

# Historical Perspectives in the Nigeria Cameroon Border Conflicts (1913 – 2002): Implications on Peace in Africa

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## Abstract

Of all Nigeria's borderlands, the one with Cameroon has remained the most conflictual. Beginning with border transgressions in 1913, the conflict increased both in scope and intensity over the century attracting international attention at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This paper interrogates the causes of this age long conflict. The methodology adopted is the multidisciplinary approach. The findings of the paper are that the twin concepts of hegemony and national interest have continually played out and accentuated the conflict. It also points out that hegemonic tendencies and interest of imperial powers have fuelled the conflicts. It suggests a more realistic people centered border policy and a revisit to the principle of sacred colonial borders (*Utti Posiditis Juris*) as a major panacea to this quagmire.

## Introduction

The long standing Nigeria Cameroon border conflict exhibits some unique attributes i.e. its longevity and persistence. Beginning with mere border transgressions almost a century ago, it accentuated into killings and blossomed into a conflictual oak that attracted international attention and politics. There is popular view that of Nigeria's Five borderlands – Cameroon, Chad, Niger, Benin and Maritime borders with Equatorial Guinea, the borderland with Cameroon has remained the most intractable and conflictual.<sup>1</sup> A highlight of the skirmishes is as shown below; The first trans border transgression was recorded in 1913<sup>2</sup>. A German customs officer in uniform in company of four native officers came from Gargai in Kamerun<sup>3</sup> to Lisam in Nigeria territory and made away with three young virgins, one woman with a child, two boys, three Hausa rubber traders, five zumper men, four black gowns, three hoes, thirteen spears, three machetes and six pieces of cover cloth with local drink. The then Deputy Governor of the Northern region F.D Lugard reported this to the colonial office in London. In a swift response, the colonial secretary; Right Honourable Lewis Harcourt ordered the Deputy Governor to “ensure not only the immediate return of the kidnapped persons and their property but also some reparation and apology with safeguard that so unfriendly an act shall not occur again.”<sup>4</sup> The Germans swiftly complied and a total of Seventy - one pounds was paid to the Northern Nigerian Government at Zungeru as compensation done in Muri province by German soldiers.<sup>5</sup> Similar border skirmishes kept occurring till 1946 when a British order in council finalized the border demarcation<sup>6</sup>, northern section of the borderland with an easier terrain of less thick forests, less or no swamps and inhibitive creeks like the southern section.

However, the Southern part of the border with a much more difficult terrain (thick forests, series of creeks, highly wet swamps) was not so easily demarcated. In the days of colonialism, the Bakassi Peninsula was dismissed by Lord Salisbury as a dismal swamp.<sup>7</sup> This was essentially because the hidden aquatic treasure as well as the rich mineral deposits of the region were not yet discovered. As such the region was less prone to conflict at to the magnitude it manifested after the discovery of these riches in the region. At that time, the argument on where to draw the border line was only for identification, territorial demarcation and administrative convenience. Given the terrain and its ‘worth’ at that time, border demarcation in this part was not really an issue and skirmishes were much less. Then, came the United Nations plebiscite of 1961.

The plebiscite was organized by the British government through United Nations to provide a leeway for the two British Cameroons (North and South) to decide which of the two countries they would wish choose to either join to attain independence. In protest against the outcome of the plebiscite where the Northern British Cameroons voted to join Nigeria, Cameroon took Nigeria to The Hague for the first time.<sup>8</sup> The results of the plebiscite were however upheld by The Hague, much to the chagrin of Cameroon who as a result rejected the jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice. Prior to this however, this borderland was replete with some forms of disquiet, all of which were either ignored or settled locally between the two colonising powers.

Earlier in 1961, Nigeria did not bother much about the population that occupied the Peninsula and while the people in the region voted to join Cameroon, Nigeria hardly made any effort to woo them back into Nigeria.<sup>9</sup> The Bakassians themselves voted voluntarily to attain independence by joining the republic of Cameroon. The entire boundary region in this area has therefore, been treated with negligence and levity by both governments. Thus, the area has been characterized by squalor, neglect and abject poverty. The attention of Nigeria turned to the borderland, particularly the Bakassi peninsula when in 1967, Isaac Adaka Boro, a Biafran secessionist tried

to make use of the Peninsula as an access route to the sea to launch his offensive on Nigeria. Primary sources available indicate that Cameroon started establishing her presence in the region in the area in the post civil war years by renaming some villages, enforcing tax collection and resident charges on citizens of the area.<sup>10</sup>

The conflicts however, accentuated after the civil war. The first casualty was recorded in 1971. An Efik man was shot in the stomach by Cameroonian security operatives and killed at the spot<sup>11</sup>. In 1972, property worth 30,000 pounds was confiscated by Cameroonians citing trespass by Nigerian fishermen.<sup>12</sup> In 1981, five Nigerian soldiers on routine patrol were shot and killed by Cameroon gendarmes. Such other cases continued till 1994, when Cameroon took Nigeria to The Hague demanding that she be awarded Bakassi peninsula. She later added that the entire boundary be defined by the court. The case was finally decided by the court on 10<sup>th</sup> August, 2002 in favour of Cameroon.

