



International Boundaries and “Split Personalities”: The Experience of the Boki Ethnic Nationality in the Cross River Region and South West Region of Cameroon

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ABSTRACT

The paper submits that international boundaries, have divided not only kith and kin but cultural coherent areas, natural regions and the sea bed, thus, placing them in one or two states. International boundaries in the perception of state-centric scholars are intended to function as barriers or limits of their states administrative and jurisdictional competence, thereby conforming to the classical attributes of the nation-state, a product of the 19th Century Nationalism in Europe. This study of the Boke, splintered by the 1913 Anglo-German boundary, utilized the micro or grassroots levels of analysis. It is argued that comparative border studies underscore certain patterns of “*universalism*” that can be applied to the behavioural pattern or borderlanders. In spite of this *universalism*, it is indicated that European boundaries are being decomposed into bridges of co-operation and development as opposed to their earlier perception as barriers. The study concludes by way of policy recommendations that Nigeria – Cameroon stakeholders should imbibe this new thinking, and embark on transborder regionalism in order to develop their borderlanders and reverse the status of the border from its conflictual litigation profile to bridges of co-operation for integration and development.

INTRODUCTION

The state-centric perspective on international boundaries locates national boundaries as the limit or margin of the states political authority and jurisdiction. It is imperative to note that where the limits are located and their expected functions as barriers to movement, they influence the lives of the people separated by the boundary. Boundaries between states are not

International Boundaries and “Split Personalities”

simply lines on maps, or the margins of states territorial political and economic jurisdiction, where on political jurisdiction ends and another begins; *they are central to understanding political life, questions concerning citizenship, identity, political loyalty, exclusion, inclusion and of the ends of the states territory.*

Borders between states are institutions and processes. As institutions, they are established by political decisions and regulated by legal texts. The Nigerian – Cameroon boundary from the coastal town of Calabar to Lake Chad was drawn by the British and Germans (1913 Anglo-German Treaty and the 1916 Anglo-French Treaty). The borders divided related ethnic groups, notably the Boki, Ejagham and Becheve Akwaya, the sea bed, a cultural coherent area into two antagonistic states. The current conflictual profile of the border is traceable to the above historical fact. Prior to 1884, the linear exclusive and sacrosanct boundary did not exist until the Europeans replicated their notion of boundary in Africa. Since then, the border has defined, in a legal sense, a sovereign authority; the identity of individuals' claims to nationality and exercise of rights of citizenship are delimited by it.

The state-centric perspective recognizes borders as instruments of state policy. So governments tend to protect and promote national interests thereby emphasizing the barrier or exclusive nature of the borders. Secondly, the modern state, fashioned after the European typology lay claim to the sole exclusive powers and prerogatives of rule, and this could be made possible by creating barriers to unwanted external influences. Thirdly, borders are limits of a state's identity, i.e. national identity, which is part of a belief system and myths about the unity of the people and sometimes about the 'national' unity of a territory, linked to ideological boundary – nationalism.

Fourthly, “borders” is a term of discourse. Several meanings have been given to borders in general and this has influenced concepts and perspectives on the subject matter. “Borders” or “Frontiers” is a term used in law, diplomacy and politics and its meaning varies according to the context. In scholarly writings in anthropology, history, philosophy, political science, public international law, and sociology, it also has different meanings according to the theoretical approach adopted. Most often political science has been used as the servant of political power and nationalist movements when borders are in dispute.

The above approach reflects nationalist sentiments thereby erecting barriers that reflect a “fortress mentality”. Until recently, scholarship in the study of borders has reflected the above perspective. This of course does not recognize the realities of African history on the ground. The imposed borders are not “pure borders” because the splintered groups that live along and astride these artificial divides yearn on a daily basis for closer interaction among themselves.

