Borders as Bridges, not Barriers

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Borders in Africa: An Anthology of the Policy History

by Anthony I. Asiwaju, ed.

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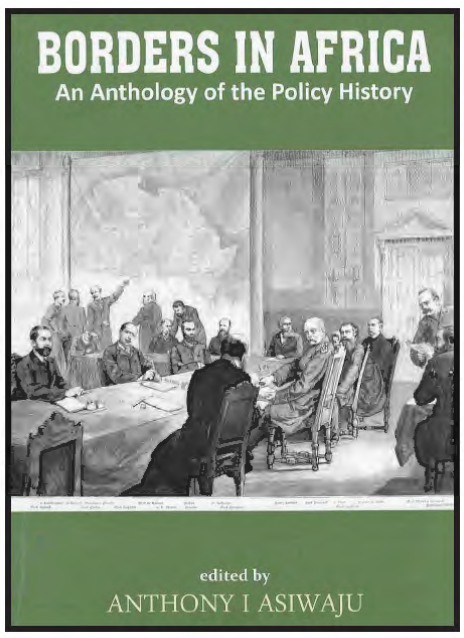
In the year 1960 alone, a total of 17 African countries gained flag independence, followed in quick succession by many others in the following years, invariably validating the euphoria that the 1960s was the decade of independence for Africa. With a plethora of former colonial possessions of European countries gaining independence, there was palpable anxiety, if not outright expectation, that the new African nation-states would explode, combust and convulse violently in an orgy of inter-state bloodbath on a continental scale. It was apparent that the territorial states that colonial adventure had created and bequeathed to Africans were anything but durable,[1] and the boundaries that separated or 'sliced' (apologies to Nobel Laureate, Professor Wole Soyinka) them into new nation-states were not only artificial and arbitrary but had scant regard for ethnographic realities on the ground, often splitting or sundering the same peoples between several territorial states and corralling diverse and hitherto un-integrated ethnic nations into the same compact. Hence what Professor Anthony Asiwaju has famously referred to as 'partitioned Africans.'[2]

True, these borders between the new nation-states have been a source of considerable bother, and their artificiality readily created the impression that Africa was inexorably bound for catastrophic implosion after independence. The apprehension may perhaps be understandable if one looks at the case of the Yoruba nation that is today partitioned between Anglophone Nigeria and Francophone Benin Republic, and also the Hausa-Fulani that is similarly partitioned between Anglophone Nigeria and Francophone Niger Republic. Across the vast continent, colonialists cynically partitioned ethnic nations and incorporated them into new different territorial entities which have now become sovereign nation-states, thus raising the spectre of post-colonial irredentist and secessionist convulsions. Mercifully for Africans, this much anticipated catastrophe did not happen as expected. What happened instead was the exact opposite. Rather than the much anticipated violent inter-state conflicts that artificial borders were expected to engender after the departure of the respective colonial authorities, it was instead the fragile new nation-states themselves that began to experience internal convulsions and centrifugal and often violent political upheavals arising from the inherent structural defects deeply embedded in their colonial provenance. Many newly independent nation-states began witnessing the inexorable descent into autocratic rule, one-party dictatorship and military coups within the first half decade of their sovereign existence.

The much expected catastrophic explosion of inter-state wars never happened. And the credit for this must go to the wisdom and sound judgement displayed by the immediate post-colonial African leaders who, at the formation of the Organization of African Unity in May 1963, and again at its Cairo summit conference a year later in 1964, decided to retain the colonially determined borders as bequeathed to each country. Though they were thoroughly flagellated for their decision to adhere to the subsisting international law principle of non-interference in the domestic affairs of independent states and retention of inherited artificial borders, which invariably guaranteed survival of authoritarian regimes, it was without question this decision that ultimately saved the continent from the violence and horrors that would have ensued after independence. With the exception of a few instances of irredentist claims (Ghana/Togo over the Ewe-speaking people in both countries, and the conflict over the Ogaden region of Ethiopia populated by Somali-speaking people), struggles for independence (Eritrea from Ethiopia and South Sudan from the Republic of Sudan) and minor border skirmishes between independent states, the international boundaries in Africa have substantially ossified, stabilized and remained sacrosanct for more than five decades.



