

# Contemporary Issues on Colonial Border Cultures

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## Abstract

Colonialism impacted on the socio-cultural ethos of the colonized. It is acknowledged as an integral part of the national history and monument of most countries and has significantly influenced the cultures of the colonized. One of the consequences of colonialism is the re-mapping and re-delineation of geographical boundaries with consequent split and relocation of cultures and languages, in addition to the introduction of cultural boundaries among people who, hitherto, never shared common cultures. The paper systematically reviews the positions of various scholars and draws relevant inferences.

Keywords: Contemporary; Issues, Colonial; Border; Culture.

## Introduction

Colonialism did more harm than good to the colonized nations and the overall impact varies from one country to another. Indeed, some European scholars argue that Africa benefitted immensely from colonialism and could not have experienced the level of infrastructural development without colonialism. However, some African scholars opine that colonialism was exploitative and driven by the insatiable quest of the colonial masters for resource control of the colonized nations.

One of the effects of colonialism is the creation of artificial boundaries and borders, hence, some citizens of colonized countries, their languages and cultures are dispersed to other countries. Although boundary agitations are not alien, the artificial boundaries created by colonialism have further deepened boundary disputes across many countries; for example, the Greentree Agreement was designed to implement a ruling of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) of 2002 under which the Bakassi Peninsula was transferred from Cross River State, Nigeria to Cameroon. Under this agreement, some indigenes of Bakassi in Cross River State, Nigeria were compelled to accept territorial identity in Cameroon while the rest remained in Nigeria. Predicated on the precedence set by colonial masters, the Nigerian Government created Rivers State in 1967 out of the former Eastern Region. Under the creation, many Igbo communities in the former Eastern Region were ceded to Rivers State, while some of their kins men remained in the present Imo State.

Jonsson describes colonialism thus; “colonialism is the capitalistic and exploitative method by a superior nation (colonizer) to lord itself over a less privileged nation (colonized) leading to the impoverishment of the latter. The concept of colonialism has political, economic and cultural implications,” (2). Jonsson considers colonialism in the negative aspect and disagrees that colonialism had a positive impact on the colonized contrary to the opinions of some western scholars. Said (1978) corroborates this notion and refers to the condescending zeal of the Europeans to marginalize and stereotype the history and culture of other people.

### **Colonial Border Culture**

Fanso (1986) posits that conceptual conflicts exist between the traditional and colonial boundaries and the former enhances, while the later hinders inter-group and territorial relations. Africans and Europeans had opposing views as to the definition and function of boundaries. Despite the discrepancy of opinions on the definition and function of boundaries, both share a common understanding that boundaries, in geo-political terms, indicate the limits of a territory which borders a foreign territory and that all humans use boundaries to delineate particular locations of their territories.

Muller (2020) argues that colonialism left many contestable boundaries which are artificial; dividing communities, people or ethnicities that otherwise would belong together. According to him, such identity can be exclusionary and trigger conflicts; it can also have a much more positive and ultimately hybrid function. He further argued that the acceptance of borders as markers of identity can be a prerequisite for finding innovative ways to overcome exclusions in the everyday lives of borderland groups.

Mbembe argues that the boundaries in use by Africans at the moment were not defined by Africans. Most of the boundaries of the countries of modern Africa were decided by Europeans and therefore arbitrary (19). Often, these countries were divided by rivers, mountains, oceans, and other major natural endowments. A few times, the boundaries of old African empires were considered before such borders were created. He goes on to state that though Africans were not considered in the process of dividing up the continent and the boundaries inherited from colonialism have been maintained as the *status quo*. Most times, people of same cultures and languages find themselves in different countries and are hindered from interacting with their kins in other countries as a result of the imposition of colonial boundaries.

