

African Borders: Putting Paid to a Myth

Michel Foucher

To cite this article: Michel Foucher (2020) African Borders: Putting Paid to a Myth, Journal of Borderlands Studies, 35:2, 287-306, DOI: [10.1080/08865655.2019.1671213](https://doi.org/10.1080/08865655.2019.1671213)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/08865655.2019.1671213>



Published online: 28 Sep 2019.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 215



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



African Borders: Putting Paid to a Myth

Michel Foucher

Collège d'études mondiales, Fondation Maison des sciences de l'homme, Paris, France

ABSTRACT

Africa's borders have a poor reputation. Even today, some say that they are arbitrary and absurd, porous and undermined, indefensible and undefended. Yet the principle of intangibility of borders, agreed by the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in 1964, has held, with rare exceptions. The time has come to put paid to the enduring myth that the scars of colonialism are responsible for all of Africa's troubles. This assertion about the disadvantageous consequences of Africa's borders is just one of a number of received ideas, others being the absence of any pre-colonial political boundaries, and the lack of consideration shown by Europeans to pre-existing geopolitical realities. Certainly, there is often too little demarcation, though much progress has been made, but Africa's borders act as creative interfaces, which are exploited by the trading networks that drive globalization from the bottom up. The borders of Africa have become Africa's borders, agreed as such and strengthened by a process of border reaffirmation supported by the African Union. The origin of the continent's internal tensions lies elsewhere, the key issue being appropriation and control of the periphery and the external frontiers.

KEYWORDS

Africa; borders; dispute resolution; geopolitics

It is not too late to base Africa's future on compliance with its treaties. Patrice Nganang¹

Africa's borders have a poor reputation. Even today, some say that they are arbitrary and absurd, porous and undermined, indefensible and undefended.

Yet July 2014 marked the fiftieth anniversary of an Organization of African Unity (OAU) resolution on border disputes between African states, which was adopted by the Conference of Heads of State and Government at Cairo on July 17–21, 1964:

Considering that border problems constitute a grave and permanent factor of dissension; conscious of the existence of extra-African manoeuvres aimed at dividing African States; considering further that the borders of African States, on the day of their independence, constitute a tangible reality; [the conference] solemnly declares that all Member States pledge themselves to respect the borders existing on their achievement of national independence.

The conference referred to the principles laid down in paragraph 3 of Article III of the 1963 Charter of the Organization of African Unity ("respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of each State and for its inalienable right to independent existence").

This principle of intangibility has held, with rare exceptions such as the independence of Eritrea (along an old Italo-Abyssinian colonial divide), and the secession – under great external pressure – of South Sudan, the success of which still hangs in the balance; only a referendum convinced the African Union to accept this deviation from general policy. Overall, the commitment made in Cairo in 1964 has been respected, and continues to be. African states have taken ownership of the legacy of what was, ultimately, a relatively short colonial period (1885–1965) in view of the African continent's long history, and of its future perspectives (2013–2063) as laid out by the President of the African Union Commission during its 50th-anniversary celebrations in Addis Abeba in May 2013.

The time has therefore come to put paid to the enduring myth that the scars of colonialism are responsible for all of Africa's troubles. According to this version of events, borders are an arbitrary, artificial and absurd construct on a continent reputedly free of political boundaries and hence of politics; the colonial administrations policed these borders violently but inconsistently, with nothing but negative effects; and, in the final analysis, these lines have been responsible for unending conflict and a lack of development. This assertion about the disadvantageous consequences of Africa's borders is just one of a number of received ideas, others being the absence of any pre-colonial political boundaries, and the lack of consideration shown by Europeans to pre-existing geopolitical realities (see Ghana at the time of the Ashanti empire, or the Shewa kingdom on the Ethiopian plateau).

In this essay I shall continue my deconstruction of this doxy,² which resurfaces with each fresh conflict³ and ignores both the political realities (the fact that states and nations have lived with the borders for the last fifty years) and the dynamics on the ground (countries manage borders pragmatically as a source of opportunity and as a resource). Certainly, there is often too little demarcation, though much progress has been made, but Africa's borders act as creative interfaces, which are exploited by the trading networks that drive globalization from the bottom up.

How to explain this long period of territorial stability? Beyond the law, it is worth looking at how border disputes between states are handled (eight appeals to the International Court of Justice in The Hague, one to the International Court of Arbitration, numerous bilateral negotiations, and economic joint management agreements) and by the Peace and Security Department of the African Union Commission. One should also pay attention to emerging trends, with improved border regulations but also enduring crises.

The borders of Africa have become Africa's borders, agreed as such and strengthened by a process of border reaffirmation supported by the African Union. The origin of the continent's internal tensions lies elsewhere, the key issue being appropriation and control of the periphery and the external frontiers. This I shall illustrate in seven points.

General Respect for the 1964 Principle of the Inviolability of African Borders

The African continent contains roughly 52,000 miles of terrestrial political borders today. Of the 165 dyads – terrestrial borders shared by two states – less than half have been properly demarcated on the ground. Twenty-two of Africa's fifty potential maritime borders have already been agreed.⁴

The Cairo Declaration of July 21, 1964 sealed African states' pledge "to respect the borders existing on their achievement of national independence." The principle of *uti possidetis juris* that conditioned the inviolability of the inherited borders has been generally respected since 1963–64. It was indeed confirmed by the International Court of Justice in The Hague, which also decides on disputes according to the same principle by tracking down the colonial snapshot, i.e. the "decisive date" of the legal document that fixed the course of the colonial boundary and is deemed binding, now and in the future.

Two states, Morocco and Somalia, had a differing opinion at the time, the former due to the status of Western Sahara (formerly Rio de Oro), the latter with regard to a pan-Somalian claim to eastern Ethiopia, southern Djibouti and eastern Kenya. Two new states, Eritrea and South Sudan, have been established along previous colonial borders or the former protectorate's internal administrative boundaries. African states have so far been able to uphold the principle of inviolability that guarantees stability, and they have avoided the process of fragmentation that has plagued the European continent since 1989.

The current political borders display several original features.⁵ Over 70% of their total length was determined in less than a quarter of a century (1885–1909) – a unique historical situation that resulted from the carving up and parceling-out of the land mass into possessions and spheres of influence by rival yet complicit external powers.

Thirty-eight percent of the total length of Africa's borders was delimited in the first ten years after the Berlin conference, and 50% in the first fifteen years, i.e. between 1885 and 1900, which confirms the reality of the "scramble for Africa." The process concluded with the French and Spanish division of Morocco in 1911–12 and Italy's annexing of Libya. With the exception of Ethiopia, there was nothing more to divide up. These were *a priori* borders, drawn in Europe on indistinct maps with many blank spots and unknown territories, usually prior to any field reconnaissance. They were unlike European borders, which had been defined *a posteriori* according to the outcomes of battles, the shifting balance of power, nationalist claims and emancipation from imperial blocs, before eventually being fixed by treaties.

