

Territorial imperatives and inter-state boundary conflicts in Nigeria

Otora, Osmond Agbor

Department of History & International Studies

University of Calabar

Calabar - Nigeria

Abstract

The paper provides a thematic survey of conflicts development over the volatile and festering sore of boundary conflicts between Cross River and Benue and Cross River and Akwa Ibom. It traced the evolution of boundaries in Nigeria to the colonial impact and the creation of states and local government areas after Nigeria's independence in 1960. It is indicated that both international and local (inter-state) boundaries generate conflicts that are similar in their origin except that in the former, two sovereignties are involved. It further argues that as a recurrent issue in the management of the increasingly complex global system, territorial boundaries constitute the fundamental problem in the paradigm of national security. The paper concludes that since boundaries define an important segment of the environment within which decision-makers must function and contend, a multifaceted approach in the management and resolution of the complex impact of boundary conflicts must be critically analysed to positively act upon the dynamics of national development.

Keywords: Territory; Inter-state boundary conflicts; National security; Boundary management.

Introduction

Conflict development in Nigeria in the last two decades of civil rule has underscored the general observation that territorial conflicts constitute the most recurrent and intractable adversarial factor in inter-state relations. As a recurrent issue in the management of the increasingly complex global system, territorial boundaries constitute the central problem in the paradigm of national security. In a study that seeks to justify the tractability of territorial conflicts, the United Nation Report¹ indicate that "whatsoever the cause may be, boundary questions go on to compromise the peace and stability of nation-states and sabotage the cause of national integration as well as orderly economic planning and development within various sub-national entities." This is hard not surprising, as boundary problems in Nigeria are inexorably tied to the politics of its transformation from pre-colonial tributary systems into a territorial state under military tutelage. The systemic construction of the nation-state, as it developed from its military antecedent, enshrines in the argument of Hans J. Morgenthau state thus:

¹ United Nations, Workshop on the Border Problems in African Peace and Security: A Research Project (New York: United Nations, 1993), 8.



the supposition by the state of the supreme authority within the territory of the state... when this transformation had been consummated... the political world consisted of several states that within their respective territories were, legally speaking, completely independent of each other, recognising no secular authority above themselves....²

This transformation in the context of the Nigerian state involved a fundamental shift from the notion of borders as confines and marches to that of a geographical space: the *frontiere-limite*, which connotes the drawing of precise lines of demarcation between respective areas of state jurisdiction and sovereignty. This shift has in turn entrenched a benign Hobessian conception of international and regional systems as a threat system in which force remains the ultima ratio where the basis of diplomacy and contractual obligations goes beyond the boundaries of the various states. The recourse to high politics in defence of the core and context-specific values of the states in this context becomes a purposive, functional thing as one of the instruments in the orchestra of power, which states utilize at an appropriate time in the pursuit of their respective policy objectives.³

The sheer importance of preserving physical security from external intrusion invariably entailed the expansion of military power as a counter to such a threat, whether real or perceived. Consequently, as A. I. Asiwaju has regrettably noted "Africa became the theatre of the most devastating wars that have occurred in the global system since 1945."⁴ This, Asiwaju observed, was the systemic outcome of the long list of cases of conflicts arising from territorial claims made by specific states over their proximate neighbours, and equally numerous inter-state conflicts.

Thus, while inter-state boundary disputes and conflicts became recurrent problems in contemporary Nigeria as a result of the contradictions arising from the formative process of the Nigerian state in the colonial era. The development of an institutional capacity to manage the conflicts became a casualty of the ignominy politics in Nigeria, centred on a host of intra and extra nationalist interests and primordial sentiments. This paper endeavours to provide a thematic survey of these developments of discord and collaboration over the volatile and festering sore of boundary disputes between our various states in Nigeria. Such a review of necessity provides graphic insights into patterns of conflict development in the Nigerian state and multiple attempts at management and resolution.

² Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1978), 272.

³ Celestine Basse, "Territorial Imperatives and Border Problems in Africa," in *Governance and Border Security in Africa*, eds. Celestine Basse and Oshita O. Oshita (Lagos: Malthouse Press, 2010), 13.

⁴ A. I. Asiwaju, "The Bakassi Peninsula Crisis: An Alternative to War and Litigation." eds. G. Bake et al, *Boundaries and Energy: Problems and Prospects*, (London: Kluwer, 1998), 255.

