

Panafricanism, African Boundaries and Regional Integration

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Abstract

The paper argues that the adoption of the “Uti possidetis” froze African boundaries making them to function as barriers. Though this division was denounced by African Heads of States and Governments little was done to revise these boundaries. This is understandable as this could have led to another “balkanization” of the continent. It is indicated that this division has led to the emergence of small states with small market economics competing rather than completing each others economy. It is argued that regional economic integration cannot take place with boundaries as obstacles. The Pan African idea of closer unity is examined. Regional economic integration is a stand of the Pan African perspectives is presented as a major way out of the deep and worsening economic crises bedeviling African economics. Attempts have been made since the 1960s to create and re-create institutions for regional economic integration in the continent. However, and in spite of the encouragement and boost given to sub-regional integration efforts as a first step towards continental integration, not much as been achieved. It is suggested that vigorous efforts should be made to re-orientate the mind set of African leaders, scholars, and policy makers alike to the reality of economic integration and the near obsolescence of boundaries as barriers. The European experience of achieving continental unity through transboundary regionalism. (or Europe of the regions) (Eurogios) as evidence in the European union is instructive. It is concluded that like in Europe, potentials for regional economic integration, and African regions (or “Afregios”) can be converted to poles of economic development and integration. This would enhance not only economic development but would improve the standard of living of the citizens.

Key words: Panafricanism; Regional integration; Economic co-operation; Uti possidetis; International boundaries

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INTRODUCTION

“We reject the desperate attempt to fossilize Africa into the wounds inflicted upon it by the vultures of colonialism... is no use smothering this problem with the verbiage of “Uti possidetis” since it will always come back to hunt the continent as it has done in the past (Nsogura, 2003, p.3)”.

“Frontiers (i.e Boundaries) are indeed the razor edge on which hang suspended the modern issues of war or peace of life or death to nations (Lord Curzon, 1904, p.23)”.

Boundaries either in Africa or Europe, are a paradox. They represent the physical aspects of state. They also determine the identity, citizenship loyalty, laws etc. of individuals within states.

Once boundaries are created, they in turn create man and other features. Boundaries are the limits of a states national space. Boundaries can be found in all aspects of life-mans. Physiological frame is bounded together by boundaries; academic disciplines and natural environment are bounded by boundaries. In territorial terms boundaries divide one nation from another, and also form the basis of their connection.

The focus of this paper is on territorial boundaries in Africa and how they negate economic integration of the continent. These boundaries were replicated in Africa by the colonialist during the Berlin West Africa conference 15th November – February 1885. It was this conference that marked for Africa the inception of the modern state

system based on the model of the European nation state with a precise and characteristically, “artificial” and “often arbitrary” territorial framework. It is indicated that, the Pan African ideal for continent unity run counter to the concepts of boundaries as national barriers. The Pan African ideal of boundaries is in consonance with the present quest for regional economic integration as evidenced in the 1991 Abuja African Economic Treaty, the African Union Initiative, the Economic Community of West African State (ECOWAS), the South African Development Conference (SADCC) efforts at regional economic integration. As far back as 1945, the Manchester Pan-African Congress had concluded that:

“The artificial division and territorial boundaries created by the imperialists powers are deliberate steps to obscure the political unity of the African people” (Touval, 1972, p.84).

The paper concludes by ways of policy recommendation that if African regional economic integration is to be taken seriously, there must be a new orientation in scholarship and policy formation with regard to African boundaries and regional economic integration. This “new thinking” should conceptualize African boundaries not as “barriers” but as “bridge”. The current “Fortress Mentality” as enshrined in the concept of “*Uti possedetis Juris*” must be persuaded to yield ground to the emerging concepts of boundaries as “osmotic points” of contact between sovereign states whose economies share similar characteristics and are begging for integration. Along and astride these borderlands can be found related but divided ethnic groups, cultural coherent areas, whose pre-colonial cultures, customs and traditions, including languages are still prevalent. These micro integration formalities at the grassroot could be galvanized for the larger macro integration process at the sub-regional and regional levels. The lesson for European integration since 1945 is instructive. Regional economic integration can therefore reduce the conflictual profiles of these boundaries to become bridges of co-operation and poles of integration for the benefit of the nation state in Africa and in particular for the citizens who yearn in a daily basis for improved economic conditions.