These two facts – exogenous partition and swift division – go a long way to explaining the basis on which the borders were defined. In 34% of cases they follow lakes and rivers, while 13% of them are orographic, i.e. they follow the contours of physical geography. In 42% of cases (compared to a global average of 23%) they follow geometrical lines (astronomical, mathematical); other categories (ethnic, pre-existing boundaries) account for only 11% of the total.

Africa's backdrop of borders is the result of several distinct processes of horogenesis,⁶ which I have divided into four major categories⁷:

- 50% of all current boundaries are the result of negotiations between the states that drew them (e.g. Nigeria and Niger) in the 13 combinations that I list here, in descending order of length and number of borders concerned: France and the United Kingdom; United Kingdom and Germany; United Kingdom and Portugal; United Kingdom and Belgium; France and Germany; Belgium and France; Portugal and Belgium; France and Spain; Portugal and Germany; Portugal and France; Belgium and Germany; Portugal and Belgium; France and Italy;
- 24.6% are the result of former administrative divisions within European imperial blocs (e.g. Mali and Senegal);

- 6.6% follow the course of boundaries from the Ottoman presence on the continent (Libya and Algeria);
- 12.1% were between African states (e.g. Ethiopia) and European empires; and
- 6.7% of the total length is the result of agreements between two African states (e.g. the most recent border between the two Sudans).

The states that took part in drawing up the continent's borders are France (32%) and the United Kingdom (26.8%), i.e. slightly less than 60% of the total between them. They are followed by Germany (8.7%), Belgium (7.6%) and Portugal (6.9%), which amounts to almost 82% for the five states mentioned. Ottoman Turkey (4%), Italy (1.7%) and Spain (1.5%) complete this overview of the continent's historic external border-makers.⁸

This division was initially a matter for ambassadors and treaties by which the states involved drew up diplomatic borders staking out their possessions and spheres of influence. It was only after the Berlin conference that the division on paper, made using vague geographical maps, became a division of territory, embedded in treaties. Unlike proceedings in Europe, the powers first marked out on a map of Africa the territories they desired to own and then set about conquering them: maps preceded texts.

As Léopold Sédar Senghor declared in 1959, African unity was the only conceivable historical response to black Africa's formidable contradictions. The discourse about the artificial nature of Africa's borders is not one pronounced by African leaders or peoples. Its origins are in colonialism; indeed, it is as old as colonization (Lefebvre 2011). It ignores negotiations between the great powers to determine the boundaries between their empires – for instance, two decades of talks to determine the sinuous frontier between Niger and Nigeria (1890–1904). It underestimates the consideration paid – first by chart plotters and then by administrators – to the existing local and regional political realities they sought to exploit, if only to cut costs. It turns a blind eye to the existence of pre-colonial political boundaries which, though buffer regions rather than modern linear borders, nevertheless marked out kingdoms and empires – proto-borders, if you will (Foucher 2012).

I have calculated from reading the texts of treaties and studying the maps that local ethnic configurations were taken into account in one-sixth of all cases where boundaries were drawn. This is a very conservative estimate, for it refers only to cases where an ethnic criterion was explicitly mentioned in the text and examined by the investigating committee. It does not include some of the pre-colonial political boundaries (kingdoms and empires, the boundaries of jihad regions such as the north of the Sokoto caliphate⁹) nor the particular arrangement for stockbreeders to use pastoral areas or wells (Foucher 2012). It should be added that the British method of indirect rule set former political boundaries in stone. The British signed a treaty with the sultan for a protectorate in northern Nigeria in 1885 that allowed the emirs to retain their security and tax collection prerogatives. Thus the traditional chain of command flowed into the colonial set-up, which explains how cities retained their territorial integrity. The same practice of converting local officials into colonial auxiliaries could be observed in British-dominated eastern and southern Africa. They also signed several hundred treaties with the authorities, with the result that the colonial boundaries were superimposed on pre-existing dividing lines between distinct political entities, especially near the coast.

Last but by no means least, the historian Dominique Hado Zidouemba pointed out long ago that the idea of borders was not alien to African cultures. For the geographer Gilles Sautter these political structures did not make space more homogeneous, but polarized it into a core surrounded by a periphery that was more tenuously connected to the hub of power, on the fringes of which lay far-flung buffer zones of shifting allegiances that were sometimes uninhabited or riddled with enclaves and exclaves. A state of affairs reminiscent, incidentally, of eighteenth-century Europe! The edges of the former Wolof kingdoms in western Senegal were sparsely populated because they were unsafe and entrusted to nomadic Peuls who were responsible for herding their livestock – and guarding the frontier.

The scale of the redrawing of boundaries between the powers or simply between districts (French West Africa and French Equatorial Africa, for example) is explained by the colonial administration's need to adapt to local circumstances; these boundary adjustments became more marked when the time came to exploit the allocated territories. The uncertain nature of post-1960 borders is a result of these minute and often unclear alterations. It was therefore the colonizers themselves who first criticized the border markings, and this critique grew after the European treaties of 1919–23, especially in teaching and textbooks at France's *École coloniale*, and the emergence of a new methodology for interpreting geographical space. Space was no longer to be arranged in zones of influence and administrative divisions, but would now be split into “natural regions” or “ethnic areas,” which were now defined for all eternity. Ethnicity became a fixed category, and politics was abandoned.

After 1945 the same portrayal of the allegedly artificial nature of Africa's borders switched sides and became the central argument of the anti-colonial movement, especially in France under the impulse of the works of Georges Balandier.¹⁰ This picture was then endorsed by the pan-African movement under Kwane N'Krumah, whose attempts in create a United States of Africa – posited on redrawn frontiers – foundered on the opposition of advocates of stability led by Félix Houphouët-Boigny, Sylvanus Olimpio¹¹ and Léopold Sédar Senghor.

Adjustments after 1963

The appropriation of the network of frontiers caused a proliferation of border disputes due to the gaps in the records left by the colonial powers¹² (particularly for the intra-colonial stretches), the imprecise nature of certain legal texts and the vagaries of physical demarcation. Forty-three cases were noted of latent tension and open conflict explicitly related to border questions, excluding domestic problems.

The status of the 165 border dyads has not been adequately assessed. The African Union is drawing up a map of them. The 1964 declaration spelled the end of N'Krumah's dreams of a continental union. The inviolability of the then borders was endorsed, for lack of anything better, against a backdrop of a serious conflict between Morocco and Algeria, and fraught situations elsewhere (Togo against Ghana, Katanga). So, with the breakdown of federalist solutions, the map of Africa was amended at independence, and almost 8,100 miles of borders were added (4,000 miles in French West Africa, 2,100 miles in French Equatorial Africa and 1,900 miles in British East Africa). As countries gained their independence, roughly 13% of the frontier lines were renegotiated (Mali/Mauritania, Kenya/

Uganda, Kenya/Somalia, Mozambique/Malawi) and several dyads demarcated (Algeria, Ghana, Ivory Coast).