Conceptual and Theoretical Explication of Boundary Problems

As a nation-state comprising of component units, Nigeria has been cut in the vortex of traumatic boundary conflicts which in many cases (Cross River-Akwa Ibom; Cross River-Ebonyi; Cross River-Benue) has escalated into a bloody confrontation. The tremendous diversity presented by the ethnic composition, socio-economic structure and physical characteristics of the Nigerian state has had far-reaching spatial consequences for the spiral of boundary conflicts and the role of the government in its resolution. As readily seen in the rancorous decades of civil rule experiments, the explosion of boundary disputes and the diffusion of military capabilities increased the tempo of armed confrontation. Thus, as R. Kanet and E. Kolodziej have noted in a recent survey that:

ill-defined territory provides many new states with reasons to challenge their boundaries if they will... boundaries were declared to be inviolable... in some instances, boundaries did not even exist, and the states expressly declared themselves to be an exception (of boundary) doctrine... in many other cases, boundaries were poorly demarcated and questionable. Still, in others, authentic criteria of geography, ethnic unity, and even history could be evoked to challenge the new boundaries.⁵

Given the unsalutary context of the genesis of the territorial state, it is not surprising that boundary problems in Nigeria have become one of the thorniest problems and source of continuing frictions and instability. This is generally so because the concept of geographical space gravitates, on the one hand, towards the defence of territorial threshold, and, on the other hand, where the criteria for spatial demarcation are ambiguous or simply none existent, then, the potential for violent conflict is infinite.⁶In this sense. Stephen Koch has argued with relevant statistical data that:

The occurrence of war in the contemporary world appears strongly related to the presence of constitutive disputes in the form of unresolved territorial conflicts... Indeed, the relationship between war and constitutive territorial disputes appears to be a very strong one....⁷

Koch's thought received theoretical validation from Lewis Richardsons *Statistics of Deadly Quarrels* (1960) and J. D. Singer and M. Small's *The Wages of War, 1816-1965* (1965), which seek to demonstrate beyond a reasonable doubt that there is a co-variance between border and war at one level of analysis and, at the other, between border and alliance formation. To that extent, Celestine Bassey contends that the problem of Nigeria's boundary disorder as a factor in

⁵ R. Kanet and E. Kolodziej, E., *Coping with Conflict after the Cold War*, (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1996), 9.

⁶ Celestine Bassey, "Territorial Imperatives and Border Problems in Africa," 13.

⁷ S. Koch, S. (1994). "Expanding the Strategic Behaviour of States: International Law as System Structure" *International Studies Quarterly*, 36, (1994), 594.

determining intra-national relations and how they “create awareness, risks and opportunities”⁸ has been the subject of extensive disputes in the literature on Nigerian boundaries.

The disputes derived from a convergence of ontological and phenomenological factors relating to the divergent world views of scholars conflicting conceptions of national integration, different views of the historical process, and multiple variants of the future of the state. As a consequence, the conventional wisdom about the cause of boundary conflict provides the analyst with a complex, confusing and often contradictory set of propositions from which to choose. Indeed, J. Barron Boyd caustically argued that:

Several different explanations are often given for the same case of conflict; plausible explanations of the Cross River-Ebonyi dispute are offered by referring to the safety value hypothesis, the ethnic population overhang factor or the salience of ethnicity in local politics. How then, are we to determine which of these propositions gives the most satisfactory general answer to the puzzles of boundary conflicts?⁹

Boyd rhetorical question reflects and anticipates the superfluity of scholarly literature on the implication of the question. Many pieces of literature on the subject matter tend to be either historical or controversial. Whereas the historical literature gives a thorough analysis of the causes and evolution of the conflict, the controversial literature emphasizes the rightness of one side of the divide. But there is little study of the conflicts as problems, requiring imaginative ideas and promising conditions for a resolution. In the light of the literal explosion of interests and findings on inter-state boundary issues, a review below represents a sort of second-order that sets out to cull out flaws and limitations in the context, content and structure of arguments in the mainstream literature on boundary conflicts in Nigeria.

The history of Nigeria predates the advent of colonial rule. Nigeria had existed in the form of several kingdoms, empires, chiefdoms and communities. But the creation of the entity now known as Nigeria is attributable to administrative fiat of the imperial authority in 1914 by the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern Protectorates by Lord Frederick Lugard. Until the advent of the colonialists, community boundaries in pre-colonial Nigeria had functioned differently from those imposed by the colonial administration. Empirical data derived from Nigeria’s territorial boundaries with proximate neighbours at the grassroots level reveals that it is erroneous to contend that boundaries are a Western creation unknown to local communities. These communities noted the extent of territories by agreeing on landmarks such as trees of very distinct nature, particularly the *iroko*

⁸Celestine Bassey, “Territorial Imperatives and Border Problems in Africa,” 17.

⁹J. Barron Boyd, (1980). “The Origin of Boundary Conflict in Africa,” in *Aspects of International Relations*, ed. M. W. Delancy African Studies Monograph, Institute of International Studies, (University of South Carolina, 1980), 9.

and mahogany, a lasting feature example, an ant-hill or other natural landmarks, rivers, valleys, mountains, etc.

Conceptually, the traditional boundary had the potential for conflict; however, the cooperative features were more prominent as these boundaries were not regarded as sacrosanct. Rather, the boundaries enabled the question of the geographical definition of kinship groups and marked growth in human organisation and its major utility value in pre-colonial society was their ability to promote inter-group harmony.¹⁰The colonial masters imposed boundaries that were alien to the traditional concept of boundaries. The boundaries have separated related ethnic groups, cultural coherent areas, common ecological zones, natural regions, the seabed, etc. The boundaries were meant to separate these groups for purposes of administrative and jurisdictional capability. However, neither the colonial nor post-colonial boundaries have functioned as they were expected to. The divided groups have continued to interact and yearn for closer relationships across the boundaries.