Afolayan *et al.* are of the same opinion that borders divided people of the same culture and language and cultural ties of people are severed; the first attack against the people and their will of improving the lives of their people or administration is affected. He writes that;

The borders created by the European colonizers that split people of common culture and ethnic groupings into different countries were more or less perceived by the people across the border as ‘artificial’; hence, many of the international migrants that originated just across the Nigerian border in the neighbouring countries of Benin, Niger, Chad, and

Cameroon perceived their movements as within the same socio-cultural space rather than between two different nations. (12)

The borders might have become legally binding, but the people see the boundaries as artificial and their consciousness do see these different countries as really different or the people different. Africans see themselves as people of the same culture and language in different countries, divided by an “artificial boundary”.

Acemoglu *et al.* reiterate the issue of borders as introduced by European colonizers where they are of the opinion that Europeans merely imported their own culture of boundary specification to their colonies, dividing up the people. This aligns with Said’s postulation that Europeans on colonizing their colonies viewed their culture as superior, overlooked other cultures, and imposed theirs without recourse to how rightly fit their culture was to these indigenous cultures. Acemoglu *et al.* write,

Borders manifest themselves in concerns with the constructed boundaries between peoples, nations, and individuals. The idea of the border is implicit in the outreach of European cultures in the colonial period. The region which this aggressive diasporic movement of European settlers reached at any point became defined as the frontier. The settled area adjacent to this was also known sometimes as the borderlands. Contemporary transcultural studies have suggested that such borderland spaces can be spaces of energy. (1380)

These scholars’ idea resonates with that of other scholars quoted so far in the aspect of how artificially constructed these boundaries were. These boundaries are not supposed to be arbitrary and legally binding because the people involved were not considered in the decision-making. However, due to the superiority and force of the colonialists, and their control of native populations, they coerced the people to adhere to the boundaries and with their neocolonialism, these former colonies continued adhering to these formulated boundaries.

Pratt argues that mapping and boundary creation are well-known and frequent practices of colonial and post-colonial cultures. Right after people are perceived as conquered or before even colonization began, the discovered land is studied and mapped out for easy administration. Pratt makes the argument that,

Both literally and metaphorically, maps and mapping are dominant practices of colonial and post-colonial cultures. Colonization itself is often consequent upon a voyage of discovery, a bringing into being of ‘undiscovered’ lands. The process of discovery is reinforced by the construction of maps, whose existence is a means of textualizing the spatial reality of the other, naming or, in almost all cases, renaming spaces in a symbolic and literal act of mastery and control. (30)

He goes further to state that in the mapping of the discovered and conquered land, new names for locations and languages are imposed. The constructed artificial boundaries are imposed on the people and limitations in movement are imposed where there was none.

Therefore, since the issue of border is already considered symbolic or representative of the colonial era, there have been attempts by scholars to study literary works of art on the basis of the effects and consequences of these colonial borders. The effects of the border introduction are evident in the lives of the people and most times represented in their literary works of art. The lives of the people are affected in various ways ranging from the slightly restrictive movement, limited trade and then to international migration. Colonial borders are strict and make the differences between the colonized countries and colonizers more pronounced, for instance, Bonchuks argues that before the introduction of mapping and boundaries, there was little or no restrictive trading; however, the introduction brought about a restrictive trading to the extent that trading along borders or between countries was considered illegal. He writes;

These days cross-border trade is more or less “illegal,” unlike before; and “little” is known about the causes and consequences, organization, profits, expenses, the factors that motivate people to participate in it, and its linkages with the official economy. Such information is lacking because this is not only part of the total economy unrecorded and unmeasured, but many of its activities are covert and on the other side of the law and difficult to investigate. However, it wasn’t illegal prior to the introduction of the colonial border and strict laws guiding it. (2)

It is the scenario of illegal trading along the borders and the perception of people about it as represented in the literature that critics study. There are also other scenarios of colonial border literature that can be studied. The major fact is that any form of colonial border literature has to connect the effect of colonial borders on the lives of people as represented in literary texts.