BOUNDARY INHERITANCE

African leaders were not oblivious of the problems posed to their independence by the artificial boundary lines they inherited. This perhaps, inform their affirmation and declaration of adhere to the principle of respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of each state by article III paragraph II of the organization of African Unity Charta 1963.

Similarly, the Assemble of Heads of state and Government at the Cairo submit in 1964 “solemnly declared that all member states pledge themselves to respect the boundaries existing on their achievement of national independence. These boundaries have today

become source of irritants and conflicts and wars; particularly where two mutually exclusive principles are at stake, namely historic rights, and its attendant territorial revisionism versus territorial or intangibility of boundaries.

It is this conflictual profile of Africa’s inherited boundaries that informed A. Groyko to submit that, “African boundaries have a father whose name is colonialism” (Barkindo, 1984, p.30).

The then Nigerian Prime minister and Head of Government late sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa was strongly in favour of boundary inheritance.

“On the problem of boundaries, our view is that although in the past some of these were created artificially by European powers which even went so far as to split some communities into three parts, each administered by a different colonial power,... discourage any attempt to influence such communities by force or through undue pressure to change, since such interference could only result in unrest and harm to the over all-plan for the future of this great continent” (Bukaranbe, 1983, p.85).

Furthermore to above, Balewa re-affirmed his stand at the May 1963 submit conference of independent Africa States have been broken into different groups by the colonial powers.

Similarly, the Ethiopian Prime minister and the Madagascan Presidents positions reflected Balewa’s view respectively: They state that, “it is in the interest of all Africans now to respect the boundaries drawn on maps, whether they were good or bad by the former colonial powers”, and that:

“redrawing the boundaries would mean introducing “black imperialism in Africa” it was no longer possible, or desirable to modify the boundaries (Bukarambe, 1963).

The issue of African boundaries became a serious matter during the Accra All- African Peoples Conference in 1958. though the nationalists at that conference denounced the artificial boundaries created by the imperialist which they acknowledge divided African ethnic groups and culture areas, they were divided on the solution to this problem.

The Pan-African concept of African unity in spite of the artificial boundaries was articulated by Kwame Nkrumah. It was Nkrumah’s idea that continent unity would re-address the issue of artificial boundaries. However, Abukakar and other conservatives perceived the issue in nationalistic terms and stood for boundary status quo. This concept run counter to the transnational paradigm thereby locating the boundaries within the confines to boundaries as barriers.

The term “*Uti posseditis juris*” is derived from Roman Law. In international law, its meaning is more fully expressed in “*Uti possediatus*” or as you possess, so may you process (Boggs, 1940, p.79). By adopting the above principle, African Heads of states and Governments reaffirmed the artificial boundaries or boundary status quo.

It was the adoption of boundary status quo with its inconsistencies and ambiguities that froze African boundaries and provided them with a legal framework for

boundary functioning and maintenance. These ambiguities and inconsistencies have been explained by a sociologist of international boundaries, Raimoldo StrasaIdo that:

“Border divided and unite, bind the interior and link the interior; they are barriers and junctions, wall and doors, organs of defend and attack. Boundaries can be managed to maximize either of these functions. They can be maintained as bulwarks against neighbours or made into areas of peaceful exchange” (Strasaido, 1989, p.337).

Star and most further under scored the binary view of borders, that shared borders are like coins with one side issuing with “risk” and the other with “opportunities” in international interaction (Star & Most, 1976, p.40).

In the view of Gross interaction between adjacent states is a continuum with conflicts at one end and co-operation at the other (Gross, 1973, p.44). In the scheme of W. Zartman:

“Any African state can have problems if it wants. The newness of African states and frequent irrelevance of their geographical frames to their economic, social and political lives make the continent more potentially susceptible to territorial disputes than any other” (Zartman, 1965, p.150).

Boundaries, as Lord Curzon reasoned, are like “razor edges on which hang suspended the modern issues of war of peace, life or death to nations” Curzon: 1904, p.12).

The above therefore illustrates clearly the policy options available to African states. It is instructive to indicate that African states policy option tend to gravitate towards conflict and wars, and this clearly blurs the boundaries as points for economics integration.

PAN AFRICANISM AND ECONOMIC INTEGRATION IN AFRICAN

Conceptually, pan Africanism is an ideal that emphasizes the unity of African states and peoples. Through the Pan African congresses and conferences recognized the artificial boundaries imposed on African by the Europeans, the idea of continental unity was to blur these boundaries. The boundaries were conceived as obstacles to the attainment of Africa’s unity. It was therefore emphasized that these boundaries be conceptualized not as separating African nations but that they were imposed for the administrative convenience of the Europeans. The concept of “*Uti*” possessedetis” or boundary status quo is a negative of the Pan African ideal.