International, interstate and even inter-community boundary conflicts are by their nature similar to each other except that in the case of the latter, two sovereignties are involved outside the questions of sovereignty, all boundary disputes whether international, inter-state, inter-community to a large extent share similar historical, socio-economic, political causations and dynamics. This is because all boundaries share such characteristics as effects of partitioned cultures, difficulties in the use and appropriation of shared resources, effects of differential politics between two adjacent territorial spheres such as taxation, and the question of confusing political loyalty by the boundary population who are caught between the requirements of the separation nature of the boundaries and the desire for beneficial socio-economic interaction. Further to the above, Michael Bonchuk contended that boundary areas whether international, inter-state or inter-community tend to be located at the periphery relative to the core areas of the entity.¹¹ This puts them at a structural disadvantage in terms of the allocation of resources and other infrastructural facilities by the controlling authorities. Thus, most boundary conflicts relate to the issues indicated earlier.

As a corollary to the above, it is imperative to note that not applying a theory to explain border conflict causation must at best be "analytically tentative, prescriptively quixotic and, in certain cases, a dangerous misdirection of effort."¹²On this score, the Report of the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa rightly notes:

Boundary conflict may appear to be only positional, but upon further investigation, we would discover that other variables might be involved; for instance, ethnic population overhang, economic resources, or domestic stability. In the case of

¹⁰M. O. Bonchuk, "Inter-State Boundary Conflicts in Nigeria," in *Governance and Border Security in Africa* edited by Celestine Bassey and Oshita O. Oshita (Lagos: Malthouse Press, 2010), 124.

¹¹M. O. Bonchuk, "Inter-State Boundary Conflicts in Nigeria," 124.

¹² Celestine Bassey, "Territorial Imperatives and Border Problems in Africa," 18.

economic resources, we could then argue that if countries have been known to go to war just for the sake of territory, the chances for conflict would even be increased if the borderland is perceived to contain some resources of value to both participants.¹³

What could be inferred from the disputes in the extant literature, is that internal or inter-state boundary conflicts in Nigeria involve both local and systemic factors and linkages among them. Even though arguments from one level of analysis to another has been considered revulsive by many commentators on conflicts, such shifts are necessary to understand the dynamics of influences from several levels in contemporary boundary conflicts in Nigeria.¹⁴ Hence the focus has been to treat boundary conflicts in Nigeria as an antagonistic situation in which influences from all levels are in constant interaction over time. By identifying linkages among individual leadership perception, societal and systemic variables, the dimension and complexities of contemporary inter-state conflicts can be analysed.

Within such a linkage framework, the immediate analytical charge is to isolate, first, the environmental factors (domestic and transnational) that contribute to conflict development in inter-state borders. Second, the geopolitical variable (systemic) that sustain the conflicts. Following Celestine Bassey's analytical framework, environmental variables include long-term (contextual and convergent), medium-term, short-term and precipitating factors. Generally considered, however, these factors range from colonial legacies of arbitrary boundaries, domestic fragmentation (ethnic pluralism), and unnecessary pressures towards secession to preventive irredentist ambitions, regional autonomy and the perception or misperception of the configuration of elite power groups. The dynamics of such elite economic, political and ideological confrontation provide the fillip for extra-regional intervention in what, were in origin, intra-regional boundary disputes (e.g Cross River – Akwalbom, Rivers – Akwalbom and Delta – Edo boundary conflicts).

The long-term (contextual and convergent) variables relate to the deep contradiction and problem in the African social formations: the historical development and nature of state formation in Africa as compared to, for instance, to its counterpart in the West. In this respect, it is generally accepted by scholars that there is a high degree of correlation between the imposition of arbitrary boundaries under colonial tutelage and boundary conflicts. It is in this regard that A. I. Asiwaju noted in retrospective perception that:

... boundary problems and the similarities of structure or physical attributes on the ground are complemented by identical functions as limits of 'defended' area, a 'territory'

¹³The Report of the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa. (Addis Ababa: United Nations Centre for Peace and disarmament, 2013), 18.