A number of significant alterations were made: a federal compromise in Nigeria in 1954; the return of Tarfaya to Morocco in 1959¹³; the merger of the two Somalias in 1960 (the delayed realization of Ernest Bevin's 1943 plan for a Greater Somalia that might counter Italian operations in Ethiopia); the merger of the two parts of Rwanda-Urundi; and Western backing for Katanga's secession under Lumumba, then unity under Mobutu. Mali, Ghana and Togo sought to base their borders on colonial boundaries other than the most recent lines. Morocco claimed Tindouf and Béchar as the monarchy made Istiqlal and Muhammad Allal el-Fassi's ambition for a Greater Morocco their own. Tripoli wished to return to the line of the 1935 French-Italian border in northern Chad.

Mali and Burkina Faso clashed violently in December 1985 due to Mali's claim to the Agacher Strip, which had not been described by the colonial authorities, but which was marked on maps (those of French West Africa in 1922 and of the French Geographical Institute in 1954) along with issues of access to ponds, channels, wells and boreholes for the Tuaregs and the Peuls. The International Court of Justice's December 22, 1985 verdict swiftly decided in favor of a delineation of the colonial boundary based on tangible signs (the study of place names and administrative texts) and an interpretation of the French district administrators' intentions. In the final analysis, this was an attempt to precisely delineate the colonial borders. Eritrea seceded in 1993 after two brutal years of war.

Lastly, it is worth remembering that the brevity of the colonial period, after sixty years of real occupation (including the actions of the Portuguese) and the 1930 Colonial Act demand that we pay greater attention to the significance of pre-colonial configurations – the basis of numerous colonial boundaries. We should also consider attempts at integration or conquest by political leaders such as Usman dan Fodio, el Hadj Umar Tall, Samori Touré, Menelik II and Shaka Zulu, who altered and established new state borders that combined a system of marches with visible dividing lines.

The stability of territorial configurations in East Africa appeared to be under threat due to the Eritrean precedent, the quasi-independence of Somaliland and the secession of southern Sudan. The latter was approved in a referendum in January 2011, despite none of the essential questions having been resolved. These include citizenship; freedom of movement between the two countries; revenue sharing for oil, 70% of whose reserves are located in the south; a clear border; and the fate of the disputed area around the town of Abyei, which is to be settled by a separate referendum. Yet the opposing parties have accepted the new situation, although neither has relinquished hopes of being able to intervene in the other state's business or even seek allies within it.

Might this represent a turning point in the policies of states and external powers that still wield great influence? It is too early to say, based on the evidence of a failed independence process marked by violent clashes between political formations; there is an ever-present risk of a political confrontation turning ethnic, first and foremost between the Dinka and the Nuer (Prunier 2013). However, the influence of American pressure groups on Washington's diplomatic position¹⁴ was very noticeable during the secession of South Sudan, and some people have toyed with the idea of independence for Kivu.¹⁵

Muslim leaders in Central African Republic have also threatened to push for the secession of the northern part of the country if politicians and the army cannot come to a solution in Bangui.

A close eye must be kept on other tense situations, particularly in Central Africa, to avoid the two aforementioned cases setting a dangerous precedent.

Legal and Political Means for Settling Disputes

The principle of respect for the colonial boundaries that Africa inherited has been significantly bolstered and revived by mechanisms for settling disputes. As stated above, the International Court of Justice makes its rulings on the basis of the colonial moment. One such case is the issue of the boundaries between Burkina Faso and Niger, filed at the International Court of Justice, which must now interpret the official decrees and an erratum from 1927. Another example of uncertainties regarding an empire's internal administrative boundaries is the dispute between Kenya and Uganda over Migingo, an island barely the size of a football pitch in Lake Victoria. The two sides have diverging interpretations of a 1926 British Order in Council and past vagueness concerning place names.

The ICJ has handled eight disagreements since 1963, the date given being that of the conclusion of the trial:

- 2013: Burkina Faso–Niger (filed in 2009)
- 2005: Benin–Niger (island of Lété Goungou attributed to Niger – filed in 2002)
- 2002: Cameroon–Nigeria: demarcation of the entire border from Lake Chad to the sea, 2008; return of Bakassi (filed in 1994, Equatorial Guinea intervening)
- 1999: Botswana–Namibia: island of Kasikili/Sedudu attributed to Botswana (filed in 1996)
- 1995: Guinea Bissau–Senegal: maritime border (filed in 1989)
- 1994: Chad–Libya: Aouzou Strip attributed to Chad (filed in 1990)
- 1986: Burkina Faso–Mali: Bély and 4 villages (filed in 1983)
- 1963: Cameroon against United Kingdom (filed in 1961)

The major advantage of an appeal to the International Court of Justice is that its impartial decision is binding on both parties, which have to ensure its subsequent implementation on the ground. The potential drawback of submitting a case to the court is that it takes several years and costs an appreciable amount of money. Its implementation must therefore consider the impact on local people (as in the Bakassi Peninsula case). This can also be an opportunity to update cartographical and geodesic data, which are instruments for development. Some experts would like to see the African Court of Justice play a greater role in these matters. Appeals to the Permanent Court of Arbitration are less frequent and generally related to domestic matters, the most recent case being the dispute over the Abyei Area.

Another means of settling disputes is through bilateral diplomatic relations, which allow the two states to continue direct negotiations and come to a compromise (either reaffirming the status quo or effecting very minor adjustments). A third – economic – option involves agreeing on mechanisms for joint management of resources located in

regions along the common border. These can be enacted in tandem with the second option, the advantage being that extraction can begin more quickly.¹⁶

Whatever the path chosen, there must be prior political agreement between the two states. An objective analysis concludes that states' attitudes range from supportive to indifferent, from a preference for the status quo right through to somewhat hostile reserve, which leads to three different approaches to border issues. It is likely that ongoing socioeconomic processes in Africa and the continent's growing integration in global events will demonstrate to even the most reluctant that it is in their interest to sign up to a policy of reaffirming borders (of the kind seen elsewhere in the world, for example in Asia).

Finally, although the principle of inviolability still holds, one should nonetheless note that cases of armed activity have been referred to the ICJ (1999–2002) from certain areas where border integrity has been breached. What is more, some observers have commented that the principle of territorial integrity can contradict the basic right to self-determination. About fifteen dyads, representing 16–18% of the total length of the continent's borders, are currently in dispute. These pending issues include Western Sahara (a de facto annexation¹⁷); the disagreement between Djibouti and Eritrea, with Qatar called upon as a mediator; Ethiopia's refusal to apply the border agreement with Eritrea; and tensions between Rwanda and DRC. In Sudan's case, the new border is contested at six points along the frontier between North and South drawn in 1956, the year Sudan gained its independence after being under Anglo-Egyptian administration. One such point is the line of the border between the districts of Renk (Upper Nile State, South) and Al Jabalain (White Nile State, North). Communities from the southern Dinka tribe currently live on the northern side of the still unclear border, whereas northern Arab nomadic pastoralists migrate south each year in search of forage for their livestock.

