Borders and Borderlands Identities: A Studyof Cross-border NeighbourhoodGovernance inthe Southern Sector of Nigeria – Cameroon Border Area

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Abstract

The paper examines how local representation of identities and territories produce new perceptions of borders and determines the extent to which such perceptions are linked to cross-border governance. Data for the study was sourced through a qualitative empirical survey processed in a socio-anthropological perspective and supplemented with a desk review of theoretical analysis of the literature levelled with empirical accounts of cross-border governance and community building. It is argued that the dynamic character of borders in Africa unfolds in diverse schemes. Against the argument that borders as conduits of migration flows with border areas are nests of growing multifaceted insecurity problems among which organized transnational crime is the most challenging; borders are also markers of national identity. In the southern sector of the Nigeria-Cameroon borderlands astride the international boundary, borders appear as domains of material and symbolic stakes. This generates the idea of homeland nationalism which originates from identity narratives of the borderlands localism that yields a local system of governance between border communities thereby enhancing cross-border cooperation from inter-state anomic diplomacy.It is concluded that while States paradoxically depend solely on state mechanisms, local authorities though not necessarily autonomous, engage in local initiatives of cross-border governance.

Keywords: Border, Borderland, Cross border neighbourhood governance, Borderland identity,Cross-border cooperation.

Introduction

Encompassing Southeastern Nigeria and Southwest Cameroon is particularly referred to here as the Cross River – Southwest Cameroon. This usage of the term is not as arbitrary as it seems. It alludes in fact to the multiple and overlapping spaces and dynamics of the global social space identifiable through historical, geographical and social variables; it alludes also to the social space of the specific communities interrelated by networks of clientelism, religious and economic solidarities, configurations which produce conflicting dynamics that can either strengthen national unity or, on the contrary, increase interdependency among the states and their citizens (Sall 1992). As the most integrated border space between West and- Central Africa, its national boundaries dividing peoples seem rather senseless. And yet they are enduring. This is one of the important issues raised in border studies which this paper also tries to contribute to the emergence of cross-border neighbourhood and governance.

This reality of national borders is constantly challenged by overlapping socio-cultural dynamics which positsa common argument, or a largely documented paradigm in Africa (Bach 1998). Both scholars and policy-makers idealistically agree that borders are spaces in which national boundarylines are diluted by other territorial and identity dynamics produced out of popular strategies (UNESCO 2005). Indeed, this paradigm reconciles the material factors such as economic and trade patterns and symbolic markers such as political and cultural elements of border life. Identity logics constitute the common realm of political and cultural dynamics that combine with and reshape territorial or spatial realities of borders.

In several studies of borders as borderlands or regions, identity and territory are the two ingredients of the same process (Nyambara 2009, Martineau 2009, Cisse 2007, Tandia 2007). They help redefine borders as borderlands as

spaces of symbolic and material stakes. For instance, in a seminal work of Sindjoun (2004), contributors globally conclude that migrants are actualnegotiators of multiple political identities (Meye 2004), multinational transnational identities that renders borders permeable to them but not meaningless (Chouala 2004). Even though borders are subject to perpetual reinterpretation in daily practices and discourses, they are not contested or avoided in these transnational territorial and identity dynamics (Bennafla 1999). The process instead is comparable to a game in which national identity is constantly used concerning negotiation with other social identifications, ethnic or community.

This negotiation process is not only conflictual between states, but also, cooperative according to situations and stakes in play. If cross-border or borderland life implies identity negotiation for migrant individuals or communities, the question remains to be asked for sedentary communities. In this vein, Cisse (2007, p. 31), investigated how socio-cultural solidarities in the sedentary Bobofing community between Mali and Burkina Faso challenged frontier lines through an intense process of identity negotiation in which "ethnic differentiation is more important than national differentiation." The work demonstrates the possibility of constructing a communitarian and cosmopolitan collective identity out of multiple identifications, they reveal little of the complex processes of this negotiation. For instance, Cisse (2007) remained silent on how these practices could, in turn, reproduce, reshape and perpetuate those identities. Furthermore, the study seems to miss the point that socio-cultural and regional solidarities that back those ethnonational identities cannot be isolated in the construction of collective identities. How they interact, through absorption or rejection, with other forms of belongingness such as national and ethnic identities is not demonstrated.