¹⁴ G. Syn den and P. Diesing, Conflict among Nationals (Princeton: University Press, 1977), 213.

over which a state exercise sovereign jurisdiction. It is the inherent lack of harmony between such boundaries of states on the one hand, on the other, natural configurations such as land, water, air, flora and fauna, that has justified their being identified as 'artificial boundaries.'¹⁵

A further dimension of boundary conflict concerns what J. R. V. Prescott termed as positional boundary conflicts which developed as a result of an incomplete boundary definition.¹⁶ That is controversy over-interpreting the delimitation or description of the boundary. Thus, Robert Mathews explained that:

Although the demarcation of a boundary usually constitutes a technical problem that administrative and skilled personnel from either side can resolve without incident the indeterminate nature of a boundary may become the focus of considerable friction, aggravated by the discovery of mineral resources cutting across the undemarcated borders, differences of opinion over the interpretation of treaties may degenerate into boundary conflicts.¹⁷

The medium-term, short-term and precipitating environmental variables include a conglomerate of resources and functional factors as well as ideological and temperamental incompatibilities of some post-colonial generations of leaders in Africa (Nigeria). The resource factor concern the ownership and exploitation of resources held in common, such as minerals, wildlife and water bodies that mark or cross any boundary. Again, as A. I. Asiwaju and P. O. Adeniyi have noted "while the dominance of the state has tended to politicize problems of territory and boundary, the quintessence in virtually all cases of dispute and conflict is economic consideration, especially resource development and exploitation."¹⁸ Salient examples of this category of inter-state boundary conflicts are those over the struggle and control of seventy-six oil wells between Cross River – Akwa Ibom in their common maritime domain, the struggle and control of land, fishing areas and markets between Cross River and Akwa Ibom at Ikot Offiong. Indeed, the underdevelopment of the majority of the littoral states of Nigeria has made exploitable mineral resources a prize possession.

There is, therefore, a widespread analytical consensus in boundary conflicts literature that the contradictions arising from the set of environmental variables considered above do not constitute a structural necessity in terms of inter-state boundary conflicts development between Nigerian states. Other prime dynamics such as leadership perception and misperception, inter-ethnic or group

¹⁵ A. I. Asiwaju, "The Bakassi Peninsula Crisis: An Alternative to War and Litigation" in *Boundaries and Energy: Problems and Prospects*, edited by G. Blake. (London: Kluwer, 1998), 254.

¹⁶ J. R. V. Prescott, *The Geography of Frontier and Boundaries*. (Chicago: Aldine, 1965), 72.

¹⁷ Robert Mathews, R. (1970). "Interstate Conflicts in Africa" *International Organisations* XXIV (2) (Spring 1970): 344.

¹⁸ A. I. Asiwaju and P. O. Adeniyi, *Introduction to Borderlands in Africa: A Multidisciplinary and Comparative Perspective between Nigeria and West Africa*, edited by A. I. Asiwaju and P. O. Adeniyi (Lagos: University Press, 1989), ix.

animosity conflict tradition as well as systemic factors bearing on the basic structure of the international system,¹⁹ the extent to which ideological rivalry sustains the structure, and the relative instability of the states that comprise the Nigerian state. Considered together, these prime variables constitute a fundamental determinant in the trajectory of inter-state boundary conflicts development and resolution.

Historical Background

The Nigerian state evolved and emerged into political independence brimming with problems of contending loyalties. That is loyalty to the Nigerian state versus loyalty to the geo-ethnic interest. The pre-colonial institutions moved the country slowly towards a weak federal system of government. After independence, the leaders of the three regions: North, East and West exhibited an attitude that questioned their commitment to a sovereign and indivisible Nigerian state. This led to a serious political crisis resulting in military intervention and a civil war that lasted for thirty months.²⁰

The creation of twelve states in May 1967 by the Gowon administration was to break the formidable geo-ethnic fronts presented by the regions. Once states were created, ethnic groups began to clamour for their state, presumably to promote their identity and enhance their participation in the acquisition and appropriation of the nation's resources. The 'inheritance elite' wanted a platform with which to gain access to the prebendal structures that the neo-colonial state had created. Thus, in 1976, the number of states was increased from twelve to nineteen in 1982, increased from nineteen to twenty-one in 1987, later increased to thirty in, and further increased to thirty-six states in 1996, including a Federal Capital Territory with obvious implications for inter-states boundary configuration.

Ethnic groups that were not large enough to constitute a state of their own invariably found themselves on the wrong side of the boundary dominated by groups with overwhelming populations in their states. Some of these groups also found out that they have been split and domiciled in two different states. This is because, like international boundaries. Some of the internal boundaries were replicated on the map without adequate knowledge and care being taken to ensure that the position of the boundary on the map was precisely the position on the ground before such states were created. This, however, complicated the problem of such ethnic groups yearning to be joined together in one state. It amplified the perennial problem of resistance by such ethnic groups when a survey official was called in to establish the precise position of the

¹⁹ O. A. Otor, "Transborder Data Flows and the Challenge of Cross-Border Security: Implications for National Security and Socio-economic Development in the Era of Globalisation," *Ndunode (Special Edition): Calabar Journal of the Humanities*, 12 (January 2017) 372.

²⁰ O. Adigun, "Nationality and Citizenship: the Legal Problematic of Transborder Communities in Nigeria," in *Borderlands in Africa: a Multidisciplinary and Comparative Perspective between Nigeria and West Africa*, eds, A. I. Asiwaju and P. O. Adeniyi (Lagos: University Press, 1989), 274.

boundaries on the ground.²¹ In cases where there were mineral resources, the problem became more intense.

