

CHAPTER 12 BOUNDARY DISPUTES AND THE THREAT TO AFRICAN UNITY

Objectives

After studying this chapter, students should be able to:

- explain why boundary disputes occur in Africa;
- identify the places where boundary disputes occur in Africa;
- discuss the effects of boundary disputes in Africa.

Introduction

Boundary disputes which centres on claims and counterclaim over portion of lands are threatening the peace and unity of Africa as a continent. African states which were initially under colonial rule gained their independence. Following this development, boundry dispute became pronounced among African countries. The question remains, why is boundary disputes occurring in Africa?

12.1 Reasons for Boundary Disputes in Africa

Boundary disputes which started in Africa following the exit of colonialism, simply suggest the fact that, colonialism is a central issue to be discussed in treating reasons behind boundary disputes in Africa. This is because the way and manner in which political boundaries were drawn by the European colonial masters, constituted a major factor in the frequent occurrence of boundary dispute in Africa. The colonial powers who in their bid to satisfy their hunger for land, sat down in their conference tables in far away Berlin from November 15, 1884 to January 30, 1885 with no African representative, to share out African lands in utter disregard for Africa's existing boundaries which were drawn by the Africans with regards to their local circumstances, such as ethnic distribution, economic needs (such as land and water use) and communication patterns. The colonial boundaries arrogantly separated people of the same tribes, culture and political and socio-economic systems. For instance, the Yorubas were divided between Nigeria, Republic of Benin, and Dahomey. In the Northern part of Nigeria, one finds out that the same colonial division dismembered members of the Sokoto caliphate, with some of its parts allocated to Cameroon, Niger and Chad. Following this action, some ethnic groups such as the Hausa, Fulbe and Mandara are found across the borders of Nigeria, Niger and Cameroon.

Ethnic Factors: This has turned out to be a major cause of conflicts in Africa as these colonial separated tribes struggled to reunite themselves after the exit of the colonial masters. This was the case of Somali whose people were distributed to Ethiopia and Kenya, when they made attempts to

reunite themselves under one country. Today, this Somalia's effort is largely considered to be the principal factor responsible for Somalia's Irredentism against its neighbours.

Historical Factor: Africa's boundary dispute evolved from the fact that the colonial boundaries of Africa were loosely delimited and not actually demarcated. Where there were demarcations, it was usually done by using some peculiar natural features such as trees, mountains and rivers. These features disappeared over the years, making it difficult for any body to trace it out.

This issue was further complicated, based on the fact that most colonial boundaries were not accompanied with detailed maps. These countries were therefore left to decide where the boundary lines were to be drawn. In this situation the territorial stances of these countries became a problem and conflict ensued. This situation has been partly responsible for the border dispute between Nigeria and Cameroon, Nigeria and Chad and Algeria and Morocco.

Political Factor: The boundary disputes has to do with the spread of nationalist ideas, which saw everything done by the colonialists as bad. In the existing spirit of anti-colonialism and in the minds of these nationalist leaders, they became critical and view with contempt, their inherited international borders. The anti-colonialism in them made them to reject these imposed borders as well as other arbitrary imposition of the colonial rule. This reason accounts for why Somali Republic, Morocco, Ghana and Togo, outrightly rejected the idea of maintaining the existing borders, immediately they gained their political independence. They embarked upon irredentist policies that demanded for a complete rearrangement of the colonial boundaries in the whole of African continents.

Another political factor was the spread of different political ideologies in Africa. The adoption of radical political ideas by some countries became a threat to other countries who wanted to maintain the 'status quo'. The radical ideologists naturally provoked the anger of the conservative neighbours who tried to retaliate by using boundary issues to provoke their radical neighbours. The poorly demarcated boundaries usually provide a good excuse for irredentism by the 'conservative countries', for instance, the hostility that broke out between Algeria and Morocco, could to a large extent, be attributed to the ideological differences which arose within the two states.

Economic Factors: In recent times, some natural resources of great economic importance have been discovered along the common borders of African countries. In such a situation, each party tries to lay claim of ownership to such lands. These claims have been sustained by the absence of clearly demarcated boundaries between the countries concerned and this has always resulted in conflicts which escalated sometimes to war. It is no longer in doubt that the presence of oil along the Nigerian Coastal areas may be responsible for the current boundary dispute between Nigeria and Cameroon along their common coastal borders.