Intra-imperial frontiers (almost a quarter of the total length) are those at the greatest risk of dispute in the long run, as they are often the result of a series of poorly documented administrative decisions (cf. the case of Mali and Burkina Faso in 1985), whereas inter-imperial borders (51% of the total), which were properly settled by treaty and delimited by joint commissions, have turned out to be more stable. They may be Ottoman (7%), Euro-African (12%, concerning Ethiopia, Liberia, Egypt, Libya, South Africa and Swaziland) or Afro-African (3%, such as those between Rwanda and Tanzania, Burundi, and the boundary between Mauritania and Mali).

The upshot of these very specific historical border schemes and the multitude of joint border-drawing teams is that the relevant legal texts can be divided into several distinct categories. A border between two empires will have a better legal grounding, because it will have been established by an international treaty, generally followed by physical demarcation by a joint commission.

On the other hand, the most dubious situations are those produced by a series of changes, decided by regional and district administrators, to boundaries *within* empires. It follows that unhindered access to the records is essential if a country is to wrest back control of its past, and such access is consistent with a respect for inherited borders. As Ali Ongoïba, the director of the National Archives of Mali, has written: "Archives are a fundamental tool, a scientific and legal instrument that establishes the constitutional legality and proper functioning of every institution, as well as being the basis of good governance." Borders, however, are both a national and an international institution. The archives should be handled with care. Also, the age of the documents, which are the product of the

historic methods for determining boundaries, are inevitably imprecise in terms of their delimitation and may be significantly different from the coordinates that can be fixed using present-day geodesic methods. It is therefore advisable to make sure that different interpretations of the records do not stoke fresh disagreements. Records must be used with caution, and this principle should guide the actions of the demarcation teams. The same prudence is required when interpreting the maps used to delimit a boundary, because they reflect the knowledge and the oversights of the period, which must now be corrected by comparing them with the latest maps, satellite images and aerial photographs (Macdonald 2012). It is advisable that the parties agree on a modern interpretation of realities on the ground well in advance of demarcation negotiations.

Last but not least, the human geography of neighboring areas has changed significantly since the age of the major boundary delimitations. The impact on local people must be a major criterion in assessing the application of decisions taken by border teams and commissions on the basis of the newly published records. The various user's guides published by the African Union Commission in May 2013 provide detailed and practical answers to technical questions of this nature.

On the Proper Use of African Borders: Resources, Interfaces and Corridors

Africa's borders are a resource that is used, abused and shaped by today's mobile communities; they do not view them as a barrier. The fact that the boundaries of major linguistic regions and economic heartlands do not coincide with state borders alters how linear frontiers are used and, in effect, creates one continuous frontier zone.

Africa is a polyglot continent. Of the two thousand or so recorded languages in use, a few are used throughout a region. Arabic (and its dialects) is the official language in eight North African countries, and West Africa uses the following vehicular languages: Peul, which is spoken in fifteen countries; Manding languages in five; Akan, which forms a close tie between Ivory Coast and Ghana, in the same way that Hausa and Kanuri are between Nigeria and Niger, and Yoruba between Nigeria and Benin; and Gbe on the Beninese coast. Wolof and Songhay are further examples of *lingua francae*. In East Africa Swahili is the official language of four states and continues to expand, along with Lingala, Tshiluba and Kikongo in the Congo Basin, and Xhosa, Zulu and Tswana in South Africa. The growing use of these kinds of vehicular languages offers a comparative advantage for trade and gives structure to regional zones of free movement.

Instead of seeing their separation by borders as a disaster, people whose ethnic group, extended family or family are scattered across several states know that they are at a considerable advantage. Their mastery of one or more local languages, dress codes and networks offers them greater opportunities to swap national and ethnic identities, as required, allowing them to cross borders and negotiate with officials, as it is customary for the Ewe (between Togo, Benin and Ghana), the Fang (between Gabon, Cameroon and Guinea) and the Hausa to do, writes Karine Bennafla (2012). The same is true of Tuareg, Arab and Tubu tribes.

All over the continent there is intense internal movement of people and goods, both locally and regionally, based on the complementarities between coastal regions and inland areas, between stockbreeding and crop-growing zones, between areas of agricultural production and urban markets. Coastal locations have benefited countries such as

the Gambia, Togo, Benin and Djibouti, which have become warehouse states, and they also stimulate activity along the great supply corridors between the countries of the Great Lakes region and the ports of Kenya and Tanzania; between the mines of DRC and Zambia and the port cities of South Africa; between the economic heartland of South Africa and Maputo; from the Ethiopian plateau and Berbera or from Ouagadougou to Tema; and along the shore from Abidjan to Lagos.¹⁸

Inland areas, on the other hand, are home to a series of cities and border market towns. When the countries of West Africa gained their independence, the region had less than ninety million inhabitants, who lived near the coast and in rural areas around the towns of the Sahel. In 2014 the population has grown to in excess of 320 million, urbanization is on the rise and rural areas are now more densely settled, leading to a coalescence of previously separated areas. It is estimated that there are fifty or so towns with over 50,000 inhabitants between the Sahel and the coast and within one hundred miles of the borders (and this will no doubt shrink to within forty miles within the next ten years).¹⁹ Northern Nigeria and northern Cameroon are becoming urbanized, as are southern Niger, northern Ghana, northern Ivory Coast and southwestern Senegal.

The map of the markets is spatially selective.²⁰ Border intersections offer income generation opportunities due to their situation: eastern Morocco/Spanish enclaves/western Algeria; the three-country border between Gabon, Equatorial Guinea and Cameroon; northern Cameroon/Chad/Central African Republic; the ports in the Gulf of Guinea; the northern Cameroon and Casamance corridors; the interfaces between currency zones, notably the one between the CFA zone and the naira zone (the Nigerian currency is unconvertible, and moneychangers therefore swap it on the black market for CFA to buy euros) and between the rand (the official currency of South Africa) and its neighboring currencies.

Business along the borders combines trade in basic articles, trafficking in often illicit goods, streams of counterfeit goods and institutionalized smuggling. A great number of people (traders and truckers, customs officials and soldiers) make their living from border asymmetries, which take the form of differential exchange rates, supply, standards and prices. This suits the state, as customs duties account for 30–70% of the national budget and are thus the cornerstone of African economies (Raballand and Cantens 2007), despite many state officials playing an active part in schemes to circumvent paying duty.²¹ Indeed, in situations where the interdependence between countries is particularly strong, as in the case of Togo, Benin and Niger's relations with Nigeria, the balance of the three states' finances depends on the porosity of Nigeria's borders.

Cross-border regions with intense trading relations are booming; they are the corridors along which all goods flow from the coast to the Sahel region, and from landlocked markets to the global market. There have been studies into these cross-border dynamics in southern Senegambia, in the area known as SKBo (Sikasso, Korhogo and Bobo-Dioulasso, on the fringes of Mali, Côte d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso), and in the development corridor that includes Maradi (Niger), Katsina and Kano (Nigeria).

It still needs to be assessed whether “defragmentation” and free trade policies are not endangering the vitality of cross-border activities, which are often an accretion of innovative individual strategies and small-scale collective arrangements from which tens of millions of border dwellers derive a living.

