The Concept of Boundary and Indigenous Application in Africa: The Case of the Bakassi Boarder Lines of Cameroon and Nigeria

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Abstract

The notion and function of boundary differed fundamentally in the European and African contexts. In traditional Africa, the concept of an ethnic boundary was expressed in terms of neighbours with whom the particular polity shared a territory and such a boundary was conceived of in terms of a region or a narrow zone fronting the two neighbours marked off by it. Thus, the boundary was the zone where two States were joined together. In other words, African boundaries were usually rooted in ethnic and social contact. But European partition of Africa conceived boundaries as physical separation points. Africans who had become frontiersmen had no immediate knowledge that their lands and kin divided by the boundary were now “foreign”. They did not know that the new boundaries functioned differently from the traditionally familiar ones. They thought the former were only for the white men until they were checked at crossing points. Its impact on their relations with their kin and neighbours made them to create secret routes across the frontiers. But these new borders soon faded in their minds. This paper, therefore, attempts a theoretical approach to the valorization of ethnic rather than international prescript boundaries by the inhabitants of Bakassi, and how their activities challenge the application of international decisions. It concludes by attempting a therapy for such challenges as on the Bakassi borderlines, and of course brings to book the African-border conflict prone paradigm.

Keywords: Concept, Boundary, Indigenous Application, Boarder Lines, Bakassi, Cameroon, Nigeria
Introduction

The Bakassi border lines of Cameroon and Nigeria is situated at the far end of the Gulf of Guinea, at the upper angle of the Bay of Biafra in Ndian Division in the South West Province of Cameroon, the Nigeria-coveted Bakassi Peninsula is a feature of the Rio del Rey estuary complex. This complex occupies an approximately 60 km-stretch between River Akpa Yafe and the west -side boundary of Mt. Cameroon and is 30 km deep, about 1800 km square. Shaped roughly like a trapezoid, this area is 12 km long at the smallest base and 35 km high between the small Benmong village to the north and the village of Kimbo, Munja to the southern coastal boundary. It thus covers a total area of 665 km- that is, a third of Rio del Rey estuary complex.

The geomorphology of the area is characterized by tens of islands of varying sizes and shapes. There are four major peninsula groups. From cast to west, they are the Pelican, the Fiai, the Fron, and the Bakassi Peninsulas, all situated along rivers Meme, Andokat, Ngosso and the Akpa Yafe; which intersect with the large Cross River estuary to the South. Bordered to the West by the River Akpa Yafe and to the East by Rio del Rey, the Bakassi peninsula itself is made up of many small islands demarcated by a network of creeks at least 100 metres wide. The Bakassi peninsula, which is coveted by Nigeria, stretches over 3 of the 7 Ndian sub-divisions, Isangele, Kombo Abedimo and Idabato. It has about 8,562 inhabitants distributed as follows: Isangele (4,517 inhabitants in 19R7), Iclabato (3,250 inhabitants in 1987) and Kombo Abedimo (796 inhabitants in 1987). These people are spread over some thirty small villages scattered along the mail rivers: Rio del Rey, Akpa Yafe, Akpa Bana, Bakassi creek and so on with principal economic activities of fishing and related activities; trade; and oil exploitation. The discovery of oil in the area plunged Cameroon and Nigeria into a prolonged war over the control of the area, all caused by colonial politics.

In July 1884 the Cameroon became German protectorate following the Germano-Douala Treaty, and in October, Germany notified the other European powers and the USA, in general terms, of the extent of this territory. On 23 July and 10 September 1884 the kings and chiefs of Old Calabar signed a treaty placing their territories under the protection of Great Britain. Other kings and chiefs of the region, including those of Bakassi, signed treaties acknowledging that their territories were subject to the authority of Old Calabar and consequently under British protection. The Berlin Conference of 1884/85 recognised the validity of the British claim to this area as the Oil Rivers Protectorate, which became part of the Niger Coast Protectorate in 1893, and the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria in 1900.¹ In 1906, Southern Nigeria, still including the Bakassi peninsula, came under the administration of the Colony of Lagos, but in November 1913 the Protectorates of Northern and Southern Nigeria were amalgamated into a single Nigerian Protectorate, though Lagos remained a separate colony. By then, however, the status of Bakassi was already in question. Since 1884,

