a lasting feature such as an ant-hill, other natural landmarks such as rivers, valleys, mountains, etc. Conceptually the traditional boundary had the potential for conflict, however, the co-operative features were more prominent, as these boundaries were not regarded as sacrosanct. Rather, they enabled the question of geographical definition of kin-ship groups and marked a growth in human organization and its major utility value in pre-colonial society was its ability to promote inter-group harmony.

The fluidity of the traditional boundaries in the border zones before 1885 enabled contacts and mutual interaction among various groups in these zones. These contacts facilitated cultural diffusion and the spread of ideas of socio-cultural, political, religio-magical institutions along and, astride the border zones. These pre-colonial features have endured, and could become the main beacons of peace and border management, should the issues be approached from the grassroots rather than from the state-centric perspective, where policy options are restricted to either "death" or "life", "conflict" or "war" to nations⁹ Bonchuk :M.Q (2001 :50).

3.1 Historical Imperative For Peace and Boundary Management

As earlier indicated, Nigeria share boundaries with five proximate neighbours and the imperative of trans-border management includes numerous and complex variables -shared adjacency, straddled by identical ethnic groups, common socio-cultural economic, religious -magical institutions, the presence of rich natural resources at certain segments of the borders etc. In spite of the numerous variables shared by these proximate states the border regime has remained turbulent and this has been "replete with gory incidents of conflicts mutual distrust and antagonism rather than mutual understanding, deliberations and co-operative determination.

The problem has been truly endemic and carries with it the adverse implications not only for international peace and security it has also militated against the realization of regional integration¹⁰ Asiwaju, A.I. (1984):47).

As Ike Nwachukwu once noted:;

.....in facing the challenge of co-operation we remain mindful that our countries and people are not strangers to each other. Geography and history have thrust us together as neighbours with a common destiny our countries and peoples share common bonds of language, culture and tradition nurtured by centuries of continuous and meaningful interactions. The long standing links and interactions of our people continue to transcend the artificial barriers imposed by colonialism¹¹ Nwachukwu, 1. (J992:30)

Along and astride the northern segments of Nigeria's boundaries with Chad, Niger and Cameroon, traditional boundaries straddle the entire border zone and provided a migratory corridor through which influences, ideas and cultures were repeatedly received and transmitted between the Hausa, Fulani Fulfulbe, etc. About two thirds of Nigeria's boundary from the shores of Lake Chad to the banks of the Benue were once under the hegemonic influence of the Sultanate of Borno and Sokoto Caliphates respectively.

These Muslim states were guided by the tenets of Islam in all their affairs. The Sayfawa rulers of Bornu established the foundation of Bornoan Sovereignty over chieftains now to be found in Cameroon. Thus, strong Islamic fraternity culture and political hegemony had welded the people across the mandara mountains to one another long before the imposition of the colonial boundary in 1885¹². Barkindo, B.M. (1984:29).

Along the western boundaries with Benin Republic the Yoruba, the Gun ...a sub group of the larger Aja cultural complex that embraced not only the Fon Are of the ancient kingdom of Dahomey and Mahin. were divided into two by the Anglo-French boundary and placed them into Nigeria and Benin Republic that now function to separate them¹³ (Dioka, L.C. (1988:33).

The Yoruba and the Gun in Porto-Novo Benin Republic and in Nigeria, form one coherent cultural area which is still closely interlocked and operate as a single economic unit in spite of the colonial partition. From historical times these peoples have operated as Siamese twins and live in a fashion that has established a true symbiotic relationship. It is this cultural unity and interlink that colour their reaction to state-centric measures and policies that seek to keep them apart.