In 2001, the Federal Survey Records identified over sixteen inter-state boundary conflicts across the country. The most vicious ones listed include Akwa Ibom-Cross River, Akwa Ibom-Rivers, Delta-Ondo, Rivers-Imo, Bauchi-Plateau, Benue-Plateau, Enugu-Kogi, Ogun-Oyo, Cross River-Ebonyi, Benue-Cross River, Benue-Taraba and Adamawa-Gombe. These are in addition to intra-states conflicts within the states between local governments and communities such as Ife-Modakeke in Ondo, Offa-Erinle in Kwara, Oma-Awe in Plateau, Ugep-Idomi in Yakur, Nko-Onyadama in Yakur/Obubra, Akam-Okuni in Ikom²², Boje-Nsadop, Njua-Bano-Irruan in Boki, Yala-Obubra in Obubra, etc all Cross River State.

Most of these violent conflicts originated from the struggle and use of land for agricultural purposes. During these conflicts, several lives are lost; property destroyed producing in their wake severe displaced/refugee fluxes. In these conflicts, guns of different brands and categories, machetes, knives, bows arrows and sometimes small arms and sophisticated weapons are used. Some of the boundary conflicts are promoted by political elites due to political allegiance to some political affiliations and parties who use these conflicts to extract (or revenge) political gains.²³

It is important to note that the scale and complexity of boundary conflicts led the Murtala-Obasanjo administration to appoint [constitute] the Justice Nasir Boundary Adjustment Commission in 1976. The Commission amongst other things was saddled with the responsibility of looking into the boundary disputes referred to it by the Justice Irekefe Panel on the creation of states set up in 1975. In its report, the Justice Nasir Commission traced the history of boundary disputes to the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern Protectorates of Nigeria and precisely in 1917 when some people from the Kabba Provinces of Northern Nigeria demanded boundary adjustment, so that, they could join their kith and kin in the Western Province of the Southern Protectorate.²⁴

The persistence of the above demand led the Governor-General of Nigeria, Sir Fredrick Lugard to appoint a boundary commission, but the commission did not recommend boundary adjustment. Subsequently, Macpherson set up another commission on the same issue. And like the predecessor, the commission's verdict was "no adjustment" and by 1957, the Willinks Commission was set up and it opted for adjustment only after a plebiscite.²⁵ Indeed, the creation of more states and local governments by the various military governments led to more agitations for more states and local governments. In other words, the relentless

²¹M. O. Bonchuk, "Inter-State Boundary Conflicts in Nigeria," 125.

²²O. A.Otora, "Fluctuating Cooperation and Tensions in Akam-Olulumo (Okuni) Boundary Relations" *International Journal of Advanced Research* 7 (October 2019), 692.

²³M. O. Bonchuk, "Inter-State Boundary Conflicts in Nigeria", 125.

²⁴J. I. Eliagwu, (2004). "The Challenge of Nation Building in the 21st Century: the Nigerian Experience." *The Institute of Public Policy and Administration (IPPA) distinguished lecture* No. 4, (University of Calabar, 2004), 8.

²⁵N. Anongo. "Internal Boundaries and Communal Crisis in Rural Underdevelopment" *International Journal of Social Science and Public Administration*, 4,2 (2001), 23.

boundary conflicts across the nation have generated attendant security implications, negates socio-economic development and above all, pose a threat to national stability.

The Bekwarra-Obudu (Cross River) – Tiv (Benue) Boundary Relations.

The evolution of the boundary between Bekwarra-Obudu in Cross River State and the Tiv in Benue State is traceable to the colonial era. In 1912, the British established a boundary regime intended to separate the Tive and Obudu and since then, relations between these groups have been moderated by boundary conflicts. Bekwarra Local Government was later created from Ogoja in 1996 and bound by the Tiv in Benue State in the North; while Obudu is located in the north-eastern section of the boundary and bounded by the Tiv of Vandeikya Local Government of Benue State. The Tiv on the other hand is domiciled in Vandeikya Local Government Area of Benue State.²⁶

The evolution of this boundary has had grave security implications for the divided groups. Before the establishment of the boundary, inter-group relations between the groups were said to have been cordial, as both groups intermingled, intermarried, traded among themselves, attended common festivals and shared similar socio-cultural and religious institutions. However, the boundary conflict between them began when Lord Lugard erected a barricade using Glenna trees to separate these groups for administrative and jurisdictional convenience. This row of trees, locally known as 'Lugard wall' or 'iron curtain' has failed to function as envisaged because of the arbitrariness of the delineation. The legal notice No. 126 of 1954 became the official boundary demarcation on the ground; thus, the boundary regime has been that of instability, generating grave security problems between the boundary groups and the two states.²⁷

In other words, one of the major causes of the boundary's instability like every other boundary related conflict according to O. A. Otor²⁸ is land hunger by both groups who desire farmlands since the chief pre-occupation of both groups is farming. Indeed, the Bekwarra-Obudu-Tiv boundary conflict is usually - aggravated during the farming season when land is needed for crops cultivation. Thus, in 1979, -the Bekwarra and Tiv had to go to war over the boundary contestation. However, the Bekwarra-Obudu-Tiv boundary regime is also characterized by incessant hostility, acrimonious violent conflicts, mutual fear and suspicion. Historical evidence indicates that the cordial relationship that had existed - between the Obudu and Tiv was disrupted after 1914. This was noted by two colonial administrators, Gordon and Macpherson in their letters of June 1st and June 22nd 1933, that:

²⁶ M. O. Bonchuk, "Inter-State Boundary Conflicts in Nigeria," 128.