it had been accepted that the boundary between British and German spheres of influence ran along the west bank of the Rio del Rey. Anglo-German Protocol signed on 11 March and 12 April 1913 in Obokun and the exchange letters between governments of both countries on 6 July 1914 redefined the maritime boundary as the Akpayafe River, placing the Rio del Rey and the entire Bakassi peninsula under German authority. But with the outbreak of First World War in August 1914 and its subsequent results, which included the defeat of Axis Powers by the Allied forces and the eventually conquering of the German colony of Cameroon by an Anglo-French force, the territory was divided between Britain and France in 1919 under mandates of the League of Nations. The Bakassi peninsula formed part of the British mandate, along with a broad strip of territory along the Cameroon-Nigeria border. For now, British Cameroons was administered as an integral part of Nigeria. For the next forty years the old boundary between Nigeria and Cameroon thus ceased to be a matter of any importance. In February 1961, the 1913 agreement again came to the fore when the UN conducted a plebiscite in the British Trust Territory of Southern Cameroons to decide their independence by either joining the independent Nigeria or reunifying with La Republique du Cameroun. The plebiscite included the people of the Bakassi peninsula, which Nigeria, rejecting the 1913 delimitation, claimed to have been an irregular procedure. Nonetheless, the majority of people decided to vote for this second option. It is perhaps important to note here that there existed 21 polling stations on the Bakassi peninsula itself, and 73 percent of the voters opted to "achieve independence by joining the independent Republic of Cameroon".

Donnalt Wet records that these nations, at first, did not pay attention to the Bakassi because of its remoteness, inhabited by a population considered inconsequential. However, when the oil and other natural resources and minerals were discovered in the peninsula, attention from both countries and also from colonial connections were ignited to create tension and/or argument over the control of the land, which in some cases resulted to numerous dead. Most scholars consider the escalation of the dispute only from the incidences of the 1980s, consequently by-passing one of the fundamental elements of the issue; the events from the 1960s, which significantly determined the trend and effect of the peace process. The prolonged conflict was finally settled by the decision of the International court of

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4 General Assembly resolution 1608 (XV) of 21 April 1961; In 1962, Tafale Baleya’s Nigerian’s government confirmed its approval of the results of the plebiscite in a Diplomatic Note No. 570 of March 27, 1962 to Cameroun, which included a map showing Bakassi in the newly reunified Cameroon. From then on, until the 1990s Nigeria would have no serious administrative or military presence in the peninsula. [Even the much-touted ‘Bakassi local government’ was only created in 1997; a full three years after the case at the ICJ had begun]. During the first republic, in addition to the Embassy in Yaoundé, however, Nigeria opened a consulate in Buea, capital of the Southern Cameroons –latter Western Cameroon. Presumably this was in recognition of the large number of Nigerians living in the region, even after the plebiscite.
Justice. Cameroon was given benefit of the territory and in 2008, Nigeria handed over the territory to Cameroon. This boundary crisis, like many in Africa was due to colonial legacy.

The African colonial territories, which have attained independence and national sovereignty, cannot in a strict sense be regarded as national states. They do not embrace a common past and a common culture; they are indeed the arbitrary creations of colonialism. The manner in which European states descended on Africa during the closing years of the nineteenth century in their scramble for territories was bound to leave a heritage of artificially controlled borders that now demarcate the emerging African states, and serve as a source of conflict among many African states. Reflecting on the emergence of new states in contemporary Africa, Davidson believes that their history begins anew. They reappear today in the sad evening of the world of nation-states. Yet their own tradition, he notes was seldom of narrow nationality. Their genius was for integration – integration by conquest as the times prescribed, but also by an ever partful mongling and migration. “They were never tolerant of exclusive frontiers.” 6 The nineteenth century imperialism cut across boundaries and peoples and left for Africa, the problems or redrawing frontiers on a rational plan.

East and Moody7 claim that all political boundaries are artificial because they are demarcated by human beings. The accidents of history, the vagaries of geography and the exigencies of economics have all played a part in determining even European boundaries. But the special circumstances operating in Africa makes its international boundaries doubly artificial in the sense that they are not, like most European boundaries, “the visible expression of age-long efforts of the indigenous people” to achieve political adjustment between themselves and the physical conditions in which they live.