This reality is wide spread not only in Africa but also in Europe, Asia and Latin America where boundaries have divided related ethnic groups. In the experience of the Cross River region and South West Region of Cameroon, the Boki ethnic nationality though divided by the 1913 Anglo

German Treaty yearn for closer interaction. This has made that segment of the border to negate the barrier function. This study would therefore analyse the Boki experience as a splintered group using the grassroots perspective. It is noted that the Boki ethnic nationality, either in Nigeria or Cameroon has been neglected by both governments. Their geographical location at the margin of the borders have compounded their problem as indices of modernity are lacking. It is therefore imperative for both governments to embark on trans-border cooperation in order to alleviate the problems so identified. Though the paper identified with the trans-national paradigm (grassroots perspectives), it is noted that failure to arrest the current underdeveloped area could result in anti-national activities. Currently, the Southern Cameroon segment of the Cameroon society is frustrated with the French components marginalization and is seeking for an independent Southern Cameroon.

Structure and function of international borders: grassroots perspective

The grassroots perspective on the study of borders is new to scholarship and polity formulation. Scholarship and orientation in policy formulation has favoured the barrier function or nationalist view of exclusivity. The grassroots perspective recognizes the anthropological nature of the borders, the lives of border peoples and communities whose kith and kin live along and astride the imposed divides. Their political, economic and cultural activities cut across the artificial boundary. To the Boki, the borders divided the Germans, British and the French and not the indigenous groups whose various activities cut across boundary.

For example, some groups live on one side of the borders, but their farmlands, fishing ponds and rivers, markets, shrines and attendance at festivals, the *Birubifi* (new yam festival) dances or marriages including visits by kith and kin require movement across the borders (Bonchuk, 1997:43). The grassroots perspective (or anthropology of borders) is distinctive in methods have enabled ethnographers to focus on local communities at the margin of international borders in order to examine the material and symbolic processes of culture. The focus is on everyday life, and on the cultural constructions and interactions across borders between splintered ethnic groups which give meaning to the boundaries between nations usually neglected by state-centric scholars whose approach is located within the ambit of relations between states. This ignores the sovereignty percolating realities at the grassroots which result in micro-integration formalities that can be galvanized at the macro level for wider economic integration between the states.

The study of everyday live of border communities is simultaneously the study of the daily life of the state, whose agents should take an active role in the implementation of policies and the intrusion of the states structures into the lives of the people. Studies based on this perspective reveal that border communities interact more with themselves than members of their core

International Boundaries and “Split Personalities”

states. The cultural permeability between the divided peoples, the adaptation of border peoples in their attempt ideologically to construct their political life, the social and economic forces that propel them to interact more between themselves as apposed to members of their core states are compelling reasons to study the evolution of border cultures. Barth’s study (1967:51) and paradigmatic ideas on ethnic boundaries, focused on culture, nations and states at international boundaries showed the value of localized studies for the understanding on how cultural landscapes are superimposed across international boundaries.

Following the pioneering works of Asiwaju (1984), more localized studies on the functions and structures of international boundaries have revealed that the divided but related groups disregard these lines and interact more among themselves in matters of culture, trade, attendance at festivals, inter-marriages and related activities. Bonchuk (1997) in his illuminating study of the Boki, Ejagham and Becheve Akwaya communities, splintered groups along and astride the Nigeria – Cameroon border at the Cross River region, submitted that there is much more “universalism” in comparative terms, of the function and structure of international borders and the extent of their disregard by the divided peoples. Thus, either in Africa or Europe, there is much more similarities than differences in the perception of the functions and structures of boundaries and the extent of their disregard by splintered personalities and their yearning for closer socio-cultural, economic, political interaction.

Despite the large and growing literature on the grassroots perspective on borders, there has been little comparative research and little in the way of theories of border regions. This situation is summarized by Prescott (1987:43) that;

“Attempts to produce a set of reliable theories about international boundaries have not failed. Attempts to devise a set of procedures by which boundaries can be studied have been successful”.

However, over the last generation, this perspective has increasingly turned to the analysis of the roles of state institutions at local levels, the impact of policies on localities at the margin of borders, and the symbolic constructions of ethnicity and nations which are often treated as aspects of identity. It is against this background that the grassroots perspective persuades the state-centric thinkers to yield ground to the unfolding literature on borders and boundaries not as barriers but as “bridges” or “osmotic points” of contact between the splintered groups. The state should therefore factor these splintered groups in their overall plan for national development and not to treat them as marginal populations. The experience of European governments that now emphasize development of European regions or “Euregios” in contradistinction to Europe of the nation state is quite instructive. African governments can also emphasize development of African regions or “Afregios”. This would blur the conflictual profile of

African borders, while developing such regions for the benefit of the neglected splintered groups. The much desired African integration cannot take place with the structure and function of international borders as barriers (Bonchuk, 2002:38).