Another place where economic motive has been used as an excuse to spark off boundary dispute is along the Libyan and Chadian common borders. The border area under dispute is believed to be rich in mineral resources, which Libya insisted is her's. While, Chad refuses to forfeit it. This uncompromising approach of the two countries along this mineral-rich border area resulted in a war, between the two states, which lasted for many years.

12.2 Some Selected Places where Boundary Disputes Occur (Nigeria– Cameroon Border Dispute)

Nigeria–Cameroon boundary dispute is one of the lingering boundary disputes in Africa. This boundary dispute had lasted till date mainly because of the economic importance of the disputed land which is believed to be rich in oil.

The Bakassi Peninsula is mostly inhabited by the Efik of Nigeria. For many years, the area had been administered as part of Cross River State of Nigeria and for many years the Peninsula had been dominated by Nigerian fishermen.

But the discovery of large quantities of oil around that coastal area of Nigeria must have increased Cameroon’s interest in the Bakassi peninsula and the adjoining territory, both of which traditionally belonged to Nigeria. The Cameroon, authorities decided in the early seventies, to strengthen their claim to the peninsula and remove all traces of Nigeria’s historical rights in the area by changing the names of various settlements to Cameroonian names. The way the Cameroonian gendarmes were inflicting pains and harassing the Nigerian settlements showed Cameroon’s readiness to go to war with Nigeria, but the Nigerian Government handled the matter with great maturity. Yet, the Cameroonian gendarmes went and physically occupied the disputed area. At this point, Nigeria had to station its troops along the disputed coastal border areas, in order to avoid further incursion into Nigeria by the Cameroonian gendarmes. Nigeria and Cameroon later opted for mutual settlement of the dispute through mediation and consultation, just for the sake of good neighbourliness.

Somalia – Ethiopia Boundary Disputes

The Somalia – Ethiopia boundary disputes is another African boundary dispute where the traces of historical and economic factors had to show itself. The colonial government in its boundary demarcations had separated many ethnic groups thereby creating new nationalists which embraces the homogeneous Somali people into Ethiopia, Kenya and Djibouti. After the exit of the colonial power, Somalia demanded for the adjustment of the colonial boundaries which she argued divided the Somali people along the entire length of the existing borders with Ethiopia and Kenya. Somalia at the 1963 OAU meeting, accused the Ethiopians of taking possession of a large portion of Somali territory without the consent and against the wishes of the Somali people. There was a verbal battle between the Somali delegates and the Ethiopian Prime Minister who had to address the Somalian delegates with some dirty informal languages in order to rebuff the challenges made by Somalia against Ethiopia.

We must note at this point that the causes of the border dispute between Somali and Ethiopia went beyond the historical factors. Ethiopia’s claim to Somalia was based on her great need for an outlet to the sea, which they believed the federation of Somali with Ethiopia would provide. It therefore follows that as soon as the Second World War ended and the question of disposing the Italian colonies arose, Ethiopia quickly laid claim to Eritrea and Somalia and many African

nationalists supported the claim. This resulted to serious border disputes. It was only through the intervention of the OAU that the matter was settled through mediation and consultation. Although, the settlement which was achieved was short-lived as the disputes re-echoed again in March 1965 and since then, the border disputes between Somali and Ethiopia have become a permanent disturbance that is yet to be resolved.

12.3 Effects of Boundary Disputes on African Unity

One thing which have affected the unity and co-operation of independent African states since the exit of colonialism is boundary disputes. Hardly can you point at any African state that has not had one or two boundary dispute with its neighbours. Statistics had shown that as at February, 1980, a total of at least thirty boundary disputes had been recorded. Out of this number, twenty-one were without violence between the affected countries while the other nine had occurred with violence.

These disputes have thwarted and made nonsense of all developmental initiatives that would have moved the continent forward developmentally.

Territorial disputes always create suspicion among nations, especially African countries that have managed to secure their independence from their colonial masters. This has made it very hard for African states to come together to deliberate and consider best ways that could better the continent and the life of its people.

Most often, enemies of the continent have cash in on these boundary problems, to cripple co-operative decisions reached by African states.