This paper examines how the twin concepts of hegemony and the pursuit of national interest have played out in the course of the conflict with emphasis on the post colonial period. The paper highlights the causes of the conflict, examines the facts of pursuit of national interest as well as hegemony and concludes with some suggestions.

### **Highlight of Causes of the Conflict**

The century old Nigeria Cameroon border conflict is the product of a number of contradictions. On the lead, the pre-colonial history of the ancient borderland political groups; e.g. the kingdom of Calabar is haunting the post-colonial reality of contemporary Nigeria and Cameroun, exhibiting a clash between tradition and modernity. Also the map is in conflict with the people a situation which leads to tension between cartographical fact and cultural reality. Another contradiction is the conflict between the dictates of abstruse international law and the existential imperatives of struggling humanity. Lastly, there is dichotomy between the needs and concerns of citizens and the demands of the state (*raison d'etat*).

The most outstanding causative agent of the conflict has been the legacy of imperialist colonial rule. The imperialist capitalist and the colonial masters (France and Britain) and their shrewd and selfish economic, political and strategic calculations of the 19th century acted as nursery for the conflicts. The ground work for such future conflicts in the region were laid through the divide and rule system of administration and the partitioning of the borders and its people irrespective of the damage it caused to the peoples language, socio-political life and cultural affiliations and ancestral lineage. This selfish behaviour divided ethnics groups into territories controlled by the colonial lords and then stifled the reign of peace in the region as divided families opposed the system and fought for the unity of their families and friends across the borders. This selfish, mean and sneaky behaviour ignited many African conflicts as evidenced in the Nigeria Cameroon border conflicts, particularly the southern portion, and the Bakassi peninsula<sup>13</sup>

It is a paradox to realize that the United Nations decision to end colonialism and grant autonomy to African states which was meant to be source of empowerment turned out to be a curse instead. When news went out from the UN that African States be granted their independence, the colonial masters embarked on a hurried exit leaving behind a litany of problems including these problematic borders. This option was taken because the colonial masters did not really want to provide a framework through which Africans could truly be free from colonial exploitation. The Portuguese hanged on in Angola till the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when they were forced to leave. This explains why even as they left they insisted on having defence pacts with their erstwhile colonies, a subtle way of re-colonisation. The reality then was not only chaos throughout the African territory but an outburst of civil wars and tribal conflicts as a result of boundary issues exemplified by the Nigeria Cameroon border conflict. The manner, in which the colonial masters invaded the African continent during the concluding years of the nineteenth century in their scramble for territories, was bound to leave a legacy of unnaturally controlled borderlines, which now define the emergent African states. Unfortunately however, it is the faulty instruments left by these colonialist that are relied upon especially by international community. The 1913 Anglo-German agreement relied upon by the International Court of Justice in the Nigeria Cameroon case is a classical example.

Another important cause of conflict between Cameroon and Nigeria was the discovery of natural crude oil in parts of the borderlands. Prior to oil adventure, the Bakassi region was considered a 'worthless swamp'.<sup>14</sup> Notwithstanding, when oil and other natural resources were discovered in the peninsula, attention from both countries and also from their colonial connections was ignited thus creating tension, argument and in some cases death. Also colonial activity along the Cameroon Nigeria border caused more harm than good because of the cultural genocide which was consciously or unconsciously ignited by separation of people through redefinition of boundary. This did not only leave people homeless but destroyed cultures.

### **In Defence of National Interest**

One only needs to assess the reasons advanced by Nigerian government in rejecting the 'faulty' 1913 document and by extension, the International Court of Justice Verdict to be able to appreciate the dire strategic implications

on Nigeria as she loses the Bakassi peninsula to Cameroon. The first and third portions of the document are particularly revealing in this case. In the first reason expert forewarned that "Nigeria will have to maintain buoys within Cameroons territorial waters" in order "to keep the Calabar port open for navigation for mercantile shipping."<sup>15</sup> Alternatively, a new channel will have to be dredged and buoyed for the use of ships entering and leaving Calabar. As for objection three, the core interest has been that if the Peninsula together with its adjoining areas is handed over to Cameroon the "Nigerian naval vessels will have to seek clearance from the government of Cameroon before moving in and out of naval base" of Eastern command at Calabar<sup>16</sup>

Note that before now the Cross River estuary was open for navigation by naval and merchant ships of both Nigeria and Cameroon, a right which the 1913 agreement also stipulated. Ate<sup>17</sup> argues that it is unthinkable for Nigeria to have surrendered her commercial defence lifeline to a perennially hostile neighbour by handing over the Calabar Channel to Cameroon. The prospect becomes even more precarious when cognizance is taken of the country's (i.e Cameroon's) acute dependence on foreign elements, such as France's presence and influence in the sub region a country that is potentially hostile to Nigerian interest. Before the verdict, Cameroonian government had invited French and American oil companies not only in areas under its legitimate Jurisdiction but also in the area in dispute with Nigerian citizens in the region.