Border Identities and Ethnicity

Comparative studies of borders from the grassroots perspective reveal certain similarities and patterns of “universalism” that can be applied to the behavioural pattern of borderlanders either in Spain France, Germany, Israel, Zimbabwe, Malaysia or the United States, Canada, Mexico borders. Either in Europe or Africa border identities are shaped by the state and their response to the states attempts to define or redefine its outer limits. Due to their frequently contested nature, borders tend to be characterized by identities which are shifting and multiple in ways which are framed by the specific state configurations which encompass them and within which people must attribute meaning to their experience of border life. These also include normal identity, identities such as ethnicity, class, etc. Identities often constructed at borders in ways which are different from, and shed light on, how these identities are constructed elsewhere in the state (Wilson and Donna, 1994:27-30).

Focused studies on borders do not obliterate the fact that national identity is a politicized ethnicity. Many national identities arise when ethnicity is politicized in the course of pursuing self-determination. The process of national self-determination excludes at times those who do not share the dominant nation’s view of nation-building. The minority groups are often labeled as ethnic, whereas they perceive themselves as nations whose homeland has been divided into two. The Boki nation fits graphically into this “universal” categorization.

The above assertion becomes clearer or perhaps most problematic where a border is drawn with little reference to the ties of blood and culture which, like in the case of the Boki bind them together in the Cross River region and the South West region of Cameroon.

Several of the borders between East and West Germany, Turkey and Syria, Turkey and Georgia, Israel and her Arab neighbours and between Spain and France in the Pyreness reflect this “universalism”. As Borneman Strokes, and Beller-Hann, Rabinowitz and Douplas respectively describe, those living in these border areas have evolved a *modus operandi* which incorporates contradictory identities.

Asiwaju’s study of the divided Yoruba between Nigeria and Benin Republic by the French reveals this phenomenon. Citizenship, state nationalism and various other forms of social ties draw border people away from the core to the border, inward, to the periphery of state power. Borderlanders are often pulled across the border by similarities of kith and kin, cultural interactions, interjection and interpenetration across borders as the notion of national identity is understood in terms of local kinship ties

International Boundaries and “Split Personalities”

which have endured the imposition of the colonial border and the later identity of citizenship and nationality of the recently created nation state (Asiwaju, 1984).

Conceptually, though border splintered populations share similar universal characteristics, not all are dissected in the same way. In terms of their ethnic identities, three main types of border population are discernable:

- (1) those who share ethnic ties across the border as well as with those residing at their own states geographical core in a contiguous territory and are homogenous,
- (2) those who are differentiated by cross-border ethnic bonds from other residents of their state,
- (3) those who are members of the national majority in their state and have no ethnic ties across the state's borders (Donnan & Wilson, 1974:43)

Examples of the first type are the Boki, Ejagham, Becheve Akwaya, Yoruba, and the borderlanders of the Republic of Ireland who share ethnic ties both across and within state boundary with Northern Ireland, and the Hungarian borderlanders, who share ethnic ties with those across the states borders in Slovenia, Romania and Slovakia. The Basque borderlanders area in ethnic minority within two states – Spain and France – but who define themselves as a nation tied to a homeland dissected by those two states. It is anticipated that these different configurations have varying consequences for expression of identity, ethnicity, border development and security.

The Boki nation in the Cross River region and the South West region of Cameroon

The people of Boki now live in the Cross River region of Nigeria and South West region of Cameroon in the Manyu Division in a contiguous territory. They were vivisected and placed in Nigeria and Cameroon by the British and German imperialists whose boundary regime led to the conflictual 1913 Anglo-German Agreement. In functional terms, the boundary ought to function as a barrier against movement by the divided related kith and kin whose new nationality and citizenship became either Nigerian or Cameroonian. In spite of the above, both splintered populations continue to interact freely across borders in matters of trade, festivals, marriages, dances and politically, rendering the state-centric perspective of the border as barrier ineffective.