But whilst inter-state or international boundaries have remained frozen and permanent over time, they have not ceased to bother Africans. Boundaries, frontiers, borders and borderlands have remained critical not only to the state-building and nation-building projects but generally also to inter-state relations across the continent and, in some instances, have been the harbingers of insecurity in cases of trans-border violence, banditry and criminality. In the post-Cold War era, globalization notwithstanding, the problems and discomforts associated with borders between independent African states have remained largely unresolved. The widening spate of transnational jihadist terrorism and insurgency across Africa such as the Boko Haram, Al-Shabaab and Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb are poignant reminders of the importance attached to borders. As far as these jihadists and terrorists are concerned, artificial borders and territorial demarcations are irrelevant and constitute no hindrance at all to their violent enterprise. Vast swaths of the Sahel-Sahara regions of West Africa remain substantially outside the control of the respective national governments, making it available and suitable for the terrorist enterprise. In general, the challenges of state-building and nation-building, incidences of territorial disputes and conflicts, the problematic of peace-building, cross-border cooperation and overall regional integration in Africa, cannot be fully comprehended except in relation to boundaries and border issues which the volume under review so brilliantly explicates. Herein lies the importance of this anthology on borders and border policy in Africa.

Edited by Anthony Asiwaju, Professor Emeritus of History at the University of Lagos and indisputably Africa's pioneering and foremost authority on border studies, this 678-page and 35-chapter book is without question a magisterial compendium on border studies (history, politics and policy). It is an eclectic assemblage of the finest essays on the subject, written by some of the best known scholars, making it an authoritative one-stop shop that offers a full inventory of all there is need to know about borders and border policy in Africa. In short, it is encyclopedic, an intellectual t*our de force*. What perhaps sets the volume apart as a must read for all scholars and policy makers on borders and borderlands issues is the diversity of the authors' disciplinary orientations. Their analyses exemplifies multi-disciplinarity and inter-disciplinarity, cutting across the diverse disciplines of political science, history, economics, geography, anthropology and even international law, in order to provide critical elucidation for the myriad issues encompassed in border studies, such as differentiating between and making intelligible such related concepts as boundaries, borders, frontiers, border or frontier communities, trans-border or trans-frontier regions and communities. It is worth stressing, however, that it is not an edited book that intends merely to parade the best possible minds in the field; it is, rather, a history of African border policy, set in comparative context, globally and in reference to Africa's own longer and richer past. Thus, what I have referred to as 'chapters' are the scholarly papers researched, compiled and arranged to tell the story sketched in the Introduction. Professor Anthony Asiwaju's own essays therein merely evidence the dominant role in the contemporary period of the story of African border policy-making, the shift from borders as 'barriers' into becoming 'bridges'.

But I must confess that an attempt to review this encyclopedic volume, no matter how brave the effort, cannot be an easy endeavour. For starters, Professor Anthony Asiwaju, the editor and major contributor to the book, has decided not to make review an easy task for anyone. His 42-page introduction to the volume titled 'Borders in African Policy History' is expansive, authoritative and breath-taking; it so brilliantly and eloquently elucidates the myriad issues interrogated by each of the authors, grouping them together in relevant sections and providing a comprehensive and holistic appreciation. No better review can be undertaken by anyone other than that already done by this acknowledged master of the field himself. This brief intervention is thus not a review, at least not in the orthodox sense of highlighting or summarizing the basic arguments of each chapter or writer, but rather an overview of the importance of borders, border issues and border policies to our understanding of contemporary African politics, economy, state-building and nation-building, African unity and integration, security challenges and overall development. At the very root of Africa's daunting problems are the colonial origins of the nation-states and the boundaries that both define and separate them.[3]

The arguments for and against retention or restructuring of African boundaries are neither new nor are they likely to dissipate or be dispensed with any time soon. Having survived in their vibrancy, relevance and currency since the first Conference of Independent African States was held in Accra in 1958, the arguments, debates and discourses on African borders remain inconclusive, as each side will always be able to marshal convincing intellectual as well as policy-relevant arguments. President Kwame Nkrumah's seminal contribution on why African borders would need to be erased to make room for overall continental integration and development remains unassailable in its logic, persuasiveness and relevance.[4] Perhaps the main drawback was its practical non-feasibility within the context and existential realities in Africa in the early 1960s when the newly independent countries were not only savouring their new sovereign status, but also had huge logistical and practical issues that had yet to be suitably addressed before continental integration could take place. The Nigerian Prime Minister, Alhaji Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, gave vent to this view. After carefully surveying the African political scene (taking into account its history, politics, economics, cultures, infrastructure, etc) he wisely concluded that political integration in the early years of independence was fraught with acute uncertainties. While not totally dismissing its future possibility, he posited that 'for the present it is unrealistic to expect countries to give up the sovereignty which they have so recently acquired and I am quite sure that it is wrong to imagine that political union could itself bring the countries together; on the contrary, it will follow as the natural consequence of cooperation in other fields.'[5] This, according to him, would come about after due process of consultations to address the inherent difficulties and smoothen out the rough edges.