Besides, as has been illustrated from cross-border migration (Sindjoun 2004; Oshineye 2009), identity construction entails material concerns which

borderland actors have to cope with in their border survival strategies. This issue of the utility of identity construction in borderlands seems to suggest that borderland identity also consists of symbolic foundations and aspirations. And finally, the extent to which transnational community identities make sense for such collective actions as cross-border governance, and what this could reveal in terms of ascribing meaning to the border.

It is against this background that in the considered settings of the Cross River-Southwest Cameroon neighbourhood, ethnic and cultural identities mostly help re-define borders, through cross-border governance as a collective stroke for border regulation and cooperation. Most importantly, this transboundary governmental authority lies more on local identity constructions and practices of border spaces than on formal legitimacies of local government or intergovernmental cooperation. This is predicated on the failure of national governments to address border issues and borderland daily challenges, hence, identity constructions processed in the long run provides the frames for cross-border governance as a collective action.

Conceptual Clarification and Theoretical Analysis

The physical or geographical border which is our concern here refers to the juridical boundary, a barrier by which nationality criterion are defined. Borders appear as identity markers, exclusive and inclusive at the same time, but also, lines of demarcation that sanction the state's sovereignty and authority. Such a graphical representation is not always easily devisable in Africa given the anachronism between the colonial heritage and the dynamics of African societies (Asiwaju 1985, p. 6). Cultural boundaries of peoples do not tally with conventional political borders of nation-states, and national identities hardly match up with cultural identities (UNESCO 2005, p. 23). This reality brings us to the fore of the issue of borderlands or "border areas" as referred to in the current discourse of African borders and regional integration. This notion is preferred to the extent that it highlights how boundarylines are subsumed in societal practices

of borders and enables analysis of borders as territories and spaces of political significance (Asiwaju 1984, p. 8).

Borders are political territories in the sense that they are appropriated spaces, whether by state or by society and its in-groups. In the perspective of cross-border governance, they can work as political territories since this peripheral inter-local governmentality contextualizes some peculiar constraints and dynamics of the border areas which are "geographical spaces straddling the national territories of two or more countries, where peoples are closely tied up together by socioeconomic ties" (Tandia 2010, p. 9). However, the political nature of borderlands on which cross-border governance is based can be revealed in more precise terms. First, cross-border areas are in this study, sub-national territories formed by administrative regions and districts. Second, they are transnational territories cutting across state territories. In this case, they appear more as socio-cultural territories or ethnonational spaces drawn by linguistic or religious boundaries, and homogenous areas in terms of the level of development that together bear political significance (Rosière 2007, p. 25). Third, cross-border areas or borderlands harbours decision-making centres such as administrative decentralized authorities and local governments. They imply many decision centres among which are civil society and non-State charismatic decision-makers are constituted by traditional and religious nobilities. Beyond their administrative pertinence, therefore, decision centres take part in the structuring and government

From sociological and anthropological theories, political science has shown that territory plays an important role in identity differentiation (Braud 2006, p. 124). On thecontrary,it is implicit that identity is important in the construction and transformation of territories, and even, in their control. For example, it is through ethnic affinities that legends and myths of kinship and alliances that the border inhabitants convene meetings and demand collective efforts for local initiatives. In these situations, communal action is always assumed to serve the immemorial ties that bound borderlanders and legitimize

mobilization (Tandia 2010, p. 10). In other words, identities import much in cross-border governance given that collective action and political mobilization aimed at inter-local government or management of borderlands as spatial frames and stakes of power and authority.

It is in this sense that we would like to treat borderland communal identities as political identities. This line of thought can be better understood if it is agreed that socio-political designation of identities is to differentiate exclusively or to build a 'we' against 'them' identity. Identity as a notion, different from identities as forms of belongingness, can be heuristically envisioned as a "force of conflict or construction of cleavages" (Duschenes and Scherrer 2003). This definition like those of borders as political territories and borderland identities as political identities means 'political', not something related only to the exertion of power; a traditional angle in political science from which national identity and state territory were strictly and exclusively political, but something relating to the conflict. Cross-border governance is also defined as this conception of what is political, in the sense that governance refers to the conflictual balances of State-Society relations (Tandia 2010, p. 11).