Arising from this state-centric perspective Emile Durkheim (1998:50-55) described boundaries as a “social fact”, transmitted from one generation to another. In each generation, individuals approved or disapproved of the extent to which they have accepted and internalized the “sacrosanct” nature of social faces. The arbitrarily drawn borders that split the Boki into two, have become reference points of inclusion and exclusion not only among their European creators but also among the successor African ruling elites (Emile, 1988).

This view of the border as the created-creator whose function is to include and exclude has been dominant not only in state-centric studies on the partition of Africa but also of European communities. Asiwaju, in his *Partitioned Africans* noted that:

Existing studies of political partition and resultant boundary problem have always been approached as studies in international relations in which border populations are of marginal interest For example, it is rare to find studies of European boundaries where the focus has been on the implications for such partitioned culture areas as the French split across the boundaries of France with Belgium and Switzerland and or the Germans split into fractions located in the Federal Republic of Germany and then the Democratic Republic of Germany, Austria, Poland and Switzerland” (Asiwaju, 1966:38).

Babatunde (1988) observed that this perennial attitude of “dominant” to the “muted” border periphery is one not of only neglect but also of incredulity at implicit claims to the dominant or the core society that border areas could not have views of their own; core society is thus, known to pursue self thought out policies that further their own interests in border locations at the expense of local interest that tend to be ignored. Due to their intractable geographical location, the Boki in Nigeria and Cameroon have been neglected by their core states. Perhaps, it is instructive to note that most border splintered populations suffer similar neglect.

Asiwaju (1986:27) has noted that all cases suggest that border areas and populations are more neglected than those removed from the borders. In every African state, border areas are treated as fringe or marginal areas of the states territory. Hence all the modernization processes, so much in evidence in the core areas of the states, dwindles as they approach the boundaries. The pre-eminence of the state centric perspective of the core society in respect of the border area has been challenged by the grassroots perspective which has revealed the inadequacy of treating the border areas and splintered groups as a simple periphery of the nation state.

The state-centric (or dominant/muted) approach to the border is unrealistic and fails to recognize the realities of African history. It has generated conflicts between inter-related dominant society (i.e. nation state) and even more critically between the nation-state as such and its own border lands, whose views are not often taken into consideration when nation-states formulate policies that regulate relations between them. The focus of this “New Thinking” is to reveal the impact of the boundary location on homogenous communities split by such lines and how these cultural coherent groups are reacting to them.

The issues relate to how the Boki perceive these boundaries. What intentions or plans do their core states have in relation to their developmental needs and are these plans similar to those of the borderlanders? Again, are the views of the border splintered groups factored in formulating policies that are peculiar to them? The answer to these questions are negative as the splintered groups are neglected in development planning by their core states

International Boundaries and “Split Personalities”

and are left to device means for their survival. Their actions in terms of cross border trade are termed “illegal” or as “aliens” moving across borders.

In relation to the above, many writers locate the functions of international boundaries as generally negative then positive, and that their unimaginable multiplicity of restrictions constitute a veritable assault on the social and economic lives of the people living in border regions.

The governments of Nigeria and Cameroon should understand the socio-economic forces in operation at their borders. The people on the Cameroon – Nigeria border had shared the same government since the former German Cameroon was administered by Nigerian Government during the Trusteeship until the 1961 plebiscite. The Cross River border region and the South West region of Cameroon share identical socio-economic profile as a result of their geographical milieu. Most importantly, the region houses related splintered groups such as the Boki, Ejagham, Akwaya. Boki settlements in South West region of Cameroon include: Boudam, Dadi, Boka, Oyi, Buamandu, Kekukesem, Kajifu, Achanji, Biajua, Oyi, Beteme, Besong Abang, Ebishi, Dadi I and II. These settlements abut the international boundary in a contiguous territory with their kith and kin in Cross River in Boki Local Government Area.