Sir Abubakar had pushed the ideological and pragmatic arguments against immediate political union which would have erased the existing borders of independent African states much more prominently and persuasively by carefully identifying and highlighting the subsisting obstacles that needed to be surmounted before the envisaged continental integration could be realized.

For example, in a broadcast to the nation on his return from the May 1961 Monrovia Conference of African and Malagasy Heads of State, Sir Abubakar told his fellow Nigerians that:

> Apart from this problem of language, there is at present in Africa great difficulty in communicating with countries which were in a different group before their independence. For instance, I can speak on the telephone with the Nigerian High Commissioner in London, or to the Nigerian Representative at the United Nations in New York, but I cannot speak by telephone to my friend, Sylvanus Olympio, although he lives only about 100 miles away in Lome. This is the sort of thing which hinders economic cooperation and expansion. It is the same with other forms of communication, with road and rail systems, and to a lesser extent, the air transport and shipping. If we are to make international cooperation a reality we must study how to overcome all the obstacles which exist at the present.[6]

For Nigeria, improvement of these 'inter-territorial communications and transport facilities' for economic cooperation and development was a *sine qua non* for political integration.

In my view, retaining the boundaries of the existing 54 territorial states, while working out the inherent practical and logistical obstacles for moving inexorably towards eventual continental integration, remains the most sensible option under the present circumstances. Let us not also forget that all previous attempts at forcible redrawing of borders have only led to bloody outcomes. Perhaps the most prominent case is that of the Ogaden region which Somalia wanted to forcibly appropriate in the late 1970s and which provoked one of the bloodiest wars in the Horn of Africa between Somalia and Ethiopia and invited considerable outside intervention. To date, Morocco has not totally succeeded in its claim to ownership of the Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic (formerly Western Sahara) which it claims was historically part of Greater Morocco. Eritrea, a territory that was federated with Ethiopia after the Second World War by UN Resolution but against the wishes of some of its own people, and later forcibly annexed by Ethiopia in 1962, had to fight decades of bloody war of independence which it finally won in 1991, underscoring the futility of forcible territorial restructuring. Outside of Africa, especially in Europe, where territorial states are much older, primordial sentiments nonetheless still bobble to the surface. Take the case of the Basques in Spain, Irish and Scottish nationalisms in the United Kingdom, the unraveling of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, the breakup of Czechoslovakia. Even in the more relatively younger North America, the French Canadians would prefer to have their own separate mono-lingual country.

Africa has thus far successfully managed intra-continental relations because there have been only few attempts to forcibly redraw inherited national borders. Even the dispute between Nigeria and Cameroon over ownership of the Bakassi Peninsula was peacefully resolved in Cameroon's favour after a World Court ruling and the conclusion of the Green Tree Agreement for the peaceful implementation of the Court's judgement. If anything, Bakassi was a territorial matter that the concerned states had inherited from colonial rule but had to be peacefully resolved five decades after the independence of both disputing states.

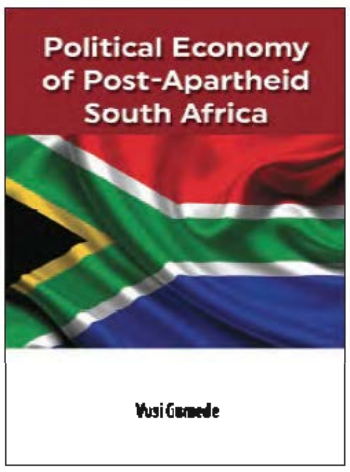
Peaceful restructuring of the continent into radically new 'federations' or 'super-states' along the lines suggested by the likes of Wole Soyinka, Wakau wa Mutua, Jeffrey Herbst, etc,[7] is also not feasible. In any case, it is not clear what criteria would be employed to determine the suggested new international borders. Not only have borders ossified and stabilized over decades but even the respective 'partitioned' peoples have themselves also comfortably settled into the different nation-states under different governance structures that may be difficult to break. For example, the Yoruba in Francophone Benin Republic acknowledge and cling to their primordial Yoruba identity but yet do not feel any need to identify with Nigeria, and it would be difficult to make them shake off the Beninois and Francophone identities they have comfortably settled into for over a hundred years. It is hard to see the feasibility of such radical but yet peaceful redrawing of the map of Africa as suggested by these eminent scholars and thinkers.