Quite important to Nigeria is also the aquatic potentials of the area. For instance the fishery resources in the area (which is the predominant source of livelihood of the people) yield close to 100,000 tonnes at over 50 million Naira in value annually.<sup>18</sup>

The strategic and security necessity for Nigeria to exercise effective control of the Cross river estuary and the Calabar Channel cannot be overemphasized. Nigeria has a naval base at James town together with the naval college at Oron town.<sup>19</sup> These Military Facilities are left unprotected with the handing over the area to Cameroon. Experts express the fear that it is bound to lead to open conflict sooner or later in the face of mounting provocations by Cameroonian functionaries. It was noticed that at a point it was impossible for ships to steer into Calabar Channel without passing through Cameroon waters and this port is planned to serve four states in the country.

There is a more serious component to the Economic consideration if one takes a larger perspective of Nigeria's presence in the bight of Bonny and the South Atlantic. Nigeria's Oil which gives more than 85 % of her foreign exchange is exploited predominantly in this zone. This area extends from Ten nautical miles offshore within the continental shelve to about Eleven nautical miles off the coast of Calabar.<sup>20</sup> Within this zone all along Nigeria's coast are at least six oil tanker terminals and an oil refinery.

Politically, Nigeria has a potential geopolitical interest in the sub region which must be nurtured now for future purposes. It is unthinkable that Nigeria should mortgage her future political influence and authority in the sub region. No matter our pretensions and current cynicism that suggests otherwise, Nigeria possesses the requisite attributes to emerge as a centre of power in the West and central Africa. According to Bassey Ate "If we do not know about ourselves we must at least know that France for example relates with us on the basis of this expectation. That is why it is for instance interested in what we do in ECOWAS."<sup>21</sup>

It is in Nigeria's political interest to cultivate a strong base of interest among the countries of contiguous zone for its diplomacy within the ECOWAS and the O.A.U our large investment in the building of ECOWAS at the expense of the tax payers is currently not an aspect of our fabled Father Christmas trait. At some points in future if the experiment works, Nigeria stands to reap both economic and some cultural rewards.

Another political interest of ours, which unfortunately is now left unprotected in the sub region is to progressively discourage our immediate neighbours from perpetual attachment to outside powers.<sup>22</sup> We need a long term strategy aimed at cultivating the numerous communities between us and these contiguous nations such that we may come to share a community of interest that will sustain a framework of mutual security. It is this type of alliance that will neutralize the temptation on the part of these countries to engage in surreptitious foreign security alignment that endanger our security and political interest such as the one that has been alleged to have been attempted by equatorial Guinea and South Africa.

Also, the plight of Nigerians who are virtual fugitives in their own land is another issue of interest. Nigeria has an obligation to come to the aid of this group of her citizens. Failure to resolve the issue will continue to alienate the people of the South -Eastern part of the country whose blood relations are the victims of the Conflict. Already, the people in the area have declared that the federal government does not care or damn about them. This is a potential source of domestic political irredentism capable of replication.

It can be observed that this dispute or conflicts are shrouded in environmental issues, which have been contested over the decades. Naturally, both Cameroun and Nigeria have been depleting their natural resources through overfishing and desertification of the Sahara. The attendant effect of these twin excesses has been the recession of the Lake Chad. Since both are non-industrialized countries relying most on the benevolence of Mother Nature, pressure now been shifted to the potential oil region with other aquatic riches. Nigeria has enjoyed much of this with her expansive access to the coast and aquatic deposits. This is a fact which Cameroon is not only aware of but also a beneficiary.

Our definition or discussion of National interest earlier in this work, a strengthened here puts it simply as “what is best” for the nation at any given point in time in her foreign policy or international behavior. At a point in Nigeria’s history, her national interest revolved round whatever guarantees her political stability, protect her territorial integrity and ensure the respect of her citizens in the international arena as her national interest.<sup>23</sup> This behavior tallies with Morgenthau’s definition of this concept. He defines National interest as the perennial standard by which foreign policy of nations must be judged and directed.<sup>24</sup> Thus for Morgenthau, the power at the nations command relative to that of other nations is, at any moment in time, an objective reality for that nation and thus serves to determine what its true interest is and should be. The poser now is; If Britain had any idea of rich mineral and aquatic content of the peninsula, would she have rejected it as a ‘dismal swamp’? Why is it that Cameroun accepted jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice only Twenty six days<sup>24</sup> to her filing the case against Nigeria? Whose interest did Nigeria want to protect by handing over Bakassi to Cameroun even as she had an option not to do so. Her actions which were based on moral grounds were not sufficient to trade her citizens’ obedience to a nebulous international organisation in the name of the principle of respect for the rule of law both nationally and internationally. That decision at that point in time as argued by many scholars and commentators was not in the best interest of the nation. What about the series of security and strategic fears raised by her cabinet? In fact this is an area where Nigeria falls short of the realist principle of rational international behavior. Leo Elanya,<sup>26</sup> warned that international politics is a jungle where nations are taken afield in a struggle or battle for self interest. Historically, most if not all nations however small or weak strives to get the best out of the world situation. Unfortunately however, the best which the world affords mankind politically is very limited in relation to the demand. Because of this, as we can see in all diplomatic struggles in history, a lot of wit or intellect, what is popularly known as diplomacy and at times strength, physical violence, is often used by nations in their attempt to take advantage of one another, and that is exactly what Cameroun has continually done over the years. That explains why until 1994, when she was convinced of having a good day at The Hague, she never risked that option. At home, Cameroun continually avoided reopening and discussion with Nigeria, once she got her bid in 1971 and 75 in the Yauonde and Marua declarations respectively.