In the successive phase of the European partitioning of the African continent, the lines demarcating spheres of interest were often haphazard, hasty and badly arranged. The Europeans agents and diplomats were primarily interested in grabbing as much as African territory as possible, and were not unduly concerned about the consequences of disrupting ethnic groups and undermining the indigenous political order. This generated great conflict between states such as those between Ethiopia and its neighbours in the Horn of Africa, between Nigeria and its neighbours in West and Central Africa, between the Democratic Republic of Congo and its neighbours in the Great Lakes region, and between Cameroon and Nigeria over the Bakassi Peninsular. For a long time after independence, border skirmishes and wars between African states were relatively rare, and governments more or less adhered to the sacrosanct nature of the boundaries inherited from colonial times as laid down in the 1963 Charter of the Organization of African Unity (OAU). However, both indigenous and foreign efforts have constantly been put in place in the face of these African disputes. This explains why authors have multiplied interest as regards colonialism and boundary, boundary activities and disputes among African states.

Rouke assesses at length the legacy of colonialism in Africa, pointing out that the industrialisation of the North was one of the factors that caused the colonisation of the South in the late 1800s and early 1900s. He shows that Africa was largely controlled by its indigenous peoples in the 1878 but had, by 1914 become almost totally subjected and divided into colonies by the European powers. The colonial boundaries had little relationship to the territories occupied by the various indigenous peoples, grouping nations together in some cases and dividing them in others. Within seventy years, virtually all of the colonies regained their independence, but many them have been troubled by the legacy of trying to get two or more states to live peacefully in a single state. The strength of this document is the fluency with which he transmits the general trend of European colonial imposed boundaries on Africa and their consequences.

Akanmode, Kolapo, Aghemelo and Ibhasebhor, and Sanusi on their part discuss the Bakassi Peninsular and the International Court of Justice. Akanmode’s descriptive geographical account of the Bakassi Peninsular puts the value of the population of the area to be mostly Nigeria. He presents the Peninsular as a paradox; a community that subsists in the midst of plenty of fish and oil deposit, but is ravaged by abject poverty. Briefly recounting the clash story between Cameroon and Nigeria of 1993 and the judgment of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) of 10 October 2002, he questions the verdict of the court and influence on the future of the inhabitants of the area.

In the same light, Kolapo, Aghemelo and Ibhasebhor give a critical analysis of the far-reaching implications of the ICJ ruling on the Nigerian state. Their emphases are on the security implications, the social structures, economic jeopardy of the Nigerian state among others and the pride of the people as a whole. Like these authors, Banansi says that the Judgment made little or no sense. His question is “How do you cede a people with different culture, language and background to another nation whose background differs completely?” He insists that the Bakassi people are Nigerians who cannot become Cameroonians overnight. He points out the need for the Nigerian government to appeal the World Court for a review of the judgment. Banansi’s writing is too sentiments with shallow knowledge about the genesis of the disputed boundary. In fact the issue of international boundaries has created a great deal of such conflict on the African continent. Evident enough are those of Chad-Libya, Namibia-Botswana, Burkina Faso-Mali, Western Sahara-Algeria-Morocco, Gabon-Equatorial Guinea, and Ethiopia-Eritrea and so on).

Nonetheless, it is important to note that there are inevitable conditions of fluidity along most of the African boundary zones where must indigenous population of the border lines by pass these colonial boundary legacies to incline to their ethnic ones; in order to satisfy their political, economic and socio-cultural needs. This transforms such boundaries

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into decorative imaginary line due enough to be respected only by their respective governments and not them, the subalterns of the border lines. It is in this light that the paper is written. It looks at the epistemology of boundary, both from the perception of the International, and indigenous African concepts, meanwhile examining how the people of the Cameroon-Nigeria border lines of Bakassi abrogates the former for the later, and at the same time looks at more complex situations on the border line, which of course challenges even the decisions of the International Court of Justice’s verdict on the disputed territory of the Bakassi peninsula.