²⁷ M. O. Bonchuk, "Inter-State Boundary Conflicts in Nigeria," 129.

²⁸ O. A. Otor, "Fluctuating Cooperation and Tensions," 694.

Concerning the Obudu-Tiv palavers, as shown in the 1914 schedule, the distance and bearing given are not always accurate. This is the case at Okorotung hill, which has given rise to most of the wrangling over ownership of farmlands....²⁹

As indicated above, the boundary communities were involved in violent conflicts in 1917, 1924, 1933 and 1950 when markets in Obudu and Tsar were destroyed. In clashes of 1974, 1976, 1978, 1979, 1983 to 1984, these groups fought over farmlands in that area, generating refugees and creating serious human security problems for both Cross River and Benue State Governments.³⁰ Violent conflicts were also recorded between the Igwo in Obudu and the Tiv in Vandeikya in 1985 in which about 533 farmlands belonging to both communities were destroyed. Between 1993 and 2003, there were flashes of conflict that also involved the Igwo and the Tiv, whereas, in 2009, the Igwo people were again engaged in a fracas with their Mbegashi (Tiv) neighbours with heavy mobilization of troops from both belligerents. In all these conflicts, sophisticated weapons and small arms were used with heavy casualties on both sides. Reacting to the 2009 crisis, the Paramount Ruler of Obudu, UtijedyAgba remarked that "war is an ill-wind that blows no society any good. I must confess that the recent fracas between Obudu and the Tiv was the most catastrophic in our history of boundary disputes."³¹ According to Anongo, the magnitude of destruction in these conflicts are often so high, so much that the replacement value of the lost property is usually never quite regained even with government intervention and compensation.³²

Akwalbom – Cross River Boundary Conflict.

On May 27th 1967, South Eastern State was among the twelve states created by the Gowon-led military administration and in 1976, the name South Eastern State was changed to Cross River State and, on September 30th 1987, Akwa Ibom State was created from Cross River State by the General Ibrahim Babangida led federal military government. The boundaries of Cross River State were re-configured and Cross River State is today bounded by Benue State in the north, Ebonyi and Abia States in the west and Akwa Ibom in the southwest.³³ The political relations between Akwa Ibom and Cross River predate the creation and re-creation of the two states. Historical records point to the fact that the people that inhabit the littoral area particularly the boundary zone were neither isolated nor self-reliant. Historical providence and geography had placed them together from antiquity. Before the creation of Akwalbom State from Cross River

²⁹B. Gordon and J. Macpherson Intelligence Report on Yakoro and Ogoja Provinces. NAE/FGP 1321 (1955), 44.

³⁰M. O. Bonchuk, "Inter-State Boundary Conflicts in Nigeria," 129.

³¹"Obudu-Tiv Disputes." Office of the Paramount Ruler, Obudu Local Government Council Secretariat. File No. Ob/TC/15, Vol 1 quoted in J. U. Agba, "Obudu – Tiv Boundary Dispute.," B. A. Project, (Federal College of Education, 2009), 5.

³²N. Anongo. "Internal Boundaries and Communal Crisis in Rural Underdevelopment," 25.

³³W. Ekpo, "Geographical Location of Akwalbom State" in Akwalbom State: The Land of Promise, ed., E. O. Uya,(Calabar: Clear Lines Publishers, 1990), 12.

State, boundary communities lived together engaging in fishing, farming, trading, etc, without acrimony and conflict over economic resources.³⁴

Historical accounts indicate that the said boundary people of Oku Iboku (Akwa Ibom) and Ikot Offiong (Cross River) had a common local authority when they settled at *Usung Esukand* answered to the same clan head and disputes between these communities were settled by the same traditional authority. These communities shared similar socio-cultural, political and religious institutions, for example, the *Ekpe* institution which is common to both groups in the disputed area. Although the people were engaged in petty trading, their main occupation was agriculture and fishing.³⁵

However, the people of Ikot Offiong who settled at *Usung Esukin Odukpani* Local Government Area close to Itu bridgehead and their Oku Iboku neighbours depended essentially on fishing as their main source of income and sustenance. This led to the establishment of a thriving fishing market: 'the Volvo market' close to the Itu bridgehead. Apart from the Volvo market, other markets serve the commercial needs of the people in the littoral including Atabong, Tom Shot Island and Oku Iboku.³⁶