The Nigeria – Cameroon border where the Boki, Ejagham and Becheve Akwaya are domiciled is the least developed of all the border areas surrounding the country. Neither the Nigerian government nor the Cameroon government has done much to alleviate the sufferings of the Boki people (Bonchuk, 1997:43). In this border region, unlike the Nigeria – Benin, Nigeria – Niger, are none of the modern automobile expressways, or the lucrative co-operative economic ventures and the endearing power grid lines which have helped the Nigeria – Benin border areas (Ekpenyong, 1989:24-30).

Throughout the length and breadth of this border region, the geography consists of very rugged terrain. The coastal lowlands in both Nigeria and Cameroon receive very heavy rainfall throughout the year as a result of their location near the Atlantic Ocean. The people’s main occupation is the cultivation of cocoa, plantain, yam, banana, timber production and the collection of forest products aside from white collar jobs, business and commercial transactions.

Due to the heavy rainfall, the people of Boki and their neighbours are exposed to climatic hazards. It is during times like this that the people are reminded of their neglect by both governments. The climatic characteristics of rainfall intensity, duration and periodicity affect both the environment and human life. They cause damage to life and buildings, while sudden torrential rainfalls wash away make shift bridges, homes and school buildings. These are precious infrastructures and personal goods which their isolation from modernity and great distance from officialdom never help to replace. In 1989, elements invaded some Boki order villages destroying food crops and other valuable items. This incident was never reported by the state media in Nigeria or Cameroon. It is in times like this that the border inhabitants

ponder to which country they belong or to which authorities they may direct their prayers.

Perhaps due to the conflictual profile of the border region the governments hardly invest in the border areas. This trend is a carryover from the colonial era when the colonialists perceived border regions as militarily vulnerable and unsafe for investment and development. The trend has continued since both countries became independent therefore neglecting the border areas to the detriment of the border splintered groups.

Though it has been difficult to obtain the correct population figures for the Boki settlements along and astride the borders the population is generally low near the border. The splintered peoples shift farther away from the borders and prefer to settle nearer to the major urban settlements where they can easily obtain the much needed social services. Even though the Boki along and astride the borders pay their taxes to the governments of Nigeria and Cameroon, they receive little or no benefit from both governments. It is astonishing to note that there is no general hospital to serve the health needs of the peoples; rather, make shift community health centres are located at the Nigerian side of the border villages at Bashua and Abo Ebam, while they are no-existent on the Cameroonian side.

The location of the Boki people close to the international boundary has not only propelled away to their core states the more dynamic individuals and youths, it has also resulted in the depopulation and decay of their economy. Due to the lack of the means of transport and communication, inter-group relations are difficult. This has resulted into "circular and cumulative causation" which tends to condemn their fate. This is the border paradox.

The above challenge posed to the Boki people strike at the very foundation of nation building. It was Karl Deutsch (1998) who submitted that a nation is a system of social learning and more indirectly of economic and social development. It seeks to mobilize a large concourse of people through material signals, symbols, devices and institutions to a consciousness of their distinctiveness as a people apart. Benjamin Disraeli (1989:12) puts it more succinctly when he said "a nation is a work of art and a work of time. It is gradually created by a variety of influences, the influence of original organization, of climate, soil, religion, laws, customs, manners, extraordinary accidents and incidents in their history and the individual character of their illustrious citizens. These influences create the nation; these form the "national mind" (Deutsch & Disraeli, 1988:20-29).

The Boki at the fringes of the borders either in Nigeria or in Cameroon, have been removed from the national mind and from the communication, transport facilities, industrial and modern market economy which offer economic and psychological rewards for successful group alignments and in the ongoing social and technological changes in spite of their naturally endured mental acumen. Given the fact that the people are not too far removed from the consciousness of their pre-colonial relations and with their kith and kin in Cameroon, the situation is confusing, fraught with frustration of separation and the contradictions of their being splintered personalities.

International Boundaries and “Split Personalities”

The ineffectiveness of social communication facilities in their area is capable of engendering a situation of divided loyalty or an unsecured commitment to national unity. They have not been drawn into the mainstream of national social communication and their economic betterment as a border splintered group has not received sufficient attention by both governments.

The problem of the border impacted groups in the Cross River region and South West region of Cameroon needs to be conceptualized and resolved in the same context as those of the Northern and Western border regions. The international boundary here should be transformed to function in more positive and in less negative terms in order to alleviate the problems of the borderlanders.