### **New Trends in Colonial Border Literature**

The factor to note about colonialism and all that has to do with it is that the experiences of the people about colonialism continue to evolve and change. Thus, colonial border literature brings up new trends constantly aside from the primary matter and focus of the creation of these artificial borders and how they affect the relationship and culture of the people. At this time, issues bordering on migration and trade have become new trends, even gender roles are beginning to change as well. However, in trade, the colonized do not let these artificial boundaries affect their act of doing business with one another.

In dissecting the economies of colonized countries and cultures prior to colonialism, Bonchuks argues that it has been evaluated that trade across borders and market integration formalities are not really evidence of colonial economic policies or even modern reactions to economic imbalance. Trade across borders is mainly grounded in native economic systems. Tracing history, it can be written that most parts of the world were colonized by the British, French, and later the Germans, who had stiff political and economic competitions among themselves, and this led to

the shifting of trade to their specified areas of interest leading to the creation of economic conditions that favored their interests (3).

To Bonchuks, top European countries fought to create maps and boundaries among people due to economic reasons. At some point, Europe as a continent suffered from overpopulation and too little resources to go round, there was a grievous struggle for the limited resources around the world and this struggle led to a peaceful meeting known as the Berlin Conference in 1885, which subsequently led to the balkanization of the African continent. The Berlin Conference was described by Harm J. de Bli in "Geography: Realms, Regions, and Concepts:"

"The Berlin Conference was Africa's undoing in more ways than one. The colonial powers superimposed their domains on the African continent. By the time independence returned to Africa in 1950, the realm had acquired a legacy of political fragmentation that could neither be eliminated nor made to operate satisfactorily."

Unilaterally, Africa was fragmented into different countries and boundaries created which did not represent the traditional boundaries of the people. The new countries lacked rhyme or reason and divided coherent groups of people and merged together disparate groups who really did not get along. Therefore, boundaries among countries were brought up to solve the problem of resource struggle and to tackle problems of identification and differentiation. However, in the African context, it was mainly to consolidate the resource control of the Europeans over Africans.

The cultures of most ancient countries did not do with boundaries or mapping, and so its introduction to most cultures that were colonized brought some sort of culture shock alongside the effect it had on their development and economies. It is in this light that Pratt makes a case that there are liminal spaces and problems created by the binary system caused by the introduction of colonialism. Colonialism dismantles the system in place and upholds the binary systems which bring lackluster economic, political, and cultural performance of the colonized into being (18).

Thus, colonialism and whatever it created are mostly of negative consequences than positive consequences. Jonsson is of the opinion that migration as a raging modern issue is very much connected to colonial border literature. He suggests that borders are artificial creations of the colonial era and even imposed identities, thus, people identify with colonial-imposed nationalities and countries and are restricted from leaving these countries by law or migrating without proper documentation unlike how easy it was in the past. Jonsson makes this argument,

Research suggests that over the past decade, there were more people moving out and within the African continent and the trajectories of migrants within Africa are less straightforward than they were in the past when there were no borders and large-scale restrictions. Nevertheless, this does not stop modern literature from demonizing Africa's intra and inter-migratory tendencies. Indeed, modern papers show that African migrants are a homogenous group with similar origins and

motives and that African migrations result in flight away from symptoms of misery and conflict prevalent in the continent. (2)

Therefore, the demonizing of other people's ways of life and culture continues. Right after plundering the continent and causing them to migrate in large droves outside their continent, Europeans have come to condemn the migratory tendencies of Africans and other colonized countries. In most papers and popular literary pieces, there are widespread issues of migration; the Europeans concerned or still subtly demonizing the continent, and the Africans and the colonized exploring migration from the pain and trauma of the dispossessed.

Aside from a good number of Europeans who have come to condemn what they perceive as Africans' dependence on foreign countries and bad governance resulting in poor living conditions and the desire of Africans to flee their continent, there are also some Europeans who argue that African migration is the same as that of other continents. People like Donald Trump lump all non-European migrants together. To Trump and his likes, migration from the third world is unacceptable and this has always been supported with racist remarks.