Epistemology of boundary and its representation

In 1890, in his own words Lord Salisbury declared:

we have been engaged … in drawing up lines upon maps where no white man’s feet have ever trode: we have been giving away mountains and rivers and lakes to each other, but we have only been hindered by small impediments that we never knew exactly where those mountains, rivers and lakes were.\(^\text{12}\)

When he said these words, it was time at a time when territorial boundaries were being drawn across the world with little or no regard for natural or cultural boundaries. These boundaries were designed to reinforce and international system of absolute sovereignty of the state in which boundaries were derived from geo-military occupation of space as determined by consenting colonial powers. More than a century later many of these territorial boundaries remained as they were drawn despite the dramatic changes that have occurred to the international system and the significant challenges that have been made to the concept of sovereignty within precise boundaries. Yet these international boundaries and ideas that were behind them still form the foundation for the present international legal system.\(^\text{13}\)

The primary components of the international legal system are states, and territorial boundaries are a key element in how states are defined by that system. While the boundaries determined by the international legal system are often artificially created and contested, they exist by the operation of the international legal system, which usually seeks to reinforce these boundaries and the concept of territorial sovereignty inherent in them. From the perspective of this system, the purpose of territorial boundaries is to clarify which entities are states and to separate them from each other in order to structure that system. This is because at the basis of international law, lies the notion that a state occupies a definite part of the surface of the earth, within which it normally exercises jurisdiction over persons and things to the exclusion of the jurisdiction of other states. The direct connection between territorial boundaries was made in 1910 when the Permanent Court of Arbitration held that one of the essential elements of sovereignty is that it is to be exercised within territorial limits, and that, failing prove to the

\(^{12}\) Lord Salisbury, speaking in 1890, as quoted in the separate opinion of Judge Ajibola, in Territorial Dispute (Libya v. Chad) ICJ Report of 1994, 6, at 53.

contrary, the territory is co-terminous with sovereignty, consequently, ownership of territory is a concept used to determine sovereignty.

As was held in the Island of Palmas case:

Sovereignty in the relations between state signify independence. Independence in regards in a portion of the globe is the right to exercise therein, to the exclusion of any other state, the functions of a state. The development of the national organization of states during the last few centuries and, as a corollary, the development of international law, have established this principal of the exclusive competence of the state in regards to its own territory in such a way as to make it the point of departure in settling most questions that concern international relations.14

This point of departure was reinforced by the international legal order that emerged after the Second World War. This order was built on the inviolability of national territory as a function of its central concern for international peace. The core of this legal order is the prohibition on the “use of force” against the territorial integrity or political independence of a state, which protects both the spatial and the decisional aspects of sovereignty. A corollary is the prohibition against intervention in matters belonging to the domestic jurisdiction of states, though it pertains not to space but to autonomous decision-making. Both these principals have been recognized as fundamental purposes in the Charter of the United Nations as reaffirmed in the authoritative declaration of principles of international law, adopted by the UN General Assembly. That declaration included “the duty to reframe from the threats or use of force to violent the existing international boundaries of any state or as a means of solving territorial disputes and problems concerning frontiers of states,” while restating the duty of non-intervention. States are perceived in international law as being the representatives of the inhabitants of the territory within each state’s sovereignty, as in order to meet the definition of being a state, there must be a “permanent population”. Thus ethnicity, religion or moral practices become largely irrelevant as living space is determined by the state’s territorial boundary. As one intension of territorial boundaries is that they enhance “group cohesion by psychologically sharpening the deferent identification of community members from others across the boundary”, the state is meant to be the only relevant identity for the habitants of a territory. Related to this, international law has developed intricate rules regarding the nationality of people in terms of their relationship to states, as determined by the degree of connection people have to the territory of a state. By determining who its nationals are, states also determine who non-nationals are: who is the “other”. Others do not have the same rights and obligations with regard to that state. The consequence for most states that emerged from colonial administration was that the new (independent) governments sought to assert powerfully the states identity above all other identities. Many of these governments argue: against the maintenance of the traditional indigenous institutions which they consider to be dangerous and anachronistic and accused the tribalism, regionalism, and racism as being the better enemies of national-state building.15

14 McCorquodale and Pangalangan, “Pushing Back the Limitations of Territorial Boundaries,” 5.
15 McCorquodale and Pangalangan, “Pushing Back the Limitations of Territorial Boundaries,” 17.
This attempt of breaking down the influence of tribalism, regionalism and racism by the new states, was an inheritance of colonial influence, which was the separation and dissociation of these ethnic entities in the course of partitioning of the African continent for their convenience and interest. Asiwaju (1984) points out that a study of European archives supports an accidental rather than an intentional making of African boundaries. This meant that the European interests were of primary concern. The population of the frontier areas was envisaged, if at all, only as dim and inarticulate presences in the background. Therefore, in determining boundaries, the Europeans did not take African interests into consideration. An Anglo-French Commission of diplomatic and colonial experts was formed for the purpose of demarcating the boundaries, but the limits of its expertise soon became evident. As put by Lord Salisbury comments in drawing lines upon maps where no white man’s feet have ever trod, they gave away mountains and rivers and lakes to each other, only hindered by the small impediment that they never knew exactly where the mountains and rivers and lakes were.  