Economic progress can hardly be made in a place where there are conflicts and disputes. Apart from that, huge budgeting allocations are used in prosecuting wars that have affected the free movement of goods and persons across the borders. These has made it almost impossible for Africans to achieve the continental aspiration of economic integration.

Boundary disputes which has continued to re-occur had affected the OAU now AU which was founded with the purpose of uniting African states, thus, the Organisation has always used precious part of its time to discuss boundary problems, while leaving other important developmental issues they need to discuss.

Summary

- Boundary disputes in Africa took a dangerous dimensions following the exit of colonial rule in Africa.
- Colonialism contributed strongly to the issues of boundary disputes in Africa, because it did not consider local circumstances such as ethnic distributions, economic needs and communication patterns, while partitioning the lands and territories of Africa.
- Boundary disputes have persisted in Africa because the colonial demarcation and delimitation were loosely made without backing it up with maps.

- The separation of the homogenous ethnic group into different nationalists has contributed to boundary problems when the group tries to re-unite.
- The polarization and spread of political ideas where some adopted progressive radical ideas and some conservative and exploitative ‘status quo’ is also a political factor responsible for boundary dispute in Africa.
- Economic importance which some of these boundary areas later acquired also provoked boundary disputes.
- Boundary disputes have been a source of distractions, suspicions and mistrusts, which have distracted African unity and development.
- Boundary disputes have affected the economic development of Africa, since huge budgetary allocation have been used to prosecute these wars.
- As a result of these disputes across the border, the continental economic integrations which would have resulted from free movements of goods and persons has not worked.
- There are boundary disputes between Nigeria and Cameroon, Somalia and Ethiopia.

Objective Questions

1. Boundary disputes in Africa occur after _____
 - A. the exit of colonialism
 - B. before colonialism
 - C. at the wake of colonialism in Africa
 - D. after the European conference in 1884/85
2. Which of these countries moved for outright review of all colonial boundaries in Africa?
 - A. Somali, Morocco, Ghana and Togo
 - B. Nigeria, Togo and Ghana
 - C. Somali, Ghana and Nigeria
 - D. Cameroon, Ghana and Nigeria.
3. African boundary disputes are provoked currently by which of the following factor?
 - A. Historical factors
 - B. Economic factors
 - C. Political factors
 - D. None of the above
4. In which year did the European conference that shared out Africa to major European powers sat?
 - A. 1963
 - B. 1988
 - C. 1884/85
 - D. 1978

5. The Nigeria – Cameroon boundary dispute was provoked in the 70s mainly because of _____.
- A. political importance attached to the dispute zone
 - B. economic importance attached to the disputes border
 - C. historic importance attached to the disputed border
 - D. ethnic importance attached to the dispute border
6. Boundary dispute in Africa has turned out to be a source of _____.
- A. economic prosperity
 - B. unity and cooperation
 - C. distractions and suspicions
 - D. none of the above
7. In what way did the spirit of nationalism embraced in the early 1960s contributed to Africa's boundary disputes?
- A. It made them see everything from the colonial powers from a bad light including colonial demarcations.
 - B. It planted the spirit of Africa's love for the Europeans
 - C. None of the above
 - D. All of the above
8. In which of the OAU meeting did Somali accused Ethiopia of taking possession of a large portion of its territory?
- A. OAU meeting in 1961
 - B. OAU meeting in 1967
 - C. OAU meeting in 1963
 - D. None of the above
9. Which of the following best explains the cause of Somali – Ethiopia border dispute?
- A. Somali's need for an outlet to the sea
 - B. Ethiopia's need for an outlet to the sea
 - C. None of the above
 - D. All of the above
10. OAU's earliest decision to leave the colonial African boundaries the way they are, was based on _____.
- A. no time to look into the matter
 - B. any attempt to adjust it will generate more problems
 - C. member states were not interested
 - D. none of the above

Essay Questions

1. Discuss the issues which resulted to the border dispute between Somali and Ethiopia.

2. What are the causes of boundary disputes in Africa?
3. Outline the major effects of boundary disputes on African unity?
4. Briefly discuss the various problems associated with African boundaries.
5. What are the contesting issues in Nigeria – Cameroon boundary dispute?