

## 6 Facing the Challenges of Renewal: The Boundary Perspective on History and Culture

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In discussing the challenges of renewal, currently faced in our collective resolve to advance the process for an immediate future Africa of citizens, as distinct from the prevailing structure of States and Governments, based on an injurious and outmoded concern about territory, boundaries and sovereignty assertions, it is pertinent to recall the prophetic lamentation of Basil Davidson, an esteemed and highly distinguished Africanist whose prodigious writings have done much to mid-wife and sustain modern African historical scholarship.

In a profound reflection on the new sovereign African States, as they began to emerge in the mid-1950s, Davidson has observed that,

...They reappear today in the sad evening of the world nation-states; yet their own tradition [i.e. the tradition of African people] was seldom one of narrow nationality. Their genius [i.e. African genius] was for integration – integration by conquest as the times prescribed, but also by an ever fruitful mingling and migration.

They were never patient of exclusive frontiers... Nineteenth-century [European] imperialism cut across [pre-existing indigenous state] boundaries and peoples and left, for a later Africa, the problem of redrawing frontiers on a rationale plan... (Davidson 1959).

The implication of colonially inherited state frontiers or boundaries and their maintenance within African States, the critical issues of identity and citizenship have been underscored in a wide range of scholarly writings and publications, including those by generations of African and Africanist historians.<sup>1</sup>

In his highly illuminating pioneer case history of Africa's international boundaries, *The International Boundaries of Nigeria, 1885–1960: The Framework of an Emergent African Nation*, a book published by Longman in 1970 but based on a doctoral thesis submitted to the University of London in 1960, the late Professor

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J. C. Anene, deposed that 'the contemporary African scene displays two conflicting tendencies: (a) balkanization and (b) federation or union. He noted that while 'all sane Africans certainly wish all good luck to the latter tendency',<sup>2</sup> there is no room for a complacency that tends to ignore the other alternative possibility: that of 'frontier wars' which have since broken out in their several numbers within and between several States in virtually every sub-region of Africa, making our continent the most war-afflicted region of the world since the end of the Second World War in 1945. The phenomenon of conflicts and wars has been so prevalent as to have virtually drowned the alternative efforts at achieving regional integration and African Unity. Efforts that have been inspired by pan-Africanism which in itself is as old as the nationalist movement that led to the creation of Africa's sovereign states and their problematic boundaries.

More recently, the Anene's two-fold optional formulation of 'balkanization' or 'union' has been taken on in a worrisomely on-going public debate, so well defined by Ali Mazrui in a 1994 article, 'The Bondage of Boundaries', published in *150 Economist Years*, where he has prophesized that...

... Over the next century, the outlines of most present-day African states will change in one of two ways. One will be ethnic self-determination which will create smaller states, comparable to the separation of Eritrea from Ethiopia. The other will be regional integration towards larger political and economic unions (Mazrui 1994).

While our own considered opinion, elaborated in a recently published book on *Boundaries and African Integration: Essays in Comparative History and Policy Analysis* (Lagos: PANAF Publishing Inc. 2003), is for the more optimistic 'alternative future of regional integration which will compel a re-orientation of the boundaries from their prevailing postures as irritants of conflicts into new frameworks of roles and functions as windows of opportunity for international [and intra-national] cooperation on the model of the evolution in the European Union' (p. 432), attention must be drawn to contrary arguments and advocacy in favour of 'balkanization' or to use Basil Davidson's understandably despairing phrase, 'redrawing frontiers on a rationale plan'.

As we have explained in the book on *Boundaries and African Integration*, especially Part Five focusing on 'Reflections on the Future', the caliber of the opinion leaders who favour boundary revision as a solution to Africa's deepening political and developmental crises makes it difficult to ignore the arguments. They range from the repeated calls in 1995 and 1996 for a 'Berlin II' by the Head of the Tutsi-dominated Government of Rwanda to the unveiled neo-imperialist advocacy of Norman Stone, until 1997 Professor of Modern History at Oxford,

who has asserted unequivocally that 'only a programme of enlightened re-imperialism from Europe can put right the bloody mess made of its former colonies in Africa'. For Darcus Howe of the *New Statesman* periodical, 'the old Africa, with its boundaries imposed by the imperialists, is on its last legs'. In Howe's view, 'the post-colonial leaders have long abandoned the mandate bestowed on them by the independence movements to reshape their continent's boundaries'. According to him, 'the OAU long ago turned into its opposite, became source for the continued legitimization of the old borders'.

This negative view of the now defunct Organisation African Unity as betrayer has been powerfully corroborated by no less a personality than Nigeria's Nobel Laureat, Wole Soyinka, who, in an interview published as 'Blood Soaked Quilt of Africa' in *The Guardian* of London (17 May 1994), is reported to have observed and suggested the following:

One hundred years ago at the Berlin Conference, the colonial powers that ruled Africa met to divvy up their interests into States, lumping various peoples and tribes together in some places, or slicing them apart in others like some demented tailor who paid no attention to the fabric, colour or pattern of the quilt he was patching together. One of the biggest disappointments of the Organisation of African Unity when it came into being more than 20 years ago was that it failed to address the issue.... [We] should sit down with square-rule and compass and re-design the boundaries of African nations... (Soyinka 1994).