Nigeria’s moral stand put her at a loser end. Throughout the history of international relations; nations that normally come out tops are those with recognized technology, military might and economic might which is normally founded on rational thinking, not nations that are morally conscious. If anything, we have known in history, morality in international politics is a relative term. It is a matter of conscience. However, nobody cares for conscience or morality where large questions of economic, strategic as well as wellbeing of citizens arise. If not, what moral right had America to go to Iraq in search of weapons of mass destruction? Is it because she has not? In 1968, Czechoslovakia was invaded by USSR. Such other examples are awash the globe over to support the assertion that in global politics, might is right and national interest the defining currency. At least the justification would seem to be that Nigeria is committed to the unity of Africa and is doing everything possible to see that feeling of unity is demonstrated. It could be deduced from this that given this posture Nigeria would not want to be diverted by any political intrigue by way of using her neighbours to provoke her.

She stakes this posture in order not to sacrifice the unity and solidarity of Africa which is necessary for the survival of the Blackman anywhere in the world, and which meant much for the oppressed blacks in the Apartheid South Africa. The intention on the part of Nigeria is noble, but what in terms of reciprocity, has been the action of sister African countries? It is in fact a matter to ponder over especially given the consistent treatment and experience with her central African neighbor, Cameroun which has climaxed into the disappointing scenario. Thus if really, the struggle has been in pursuit of the national interest, what should have been the right response? Obviously, the continued paternal response of Nigeria, even to the loss of lives of her prized citizens did not point at any reasonable fight for national interest.

A good example of positive utility of combat readiness can be seen from Israel and United States. In this regard, the late General Sani Abacha, was quite proactive. Should Nigeria had policy consistency, Obasanjo would have followed the examples of the late General on the issue of Bakassi and not only refuted the obnoxious judgement, in spite of Nigeria’s unfortunate precedence, but had gone ahead to occupy the area. As Leo Eleanya purported, surely, the world would make noise and perhaps make some uncharitable remarks about the situation.<sup>27</sup> After all, America and Germany backed out of the League of Nations when it never served their interest.

As explained by the ICJ’s information officer, Mr. Boris Heim-  
If a state does not comply with a court decision, the ICJ itself cannot do anything. It is up to the other state party to the case to refer the matter to the security council of the UN in New York and ask for a UN resolution on other measures to be taken to force the other party provided in Article 94 of UN charter, but also in Articles 59, 60 and 61 of the courts statute and Article 94-2 and 99-5 of the rules of the court.<sup>28</sup>

In any case, if it were in defence of her national interest, Nigeria had the option of taking further steps to prove this to the world and her citizens given the wide outcry against the case. This is because, over time in

history, examples abound that international politics “talks from a position of visible strength and where this is not there, all that is left is religious moralizing.”<sup>29</sup>

Therefore, for whatever reason, her inability to launch a counter offensive against this obvious miscarriage of justice and conspiracy has placed her in invaluable danger. This is because what would have simply been a ‘police action’ has now cost Nigeria her economy, security, strategic loss and above all loss of invaluable lives.

### **Hegemonic tendencies in the conflict**

In analyzing this concept in relation to our study problem we look at the activities of the two countries against the backdrop of their purported intentions. Simply defined, the concept hegemony implies domination of one nation over a group of nations within a regional bloc, a continent, an international organisation or a gathering of nations..

In Weber’s view<sup>30</sup> “power”( which is hegemony) “is the possibility of imposing ones will upon the behavior of others.” To this scholar, power involves domination- a reciprocal relationship between the rulers and the ruled in which the actual frequency of compliance is only one aspect of the fact that command exists. Thus power exists only when and where there is one on which the influence can be exerted. For Laswell and Kaplan<sup>31</sup>, power is the special case of the exercise of influence. Between nations therefore, it is a process of affecting the policies of others with the help of (actual or threatened) severe deprivation for non conformity with the policies intended. Similarly, power to Carl Fredreich<sup>32</sup> is the capacity of individual or groups of individual or nation(s) to modify the conduct of others in a manner which they desire. This view tallies with that of Russel<sup>33</sup> which sees power as ‘the production of intended result on theirs’ Thus, Dahi<sup>34</sup>illustratively presents an analogy that (nation) A has power over (nation) B to the extent that she can get B to do something that she should not otherwise do<sup>35</sup>. Power, in our case seen as hegemony is seen to be exercised to the extent that influence is exerted on the behavior of others to the extent that it changes their intended behavior or conduct. From all the views above, power entails getting something done according to ones intentions as contradistinguished from intention of persons carrying out the act, function or behavior. Though the concept of power and domination are broad based, our restriction here is on political power or domination with emphasis on international domination. Three major types of power may be distinguished in terms of the type of influence brought on the subordinate: force, domination and manipulation. The discussion on these is well out of our scope and need not detain us here.