Regional integration on the other hand is indeed acknowledge as a major way out of the deep and worsening political and economic crises confronting postcolonial African states. These perhaps, explain why countries have consistently pursued policies of regional cooperation. With regional co-operation and integration, there are the prospects of ensuring long term socio-economic growth and development. This would reduce if not eradicate border conflicts between many adjacent states through systematic promotion of trans-boundary regionalism, predicated on international cooperation.

After independence, various institutions for regional economic cooperation and integration were created and re-created at the continental and sub-regional levels. In spite of the above, not much premium has been placed on the revision of these boundaries “bridges” to be used for regional and sub-regional areas for economic co-operation and integration.

“Trans boundary regionalism” is a reference to a novel category or international forced on territorial adjacent sovereign states. These states are compelled to interact for reasons not only common interest in human and natural resources straddled by a shared international boundary; but also common concern about the cross border environmental impacts of human activities and natural disasters (Asiwaju, 1999, p.114)

In this respect regional integration has been boosted by the spectacular success story of the European Union including the effective conversion of boundaries between member states from historic roles as barriers into new functions as bridged. This has influenced the phenomenal growth and expansion of both theoretical and empirical studies in various fields particularly border studies and have collaborated to widen and deepen the understanding of regional – co-operation and integration as revisionist perspective on border as opposed to boundary status quo or boundary maintenance.

Transborder regional in Europe began as uncoordinated informal initiatives across several international boundaries in Western Europe. The organization of “European Regions” or “Euregios” evolved and became new coordinating power of European integration from their initial status as informal organizations, “Euregios” now operate everywhere in the regions formal institutions recognized by international law. This strategy has been adopted by the Scandinavian countries, and in Eastern Europe since the demolition of the Berlin Wall. In North American, this paradigm shift from Europe of the nation state boundaries to Europe of the regions is being canvassed and adopted in transboundary cooperation integration and management of shared natural resources.

Trans boundary regionalism is aimed at achieving trans-border micro-integration that would dovetail into European macro-integration. This has been promoted by the council of Europe (founded in 1949) and has been boosted since the 1980s following the adoption of a regional approach to planning and development by the European union a systematic promotion of the concept of a new “Europe of the Regions”, in contradistinction to that of the old Europe of the nation state with attendant boundary problems.

Consequently, since 1980 when the European single act was initiated to anticipate the primary of regions are choice points for planning and development in community Europe. “Euregios” and associated transborder cooperative initiatives had become permanent features of European life with special reference to member states

of the Council of Europe and the European Communities and trans boundary regions adopted by the association of European Border Regions has 46 such regions and association located all over Western and Northern Europe concentrated on the Rhine (Asiwaju, 1966, p.71).

Since the 1970s transborder regionalism has gained tremendous significance culminating in the signing of 191980 of the Europeans outline convention on Trans Boundary Cooperation Between Territorial Authorities and Communities (Bonchuk, 2001, p.46). The coming into effect of the European single act enthroned the privacy of regions as the planning unit in border areas to reflect the concept of borders as “bridges” rather than “barriers”.

However, this “new thinking” is yet to be seriously considered and adopted by African leaders as they still hold tenaciously to the concept of national sovereignty, there erecting barriers and obstacles of regional economic integration. Much as in Europe, the prospect for trans border regionalism in Africa exists and are irresistibly driven by some interlocking variables. These include the divided but related ethnic groups along and astride the international boundaries border economy and trade, availability of natural resources in some of the borders and the environment the sea bed, including the widely recognized necessity to ground African regionalism and sub-regional integration on the realities of African history.

PROSPECTS FOR REGIONAL ECONOMIC INTEGRATION IN AFRICA

In terms of their structure and functions state territories and boundaries in post-colonial Africa are not so different from those found in Europe and North America, etc. though there are important differences in the detail of history and geography, significant similarities exist between Africa, Europe and North America, with special regard to local people perception of the arbitrariness of the process and artificiality of the partitioned effects. Comparative studies of African and Europe boundaries point more to similarities than differences. Studies of African boundaries often ignore these important similarities and therefore obfuscate a clear vision of the vital lesson which Africa can learn from European experience. (Asiwaju, 1998, p.80)

In Africa, it has become customary to lament that the continent was badly “partitioned”, that African boundaries are artificial and often “arbitrarily drawn” with “little or no regard” for pre-existing socio-economic patterns and network on the ground that the boundaries have split unified culture areas and “mindlessly fragmented coherent natural planning regions and ecosystems”, that a great deal of Africa’s contemporary economic problems have stemmed from the fact of territorial division into such a large number of competitive rather than complementary national economies and finally, that much of the continent’s current political problems have originated from the arbitrary

nature of the colonial boundaries which (among other things) results in “artificially juxtaposing incompatible antagonistic groups” (Asiwaju, 1984, p. 130).