Bonchuk, M.O. has demonstrated that along and astride the Nigeria Cameroon boundary in the Cross River region and South West Cameroon are the Ejagham Boki, and Becheve Akwaya, the dominant groups visisected and placed in the Cross River region of Nigeria and South West Cameroon by the 1913 Anglo-German boundary. These communities still live in contiguous cultural coherent areas with their divided kith and kin in South West Cameroon. They share the same kinship systems, political institutions, same cosmological orientation, magico-religious institutions, divination, cultural features such as the Cross River monoliths or (Akwenshi, Civilization) that spread from upper Cross River to South West Cameroon, ancient trade routes, the sea bed to Cameroon and Equatorial Guinea¹⁴. Bonchuk, M.O. (1997).

Thus, these extended communities or ecumens have remained centers of close transactions interaction, interjection and constant interchanges arising from movements and diffusion of cultures and practices which act as a paradigm to the various culture communities in these border zones¹⁵. Bonchuk, M.O. (2003:43).

These pre-colonial historical realities or networks of relations have endured and still oblige loyalty among these extended communities along and astride the borderlands. To these divided groups, kinship-ties, close knit socio-cultural value systems and traditional modes of interaction inherited from their ancestors are seen as superior to the artificial boundary lines which in any case are said not to divide them. Therefore, nationalist aspiration at the state-centric level must be persuaded to yield ground to the realities of ethnic and cultural relations across Nigeria's borders and their neighbours. This is also in consonance with the African Union Charter which suggest that African integration must be predicated on the realities of African history and in tandem with the Pan African dream that grounds African unity on sovereign historical percolating realities. This historical reality has become imperative, given the fact that Europe of the nation states that was replicated in Africa is paving way to Europe of regional integration that has evolved into the European Union.

4.1 Trans boundary Management: The European Experience.

Nigeria would therefore benefit from the experience of European trans-boundary management. Trans "frontier regionalism" or management is a reference to a novel category of internationalism "forced" on territorially adjacent sovereign states. Such sates are compelled to interact for

reasons not only of common interests in human and natural resources straddled by a shared international boundary but also common concerns about the cross border environmental impacts of human activities and natural disasters.

In Europe, trans-boundary management began as uncoordinated internal initiatives by divided transborder -landers across several of the international boundaries in Western Europe. The organization of European Regions or "Euregios" evolved and became a well coordinated powerhouse of European integration.

From their initial status as informal organizations, "Euregios" now operate everywhere in the regions as formal institutions recognized by both domestic and international laws. The success recorded by the practice of trans-boundary management and its contributions to European integration has attracted policy makers outside Europe; particularly in Northern Europe where this strategy has been adopted¹⁶. Asiawaju A.I. (1999-211).

In Eastern Europe, and since the demolition of the Berlin wall, and the reverses suffered by communist regimes, this "New Thinking" has become attractive. Also, in North America, this paradigm is being canvassed and adopted in the management of the shared national resources.

Trans-boundary management began in Europe as a companion movement of the evolution of European integration. The aim of trans-boundary management is the achievement of trans-boundary micro-integration that would dovetail in European macro-integration. This was initially promoted by the Council of Europe, and trans-boundary management was boosted in the 1980s when a regional approach to planning and development was followed by the systematic promotion of the concept of Europe of the regions, in contradistinction to Europe of the Nation-State¹⁷. Asiawaju A. I. (1999:30).

By 1986, the European Single Act was initiated and this focused on the primacy of regions as natural choice points for planning and development in Europe. Thus, "Euregios" and trans boundary initiatives have become permanent features of European life especially by the member states of the Council of Europe and the European Union. For example, the European Charter on Frontiers and Transfrontier Regions, which was adopted by the Association of European Border regions is

made up of 46 such regions and associations located all over Western Europe, concentrated on the Rhine (European River of Unity) that serves as the international boundary between Germany, France and between Germany and the Netherlands¹⁸. Anderson, M. & Bortes, E. (1980:64).

The Regio-Bassiliensi was created in 1963 and is a typical Euro-region around the Swiss-French-German transnational boundary with Basel as nucleus of a larger trans boundary region whose divided peoples speak a local Germanic dialect.