It was apparently in response to the arguments for 'redrawing frontiers' or 'sit [ting] down with square-rule and compass and re-design[ing] the boundaries of African Nations' that Makau wa Mutua settled down to draw a new map of Africa published in *The Boston Globe* of 14 September, 1994. Although this was not the first attempt to propose a new political map for Africa, Makau wa Mutua's was unprecedented in the radical reduction of the present structure of 54 or so mainland States into a new one of 15, based on a highly debatable combination of what he has referred to as 'historical factors, especially demographic contours of Africa's pre-colonial state and political formations, ethnic similarities and alliances based on cultural homogeneity and economic visibility' (Wa Mutua 1994).

That this worrisome dimension of the debate has not been laid to rest is evident in the trend of thoughts generated by an international seminar on the paradoxically troublesome theme of 'Improving African Boundaries', hosted on April 2 to 3, 2003, by the African Studies Programme of the policy-influential School of Advanced International Studies of the Johns Hopkin University in

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Washington, DC, where the arguments for redrawing Africa's problematic borders were more dominant than those for their re-orientation within frameworks of the emerging programmes for regional integration and 'union'. The more popular question seemed to be that, if the political map of Europe, cradle of the classical nation-state, has been drawn and re-drawn over the years and, most especially, in the recent aftermath of the collapse of the USSR and its satellite communist states in the Central and Eastern sub-regions, why should Africa hold on to the doctrine and practice of *intangibilité* and sacrosanctity of colonially inherited boundaries?<sup>3</sup>

Protagonists of the arguments for boundary revision have continued to feel justified by the spate of new territorial and identity – concerned crises such as have since broken out in Côte d'Ivoire, once considered the paragon of peace and stable socio-economic development in West Africa, and the Darfur region of the Republic of Sudan where the Arabo-Islamic North has been pitted against the predominantly Christian and Animist South in one of the bloodiest and most protracted civil wars in Africa's Northeastern sub-region, perhaps the most notorious, not only for incidents of territorial and border wars, but also those of the concomitant 'embattled identity' and citizenship questions.

Whatever the merits, the ever raging arguments for explicit and systematic boundary revision in Africa are easily outweighed by the more towering advantages and benefits of what Anene would call the 'sane' alternative of regional integration or 'union'. Mutua's map, for example, illustrates the kind of conceptual confusions and actual production problems which the founding fathers of the OAU were trying to avoid when they took the historic decision to retain the boundaries as inherited at the formal political independence of each Member State.

But while considerations for regional peace and stability have justified the collective decision to retain the boundaries, it has certainly been a matter of deep regret that the right vision was not exercised for the next logical step, also best at the continental level, to be taken to actively and systematically promote the retained borders and, especially, the borderlands (i.e. lands and local communities along and across the inter-State boundaries), as natural adhesives for transborder cooperation and, therefore, lynchpins for African regional integration process.

In the entire era of the defunct OAU, contrary to the expectation of 'all sane Africans' (to continue our use of Anene's famous phraseology), the boundaries were hardened in the service of the emerging post-independence inheritance State-nations, rather than softened in the promotion of transborder cooperation and genuine regional integration agenda. In the OAU phase of African history,

African Unity sadly became the unity of the invariably authoritarian African States, most of them under brute military regimes or the inglorious one-party personal dictatorships, that trampled freely on the fundamental human and peoples rights of their citizenries, including, of course, the doubly disadvantaged constituencies in the geographical peripheries of the State territories. The OAU era was one of dedication to the political independence of African States, and the emergence of the modern African State system. It was an era for the enthronement of Africa of the States, not of the peoples and regions. The OAU era, characterized by little or no manifestations of any serious commitment to democratic governance, was especially unsuitable to any serious collective commitment to the idea and the ideal of an Africa of citizens.

Happily, the calls for the democratization and popularization of the African regional integration process, which have constituted the focus of my own entire research career of over four decades, dedicated to the comparative studies and analyses of Africa's 'transborder peoples', are beginning to yield some positive policy responses. It gladdens the heart, for example, to have lived to see in ECOWAS, not only the relevant cross-border-cooperation provisions in Article 58 of the Revised Treaty of 1993 but also the official adoption in February 2005 of the Community's new Cross-border Initiatives Programme (CIP) which will, henceforth, make collaborative planning and development of shared border regions or 'crosss-border areas' and the welfare of borderlands communities the heart of a new regional integration drive for the Community and individual Member States. The holding two weeks ago (September 26-28, 2005) in Sikasso, Mali, of a regional Workshop to launch the Sikasso (Mali) - Bobbo Dioulasso (Burkina Faso) -Korhogo (Côte-d'Ivoire) Cross-Border-Area development scheme, as the first pilot project under the new CIP of the ECOWAS, is evidence of the seriousness attached to the new grassroots people-oriented regional integration drive in the Community.