Indeed, the socio-cultural relationship that had existed between the *Efik* speaking people of Ikot Offiong in Cross River State and the *Ibibio* people of Oku Iboku in Akwa Ibom State who had been domiciled at the Itu bridgehead over the centuries became strained after the creation of Akwa Ibom State. The boundary did not take into consideration the realities of the boundary between Akwa Ibom and the Cross River States. In 2001, there was a boundary disagreement over some parcels of land and the people of Ikot Offiong was attacked and sacked by their Oku Iboku neighbours, and the Ikot Offiong had to abandon their ancestral homes and settled at *Usung Esukin Odukpani* Local Government Area.³⁷

It is important to note that the boundary conflict arose due to land hunger and fishing rights in the area. It was alleged that the Oku Iboku people recruited mercenaries from Umon Island and Agwagune in Biase. These mercenaries adopted a guerrilla type of warfare and burnt down the entire Ikot Offiong villages including their economic trees, fishing nets, markets, etc. The *Punch* newspaper editorial noted that "the extent of destruction was quite massive and rehabilitating the displaced people would cost millions of naira" (The *Punch* 2001, p. 2).³⁸

After the creation of Akwalbom State, the boundary between the two states was not properly delineated, mapped out and demarcated by the National Boundary Commission. The boundary configuration was, therefore, confusing to the boundary impacted people. The people perceived the Cross River as the

³⁴ O. A. Otor, "Calabar and the Challenges of Maritime Security in Nigeria's South-Eastern Borderlands," *International Journal of HumanitiesTheoreticus* 2 (December, 2019), 106.

³⁵ M. O. Bonchuk, "Inter-State Boundary Conflicts in Nigeria," 127.

³⁶ M. O. Bonchuk, "Inter-State Boundary Conflicts in Nigeria," 129.

³⁷ O. A. Otor, "Calabar and the Challenges of Maritime Security in Nigeria's South-Eastern Borderlands," 106.

³⁸ The *Punch* Newspaper, "Editorial," The *Punch* Publishers, August 10, 2001.

natural boundary, yet, the people of Oku Iboku in Akwa Ibom persistently cross the river to attack villages in *Usung Esukin* Odukpani Local Government Area of Cross River State. Both communities have constantly resorted to historical rights to claim their ancestral lands. Community leaders in Oku Iboku opined that the land had always been their land, it was passed on to them by their forefathers, in the same vein, the exiled people of Ikot Offiong also claim historical rights over the disputed area. The natural resources in the area and the economic potentials from the Calabar-Itu bridgehead to the Bakassi Peninsula have also fuelled the boundary conflict. On this score, A. E. Ekoko submits that “internal (inter-state) boundary conflicts are sometimes so serious that the dead are not allowed to rest in peace. In the Cross River and Akwalbom conflict at Itu bridgehead popularly called ‘Volve market’, for example, graves were exhumed and corpses of aliens buried in foreign territories are relocated for burial.”³⁹

The Ikot Offiong (Cross River) and Oku Iboku (Akwa Ibom) boundary conflict has produced one of the worst refugee fluxes in recent times as evidenced by the number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) who moved either to Cross River or the Akwa Ibom States respectively as their states of origin. For instance, the entire villages of Ikot Offiong were forced to migrate across the Cross River into Odukpani Local Government Area in Cross River State and were settled at Ikot Imot Ekpo;⁴⁰ while those from Oku Iboku migrated into Ekaiko, close to the defunct Nigeria Newsprint Manufacturing Company (NNMC). The conflict dislocated socio-economic activities and stalled development in the area since socio-economic development can only take place in a serene and peaceful environment. The aftermath of the conflict has continued to generate mutual suspicion and insecurity particularly for those who commute the Calabar – Uyo highway either for leisure, government or livelihoods.⁴¹

Policy Options

The persistence and intractability of inter-state boundary conflicts in Nigeria (as could be seen in the fratricidal conflict between Obudu – Tiv and Ikot Offiong – Oku Iboku) pose a greater problem for socio-economic development and the process of national integration in Nigeria. This is because the successful implementation of national development plans to collective self-reliance in isolation from the prevailing political environment in Nigeria is quite doubtful. This is because the successful implementation of plans relating to collective self-reliance in isolation from the prevailing political environment in Nigeria is quite doubtful. It has to be recognised, therefore, that basic choices of economic development strategy and focus of development programmes are always political as well as economic; they cannot be successfully implemented in isolation from the transboundary and political fabric of a given national entity. In other words, a functional collaboration of the type envisaged by the national development plans cannot be viable without a high degree of mutual trust in the political class, substantial faith in the permanence of the joint economy of the

³⁹A. E. Ekoko, *Boundaries and National Security*. (Abraka: Delta State University Press, 2004), 18.

⁴⁰M. O. Bonchuk, “Inter-State Boundary Conflicts in Nigeria,” 129.

⁴¹O. A. Otor, “Calabar and the Challenges of Maritime Security in Nigeria’s South-Eastern Borderlands,” 108.

subnational entities and substantial consensus on common socio-political objectives.