Although geographers were available to advise, Europeans’ knowledge of the physical, let alone the human, geography of Africa was still rudimentary. According to Asiwaju, a famous epigram defines geography as being about maps rather than chaps, but its value is always defined by “the knowledge of the chaps who draw the maps”. The notion and function of the term ‘boundary’ differed fundamentally in the European and African contexts. However strict the observation of these boundaries were to be, the reasoning of the inhabitants of the Cameroon-Nigerian border lines was not the same. Their geographical proximity caused the disrespect of the lines a familiar commodity.

 Fanso reinforces this idea African concept of boundary. He says the notion and function of the term “boundary” differed fundamentally in the European and African contexts. In traditional Africa, the concept of a political or ethnic boundary was expressed in terms of neighbours with whom the particular State or polity shared a territory and such a boundary was conceived of in terms of a region or a narrow zone fronting the two neighbours marked off by it. In this sense, the boundary was the zone where two States were united or joined together. In other words, African boundaries were usually rooted in ethnic and social contact. European states, however, conceived of boundaries as lines or points of separation. In the case of Cameroon, the Anglo-French partition of the former German colony in 1916 provided that inhabitants living in or near the border region had six months from the time that the border was delimited to express their intention to settle in a region placed under the jurisdiction of the other colonial power. A problem was thereby created. The Africans who had become frontiersmen had no immediate knowledge that their lands and kin divided by the boundary were now ‘foreign’. They did not know that the new boundaries functioned differently from the traditional ones with which they were familiar. They thought the former were only important to the white men who made them and were not immediately concerned about their existence until they were checked at crossing points. It was then that they began to feel the impact on their relations with their kin and neighbours and began to create new and secret.

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routes across the frontiers. Such an impact was directed reflected in the Nigeria-Cameroon border of Bakassi.

Peoples of the Bakassi Border Lines: Application of Indigenous Boundary Norms

In fact, however separated these nations seem to be, some scholars consider them as a common people. They are duly associated not by colonial effort but through ethnic affiliations. Rather, colonial state creation dishearteningly fragmented brethrens. But According to the inhabitants of the bakassi border lines of Cameroon and Nigeria, the presence of the international boundaries faded away fast in their minds even before it was established. International boundaries represent nothing to them but their ethnic boundaries. They insisted never to give it up for nothing else; since giving it up was tantamount to breaking up their ancestral connectivity. In the coast, around this area, according to Mbuagbaw and R. Brain, the case of the Mamfe depression constitutes part of this circumstance. Within the division of Manyu, besides the Banyang, their northern neighbours living on the ‘overside’ of the Cross River, generally referred to as Anyang and the Keyaka-Ekoi people (Obang, Ekwe and Keaka) constituted an ethnic connection with those distributed in neighbouring Nigeria. Fanso adds that the Ejagham, who straddle the Cameroon-Nigeria border, are located in the area extending from west of Nchang near Mamfe town to Ikom in Nigeria. They also extend from Agbokem on the Cross River to the Oban Hills and Calabar at the mouth of the Cross River. Kane highlights reflects the Kanem Bornu, and states that the “nearness and connectivity between these same peoples of Cameroon and Nigeria propelled them to consistently see themselves as brothers despite the international boundary influences. They depended on one another’s political, economic and social contacts”, and hence, introducing a high degree of permeability on the international recognized boundaries of Cameroon and Nigeria.