Indeed, cleavages make the individual in a group to which they claim to belong represent this group as opposed to other identity groups they belong to. They do this through a hierarchy of the multiple forms of belongingness they identify with (Duschenes and Scherrer 2003). Following from the above, therefore, borderland identity as a community identity proceeds from other identities in a critical context where the necessity is to face contradictions common to territories constituted by borderlands. In this vein, a quite convincing application of this definition of political identity to borderland identity would hold on the following premises.

First, the meaning of this identity production in cross-border governance is to define two kinds of relationships: one between the borderland territories and the global national entity through an assertion of politics of autonomy (autonomy

of representation and autonomy of action) towards central governments; and between the two borderland communities and spaces (Tandia 2010, p. 21). Second, a consequence of what precedes the local communitarian identity or localism is not only the vehicle of a feeling of common belongingness but also, a function of inter-local imaginary which territorializes those constraints and dynamics of interdependency known in the cross-border areas given their collective appropriation. Thus, the identity of "local citizenship" constitutes the milieu for action in cross-border governance. It is the publicized representation and experience of border peoples, the social bonds that bind them and their different roles in the borderland (Adejumobi 2005, pp. 22-23).

Third, communal responsibility in which particular identities (national, ethnic, class, etc.) are concealed, is also a collective power taking through which cross-border governance is legitimized and worked out as a form of public action, a realm of public social relationships (Surel and Muller 1998, p. 52). Behind the logic of meaning arising from borderland identity and cross-border governance lies the logic of power which principle is to provoke a unitary dynamic action. It could, therefore, be inferred that the political nature of borderland identity and management lies in the fact that cross-border governance, to a great extent, turns borderlands into public and governance jurisdictions.

The above argument is premised on the fact that cross-border governance is a political enterprise in both its form and meaning. One obvious reason for that is that, on the one hand, governance as a holistic concept relates to "issues that are necessary to the achievement and reproduction of balanced state-society relations" (Olukoshi 2006, p. 6), and, on the other hand, borderlands are spaces where those questions are mostly raging, if the problematic of grassroots integration and border management is to be seriously considered in current national and regional policies. In the face of all the glaring problems, borderlands cannot but device inner mechanisms of government or self-reliance strategies. In the Cross River-Southwest Cameroon neighbourhood, there is strong

interdependence that has grown to genuinely overwhelm cross-border problems. Despite the erratic intergovernmental relations, these borderlands are challenged by the relentless weakening of the security sector, the proliferation of roadblocks, environmental erosion, weakness of local institutions and inaccessibility of central government structures, as well as cross-border trade and its daily share of criminality and insecurity (Bonchuk 2010, p. 12). This is without recourse to the impact on the social fabric and interconnectedness across thesecontiguous territories.

With particular reference to governance, it is conceived as a heuristic concept that conveys an epistemological concern which is to understand the alternative forms of regulation that have emerged in a context of social complexity and (or) political disillusionment marked by critical transformations of the nation-state. Fawole and Ukeje (2005), are of the view that the crisis of permanence of the nation-state at all levels, has diminished the readability of collective action, arising from the crisis of legitimacy, efficacy and territoriality (Igue 1995), in the wake of the crisis of national identity and citizenship (Bach 1998), the multiplicity of actors, with growing divergent and almost unmatchable interests, engage in a regime of governability at the margins of the state. In this sense, Lascoumes (2004) further indicates that:

> The notion of neighbourhood governance appears therefore as a conceptual designation of alternative state representation and reproduction of the state, or more precisely of the public realm, through the social practices and within the framework of collective action. In other words, it refers to the new governmentality of the state defined as a specific mode of exerting power.

We used the concept of governance in this way because it helps preclude the ideological significations that sometimes pollute it. More interestingly, it is more useful than government (as in local government) and leadership in recent civil society myths of popular elite liberating rule. However, as Hyden (1995)

observed, the concept should not always and mistakenly denounce the imbalance of state-society relations. However, we agree with Hyden when he argues that, "the state is rarely the sole harbinger of political power and it is often the public realm, not just the state that is weak" (Hyden 1995, p. 6).