Thus, transboundary rather than sub-national sovereignty assertion and related territorial claims and counter-claims serves as the only viable option for transboundary cooperation in national planning and integration projects, which have become far more urgent now than ever before given the worsening economic crisis currently facing the individual subnational entities of the Nigerian state. What is, therefore, required is an interactive model of boundary conflicts resolution (win-win approach) which holds greater promise for a more enduring solution than the 'win-loss alternative of military hostility or argumentative litigation.

Since territorial claims and inter-states boundary conflicts in Nigeria have become so dramatic with the extreme manifestation of what has been termed "manifest conflict processes or situations" which at least two actors or their representatives try to pursue their perceptions of mutually incompatible goals by undermining directly or otherwise, the goal-seeking capability of one another. In this regard, it is important to remember that it is not in the occurrence of conflict as such, but how the antagonistic parties attempt to deal with the consequences afterwards. As Maron Deutsch admonished that:

... there are two orientations to conflict management: competitive and cooperative dimensions. Cooperative processes are associated with 'zero-sum' thinking and adversarial behaviour, while cooperative processes have to do with 'positive sum' thinking and collaborative behaviour.⁴²

However, the two orientations above can certainly be viewed as extreme opposites, there is also a continuum in between them. Lethal force, litigation and arbitration are intended to impose solutions in O. A. Otor's paradigm to settle, rather than, resolve boundary conflicts. conciliation, traditional mediation, facilitated and unfacilitated problem solving, on the other hand, involve efforts to resolve rather than settle boundary conflicts.⁴³

Therefore, if the initial focus of boundaries is justified by the escalating conflicts with proximate neighbours, the current escalation of crises on inter-state boundaries suggests the need for a shift in emphasis to inter-state and inter-community boundaries which have been so productive of conflicts that threaten internal security and impact negatively on the security of Nigeria's external boundaries. To that extent, the state governments must begin to play more positive roles in the management of inter-state and inter-community boundary conflicts to complement the efforts of the National Boundary Commission. One area in which state governments can play proactive roles is in the funding of seminars, symposia or partnering with the universities, research institutes,

⁴²MaronDeutsch, M. (1973). *The Resolution of Conflicts*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973).

⁴³ O. A. Otor, "Fluctuating Cooperation and Tensions," 699.

inter-governmental and non-governmental organisations on the vexed issues of boundary conflicts.

It is hoped that the Cross River State government in collaboration with the governments of Akwa Ibom, Ebonyi and Benue states would evolve imaginative policy options that would saturate boundary conflicts. As showed in the study and even recently, some boundary communities residing between Cross River and her proximate neighbours have gone to war to settle their differences over boundary related issues. In agrarian communities, for instance, the fight for access to fertile parcels of land is not uncommon, or in fishing communities where they fight to control creeks, ponds and maritime areas that are rich in natural resources as reflected in the bloody Ikot Offiong and Oku Iboku crisis.

From historical experiences, recourse to conflict has never settled any boundary dispute because in a war situation, there is never a winner and, litigations are yet to produce acceptable boundary settlement. Therefore, war and litigation must be persuaded to yield grounds to the emerging paradigm of transboundary management of shared resources. The paradigm emphasizes common utilization of shared natural resources, the establishment of joint economic ventures for the common good of the boundary impacted populations, thereby reducing tension and promoting cooperation, planning and development. Finally, identification of early warning signals and addressing them forthwith. This is important because if such flashpoints are left to snowball into a crisis moment, the cost of solving these boundary problems cannot be overemphasized. Indeed, considering human lives and property lost to boundary conflicts in Nigeria, nothing would be too much to avert further losses.

Conclusion

From the foregoing, it could be concluded that because boundaries define an important segment of the state in which decision-makers must function, inter-state boundary conflicts have had a multifaceted and complex impact upon the dynamics of inter-state, inter-local government and inter-community relations in Nigeria. The paper traced the evolution of boundaries in Nigeria to the colonial impact and the creation of states and local governments after Nigeria's independence in 1960. It was indicated that both international and inter-state boundaries generate conflicts that are similar except that in the former, two sovereignties are involved. Analytical emphasis was on the Tiv people in Benue, and Obudu-Bekwara in Cross River on one hand, and the people of Ikot Offiong (Cross River) and Ibibio people of Oku Iboku (Akwa Ibom).

The nature and character of the conflicts were revealed, indicative of the massive destruction and security implications of the conflicts. By way of recommendations, various policy options were suggested to douse the tension and conflicts. It was emphasized that states in conflicts should jointly develop their boundary areas and imbibe the alternative model of transboundary management as opposed to war and litigation. Hence, war and litigation must, therefore, be persuaded to yield to the emerging paradigm of joint planning and development of shared economic resources for the inclusive use of the boundary impacted populations. This would enable the decomposition of the barrier

mentality and perceive boundaries as merely administrative and as bridges for peaceful co-existence.

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