Together with Nigeria's older policy initiative and practice of transborder cooperation with her neighbours, formerly launched with a highly successful Nigeria-Benin Transborder Cooperation Workshop<sup>4</sup> at ASCON (Administrative Staff College of Nigeria), Topo, Badagry, in May 1988, the newly launched ECOWAS' CIP pilot project for the Mali-Burkina-Ivoirian shared Cross-border Areas is bound to produce considerable multiplier effects on other 'cross-border areas' of West Africa.<sup>5</sup>

The chances for a future projection of the ECOWAS' Cross-Border Initiatives Programme to a wider and higher African regional context and level are enhanced by the fact that Mr. Alpha Oumar Konare who, as President of Mali and initiator of the process for ECOWAS, is currently the Chairperson of the African Union

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Commission, and has already given some clear indications to this effect. The other indications for a collective resolve to achieve a new Africa of the people, rather than the present one of exclusively States, are contained not only in the establishment of an ECOWAS forum for civil society organizations (e.g. organised labour, women groups, traders, manufacturers, transporters, etc.) active in fields relevant to the cause of the Community. There are also so many of the provisions of the Constitutive Act of the African Union, urging, stimulating and mandating active participation of African peoples in the programmes of the Union.

The coast is, thus far in the matter of African regional integration promotion, reasonably clear for the renewal of a 'collective commitment to the idea and the ideal of an Africa of the citizens'.

But a great deal remains to be done, if a complete entrenchment of a genuine Africa of the people is to take an irreversible course. Among the tasks calling for urgent attention in this regard are:

- i) Entrenchment of democratic governance;
- ii) Acceleration of the decentralization process, going on in the mostly centralist African States;
- iii) (perhaps the most critical) The inauguration of a new regional-integration-friendly educational system, aimed at de-programming the educated elites, public decision makers and public servants, including especially the staff of the various law-and border-enforcement agencies of the various states, whose nation-statist mindsets tend seriously to obstruct the regional integration process;
- iv) In this latter regard, we suggest the establishment or/and support for specially designed regional and sub-regional 'unity schools' and institutional networking and scholarship programmes, on the model of the practice in the European Union.<sup>6</sup> It is especially recommended that adequate support be given to the African University Institute, Imeko, Ogun State, Nigeria, private-sector initiative that has been inspired by the example of the European University Institute in Florence, Italy, founded in 1972 by the then Member States of the European Economic Community and since taken over by the European Union.

These medium and long-term perspectives must be brought to bear on planning and development before the hope can be fully realized for an Africa of the people.

## Notes

1. For two latest Syntheses and Reflections, see Bahru Zewde, 'Embattled Identity in Northeastern Africa, A Comparative Essay' and Pierre Kipre, 'De la question nationale en Afrique noire', papers presented at the Special Theme One (African History in Comparative Perspective, New Approaches), CISH 20th International Congress of Historical Sciences, 3-9 July 2005, Sydney, Australia. The panel papers are to be published as a special issue of *Afrika Zamani*, Journal of the Association of African Historians.
2. Anne, p. xvi.
3. The Proceedings of the Seminars are soon to be published with Prof. Williams Zartman as editor.
4. The Proceedings of the Transborder Cooperation Workshop Series (with Benin in 1988, Niger in 1989 and Equatorial Guinea, 1992) have all been published by or for the National Boundary Commission in Abuja.
5. There is already a proposal for more of such pilot projects, submitted to the UN Office in West Africa by AFSTRAG in Lagos.
6. Apart from the European University Institute, there are in the European Union so many such other new regional-integration-promoting knowledge infrastructural facilities, including, for example, the International Scheldt Facility (ISF), founded in 1990, which supports higher technical education programmes, notably the Euro-Master degree, through courses taken in networked universities and polytechnics in Holland, Germany, Scandinavia and adjacent South-eastern U.K. There are also supportive scholarship programmes named after great European integrationist thinkers, artists and statesmen such as Jean Monnet, Leonardo Da Vinci and Erasmus.

The point about this essay is that Africa stands in dire need of similar supportive regional-integration knowledge infrastructure; and the African University Institute in Imeko is disposed not only to organize relevant consultative seminars and workshops, but also to coordinate host and judiciously disburse endowed scholarships that may be named after Africanists such as Nkrumah, Mandela, Modibo Keita, Gowon, Eyadema and of course, Obasanjo and Konare.

## References

Basil Davidson, 'Old Africa Rediscovered', 1959, pp. 267-8, as quoted in J. C. Anene, *The International Boundaries of Nigeria 1888-1960* (1970), p.2.

For sample publications, see *Western Yorubaland Under European Rule 1889-1945* (Longman 1976); *Partitioned Africans: Ethnic Relations Across Africa's International Boundaries, 1884-1984* (Lagos, London, New York, 1994); *West African Transformations* (Lagos, 2001) and *Boundaries and African Integration* (Lagos 2003).

Makau, wa Mutua, 1994, *The Boston Globe*, 22 September.

Mazrui, A., *150 Economist Years*.

Soyinka, Wole, 1994, *The Guardian*, 17 May.