The permeability of the Cameroon–Nigeria border has been concern of Margaret Niger-Thomas, Kate Meagher and Molem, who investigated cross-border economic activities. According to them there has been an increase in the actual quantity of cross-border flows, as well as a deepening of the penetration of cross-border operations in to the heart of the national territories.” This implies that cross-border operations have undergone some structural reorganization. It also indicates that the socio-economic interactions of the respective indigenous populations are carried on with little regards for the colonial demarcation. Because the boundary is ill-defined and unimportant to them, the locals hardly confine their socio-economic activities to particular areas. Indigenes in both countries are able


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to evade gendarmes from Cameroon and police, customs and immigration officers from Nigeria given that they cooperate in their actions and are very familiar with the terrain. In fact, smuggling is no longer an issue for concern, but has become an accepted strategy for both survival and capital accumulation. Not only smugglers but other categories of people in both societies too benefit from this activity, including state officials themselves. In this part of Cameroon (the South West Province), which is closely aligned to Nigeria, it is clear that national borders are just political creations.

A case in point is the fuel transactions across the border line. The fuel is called *zuazua*, mostly effected by a group of youths; about 20 to 26. These youth have their customers in Cameroon to whom they bring the fuel. They boarded a large wooden canoe to cross the river (plate 1 shows youths preparing their canoes for the cross). The canoes powered manually by six men using 30-foot poles, are mainly used to ferry vehicles including the four-wheeled vehicles used for carrying of fuel across the river. On particular days, a four wheel-driven Steyr-Pouche mini jeep is also on board the wooden ferry. The vehicle carries 28 jerry-cans containing a total of 2,800 litres of petrol which is being carried over to Cameroon. The issue of border crossing paper checking is far from being an issue since the law enforcement officers are familiar with the activities and have become part of the deal. Sometimes at mid-stream, disaster stricks, caused in the main by waves. The canoe capsizes and the whole load tumbles into the river, several drums falling on the people and making them unconscious. Some often die before he could be rescued. Through this route more than 30 million litres of fuel worth more than N1.056 billion are smuggled out of Nigeria into Cameroun and other African countries yearly.²¹

Among the trade transaction going on unperturbed along the border lines, are the buying and selling of house hold utensils from Nigeria by Cameroonians. On Mondays and Wednesdays, the market of Bakassi takes place. Here, both traders from Nigeria and Cameroon display their trade items. During the buying and selling, both the CFA franc and the Nira are used and accepted as legal tender without problem. There is often no need to exchange one currency to another. Among the items sold are, clothes, aqua-products, jewelries, household utensils and appliances, shoes and food stuff and handicraft of the area. Essential items also include salt, kerosene, matches, bush lamps, soaps and so on. Some local craftsmen, like tailors, blacksmiths, weavers, dyers and tattooers not only offered their crafts, but also performed paid services on the markets days. In fact, such days are not only meant for commercial activities, but a forum for people to meet with friends and discuss and share intimate information.

Plate 1. Youths preparing canoes for the transportation of fuel

It was very common for people to cross the borders to meet with friends and to share a drink, befriend girls, help in marriage ceremonies and other cultural rituals of their kith and kins. There existed annual festival, the zuing, that both peoples organize and danced together. This is performed with preparing for the next fishing season, as an appeasement strategy of the gods of the waters to give them good catch (plate 2 shows the zuing priests from both sides in action). Death ceremonies of both peoples across the border are jointly attended by them. Elango\textsuperscript{22} affirms this when he says that such a dance, like the jengu among the Isuwu (Bimbia) and the Douala groups is a magico-religious institution which organised rituals dances, sacrifices and gift to the water spirits, and is associated with the good fishing and all kinds of luck including fecundity. Its initiation rites “often lasted several days and involved great feasting and dancing.” This ceremony served as a vital link between the border line people. It directly or indirectly strengthened the cultural contact between the two groups. It also strengthened the basis of commercial cooperation which of course served to cement their political solidarity. In fact, such activities talk much of themselves as people move from one side of the border to the next with ample ease, not even noticing the presence of an international established frontier.

Fanso\textsuperscript{23} says that in the traditional setting, local markets were important not only as a place of buying and selling, but also as a meeting-place for relatives, friends and traditional authorities. The people go to there most importantly to “hear news”, “see” some relatives, dispatch a gift, meet a lover or in-law, pay a debt, settle a dispute, or pay respect to elders. Some people organise and hold their periodic thrift or mutual aid associations. In fact, traditional announcement of their chiefs or local council were also made on the market day. He posits further that, indeed, these border-line markets functions for the ethnic folk as a social club where dancing, drinking and all forms of entertainment and attractions take place. The border in the light of the international perceptive becomes inexistent. In fact, the


Ardeners say that from birth to death, a person can grow and stay here without noticing the differences between being a Cameroonian and Nigerian. The word migration is not known to the people. They considered themselves as one, thus movement across the border lines is not considered crossing the border by the people, but circulation within common ethnic spaces.  