A graphic presentation of the Cameroun-Nigeria border conflict reveals that persistence on the part of Cameroun has been on the rise beginning from the time of Germany through France and now the independent Republic of Cameroun. The first hegemonic onslaught was displayed by German Kamerun in 1913 with border transgressions resulting to arrest of people on the British side and forceful collection of taxes, conscription and other forms of extortions. At that point, Sir Lewis Harcourt<sup>36</sup>ordered for reparations from German Kamerun. This attitude continued up to independence with actual noticeable killings of civilians in 1971. The climax came in 1981, when Cameroon gendarmeries killed five Nigerian soldiers on routine border patrol. Since then Cameroon has sought to compel Nigeria to yield to her expectations on the borders until 1994, when she finally took the case to The Hague for arbitration. Even when Cameroon killed 5 Nigerian soldiers in 1981, Nigeria behaved as if there was nothing to act upon. This gave Cameroun the impetus to act like Oliver Twist and kept on asking for more. Nigeria’s shy and unfocused position meandered through the decades culminating into the calamity of 2002. To this O. Ede honestly opines that:Let me point out from the onset that Nigeria has pursued a rather shy and sometimes weak boundary policy. By and large it has been non-challant and compromising approach on boundary issues.<sup>37</sup>

Contrasting Nigerias behavior with Cameroon, the scholar argues that “n the contrary, Cameroun has pursued a vigorous, aggressive and consistent policy which as writer has tagged “Cameroun policy of Greater Cameroun or irredentism” Since independence Nigeria never came up with any reactionary boundary policy. Since August 1960, when Sir Abubakar Balewa declared that:

On the problem of boundaries, our view is that... these were created artificially by Europeans which even went so far as to split some communities into three parts...we shall discourage any attempt to influence such communities by force or through under pressure to change, since such as interference could only result in unrest and harm to the overall plan for the future of this great continent.<sup>38</sup>

Nigeria has respected this position even in the face of glaring contradictions. Though Nigeria ascribed to the fact that we shall discourage any attempt to influence such communities by force or through undue pressure to change; she made no attempt to discourage the change in the Bakassi despite wide outcries by the people protesting the judgement of the International Court of Justice. This supine disposition which ascribes the territorial statusquo irrespective of apparent dislocations of communities or the weaknesses in the agreements does not point to any move to establish hegemony over this region. Despite the recurring inconsistency in her political culture, with intermittent military disruptions, the policy remained the same.

That explains why series of declarations quoted by the Republic of Cameroun and accepted by the ICJ were between 1971 and 1975 which were all during military regimes. It was these crave for peace on our

boundaries that blinded Gowon to the greater goals by conceding to Ahidjo's demand. It was only during Abacha's time that he made an attempt to settle the Bakassi problem once and for all.

In all fairness and honest contention if Nigeria wanted to stamp her foot, the boundary problem needed to be solved. The political, economic, strategic cum security importance of both the Northern and particularly the Southern segments were and are still very high for Nigeria. Surprisingly, Nigeria ignored the warning of her prominent citizens. As far back as 1977, a prominent politician and diplomat, Matthew Mbu who hails from the region warned against this inaction and resort to quiet diplomacy. According to him, the characteristic unwillingness of Nigerian government to tackle the border problem because of her commitment to the OAU was tantamount to a great loss.<sup>39</sup> What a prophecy! And it has come to pass. Giving Nigeria's military might over her neighbours she needed not to opt for any negotiation in the face of border violations against her. The moralistic approach of her paternal thinking on Africa was and is still more killing.

Domination or hegemony which is a product of power is not the dormant power but power in action. Abundant evidence exists that support this claim. In his analysis Anifowose<sup>40</sup> posits that power can be realistically estimated only in action and hence discussion of the elements of power is within the confines of states potential or capacity for such action. We should note that "all power elements are relative to those possessed by other states, especially neighbours and possible rivals and opponents." Mere quantities are fairly meaningless. Population figures with deficiency in industrial resources to keep pace with technological advance to replace possible loss does not imply power. Nigeria may have been priding herself as the 'Giant of Africa' but to neglect these vital aspects in the face of glaring contiguous security threats negates the concept of hegemony. Propagandists would have termed her action to Cameroun as bullying but of course hegemony does not have to agree with morality and size. America's presence in Iraq, Afghanistan, Vietnam and her threat on Libya recently was a clear case to demonstrate her hegemony in world politics. Not to protect her borders with both contiguous security threats and huge economic potentials which she needs to boost her industrial prowess to support both internal and external obligations negates the concepts both national interest and hegemony.