What is emerging, though, and which should be encouraged, is the gradual de-emphasis on borders as a limiting factor to collective action. Borders, as the book contends, should be bridges, not obstacles. West Africa, for example, has set the pace in trans-border cooperation, not necessarily because international borders no longer exist but because free and easier international movement of peoples, goods and services across them has been made possible by the adoption of the ECOWAS Protocol on Free Movement of Persons, Residence and Establishment (1979). If this practice is adopted and implemented by other sub-regions on the continent, Africa would make considerable progress towards the eventual disappearance of national boundaries.

The importance of this collection of essays inheres, as Professor Asiwaju himself makes clear in his introductory chapter, in the fact that 'the strictly territorial dimension of our history is characterized by an observable dearth of usable research material.'[8] This anthology substantially and brilliantly bridges that observable gap in the literature, and is therefore a must read for scholars and policy makers interested in understanding and addressing 'the policy issues … relating to borders and territorial disputes and conflicts, peace building, cross-border cooperation and regional integration, state and human security, and governance' a – in essence, all the contemporary challenges facing the Africa continent.

Notes

1. See among others, James O'Connell, 1967, 'The Inevitability of Instability, *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 5, 2, pp. 181-19; Dani Wadada Nabudere, 2001, 'African Unity in Historical Perspective,' in Eddy Maloka, ed., *A United States of Africa?*, Pretoria: Africa Institute of South Africa, pp. 9-28; Basil Davidson, 1992, T*he Black Man's Burden: Africa and the Curse of the Nation-State*, New York: Times Books.
2. A. I. Asiwaju, ed., 1985, *Partitioned Africans: Ethnic Relations Across Africa's International Boundaries*, 1884-1984, London: Hurst.
3. See Kwame Nkrumah, 1963, *Africa Must Unite*, Panaf Books Ltd.; also Davidson, Nabudere, op.cit.
4. Nkrumah, *Africa MustUnite*, ibid.
5. Speech delivered at the General Assembly of the United Nations in New York on the occasion of the admission of Nigeria as the 99th Member of the UN, October 7, 1961. See *Mr. Prime Minister, A Selection of Speeches made by Alhaji the Right Honourable Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa*, 1964, Lagos: National Press Ltd., p. 55.
6. 'Broadcast to the Nation on the Monrovia Conference of African and Malagasy Heads of State, May 13, 1961', *Mr. Prime Minister*, p. 90
7. See pp. 21- 24 of the book under review.
8. Asiwaju, Introduction, p. 1.
9. Asiwaju, Introduction, p. 18.



Political Economy of Post-apartheid South Africa

Vusi Gumede

The book, made up of three parts, covers a wide spectrum of political economy issues on post-apartheid South Africa. Although the text is mainly descriptive, to explain various areas of the political economy of post-apartheid South Africa; the first and the last parts provide illuminating insights on the kind of society that is emerging during the twentyone years of democracy in the country. The book discusses important aspects of the political history of apartheid South Africa and the evolution of post-apartheid society, including an important recap of the history of southern Africa before colonialism. The text is a comprehensive description of numerous political economy phenomena since South Africa gained its political independence and covers some important themes that have not been discussed in detail in other publications on post-apartheid South Africa. The book also updates earlier work of the author on policy and law making, land and agriculture, education and training as well as on poverty and inequality in post-apartheid South Africa thereby providing a wide-ranging overview of the socio-economic development approaches followed by the successive post-apartheid administrations. Interestingly, three chapters focus on various aspects of the postapartheid South African economy: economic policies, economic empowerment and industrial development. Through the lens of the notion of democratic developmental state and taking apartheid colonialism as a point of departure, the book suggests that, so far, post-apartheid South Africa has mixed socio-economic progress. The author's extensive experience in the South African government ensures that the book has policy relevance while it is also theoretically sound. The text is useful for anyone who wants to understand the totality of the policies and legislation as well as the political economy interventions pursued since 1994 by the South African Government.

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