This concept of human movement has been taken advantage of by many as a means of gaining employment in Cameroon. Nigerians have greatly increased the labour force of the Cameroon plantations. The territory’s economy involved the large number of workers the plantation drew form within the Cameroons as well as Nigeria. There is a growing migration of eastern Nigerians, particularly the Igbo, to the ‘greener pastures’ in Cameroon. Migration became instrumental in escaping from widespread land scarcity in their densely populated areas and in providing the necessary manpower and trading circuits in the underdeveloped south West region of Cameroons. Migrants started working in the various agro-industrial enterprises in the Southern Cameroons, notably the now Cameroon Development Corporation (CDC) and Pamol, both of which had inherited the former German plantations in the area. In the 1950s Nigerians, especially Igbo, comprised roughly 25–30 percent of the CDC labour force and 80 percent of the Pamol workforce. Many of these workers settled in the Southern Cameroons. They acquired land for food farming and cash cropping, originally on a usufruct basis, by providing village elders with a token payment. Although the transfer of land was not intended to be permanent, Nigerians were able, with the increase in the value of land and the formalization of land tenure, to secure titles and set themselves up as landlords. A growing number of them used their earnings from plantation labour to launch small-scale trading enterprises, selling food and durable goods in the vicinity of the plantations. Gradually, Igbo have come to dominate the market trade in local foodstuffs and imported goods, as well as the transport industry and the retail and wholesale distribution of palm oil in an area centred on Kumba, Tiko and Victoria (Limbe). In these towns, large numbers of Nigerians have entered the restaurant business or became involved in photography, baking, tailoring, shoemaking, bicycle repairs and a variety of other small enterprises. In the Kumba area, they are the principal buyers of cocoa.

This feeling of one people and the desire to protect it has been made manifest by the idea of breaking from the ICJ’s decision of giving Cameroon the Peninsular. The people desire to break from Nigeria and Cameroon to form their own nation. This, they made the voices heard by terrorist attitude, pirates on the sea and hostage taking. After several border clashes with Nigeria over Bakassi and a northern region near Lake Chad, Cameroon took the

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issue to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in 1994 as earlier highlighted. With special reference to the Anglo-German Treaty of 1913 and colonial era diplomatic correspondence between the two imperial powers, the ICJ ruled in favor of Cameroon in 2002, ordering Nigeria to transfer sovereignty over Bakassi to Cameroon, but without requiring any of the Nigerian residents in Bakassi to leave or change their citizenship. The details of the transfer of sovereignty were worked out in the Green Tree Agreement, which was assembled with the additional participation of the United States, Great Britain, France and Equatorial Guinea. Popular and political opposition to the decision within Nigeria delayed the transfer of sovereignty, though the government neither ratified nor rejected the court’s verdict. In Bakassi itself, there was wide dissatisfaction with the decision, especially in the English-speaking Nigerian majority. As popular opinion on the Bakassi border lines hold:

The United Nations should realize that we have the right to decide where we want to be and the right to self-determination. We are Nigerians and here in our ancestral home. You can see some of the graves here dating back to the 19th century. How can you force a strange culture and government on us? We appreciate what the Nigerian government is doing but let it be on record that they have betrayed us and we will fight for our survival and self-determination. We expected that the government as well as the ICJ could have come to the people and called for a referendum so that the people would decide what they wanted for themselves. But we don’t really know why it had to be done that way. If they do not then we and our brothers on the other side will decide to take things into our hands, and have our voices heard no matter what it takes until our desire is attend.28

Taking things into their hands and having their voice had no matter what it takes was inclining to pirate actions; and taking control of what they called their own political future.

In July 2006 the Bakassi Movement for Self-Determination (BMSD) joined with the Southern Cameroons Peoples Organization (SCAPO) and the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) to declare the establishment of the Democratic Republic of Bakassi, an unsuccessful attempt to found a new nation in the small peninsula that brought out few supporters. After the Nigerian Senate ruled the transfer of sovereignty was illegal in 2007, the three groups again declared the independence of Bakassi in July 2008, this time with BMSD declaring it would subsume all its activities under the “joint leadership” of MEND. The secessionist SCAPO movement had a different plan including Bakassi with the Southern Cameroons in a secessionist “Republic of Ambazonia.”