A Defragmenting Continent

A World Bank report published in April 2012 bore the title *Defragmenting Africa. Deepening Regional Trade Integration in Goods and Services*. It identifies the barriers to greater intra-regional trade (which accounts for 5% of imports for COMESA (Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa), 10% for ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States) and 8% for UEMOA (West African Economic and Monetary Union)) compared with 20% for ASEAN (Association of South East Asian Nations), 35% for NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) and 60% for the European Union. These obstacles include high transaction costs, non-tariff barriers and immigration procedures. The report emphasizes the scale of informal cross-border trade (more than half of official flows of goods and services, especially in West Africa and East Africa). It points the finger at the “thickness” of the borders, which is characterized by poor logistical performance (infrastructure, customs, procedures).

According to the latest annual report of the World Bank Group and the International Financial Corporation, *Doing Business*, certain interfaces are serious bottlenecks (Kinshasa/Brazzaville). One indicator of these barriers to trade is what is generally referred to as “border waiting time,” which is calculated by multiplying the number of customs documents by the number of signatures required and the time it takes to pass through the border post (excluding actual transport times). This is 35 days for exports from sub-Saharan Africa and 41 days for imports (compared with ten days on average in developed countries) and costs twice as much as in East Asia or in OECD countries.²² It says that the waiting time for goods/containers along the western corridor at the ports of Cotonou, Lomé and Abidjan varies from 18 to 21 days (2011); the border transit time for trucks ranges from 13 to 65 hours, and the coastal highway has between five and eight control posts every 60 miles, with the declared objective of safety. These barriers are particularly hard on landlocked countries, which rely on the smooth functioning of the major international corridors, as these carry approximately 70% of their international trade (Raballand and Macchi 2009).

High costs, long and unpredictable transport times and excessive delays hamper trade. A quarter of the delays observed along the major corridors are due to poor infrastructure, but the rest are down to non-tariff barriers and a lack of trade facilitation measures.

Nevertheless, the continent has experienced an economic growth rate of five percent per year over the past decade, and the needs of other emerging economies ensure that this is likely to continue. Admittedly, this growth is linked to revenues from mining and oil exports, and there are still all too few states whose performance is driven by economic diversification.

The last two decades have seen an increasing number of border settlements around the world, including bilateral delimitation and demarcation agreements in Central Asia, the Arabian Peninsula, East Asia and also surrounding new states on the European continent. This general trend can be considered one of the technical and legal prerequisites for emerging economies to be able to join the global economic game.

The African continent is undergoing radical change. Its population trebled between 1960 and 2005, and will double again by 2050; urbanization will continue apace. The consequence will be more intense flows of goods and people between the cities and the countryside, but infrastructure and amenities will not be able to keep up with this acceleration.

Yet Africa looks outwards and finds it easier to trade with the rest of the world than with itself. Despite the existence of fourteen regional economic blocs, internal trade allegedly represents only 9% of all African trade (compared with 18% in Latin America, 40% in Southeast Asia and 74% in the European Union). As Pascal Lamy notes:

In certain respects colonial borders are less relevant and less rigid than elsewhere in the world, and hence easier to cross, formally and informally. From that standpoint, the considerable importance of the informal economy in Africa is an asset – which is why I am wary of official statistics. When I say that intra-regional trade in Africa is less significant than anywhere else except in the Arab world, I am sure that I am right. When I speak of an order of magnitude of 10–20 percent, I am doubling the figure, but that figure could be anywhere between 10 and 30 percent. If we look at how the economy actually operates rather than focusing on the formal economy, there are plenty of areas in Africa where trade simply ignores the borders (Lamy 2010).

National and regional policies to improve “border regimes” would reduce waiting times and ease the flows. Regimes such as the “one-stop border post” between Zambia and Zimbabwe, opened at the end of 2009, or customs simplifications at ports such as Accra (to give just two examples) are interesting. Incidentally, UNCTAD estimates that improved road networks have a beneficial effect on trade; an investment of US\$ 23 billion on the continent would generate US\$ 250 billion in trade, a leverage effect of one to ten over ten years. Asphalted the highway between Mali and Senegal would lead to a fourfold rise in trade, and doing the same to the road connecting Côte d’Ivoire to Senegal would double it. Trade within UEMOA could treble if all the roads between its members were asphalted. The same is true for projects to connect the electrical grids and to modernize the railroads.

The introduction of single visa arrangements, although approved by the eight UEMOA states, is slow. The modernization of inter-state infrastructure and border regimes can at last stimulate the creation and consolidation of integrated regional blocs, of which “border countries” would be the hinges and doors. Finally, contrary to certain received ideas, it is a proven fact that inter-African migrants, who are more numerous than those who emigrate from the continent, play their part in poverty reduction.

An African Geopolitical Idea of Border Reaffirmation ...

... with some first concrete results, in spite of domestic political tensions. The figures illustrate the size of the task. In 2014 35.8% of the total length of African borders (excluding maritime borders), that is to say 18,561 miles, can be considered delimited (6,779), demarcated (9,321) and reaffirmed (2,474). The demarcation is often dated and will have to be redone in many cases, as those who drew the borders often used rapid methods (notches in trees) and gave unclear instructions.²³ Such uncertainties have been, and continue to be, a source of tension and randomness.

A total of 8,203 miles of boundaries (or 15.8% of the total) are in the process of being reaffirmed, along with 21 dyads. When this work has finished, the 50% mark (of the total length of Africa’s land borders) will have been passed. This progress can be attributed to the impetus provided by the African Union Border Program (AUBP)²⁴ and to states’ recognizing the technical interest of the exercise. Delimitation and demarcation work is ongoing on a further eighteen dyads and some 7,450 miles of border. Once this too has

been completed, the two-thirds mark will have been reached. The final third will still need to be raised to the same standard, to the benefit of all Africans.

Half of all African states have been embroiled in border conflicts, at some point between the late 1950s and the end of the 1990s. Some were settled by bilateral negotiations or mediation (Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia, 1960–1; Mali/Mauritania, 1960–3; Dahomey/Niger, 1963–5), while others have persisted (Cameroon/Nigeria, 1963–2002; Ethiopia/Somalia, since 1950). The first fifteen years after independence saw the greatest inter-state tensions.

Nigeria decided to bring up the issue of border disputes at the OAU in June 1981, proposing that the organization establish a Border Commission at a time when the country was engaged in a number of violent conflicts with Cameroon, especially over the delimitation of the maritime border through the Niger Delta, an oil-rich area. The goal was to depoliticize the problems as far as possible and to discuss them as a purely technical issue. Nigeria's proposal was linked to Sierra Leone's call for a Political Security Council to be set up. Both ideas were rejected. The OAU returned to the topic in 1986, encouraging peaceful settlements and bilateral negotiations. Nigeria reiterated its request in 1991, suggesting the establishment of national and regional border commissions, but once more to no avail – although the memorandum adopted at the 2002 Conference on Security, Stability, Development and Cooperation held in Durban included a goal of concluding the delineation and demarcation of the continent's borders by 2012. The Constitutive Act of the African Union, adopted in Lomé in July 2000, includes the principle of “respect of borders existing on achievement of independence” in paragraph 4(b). The principle of inviolability was, therefore, reasserted, even though there is no mention of that word, which is more pertinent from a legal point of view.