The concept of governance here createsapossibility to alienate judgment about the exact relationship between political authority and formal institutions in society. No presumption is permissible as concerns the holder of authority or the possession of political control by any given actor in cross-border governance processes. Rather, it is concerned in effect with "struggles for the expansion of citizenship, [and therefore with the nature and character of public opinion]" (Olukoshi 2008, p. 6); governance raises the questions of new systems of checks and balances between public and private actors, state and societal institutions, the articulation of the rights and responsibilities of citizens individually and collectively, the definition and operationalization of rules of political regulation (Olukoshi 2006, p. 23). Governance in the borderlands, therefore, works as an instrument to apprehend the current transformations in the modes of management of public affairs (Hermet and Kazancigil 2003, pp. 1-14).

With particular reference to border regions, governance is viewedfrom a geographical and anthropological standpoint. In effect, it refers to territories and collective actions, in socio-spatial areas where the governmental authority is reinvented on the one hand and, on the other hand, it is considered them as symbolic sites and identity centres. Consequently, the concept of cross-border governance is very necessary when interpreted from the symbolic or cognitive dimension of the production of the borderland governmental structurethrough an analysis of identity constructions that legitimize such authority. It is in this sense that we visualised cross-border governance as a collective action to be strictly associated with borderland identities and territories. In this sense, cross-border governance will be considered as a collective regime by which inter-local

problems of border areas are managed and borderlands regulated withinindistinct relations to the respective national frames.

In its empirical scope and implications in terms of border meaning and transformation, reference is hereby made to Hyden (1995, p. 9), whose analytical framework seems to correspond to cross-border governance as a political enterprise connecting identity, territories and governance. Hyden theorised some basic dimensions of governance that seems relevant in understanding the empirical logic of cross-border governance in the Cross River-Southwest Cameroon borderlands. Hyden schematic of the governance jurisdiction tallies with the view of borders as public domains since cross-border governance and borderland identity aim at achieving public good in terms of social relationships and problem-solving initiatives.

There are three dimensions for optimal analysis of governance. First, he considered the actor dimension of governance in which the nature and character of relationships between actors tell something about the degree of publicity in collective actions implied by governmental authorities. According to Hyden, two types of relationships exists between actors. First, the relationships of authority: authority here refers to that governance relationships are based on "legitimate power. In other words, the voluntary acceptance of asymmetrical relationship" (Hyden 1995:10). In this sense, it comes close to a reciprocal relationship. Both imply an underlying normative consensus on rules for the exercise of power" (Hyden 1995). Following from the above, it confers the advantage of being less discrete, and consequently, more transparent unlike exchangingreciprocity which requires "each to contribute to the welfare of the others with an expectation that they will do likewise" (Hyden 1995). A reciprocal relationship, therefore, requires a "broader agreement and consensus on the basic norms of social action" (Hyden 1995). Hence, the condition for this consensual processing is the implementation of an ethic of dialogues, which holistically stresses the role of borderland management discourses.

The second dimension has to do with the "jurisdiction of conflict and dialogue" where consensus has to fit in a defined governance structure (Tandia 2010, p. 18). The structural dimension of governance here refers to the type of political structure implicit in politics, or "the normative institutions so created by the neighbourhood to pursue socio-economic and political ends" (Hyden 1995:10). The structures of governance in the neighbourhood are formal and informal, spontaneous organisations and institutions. Therefore, the emergent cross-border governance will function as a hybrid character of governance structures as recognisable through the presence of social forums monitored by civil society organisations or deliberative encounters gathering (local) state authorities and traditional powers. It is in this sense that governance structures flourish in a communitarian context, meaning that they could well be found in borderlands where collectivism still dominates patterns of social life.

Third, Hyden infers from themain variables from which to understand the empirical working of a regime. Citizen influence and oversight, responsive leadership and social reciprocities should be observable components of what might be termed as the regime dimension of governance situations. Citizen influence and oversight according to Hyden designates:

> how individual citizens can participate in the political process and thereby express their preferences about public policy; how well these preferences are aggregated for effective policymaking; and what means exist of holding authorities accountable for their decisions and actions (Hyden 1995, p. 15).