Strategically, the border region is the underbelly of the two nations' economy. It is sad to note that apart from Mfum in present day Ikom Local Government Area, there are no customs, and immigration posts at the margin of the borders. This poses security challenges to the Boki people particularly if the Bakassi crisis were to resurface.

The geo-politics of nation states suggest that alienated and dissatisfied splintered personalities readily become the Achilles heel of unwary nations in the event to a threat to their security from outside. And to prevent such an unwanted event, Nigeria – Cameroon should, as a matter of deliberate policy, develop the border region bearing in mind that development in a broadened sense, carries with it not only the idea of economic betterment, but also of great human dignity, security, justice and equity.

The above assertion is related to human rights and development. For example, the International Conference on Human Rights, Tehran, Iran, 1968, adopted resolution XVII in which it was pointed out that “the enjoyment of economic and social rights is inherently linked with any meaningful enjoyment of civil and political rights and that there is a profound inter-connection between the realization of human rights and economic development”.

The majority of the Boki people along and astride the border continue to live in poverty, suffer from squalor, disease and illiteracy leading to a subhuman existence meaning a denial of their human dignity for no fault of theirs but for the sins committed in Africa by the British and the Germans. The United Nations General Assembly Resolution 1161 (XII) of 26 November, 1957 expressed The majority of the Boki people along and astride the border continue to live in poverty, suffer from squalor, disease and illiteracy leading to a subhuman existence meaning a denial of their human dignity for no fault of theirs but for the sins committed in Africa by the British and the Germans. The United Nations General Assembly Resolution 1161 (XII) of 26 November, 1957 expressed the view that a “balanced and integrated economic and social development should contribute towards the promotion and maintenance of peace and security, social progress and better standards of living, and the observance of, and respect for, human rights, fundamental freedom for all (Chukwura, 1989:36).

It has become imperative for the governments to translate this declarations to action plans to resolve the problems posed to the border impacted groups due to their location at the margin of the states periphery. Nigeria and Cameroon should not continue to alienate the Boki in the process of their nation's development or deny them a faire distribution of the benefits of development.

Finally, since Europe that started the proliferation of artificial boundaries on the continent of Africa has deemphasized the existence of national boundaries for the new and appealing concept of Europe of the regions – "Euregies", which Ralf Von Ameiu (1994:28) has described as an attempt to overcome frontiers, draw closer together, live and work together, get to know and understand each other". It would be insensitive on the part of Nigeria – Cameroon governments not to adopt the transnational paradigm in the development of their borders. This would enhance the development and human dignity of the splintered personalities because a heart divided into two cannot function.

CONCLUSION

The paper examined the partitioned border of the Cross River region and South West region of Cameroon by the British – Germans. This created region is one of the prospective Afrigios in consequences of the European partition and the subsequent emergence of the independent states of Nigeria and Cameroon. The study analysed both the State-centric and grassroots perspective of border studies. It was indicated that unlike the state-centric perspective, the grassroots level of analysis deals with the localized impact of the borders on the splintered populations. This perspective of "new thinking" is more relevant to the realities of African history.

Furthermore, it was suggested that since the Boki who inhabit the margin of both countries borders have been neglected by both governments, it has become imperative for the two states to embrace the transnational paradigm. This paradigm involves the development of the border lands by evolving collaborative and co-operative policies in the process of developing their neglected border lands. This concept is gaining grounds in Europe and has assisted in ameliorating the problems of divided groups. Potentials for translational development exists and these include shared adjacency, common history, presence of national resources along and astride their borders, the sea bed and above all, the presence of splintered but related ethnic groups.

The realities of African history suggest that African economic integration cannot take place with boundaries as barriers. The barrier function of boundaries should be persuaded to yield ground to emerging concepts of boundaries as "bridges" for development and poles of co-operation to be crossed as the socio-economic and political yearnings of the splintered

International Boundaries and “Split Personalities”

groups demand, but taking cognizance of the existence and respect for their cores states laws or jurisdictional obligations.

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M. O. Bonchuk

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