The lack of collective progress on this sensitive topic is related to tensions arising from the new geopolitical context ushered in by the end of the old bipolar world order. Crises are now mainly internal, within inceptive states. The underdevelopment of border regions – poorly connected and poorly integrated peripheries – has led to their emergence as centers of rebellion and conflicts spill over into the surrounding regions. Wars have spread from Liberia to Sierra Leone and Côte d'Ivoire; from Rwanda to eastern Zaire (now DRC), and from Burundi to Chad; from Sudan to CAR and Congo; and, with the implosion of Somalia, throughout East Africa. This regionalization has given birth to several semantic terms: “the Great Lakes,” “the Horn of Africa” and “the Sahel.”²⁵ The porous nature of a state's fringes and the cross-border character of cultural, ethnic and religious identities have encouraged political parties to fan emotion in these marginal communities around illusory subjects such as justice and liberation. In truth, these border zones have become places where refugees and displaced persons throng together and survive in the most atrocious conditions (thirteen million of them in 2013, according to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)).

The Congolese state's structural weakness leaves it defenseless in the face of predatory activity by actors from the Great Lakes region, who have set themselves up as mineral exporters. In East Africa, ambitions for a “Greater Somalia” have run into Ethiopia's political and military might; the wars between Ethiopia and Eritrea featured leaders from the same political party, both of them driven by the dream of controlling a “Greater Tigre.” Diverging modernization strategies have aggravated the internal

conflicts on Sudanese soil between northerners (who had long been governed by Egypt) and southerners (a buffer zone between the Muslim north, Kenya and Uganda). As already noted, the independence of South Sudan on July 9, 2011 has not led to peace as desired, either in the north, the south or between the two sides – unsurprisingly, as the governments that supported the new state of South Sudan made the mistake of accepting independence without agreed borders or a fixed transit fee for oil.

It was thus against this troubled backdrop of regional conflict that in 2007 the African Union Commission launched a program to encourage the reaffirmation of borders, both terrestrial and maritime, through delineation and demarcation, and to facilitate the improvement of border regimes.

As we have already seen, the division of the basis for the course of boundaries by category is as follows²⁶:

1. Boundaries along rivers and lakes: 34% of the total length;
2. Boundaries based on orographic elements (watersheds and ridges, both major and minor): 13%;
3. Boundaries following geometric lines: astronomical (parallels or meridians), mathematical (straight lines, equidistant lines, arcs): 42%;
4. Other types of boundary determined by the discontinuities of human geography (ethno-linguistic boundaries, proto-borders): 11%

These percentages are approximate, especially as many boundaries are determined by a combination of factors. They should be taken only as averages, since the precise nature of the basis for the boundary route varies according to the scale of the map, especially regarding hydrographical features and ridge lines, and this often explains the divergence between the delimitation line and the course of the demarcations. It is the task of the border commissions to come to decisions that respect the spirit of the treaty. The large proportion of boundaries that fall into the third category is obviously the result of colonial horogenesis, which threw up many theoretical and diplomatic borders.

The program's two objectives are to prevent conflicts and to promote regional integration through cross-border cooperation. The pilot countries are Mali, Burkina Faso and Senegal in West Africa, along with Mozambique, Malawi, Zambia, Tanzania, DRC and Rwanda. Mali and Burkina Faso have completed the demarcation of their dyad; Mozambique, Zambia, Malawi and Tanzania have placed additional boundary markers; and Senegal has commenced procedures to delineate and demarcate its borders with three of its neighbors, Mali, Gambia and Guinea.

In addition, the former Malian president Alpha Oumar Konaré – known for his federalist views, and still mindful of the 1985 border conflict – conceived of and promoted the concept of “cross-border areas” to encourage bottom-up regional integration and freedom of movement, whilst diluting the tensions related to the secant character of the border lines by restoring the ties between ethno-linguistic regional groupings.

Cross-border activities are flourishing along settled borders such as Burkina Faso/Mali, Mali/Mauritania/Senegal, Mali/Côte d'Ivoire and Nigeria/Niger. Relations between the neighbors along rivers and lakes (Senegal, Niger, Congo, Ubangui, Okavango, Nile) are on a similar path. Conversely, tense stretches of border are a

barrier to normal local relations (Chad/Sudan, Chad, CAR). Local and regional security is crucial not only for relations between states, but also for local communities (Uganda, Kenya, DRC). We should conclude this section by mentioning some common initiatives: joint management of the Kruger National Park (1991); a transfrontier nature reserve between South Africa, Mozambique and Swaziland (1996); a working group on the Beitbridge border post and on a second bridge over the Limpopo (1994); a joint water management agreement (South Africa/Mozambique, 1995); and the “one-stop border post” in Zambia.

Once the Borders of Africa, Now African Borders

Borders define the state, which cannot exist without linear boundaries. However, due to the effects of pre-colonial history, colonial carve-ups and climatic, geomorphological and demographic conditions, many African states are both vast and underpopulated in parts. The management of Africa’s borders requires the extension of state authority and an embracing of the general trend towards a more open and interconnected continent that is increasingly involved in world affairs.

As the critical state of the Saharo-Sahelian region illustrates, the key issue is to be able to reconcile a logic of space with a logic of flows, and master both, at the same time as controlling the borders. How can a state enact strategies based on movement, intense spatial mobility and networks that connect that mobile space, where mastery of distance is a more effective foundation for power than a mastery of space? The movement of people is a major vector of spatial organization in several large African regions. Attempts to stabilize countries with clearly delineated and demarcated borders and defined perimeters are insufficient to meet the serious challenges facing the continent. The sheer surface area and the dispersed nature of the resources and people in the forested areas of the Congo basin, combined with the almost complete absence of any viable infrastructure, place severe pressures on a weak central government that has been disputed from the margins since its inception (Durand 2012).

Modern state-building is based on, and achieved through, a country controlling its territory, which is meant to act as a marker of identity and a tie between the government and its citizens. However, the reality on the continent is one of coexistence between distinct ethno-demographic centers (though they meet and mix in cities) and poorly incorporated peripheries and fringes, which are only integrated when their resources are extracted or if they are traversed by major trunk roads. No cartographical study has yet been made of how states tame their border regions. The Malian crisis of 2013 offered an illustration

Table 1. UN peacekeeping operations in Africa in 2013.

Mission name	Location	Date of inception	Personnel	Annual budget (millions of US\$)
MINURSO	Western Sahara	1991	503	60
UNMIL	Liberia	2003	8,966	476
UNAMID	Darfur (Sudan)	2007	23,756	1,335
MONUSCO	Kivu (DRC)	2010	26,000	1,456
UNISFA	Abyei (Sudan)	2011	4,257	290
UNOCI	Côte d’Ivoire	2013	6,910	584
UNMISS	South Sudan	2013	10,228	924
MINUSMA	Mali	2013	6,000+	366

Source: Author.

of the disastrous effects of a central government's refusal to exercise its sovereignty by controlling its margins and infrastructure.