Nigeria has over the years lost sight of the heavy presence of foreign powers around her. This could be seen in the involvement of foreign powers, especially France in the affairs of her former colonies. For instance, faced with the rebellious attitude of the UPC the Cameroonian government had to rely heavily, on French support to neutralize them. Hammarie Diori had to do the same, until his overthrow in 1974<sup>41</sup>, to keep the Sawaba party at bay in Niger. It remains to be seen whether these presence has been to checkmate Nigeria's rise politically. This is because in comparative terms, the known statistics on the military and economic capability of Nigeria's neighbours represents a very weak position relative to that of Nigeria. Imobighe reveals that put together the five immediate neighbours- Benin, Chad, Cameroun, Niger and Equatorial Guinea has an estimate GNP which is about one ninth of that of Nigeria. Their total population is about one third while the total strength of their armed forces is less than one fifth of that of Nigeria.<sup>42</sup>

They are also collectively inferior to Nigeria in terms of equipment and exposure. The bigger advantage is that these countries harbor no threat of disturbing Nigeria's peace or so it seems. They feel that with her size and ability, Nigeria can easily swallow them up. It is then quite instructive to reason that even though they might themselves not be able to do anything to Nigeria, if their fear and suspicion persist, external power could easily exploit their frailty in a matter that is not in consonance with Nigeria's interest. This was amply demonstrated in the voting pattern in the ICJ judgement over the Nigeria-Cameroun border case where even Britain voted against Nigeria. France, of course championed the anti-Nigeria voting pattern.

Thus, the tendency on the part of Nigeria's neighbours to be over dependent on foreign powers, as seen in this case, is already an established fact. Because of their economic weakness and inability of some of them to balance their budget, they have had to rely heavily on their former colonial rulers to realize their basic economic needs. This weakness and relative poverty on one hand represents assets to Nigeria as it poses no threat; on the other hand it is a liability. This is because many powers that are not friendly with Nigeria have shown interest in the affairs of Nigeria's immediate neighbours and the entire West African Sub-region. Among these countries, France occupies a leading position. France has defence agreements with Benin, Niger, Chad and Cameroun dating back to the time of these countries' independence. It should be noted that these pacts suffer some setbacks at various points with other countries, that of Cameroonian French military connection has since independence been on a steady plane.<sup>43</sup> For Nigeria's national security efforts to be meaningful, it must be cautious of the 'behind the scene' activities of this unfriendly power. This is why one wonders so much why Nigeria raised no alarm on the composition, especially with a French Judge as president of the court and agreed, even before the announcement of the decision to abide by it on the instance of a call from the President of France.

### **Some Suggestions**

Is the West Still our Friends? This question stems from the fact that for the second time, Britain, our colonial overlord has abandoned or rather stabbed us in the back in our hour of critical need. The first time was during the critical years of the 30 months civil war. While France worked against Nigeria by recognizing Biafra, Britain

stayed on the fence claiming she would not want to be involved in what she called ‘genocide’<sup>44</sup> over the Igbos. In the same vain America simply called the war an ‘internal problem of Nigeria’.<sup>45</sup>This time around Britain again consistently voted against Nigeria at The Hague. The question then is: is it not true that the decision of the International court of Justice is imperially motivated to checkmate the rising profile of Nigeria in Africa which could counter imperialist interest in the continent? Our first suggestion, though revolutionary is that Nigeria should reconsider her choice of Western friends. In the same vein, we suggest that using Nigeria’s oil Money to salvage the economies of these Western interests to the detriment of our domestic economic diversification is counterproductive. What we mean here is that our mono (oil dependent) economy is been encouraged by the west in their own interest.

Policy formulation regarding our borderlands or boundaries should begin with the recognition and adaptation of domestic interest, which then should metamorphose and take international outlook. We can now see in our case that applying technical considerations in solving what is basically human problem has created more problems than solutions especially for culturally heterogeneous areas such as our border communities. It is clear from this case that in search for just boundaries derived from legal and geometric considerations, the real human or anthropoid reality of the borderland is relegated to the background. Therefore, if we must strive for an equitable boundary policy, which takes both the interest of the states and occupying populations at heart, the process should begin from the socio-political and sociolinguistic considerations which have had and will still have its immediate impact. This would be a step towards evolving a humanistic boundary policy which recognizes the organic and human character of the border region, and its intrinsic relevance for evolving a harmonious interstate relation.