Comparative border studies have revealed that these assertions about Africa have been sustained by findings of focused comparisons with Europe. Comparative assessments based on detailed case studies have demonstrated a replication of the quintessence of European experience in Africa.

In Europe and Africa, neighbouring border regions represent areas of opposing official languages, national cultures and histories as well as different economic systems, disharmonious legal regimes and parallel administrative traditions and superimposed upon invariably distinct local indigenous cultures straddled by the inter-sovereignty boundaries (Sahline, 1989, p. 43).

Thus, close similarities have been found in respect of the divided peoples and culture areas in Europe, North America and in Africa. Detailed case studies along and astride the Nigerian borders with their proximate neighbours reflect this view. For example, in Western Yoruba land, the Ketu were split between Nigeria and Benin Republic by the Anglo-French boundary, the Hausa were also split by the Anglo-French boundary, in the eastern borderlands with Cameroon, the Akwaya, Boki, Ejagham were split by the Anglo-German boundary of 1913, leaving a section in Nigeria and Cameroon. (Asiwaju, 1983 & 1984; Barkindo, 1989; Bonchuk, 1999).

These groups either in Europe or Africa, are but a few of the numerous vivisected ethnic groups or “transborder people” found across virtually all state borders in the two continents.

There have also been similar experience with artificially partitioned natural regions-seas, lakes, rivers, mountains, valleys, forests, deserts, etc, and coherent ethnic groups and cultures. The later sub-category of the effects has proved to be extremely productive of ethnic nationalities or minorities and the associated question of irredentism including the more frightening practice of “ethnic cleansing”. Both in Europe and Africa state boundaries are notorious for their roles as irritants of disputes and conflicts within and more (especially between states).

A cursory of the regions of the world reveal that Africa is, by far, the poorest, least developed continent in the world. This appalling economic situation has convinced African scholars, particularly those with a Pan Africanist orientation to conclude that regionalism and integration is the most appropriate strategy to achieve self sustained development. Thus, and African Common Market based on progressive Coordination and integration was suggested by the 1979 A. U. Monrovia submit.

Similarly, the 1980 O.A.U. Lagos Plan of Action (L.P.A.) and the Final Act of Lagos (F.A.L) proposed the establishment of an African Common Market, as a first step towards creation of an African Economic Community (A.E.C.) by the year 2000. The African Priority

Programme for Economic Recovery 1986-1990 (APPERT) adopted on 20th July 1985 by the 21st O.A.U. Assembly of Heads of States and Governments acknowledged that “Economics Integration through regional and continental cooperation is today a top priority which will enable the economic of the African countries to be viable within a system of international relations characterized by inequality in the balance of power (O.A.U 101, 1985). Similarly, the United Nations Programme of Action for Africa’s Recovery and Development (UN-PAHERD), the U.N. General Assembly Special Session on Africa, June 1986 reiterated the conviction that economic integration and technical cooperation should constitute a key element in the economic recovery of African states (U.N. 1986).

Also in the 1990s, sectoral integration was to be strengthened, through sub-regional organizations, such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Preferential Trade Area of Eastern and Southern Africa, (PTA Lusaka in Libreville, (18th Oct. 1989), the Union of Arab Maghreb (Marakesh, 17 Feb. 1989), the Southern African Development Coordination Conference (Lesotho, 1989).

Like in Europe of the post war era there are similar pressures in relation to Africa’s local history, geography and politics for transborder co-operation and wider regional integration. This is predicated on the availability of vibrant regions awaiting appropriate attention to stimulate and transform them into African regional organizations envisioned in the African economic. Treaty initiated in 1991, on the model of the European Treaty of 1957 (Bonchuk, 2002, p.97).