The reality of these spatial contradictions – the logic of territory and the logic of infrastructure, the organization of the spaces between the center and the peripheries – intersects with political circumstances in which multiple “nationalities” must coexist within a single national project and there is the pressure of unequal income distribution, and a persistent risk of minorities being excluded even from democratic elections.

The continent is still far too prominent on maps of global crises and conflicts. It accounts for 27% of the world's violent conflicts (22% of which are conflicts, 40% limited wars and 50% open wars), which are at their highest recorded level since 1945 due to the critical situations in Somalia, the two Sudans, Mali, CAR, Nigeria and DRC in 2014. Factors that contribute to these conflicts are access to central government, tensions between the center and the peripheries, the control of resources and attempts to impose imported religious ideologies.

It is estimated that 62% of the United Nation Security Council's negotiating time in 2012 was spent on crises in Africa, which explains the increasing presence of UN stabilization forces on the continent – eight out of 15 worldwide (Table 1).

This amounts to almost 87,000 personnel (mainly service personnel and police) – i.e. 80% of the total number mobilized by the UN worldwide – with a budget of US\$ 5 billion (or 73% of the UN Peacekeeping Department's total expenditure). We should also mention the African Union's missions such as AMISOM (Somalia) and MISCA (CAR).

The 2001 Constitutive Act of the African Union laid the groundwork for a paradigm change, with the principle of “non-indifference” replacing the policy of “non-intervention” that had predominated during decolonization up until 1963. It is a fact that the African Union's intervention capacities have increased, as was illustrated in 2003 when the AU established a Peace and Security Commission with both prevention and deployment mandates. The Commission has already held 365 meetings. The rapid alert system is in place; the formation of rapid-reaction African forces is not on schedule, but it will be accomplished. The AU was unable to intervene in five conflicts (Burundi, Sudan, South Sudan, Somalia, the Comores) and, as in other areas, the organization will learn the lessons from its successes and failures. The international community acknowledges its role. Yet the AU has not been able to compensate for its member countries' deficiencies, such as inexistent or corrupt governments, and unequal distribution of resources. It must also strike a better balance of roles with the UN (whose reform is blocked by the lack of consensus between African states, among other reasons) and with the regional economic communities that are, after all, the pillars of African integration.

The main tasks of exercising sovereignty fall to Africa's states and governments, and they include controlling their country's borders, protecting its people and integrating its peripheries. All in all, these are very classical challenges for a developing state. Current crises (hostages, trafficking, subversion) are an eloquent example of the necessity for Niamey, Bamako and Nouakchott to control and monitor the Sahel-Saharan borderlands. Whereas Algeria can afford the requisite technical and human equipment, the same cannot be said of the Sahel states. It is hard to credit that these states, which were once seen as pioneers in development cooperation, are unable to garner the necessary financial support, either from France or from Europe, to monitor their borders.

Delineation, demarcation and effective control are the key to ensuring the geopolitical stability of African states and the advancement of legitimate ambitions of regional integration. Beyond these technical duties, the enduring internal crises – which seem only to be containable through external military interventions (UN, France, etc.) – makes one wonder whether African states are capable of acting in their common interest without recourse to help from outside the continent. Very few African states have armies capable of carrying out stabilization and peacekeeping missions. The regional communities offer a decision-making framework, and the continent does not lack financial resources, it is simply that they are not mobilized.

In geopolitical terms, the postcolonial period is over. It is becoming urgent for states that have been independent for over half a century to define an African strategic policy in the appropriate African forums.²⁷ This would seek to emphasize and encourage the security commitments by African states and armies to manage internal crises²⁸ and also those that exceed any single country's capacities: control of territorial integrity and borders; decentralization that benefits the margins; a military role for regional organizations; regional training; participation in peacekeeping operations for the UN; cooperation with the EU; and civil security capabilities. It would also formulate a detailed long-term vision of the practical linkages between security and development – the security of flows and stocks, the effectiveness of customs arrangements, crisis prevention – that dovetails with EU operations and those of other organizations. So the issue is not so much borders themselves as their control, as well as the judicious use of border zones as pivots in the regional integration process. Very real chances of growth mean that international investors and African entrepreneurs are expressing a newfound optimism about the continent. “If it weren't for wars!” commented one experienced observer.²⁹ And those wars are not “colonial,” but the result of grave deficiencies of political leadership.

The postcolonial period is also over politically. Africa must adopt a doctrine of settling political disputes through negotiation – of its own initiative, as a condition for turning growth into development.

“How many Africans might we have saved from death if, after independence, respect for the constitution had been elevated to a fundamental principle, as was the case with the borders left to us by colonialism? Would millions of lives not have been saved if coups d'état had been outlawed?” is author Patrice Nganang's comment.

Notes

1. Cameroonian author and winner of the Grand prix littéraire de l'Afrique noire and the Prix Marguerite Yourcenar for *Temps de chien* (Paris, Serpent à plumes, 2003); Prix des cinq continents for *Mont Plaisant* (Paris: Editions Philippe Rey, 2011).
2. Michel Foucher made a first attempt in 1988, which led to the publication of *Fronts et frontières: un tour du monde géopolitique* (Foucher 2012). The book's section on Africa emphasizes the part played by the continent's geopolitical and geo-historical realities; the need to take account of particular timescales and contexts; and, last but not least, the necessity of field studies, close interpretation of the treaties, and an examination of the available maps. This analysis led former President Alpha Oumar Konaré to invite Michel Foucher to join the African Union's Border Programme, which was inaugurated in June 2007 with the adoption of the first declaration of the African Ministers responsible

for border issues (Addis Abeba, June 2007 and June 2010, and the Niamey Convention, May 2012).