While this rather elaborate construction could be somewhat difficult for cross-border settings often marked by the absence of state mechanism of governance, looking at the presence and activity of civil society structures to replace local administrative and political powers; Hyden's analogy was drawn from the European experience where the level of state politics, governance and democracy as a concept of belongingness can lead to progressive changes in the public realm

of the contemporary state system. Therefore, the argument about government authorities and the citizens in the borderlands is predicated on the looseness or inexistence of a central authority and, a deliberate search for many contributing or decision-making centres that would give the neighbourhood governance legitimacy.

The Cross River–Southwest Cameroon Border Area: Natural Identities and Socio-Cultural Characteristics

Scholarly pieces of literature and analysis have affirmed that the Cross River (Nigeria)–Southwest Cameroon border region like other African borderlands were hastily and hazily delineated to accommodate rival imperial interests, which up to date have no concrete expression in terms of permanent recognizable physical instruments of demarcation. This "political surgery" according to Bonchuk (2003, p. 23), have divided not only physical features but homogenous ethnic groups in their cultural coherent environment and placed them between two antagonistic systems.In his part-breaking study on *Borderlands in Africa,* Asiwaju (1989, p. 273) submitted that between 1886 and 1893, the Anglo-German agreements partitioned the Nigeria and Cameroon borderlands from Borno through the Cross River estuary, thus, the Emir of Yola was quoted to have lamented that "the Europeans had cut-off the head of his kingdom and left him with the body." Consequently, in the Cross River (Nigeria) – Southwest Cameroon region, the boundary line has divided the Ejagham, Boki, Becheve and Akwaya despite their historical bond.

Writing much later, Asiwaju (1993, p. 18) later revealed that the border communities based on the above, share a lot in common. They are invariably the same people separated by a devious invincible line. Their hatred and aversion to vice are assumed to be similar. These common ethnic, socio-cultural and religious affinities on both sides of the border have defied this arbitrary separation as border people continue their age-long socio-economic and cultural

relations which make it difficult to check the movement of people across the borderlands.

It is equally a revealing characteristic that Nigerian migrants into Cameroon, particularly, Southwest Cameroon after 1913, constitute by far the highest number of foreign residents in that region of Cameroon and they are commonly referred to as "Cam-Gerians." Some of them were taken into the Southwest region of Cameroon to meet the labour needs of German plantations to effect a speedy economic recovery. According to Bonchuk (2005, p. 78), these "Cam-Gerian" are residents in Kumba, Tiko, Buea, Ekom and Eyum-Ojok have contributed enormously during the colonial period to the development of the region, and their off-springs who most often than not, have become merchants, in Kumba. They are also landlords in Limbe, poor fishermen Ekondo-Titi and cultivators of cash crops at Mayuka, who continued to control the economy and contribute to the socio-economic development of their host communities despite threats from the Cameroonian authorities and denial of their resident permits.

Another distinguishing feature of the border region under consideration is that of underdevelopment. The region is the least developed and most volatile of all Nigeria's borderlandseven though the region is the 'soft underbelly of the nation's revenue yielding source. In other words, the neglect of this border region is a historical process that was set in motion in 1884 Berlin West African conference when the Germans and the British exploited the region's resources for their selfish interest; and abandoned the region in the wake of the 1960s national independence with little or no indices of development (Ejoh 2013, p. 48).The isolated nature of the border region including its underdeveloped nature put the region in dire need of government attention. For instance, the region cannot boast of any industrial concerns, electricity or the presence of any indices of modernity. This has accentuated a steady and varied flow of cross border unrecorded trade along Ikom-Ajassor/Mfum-Ekok, Ikom-Bashua-Danare and Calabar-Ikang/Ekang border routes (Bonchuk 2009, p. 12).

The above scenario cannot be divorced from the people of the region's distinct identity, culture and historical experiences over time. The inhabitants of the border region are prone to poverty as well as political impotence, thus, any attempt to develop the border region must take into account the peoples' local desires. It is for this reason that Stoddard (1978, p. 8) argued that border people out-rightly reject the nation-state model of "fortress mentality" and rather embrace "mutual necessity." In that sense, they are more united to their neighbours astride the boundary than their brother in the same country via unity of purpose and the search for identity and recognition.