The false and racist consciousness of the Europeans against the third-world countries did not begin today. Said had stated it was part of the colonial system and it continues to be part and parcel of the minds of the Europeans. Maug Shein in his work explores Burma's pre-colonial history and what Africans had, prior to colonialism; however, Europeans overlooked these achievements or stole some of them as their own achievements.

Shein states that the pre-colonial history of Burma's transport and the road system is often neglected by European writers because of an early emphasis on the importance of maritime trade in Burma and the interest of the early European settlers who came in boats and focused more on the maritime sector. One of these European writers, G. E. Harvey, remarked of classical Burma (Pagan) that Burma even had no roads at all (Harvey 1983). Shein refutes this claim and states that as there was an active maritime transport system in use, there was also a road system in use (29).

This misconception is the same way African migrations are misconceived and viewed as attempts by Africans to flee from the crises and disasters in their continent. Sometimes Africans are not the only ones whose migration was demonized, even people from other third world countries, but the same cannot be said for European migrants. This is not even withstanding that Europeans by colonizing these former colonies facilitated the migration.

Jonsson argues that African migration dynamics can be described in terms of various historical continuities and discontinuities. There is the factor and experience of colonialism and the associated processes of state formation and capitalist development, which have to a significant extent, shaped and structured contemporary migration patterns. Most migrations were caused by industrialization and urbanization in some places, which was virtually non-existent before the onset of colonialism. (5)

Thus, just like other people who migrate out of their nations due to industrialization and urbanization, Africans equally migrate due to these factors. However, the question of migration has taken a new dimension as the study of migration according to gender has surfaced. Migration was done by men more in the past, however, women are now considered to contribute to the factor of migration a lot.

According to Berriane and Aderghal modern trends of migration flow in Africa has increased, including increasing participation of women as free migrants who do not come with their spouses, fathers, or parents. Most governments now consider women as major migrants; that they are beginning to eclipse the role of men in migration (8). This is a twist in the participation of genders in migration.

Awumbila *et al.* gave a title to this twist in the study of colonial border literature and migration as the Feminization of Migration. To them, this is being actively represented in literature and there is good documentation of this in current research. In the past, women moved in their capacity as accompanying spouses and these movements were over short distances. In contemporary times, however, women move independently within and outside the country for economic, as well as other reasons such as education and career development (37). Thus, the feminization of migration as part of colonial border literature identifies one of the modern trends of the literature. The power of migration for better lives does not lie solely in the hands of men again; women are beginning to take bold steps.

Another great modern trend of colonial border literature is in the study of the effects of colonialism on the people according to their geographical location and their colonizers. Lee *et al.* argue that different countries according to their different colonizers received different administrative standards. Thus, people of the same culture finding themselves in different countries do not grow at the same pace due to the differences in administration (65).

Acemoglu *et al.* state that British Protestantism encouraged growth and support; thus making their colonies perform better than French and Portuguese colonies in Africa. In their study, there was an effect of religion on per capita income (7). Posner also argues along this line where he states that some scholars have exploited the arbitrary nature of colonial boundaries in Africa to compare members of the same ethnic group on different sides of an imperial boundary and found out shocking results in varying levels of development (35).

Asiwaju's study of Yoruba of Nigeria and Benin, for instance, argues; "the marked differences in policy across empires, with the British-controlled areas being characterized by greater economic dynamism and respect for traditional political institutions than French-controlled areas resulting in better performance of British-controlled areas" (22). Thus, the Yoruba of Nigeria (British-colonized) perform economically better than the Yoruba of Benin Republic (French-colonized).

The last modern trend of colonial border literature is the study of the same culture in different countries colonized by different colonial masters in literary texts. The result is that the policies of

the French are not quite beneficial to the growth of their colonies. The same culture in different countries ends up economically and socially different.

## **Conclusion**

Colonial border literature has diversified from what it was in the past. It cannot be clearly represented as it was in the past as new trends are beginning to evolve. In the past, aspects of it like culture contact or culture conflict was not even one of the major focuses in criticism now. Modern situations and modern trends are rising. These modern trends are used in studying literary texts and experiences relating to colonial border situations.



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