This paper considerably faults the policy of sacred colonial borders, *Uti Possidetis*, the principle on which our boundary and border policy is based. We submit that this was escapist; as such continued adherence to it is self destructive. This is true as can be seen in the continuous manifestation of deficiencies traceable to the glaring inadequacies inherent in the faulty and arbitrary colonially inherited boundaries which have stared in our face over time. It is obvious that the modern African state operate on a problematic premise. We therefore toe the line of Etiodé<sup>46</sup> that even if the boundaries should be respected they should not continue to function as dictated by colonial machinations. As Mr. M.T Mbu an eminent Nigerian diplomat and one time Nigeria’s minister of Foreign Affairs once observed: ‘... indeed this country is second to none in the promotion of African Unity, Nigeria must avoid concessions to her neighbours over cocktails and in her transient moment of adulation.’<sup>47</sup> The hurried implementation of the Judgement was another lost opportunity Nigeria would have exploited to her advantage. Nothing stopped Nigeria from holding fast on the principle of self determination and insisting on a plebiscite thus providing the inhabitants of the area an opportunity to determine their fate. Thus, spearheaded by Nigeria, Africa should set up an organization or body of The Hague status and set in motion a machinery to revisit the principle of sacred colonial boundaries.

This suggested process of change which should begin at the domestic level should be gradual and systematic as in the case of Nigeria Cameroon borders. It should begin with attitudinal change. This means policy reconstruction should begin with an official reorientation towards accepting the traditional concept of boundary as a point of contact and essential for intergroup harmony. The borders will therefore be seen as corridors<sup>48</sup> of integration not walls of separation. This will have the immediate impact of simplifying the boundary operational rules. The boundary would then become reception for accepting change and serve as a platform for developing positive contacts. The Nigerian Cameroon border for instance is made up of over thirteen culture areas. In the Lake Chad area the culture area is intersected by four international boundaries; Chad, Niger, Cameroon and Nigeria. This is among the one hundred and three criss-crosses of cultures that Asiwaju<sup>49</sup> talks about. Such a fertile cultural concentration can be positively explored through the organization of international borderland cultural fiestas which would serve the dual purpose of economic fund raising and bilateral cultural cooperation and continental integration. Giving the pervasive nature of the Nigeria Cameroon borderlands, especially in the Bakassi region, this paper recommends a de-emphasis on any policy that is restrictive in nature on the borderers. In all the affected areas such a leeway provided by a democratic border would reduce tension in the borderlands. This would provide a basis for further exploration of other cultural linkages as well as other symbiotic economic opportunities.

Also, the economic rights and interest of the communities that crisscross the borderlines should not only be recognized but also be granted and respected. In the Bakassi region the traditional Efik trade with Doula should be encouraged and strengthened. This is in addition to the fishing rights of the communities which should be protected and not hampered by regulations that vest the ownership of economic resources in the coast to the states. In order not to deny the local population their livelihood, Governments of the two countries should meet the desires of the communities optimally by controlling only high sea fishing. Such policy at micro level should serve as a forerunner to general trade liberalization so feverishly advocated in summits of Economic Community of West African States.<sup>50</sup>

In furtherance of the process of mutual confidence building, we suggest that the entire border region

should be demilitarized. This will be in consonance with the traditional concept and practice of non militarised borders. By so doing some compromise can be reached between western and African practice of securing the borderlands by engaging in liberal security system perhaps drawn from the community to secure trade and security at the borderlands. In which case, security at the borders becomes localized and community driven thus giving the community a stake in maintenance of peace at the borders. The local government structure on either side of the boundary should be saddled with the supervisory role in this arrangement. This is because giving its orientation, the local governments become better placed and more qualified as effective agents on rural security, development and harmony.

We could offer to buy the Bakassi peninsula from the republic of Cameroon thereby further demonstrating both our good faith and determination to secure our historical claim to the peninsula. The United States made use of this option on different occasions in her early history of development.<sup>51</sup>

The governments of Nigeria and Cameroon could proceed to develop other institutional strategies for bilateral relations, to build a platform of effective cultural ties. This can be done through the instruments of an international agency or commission jointly set up by both governments to continuously study policy actions to solve problems arising at the borders. The primary role of such an agency shall be information gathering and policy monitoring to provide data for adequate and effective understanding of the border problems and also nip potential areas of crises in the bud. This means we should seek to institute jointly with the Cameroon, a cooperative regime that will administer in contention for the people of the two countries with the following responsibilities; joint management of security, joint exploration of fishery and minerals including oil that are abundant in the adjoining waters through joint enterprise, joint customs and immigration authorities and joint political administration etc.

We believe that there is still room for negotiation. Nigeria can offer to buy some sensitive portions of the disputed area as they affect the strategic interest of the country. This will be in addition to a structured policy which puts her interest and hegemony first in her dealings especially with her contiguous neighbours. As managers of economic, social and cultural affairs, governments in Europe have become increasingly sensitive to pressures as well as to lures of global and regional interdependence.<sup>52</sup>

Also, non-governmental and institutions have appeared on the international scene as cofactors in border relations. They complement their central governments on issues of economic, social, ecological, labour migrations, human rights and securities of their nationals through trans-border operations. A trans border regime is a set of rules and institutions, formal and informal, aimed at, and succeed in regularizing neighbourhood behaviour; a set of procedure around which actors expectations are converged.<sup>53</sup> The aim of such a regime is an inter-sovereignty cooperation without an intention to dissolve the basic link and with political challenges to the respective national systems, in the process transforming physical proximity to political intimacy.