The adoption in 1980 of the European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Cooperation Between Territorial Authorities or Communities and its additional protocol to the convention by the Council of Europe in 1993, underscores the premium placed on trans boundary management, co-operation and integration in Europe. The Outline convention indicated the legal and common bases on which bilateral cooperation would be founded in the framework of the national sovereignty of each country and region. It is aimed at promoting trans boundary management and contributing to the economic and social progress of borderlanders¹⁹. Cbukwurah, A.D. (1992:16).

However, this "New Thinking" is yet to be seriously considered and adopted by Nigeria in the management of the shared boundaries.

4.2 Boundary Management: ..Recommendations and Implementation Strategies

State territories and boundaries in Africa are structurally and functionally not so different from those found in Europe and America. Though there are important differences in the details of history and geography, significant similarities exist between them particularly with special regard to local people's perception of the arbitrariness of the processes and overall artificiality of the partitioned effects²⁰. Asiwaju, A.I. (1989:140).

Comparative studies of the localized impacts of the boundaries in Europe and Africa point more to similarities than differences. Studies and policy recommendations and even strategies for their attainment in Nigeria have often ignored these important similarities and therefore obfuscate a clear vision of the vital policy options and lessons which Nigeria can learn from European experience in boundary management. After all, even in Europe and America, boundaries partitioned homogeneous groups, splitting unified cultural areas, mindlessly fragmented natural

planning regions, and ecosystems, imposing different parallel administrative.. systems and legal regimes.

With particular reference to the present focus, a great deal of border conflicts have involved the problems of the generally indeterminate character of the borders and rival national interests in transborder economic resources. The notion of boundaries as exclusive barriers is archaic. Nigeria should therefore institute Joint Economic Ventures in order to exploit the natural and mineral resources in collaboration with her neighbours. This also calls for certainty of the borders. Experts from both countries such as surveyors, etc, should map and demarcate these boundaries or rebeacon them in order to assist both countries' security agencies in the discharge of their duties.

With respect to the concept of peace, our concern must be seen to mean more than the absence of war. Efforts at ensuring peace must be understood to embrace not only the prevention of war as the worst form of conflict, but also the systematic devaluation of the boundaries as barriers and promotion of co-operation between Nigeria and her neighbours in the process of border management.

Closely related to the above is the issue and concern for security; a vital process in border management. Security should be viewed beyond the conventional states-centric concern. The concern should not be limited to the safety of the state machinery and its operators, but extended to the people and society within and across the borders. It goes beyond the strictly militaristic dimensions of the conventional meaning to cover concerns for socio-economic development and the welfare of the divided but related centric groups.

"Security" is development and without development there can be no security 1. Mcnamara(1993:30). National security is more than territorial defence, and should focus on the physical, social and psychological quality of life of society and its members; currently, the quality of life of the borderlanders is very poor. This could lead them to imbibe values that are detrimental to their state's national interest.

It is imperative therefore to provide basic social amenities such as roads, clinics, pipe borne water, electricity, transport and communication. schools, joint ventures in projects and the participation of the border communities establishment of border markets, etc., as this would reduce the stress and strain on the borders.

In the area of crime prevention, smuggling across borders, fish poaching on maritime borders, joint patrol between both customs immigration, police, gendarmes and coastal guards, secret service should be institutionalized. These services should be reoriented to understand that these borders are not "pure borders" and that the notion of boundaries as barriers is archaic.

Perhaps the most fundamental forces compelling boundary management is the commanding presence of sequestered partitioned ethnic groups and culture areas. The operation of these vibrant factors have ensured a systematic and sustained contradiction and obliteration of the normal separation or barrier functions and effects of intra sovereignty boundaries. ..Thus, cultural festivals between these communities should be encouraged, organized tours and visits by the local chiefs, dances, and other forms of the peoples ethnographic data and cosmological orientation should be displayed and preserved.

Furthermore, the basis of human communication is interaction. Conflict is defined as a breakdown in communication. Transborder Communication thus, becomes a deliberate process from which can be derived infinite interaction.