The pirates called themselves Africa Marine Commando (AMC). They claimed responsibility for the abduction of six sailors from a Belgian ship anchored 40 km off Douala. An AMC spokesman said the hostages were moved to a camp on Nigerian territory and demanded the release of ten Ijaw fighters in a Cameroonian prison and the immediate opening

28 Terrorism Monitor: Indepth Analysis of the War on Terror, 8 no. 43 (2010)
of direct talks with Cameroon president Paul Biya. The immediate opening of talks with the president was to discuss practical steps of giving up Bakassi Peninsular for the new nation to formed. The AMC, which appears to be a faction of the larger Bakassi Freedom Fighters (BFF) movement, also kidnapped seven Chinese fishermen in Cameroonian coastal waters who were later freed in exchange for an undisclosed ransom. These gunmen in light boats attacked two cargo ships in Douala harbor, kidnapping two Russian crewmen from one ship and looting the safe and abducting the captain of the second ship, a Lithuanian refrigerated vessel. The security of Douala’s port is a major regional concern as Douala acts as the commercial lifeline for the land-locked Central African Republic and Chad, another major petroleum producer which runs its oil through the Chad-Cameroon pipeline to the Cameroon port of Kribi.

Although the Cameroon government refused to acknowledge the political dimension of the violence in Bakassi by declining to identify the insurgents as anything other than “armed bandits,” the decision to hold 14 August 2009, ceremony marking the transfer of authority in the Nigerian city of Calabar rather than in Bakassi was interpreted as an acknowledgement that Bakassi was far from secure. In respond, the Cameroon’s Bataillon d’Intervention Rapide (BIR). The BIR commandos were sent to the coast in 2007 to assist the Delta Command in dealing with a rapidly deteriorating security situation.

Conclusion

This article attempted to see how the epistemological concept of boundary differed fundamentally from the European and African applications. Even though both operate within the confines of the acceptable system of International law, with the former intuit by colonial heritage, confining inhabitants of a particular territory to the mandate of state control and ownership, the traditional African concept of boundary prevails and is applied most often than not, especially on the Bakassi frontier line of Cameroon and Nigeria. Here, the socio-

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29 Le Jour, September 29,
30 Radio France Internationale, March 13,
32 The BIR was formed in 1999 as the Bataillon Léger d’Intervention (BLI), a special intervention force designed to eliminate foreign rebels, bandits and deserters (the “couteurs de routes”) who were destroying the security of Cameroon’s northern provinces through cattle rustling, abductions, murder and highway robbery. As part of military reforms carried out in Cameroon in 2001, the unit took on its current BIR designation. BIR officers are selected from the graduates of the Ecole Militaire Interarmées in Yaoundé.
33 The Sun, 13, 29 October 2008.
34 IRIN, 13 November 2007.
economic and cultural mores by pass and/or abrogate these international notions and functions of boundary to incline to their ethnic jurisdiction. The international border faded in their minds. Their activities have been a serious challenge to the decisions the Nigerian and Cameroonian states as well as the International Court of Justice, especially as regard the decision of handing the disputed Bakassi Peninsular to Cameroon. The inhabitants or the subalterns of the border lines prefer to create their own nation in respect to their ethnic functions, and so do all at their capacity to have their voices heard, which include terrorist and pirate actions. But due to the efforts of both the Cameroon and Nigerian governments, these violent actions have been checked. But the spirit of unity that hovers around the border lines has not been checked yet. It will be in this light that great sanitization and education of the local population can be done to that effect. Also, the Cameroon government needs to make its presence felt there by not only deploying soldiers, but implanting realistic political, socio-economic and cultural institutions. It is only then that the people would gradually feel integrated into the statehood confines according to the international expectations. It would be helpful for African nations which share a common ethnic border composition to create states confederacy for a better comprehensive frontier space, as well as manifest a political will to partake in the effective implementation of the four-point African Union border zone programme.
References


-General Assembly resolution 1608 (XV) of 21 April 1961.


- Le Jour, September 29.


- Lord Salisbury, speaking in 1890, as quoted in the separate opinion of Judge Ajibola, in Territorial Dispute (Libya v. Chad) ICJ Report of 1994, 6, at 53.