Since Nigeria and Cameroon share geographical border, a common history with related ethnic groups along and astride their border, and most importantly with a large number of "Cam-Gerians,"<sup>54</sup> in the South West Province, the two countries ought to evolve policies that would protect these marginalized Nigerians in that country. This is in perfect agreement with the African notion of integration, which is predicated on the realities of African history, premised on peoples. Although both countries have diplomatic representatives at the state – centric level and have concluded various cooperation agreements in virtually all fields of human endeavour, much efforts is still required by both states to utilize the micro integration going on along and astride their borders to achieve the most desired macro integration.

Nigeria and Cameroon can borrow a leaf from Western Europe, where conflicts arising from labour migrations have been submerged in favour of mutual economic development and cooperative efforts to promote international mobility of peoples, goods services and information through the various channels provided by the European Union with the result that international boundaries have become increasingly permeable. Accompanying these developments, the rights of foreigners, including their investments are secured by legislation including right to citizenship, freedom of expression, privileges and equal opportunities. In Africa the concept of citizenship is based on colonial experience while citizenship in the west is based on unique analysis of rights and duties. Until African countries begin to de-emphasize the barrier functions of boundaries, integration of their boundaries and the consequent associated benefits will not be attained.

The importance of trans-border cooperation between communities, states and regions should be officially recognized in Africa based on our experience. Like it is now found elsewhere,<sup>55</sup> all of the major governments in Africa should design a regime wherein they pledge to protect and promote cooperation as far as possible and to contribute in this way to the economic and social progress of frontier regions and to the spirit of fellowship which serve as a uniting force between the feuding countries and as an example to other African countries.

The region, Basilemsils in the Alsace-Baden-Basel region is a credible reference to trans-border regionalism, where migrant workers from Switzerland, Germany and France cross to and from one country to another and their investments are secured<sup>56</sup>. The principal difference between Regio Bessiliesis and



USA – Mexico case no doubt contribute to different regional and national on such issues as international migration and commuting, environmental protection and economic development strategies. As Boncuk reveals, each country blames border misfortunes on the presence of foreigners.<sup>57</sup> The South West Cameroon, the U.S is vexed by the dominant presence of Mexican-Americans living within its territory and seeks, through formal means to keep further immigration under control. Mexicans regard their economic misfortunes as resulting from loss of their lost lands north of the present border and from the economic dependency on the powerful US economic system.

In like manner the Cameroonians regard the numerical strength of the Cam-Gerians in the South-West province and their control of the local economy as a vexed issue.<sup>58</sup> The strong Nigerian economy vis- a -vis the of Cameroon and the claim of Nigeria to the ownership of the Bakassi peninsula have compounded their relationship across the border, particularly in the South west region of Cameroon and the Cross River region. Nevertheless, while the U.S; Mexico and Canada are making conscious efforts to establish entities to engage in cross border cooperation and problem solving agencies based on the doctrine of “mutual necessity” Nigeria and Cameroon, in spite of their fluid cultural criss- cross are hardening their borders and have made no meaningful attempts beyond mere declaratory policy to institutionalise a problem solving approach. Thus, if effective problem solving mechanisms are instituted, Nigeria and Cameroon can realistically resolve the vexed question not only of their borders but of the citizens of both countries residing on the either divide of the borderlands especially the Cam-Gerians living mostly in the South-West province of Cameroon. This by extension will very importantly take of their (foreigners) investments.

It is also the position of this paper that both countries should drop their conflictual posture and base their border (integration) policy on the realities of (ethno cultural/ethnographic) African history and experience. We can thus borrow a leaf from the Western experience earlier cited. From history, Nigeria and Cameroon share much in common and in facing the challenges of integration, they should be guided by the fact that the artificially divided but historically related kinships in this segment of their common border especially by the colonial instrument of the most talked about 1913 Anglo-German agreement are yearning for closer interactions despite the political problems faced by the two countries. The presence and persistence of this micro-integration noticeable at the borderlands is an eloquent reminder that those groups not only disregard but also despise and resent the colonial borders. This exercise will be very beneficial especially to Cameroon who stands to benefit, not only from the rich purse of Nigeria but also her enviable human resources. This would complement the efforts of the Cam-Gerians who are already contributing invaluablely to the economic development of the Cameroonian South West province.

## Conclusion

It is clear from the foregoing that the twin concepts of hegemony and national interest have been very central to the struggle over the disputed borders. The clandestine involvement of imperial powers in the struggle is also noticed. Attention is also drawn to the fact that Nigeria’s Neighbours may continue to be a threat should Nigeria continue to overlook the rival interest of France and her hostile presence around her. It is suggestive therefore, that a more people oriented border policy which sees borders, not as walls of separation but as corridors of integration should be encouraged by the feuding countries. It is also high time to revisit the principle of sacred colonial borders to correct imbalances inherent in the inherited in the faulty colonial (boundary) arrangements.

## ENDNOTES

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