For effective border management" the transnational perspective as evidenced by the pre-colonial linkages of language and cultural relations across borders should be made to increase the probability of realizing effective communication at the more formal conflictual level as the intensity of informal interaction or micro-diplomatic relations are raised. To enhance the already existing cordial relations at the micro level, radio and television programmes that utilize these local languages should be encouraged, "Unity institutions" joint ventures in the use of local languages to disseminate information should be established. These cross-border languages have their uses. They are often tools for regional communication and understanding. The spin off from this can include peace, co-operation, stability, etc all of which are necessary for development. 22. Bonchuk" M.O. (2003:62).

Currently, the unrecorded trade along Nigeria's borders is enormous, and what is recorded is usually marginal. The revenue lost to the nation due to smuggling is enormous. The realization of the magnitude of cross border unrecorded trade flow and the character of dynamics has led experts of the West African Studies to appreciate and suggest the need for a new strategy -a radical re-orientation of the current approaches to regional integration in favour of a new strategy of market driven integration.

Instead of pursuing regional integration on the traditional model of international organization, regional integration should be rooted in the alternative realities of trans-national interactions as so strongly manifested in cross border trade. This is in conformity with Article 2 of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Treaty which seeks to abolish the quantitative and administrative restrictions on trade among its member states.

Apart from joint venture economic concerns along the Nigeria-Benin border, no such thriving business and economic concerns exists between Nigeria and other proximate neighbours. Though the Lake Chad Basin Commission has stood its grounds and made giant strides that can lead to economic and regional integration, much needs to be done in that direction. Joint Ventures in agriculture, cattle breeding, fish farming, particularly the collaborative assessment and management of fish stock in the maritime sectors can assist in reducing the stress on the borders.

Already, there are existing bilateral and multilateral agreements covering almost all aspects of human endeavours between Nigeria and her proximate neighbours which have remained death letters. One limitation of these agreements is that they are state-centric in perspective, as the problems of the border communities and their right to development remains marginal to policy makers. It is therefore imperative for Nigeria to operationalise these agreements to reflect the prospects of planning and developing these neglected areas. This no doubt would enhance the possibility of peace and the reduction of the borders from the conflictual postures to poles of development as the experiences of Europe and America reveal.

The above submission is in agreement with the United Nations Programme of Action for Africa's Economic Recovery and Development (UN-PAAERD) adopted at the UN General Assembly special session on Africa on 1st June, 1986, which affirmed the strategy for collective self-reliance and that economic and technical cooperation among those countries should constitute key elements in the economic recovery of Africa to their mutual benefit.

The Lagos Plan of Action and the African Economic Community is aimed at promoting collective accelerated self-reliance and self-sustaining states and their integration in the economic, social, cultural field. These various arrangements including the already existing

ECOWAS protocol could be harnessed by Nigeria to erect a durable trans-frontier regime.

Already the gains made by the National Boundary Commission in relation to workshops held with the proximate states should be sustained and the quantum of its efforts to resolve conflicts arising from these boundaries be encouraged. Perhaps the setting up of a border development commission could enhance some of the achievements made by the National Boundary Commission.

CONCLUSION

The paper examined the international boundaries of Nigeria in relation to the possibility of erecting a border management regime that would promote peace. It was indicated that these boundaries were inherited from the colonial regimes, and that they are not pure boundaries since they divided related ethnic groups their coherent cultural areas, kin-ship systems etc. It was argued that conflicts along and astride these borders is promoted by state-centric policies adopted by the "inheritance elites" who perceive borders as barriers. At the grassroots level, the divided but related groups continue to interact freely as their socio-cultural, political religious desires demand.

It was suggested that the micro-integration formations at the grassroots level should be harnessed for broader macro management of the borders. The lessons of European trans-border management were highlighted as policy options for Nigeria to study, and adopt.

Finally, recommendations and strategies for their implementation were suggested.

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