The prospects for transborder, integration in Africa is driven by certain interlocking forces: the commanding presence of sequestered partitioned ethnic groups and culture areas. This effacing impact of Africa’s “transborder peoples” is produced by the operation across the border of the strong networks of cultural, socio-economic and even political interactions between borderlanders: (Bonchuk, 2001, p.77).

Related to the above is the factor of transborder trade or parallel markets along the astride the borders. This factor has been recognized by researchers and international development and donor agencies. The magnitude of unofficial forms of inter-African trade or cross border trade flow and the regional character of its operation has led experts of the West African studies to appreciate and suggest the need for re-orientation of current approach to regional integration in favour of a new strategy of “Market Driven Integration”, i.e., instead of pursuing regional economic integration from the concepts of traditional international organizations, it should be rooted in the alternative realities of transnational interactions so strongly manifested in cross border trade.

The above factor is emphasized due to presence and importance of river transportation such the Mano, Zambezi, Limpop etc, Lakes such as the Chad, Victoria and transitional rivers – the Niger, Nile, Senegal and Orange, (Wilka, 1990, p.36).

Apart from a wide array of transborder ecosystem entities and natural habits, they are also natural choice regions for transborder cooperation in planning, development. Joint project in energy, water resources, strategic minerals, fishing and fisheries development, can reduce the conflictual profile of the borders.

For example, the offshore hydro-carbon deposits in the Gulf of Guinea which have provoked a border dispute and aggressive litigation between Nigeria-Cameroon, the Lybi-Chad-Mali Burkina Faso border conflicts can be obliterated if economic integration is pursued.

The increasing number of advocacies about a reorientation of regional integration projects on the more solid foundation of local African cultures, informed by known affinities of history and traditions of people lends credence for the quest for closer regional integration project.

It is instructive to indicate that Europe of the nation state nationalism has converted to Europe of the region. The notion of the nation state is perceived to be obsolete model organization of territorial administration. In Africa, there is an increasing centralization which runs counter to the process of Pan Africanist concept of unity and regional integration. For economic integration to achieve the expected results, the nation state in Africa must be re-directed to achieve a future of the region or “Afriios”. In Europe, border communities have been factored in development planning project and have become the cornerstones for the realization of community Europe, African border communities are still being held in asylum” by their nation states.

The future of Africa development must gravitate towards institutionalization of transborder cooperation integration. Thus, sub-regional bodies such as ECOWAS, SADCC, AMU, etc. should be upgraded to be rooted in functional practice of transborder cooperation and integration. In order to sustain the modest achievement and ensure their acceleration and spread there should be a re-orientation of the mind set of African leaders to imbibe the concept of boundaries as “bridges” rather than “barriers”. The principles of “Uti possedetis” must be persuaded to yield ground in favour of the new thinking, as economic integration cannot take place with boundaries as barriers Africa. African researchers must shift emphasis from the traditional statist, and therefore, predominantly conflictual perspective and re-focus on projects that explore more for peace, cooperation and regional integration potentials of African boundaries. Establishment of research links with international institutes that deal with Border Problems particularly the European Union would assist in this direction.

CONCLUSION

The paper examined the evolution of African boundaries and the adoption of the concept of “Uti possedetis juris” or boundary status quo, it was argued that boundary maintenance is a negation of the desired goal of

economic cooperation and integration and Pan African ideal of closer political contacts and eventual political unity of the continent, since boundary maintenance sharpens the boundaries.

The need for economic cooperation and integration based on the European Model of European of the regions was highlighted. It was also indicated that there is much more similarities than differences between the African and European boundaries. Also, the potentials for regional integration based on African regions or "Afrégios" exists.

In order to sustain the modest achievement it was suggested that more institutions for economic integration be established.

To ensure their acceleration, there should be a new orientation in scholarship, from the concept of boundary as a "barrier" to that of "bridges". This concept is in consonance with the Pan African ideal for closer political and economic relations between the divided but related ethnic groups along and astride the borders who yearn for closer contacts in spite of the presence of international boundaries and also for the improvement of their economic conditions.

Development of the borderlands for the benefit of the border impacted groups who yearn for closer interaction.

In the 21st century, war is becoming an anachronism. The idea of war or conflict can "pull or push" in extra-African countries especially France whose interest in Africa is viewed with suspicion. The experience of Liberia, Rwanda, Yugoslavia, Iraq, etc., where extra-regional powers have zeroed and should be avoided. The nature and character of modern technology and weapons inventory with attendant serious collateral damage to nations and peoples should instruction enough.

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