3. Mali is a case in point; the Tuaregs' incorporation into the new state was a source of tension.
4. It is estimated that 50 of the world's 450 potential maritime borders are located around the African continent. Thirteen of these were settled before 1998, and nine have been fixed in the last ten years, which brings the number of "open" borders to 22 – 5 in the Mediterranean Sea, 12 in the Atlantic Ocean and 5 in the Indian Ocean. There are no major disputes, but it seems urgent to settle the status of these currently virtual borders. It should be noted that cooperation agreements have been signed to enable the joint extraction of petrol and gas reserves in border waters (between São Tomé and Príncipe and Nigeria, for instance).
5. For a more detailed analysis see *Fronts et frontières: un tour du monde géographique* (Foucher 2012).
6. By "horogenesis" I mean the process by which borders are created: who, when, where, why a particular boundary course, with which intentions and which consequences?
7. Author's own updated estimates, February 2014.
8. For simplicity's sake, "Belgium" includes Leopold's ventures.
9. The cities of Kasar Haussa (Zamfara, Kebbi, Katsina, Kano, Zaria, Alkalawa and Birnin Gazarganu) were weakened by drought during the eighteenth century and were subjugated between 1804 and 1808 by a jihad of Muslim Peul reformers, led by Usman dan Fodio, and organized into a confederation of emirates.
10. See Georges Balandier's article in *Le Monde*, January 10–11 and January 12–13, 1960. Camille Lefebvre concludes his analysis of this article thus: "The subject of the artificial nature of African borders postulates that African forms of territorial organization lack any historical depth and are mainly European achievements, as well as saying that traditional African societies are strangers to modern forms of political organization." Camille Lefebvre, op. cit.
11. Sylvanus Olimpio rejected the pan-African regional version of N'Krumah's project to merge Togo and Ghana into a single state, thereby resolving the issue of the Ewe people, who lived on a strip between the Ashanti and the Abomey kingdoms and had been split between the two states since the Anglo-German division of 1884.
12. The German Minister of Foreign Affairs handed over his country's records to the African Union on June 7, 2013, followed by France on November 29 of the same year. Similar gestures are expected from Belgium and the United Kingdom.
13. And Ifni in 1969.
14. Mark Landler wrote the following: "South Sudan is in many ways an American creation, carved out of war-torn Sudan in a referendum largely orchestrated by the United States, its fragile institutions nurtured with billions of dollars in American aid. But a murky, vicious conflict there has left the Obama administration scrambling to prevent the unraveling of a major American achievement in Africa." "U.S. Is Facing Hard Choices in South Sudan," *The New York Times*, January 3, 2014.
15. There are clear precedents in Kosovo and Iraqi Kurdistan, with the same logic of reprisals against a central state seen as unreliable.
16. The United Nations has been required to intervene in some cases, usually to encourage states to implement the decisions approved by both sides and to assist with the working of a joint commission.
17. There are serious doubts about the true number of authentic Sahrawis. A 1974 Spanish census put their population at 73,487, while other sources gave a much smaller number, far fewer than the Polisario's claims of 750,000 from around the same time. Is it really a good idea, in 2014, to continue to encourage the proliferation of non-viable states? Greater autonomy would appear to be a sensible approach. Regarding Algeria's desire for access to the Atlantic Ocean, there are precedents in South America that might provide a lead to Algiers.
18. The western corridor from Abidjan to Lagos, which is 620 miles long (and has been undergoing modernization since 2010 with World Bank funding), accounts for 65% of all economic

activity in the ECOWAS zone, serves 35 million inhabitants and sees 46 million people pass through it every year.

19. See studies of ECOWAS's cross-border programs (written with the support of the Sahel and West Africa Club).
20. Abdoul, Dahou, and Trémollières (2007) have drawn up a detailed typology of markets in Sahelian West Africa: collection, grouping, transit or frontier. They counted almost one hundred frontier markets along the 930-mile border between Niger and Nigeria from Gaya to Diffa.
21. On the border between DRC and Rwanda, between Goma and Gisenyi, food vendors have organized themselves to make their work easier. Yet they still have trouble paying the high taxes in Rwanda and asserting their rights against the many illegal tax collectors in DRC. At least 22,000 people live from selling food, according to a recent report by the *Association d'appui aux initiatives de base* (APIBA – Association to Support Grassroots Initiatives). The organization's chairperson, Jerry Shungu, points out that “85% of this small-scale business is run by women” in the two countries. Several associations have become involved to help the women to cross the border. Michel Djamba, an attaché at the Central Trade Information Office of the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), says: “Seven associations belong to the ACT (Association des commerçantes transfrontalières – Association of Crossborder Vendors) platform and that their members cross the border without paying.” Wivine Mujinga, director of the ACT, adds: “Each member pays 4,500 Rwandan francs per month. In exchange, the association takes care of taxes payable to different customs.”
22. *Abidjan-Lagos Trade and Transport Facilitation Project (ALTTFP), preliminary report n° 1*, August 2011.
23. To give but one example from the 1924 protocol between Chad and Sudan: “After that the border proceeds in a west-northwesterly direction and follows a straight line until a ‘murraia’ tree at Wadi Kajul, about a half-mile south of the village of Siarrei.” But was it possible to be any more precise, given the state of cartography at the time?
24. This African Union Border Programme is under the responsibility of the Peace and Security Commission (the Commissioner is Smail Guerbi, Department Director El-Ghassim Wane and Program Director Aguibou Diarra). It receives financial support from GIZ, the German development cooperation agency. The *Agence Française de Développement* (French Agency for Development) has not yet provided any backing, nor has the European Commission. Reference documents and user's guides were published in May 2013.
25. The Sahel is actually a climatic term (a region where the rainfall is between 200 and 600 mm), but it is frequently – and incorrectly – extended to the Sahara, whose image in Europe is dominated by ideas of endless, supposedly untouched seas of sand dunes.
26. Author's updated calculations, February 2014.
27. Dakar Forum on Security in Africa, 2014.
28. “It is not acceptable to call on European soldiers to come and sort out problems on our territory.” Macky Sall, President of Senegal, *Le Monde*, June 30 – July 1, 2013.
29. Conference on securing flows of goods in Africa, DAS and IHEDN, 3 April 2013.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

References

- Abdoul, M., K. Dahou, M. Trémollières, and ENDA Diapol. 2007. Le cas Maradi-Katsina-Kano: un couloir de développement? (Cross-border dynamics in West Africa). In *Les dynamiques transfrontalières en Afrique de l'Ouest*, 117–61. Paris: Karthala Editions.
- Bennafla, K. 2012. L'instrumentalisation et la légitimation des frontières d'Etat à l'aune des circulations de marchandises. *Unpublished paper*. https://www.academia.edu/7418067/L_instrumenta

[lisation_et_la_l%C3%A9gitimation_des fronti%C3%A8res_%C3%A0_l_aune_de_la_circulation_de_marchandises_2012_](#).

- Durand, P.-M. 2012. Congo-Zaïre-Congo: retour sur l'échec obsédant et exemplaire. In *L'Afrique indépendante dans le système international*, eds. E. Robin-Hivert and G.-H. Soutou, 39–51. Presses universitaires Paris Sorbonne.
- Foucher, M. 1988. *Fronts et frontières: un tour du monde géopolitique*. Paris: Fayard.
- Lamy, P. 2010. Regional Integrations in Africa: Ambitions and Vicissitudes. Paris: Notre Europe, n° 43.
- Lefebvre, C. 2011. La décolonisation d'un lieu commun. L'artificialité des frontières africaines: un legs intellectuel colonial devenu étendard de l'anticolonialisme. *Revue d'Histoire et des Sciences Humaines*, n° 24, January 2011, 77–104.
- Macdonald, A. 2012. Preparation for boundary recovery and demarcation. In *Delimitation and demarcation of boundaries in Africa*, 117–34. Addis Abeba: African Union Border Program.
- Prunier, G. 2013. Au Soudan du Sud, l'écroulement des espoirs démocratiques. *Le Monde*, December 29–30.
- Raballand, G., and T. Cantens. 2009. Introduction thématique: Réforme des douanes et développement en Afrique subsaharienne. *Afrique contemporaine* 2009/2, no. 230: 19–31.
- Raballand, G., and P. Macchi. 2009. Transport prices and costs: The need to revisit donors' policies in transport in Africa. World Bank (Bureau for Research and Economic Analysis of Development).