However, Oscar Martinez analogyof the US-Mexico border has demonstrated that since border people deal with immediate problems that are common to both sides of the border on daily basis, their cosmology is geared towards survival. Therefore, arbitrary state proclamations merely treat such systems of traditional informal networks across the border areas as "the enemy" rather than the most effective means of reducing border tensions and strains (1994, p. 66). Evidence of the Cross River (Nigeria) and Southwest Cameroon identity and socio-cultural penetration is apparent to any observer. For instance, crossing the border into Cameroon through Ikom or Ikang, one sees abundant evidence of trade at the Four Corners, Mfum, Ekok and Marina. More so, the extensive use of the Pidgin English in advertising articles of the trade like electrical/electronic appliances, soft/chocolate drinks and the popular 'Naija Jamz and other broad manifestations of Nigerian culture (Otora 2013, p. 14). On the Nigerian side, one encounters diverse aspects of Cameroonian culture in music: *makossa, mapoka*; food: *ndole* and drinks: *majunga, baron de Valle* among others; and in Ekok, Eyumojok, Nasakang and Bamenda one still find the overwhelming presence of Nigerian culture in music, food and drinks etc; hence, lending credence to cross-cultural fertilization through the process of "contact metamorphosis" (Bonchuk 2009, p. 12).

Furthermore, records abound that reveal the enormous cross-border relation via social institutions. John Ekpenyong for instance indicates that since borderlanders astride the border area are of the same ethnicity, by and large, they operate indistinguishable social institutions. These range from births, marriages, agesets to burial rites or ceremonies. The Becheve in the Cross River, for instance, look forward every year to the *inginita* ceremonies in the Matengi hunting grounds in the Cameroons where the priest resides; *kobiamak* is another festival also celebrated across the border; thus, bringing members of the groups' together (Ekpenyong 1993, p. 82).

Again, the Boki New Yam festival celebrated on 18th August annually is also celebrated by their kith and kin in Bodam, Dadi, Bajie, Kajifu, Kekukesim, Boka, and Oyi in the Republic of Cameroon (Otora 2013, p. 20). This is also applicable to Ekok, Eyumojok, Nsanaraghti, Nsanakang (Cameroon) who observe and celebrate the New Yam festival on 4th September every year; thereby revealing the cultural linkage of the Ejagham people across the border (Otora 2013).Also, religio-magical institutions including *Bapong* and *Lakumbo* are more often than not referred to as supra ethnic deities from which they venerate overtime as instruments of check and deterrence from criminality and other unscrupulous behaviours among the people of the border region. The people who still believe in the potency of these deities and their invincibility in the border region and beyond appease them often. Indeed, they were sources of strength in all their wars, ordeals and victories (Ejoh 2010, p. 52).

The border markets in Abonorok, Bashua, Ajassor, Ikom, Ekang, Ikang (Nigeria) witness the in-flow of Cameroonians who buy several Nigerian goods including rice, floor, electronics; and in Ekok, Duala, Mamfe, Limbe, Kumba (Cameroon) also witness a large number of Nigerian who buy matrasses, pirated makossa music, wine/hot drinks, French shoes and fabrics etc (Bonchuk 2009, p. 12). Furthermore, social institutions like *Nkim* (circumcision), *Ebai* (marriage), *Nkan* (age-grades) thrives in the Ejagham and Boki speaking groups of the region.

Sandy Onor described *Nkim* in this context as "clitoridectomy" – an exercise conceived of as a means of ensuring the fidelity of women in marriage. In other words, it is an institution created to teach young maidens in the Ejagham society the inner intricacies of marriage, especially "as it relates to its vicissitudes and harsh realities" (Onor 1994, pp. 88-89). Therefore, *Nkim* remains a moral code for young maidens across the Ejagham nation straddling across the borderland under consideration.

It is quite a revealing fact that *Ebai* (marriage) and *Nkan* (age-grades) across the border region are the same, both in content and function. Hence, inter-marriages which are more often than not, have over time produced trans-nationalities or dual-nationalities, and constitute a major problem to border policing and security management.However, the most reverent political institution in the Cross River – Southwest Cameroon border area from the earliest times is the 'Leopard' institution which has existed with different nomenclatures including *Mgbe* among the Ejagham; *Ekpe* (the Efik) and *Bakundin* (the Balondo), etc. Scholars such as E. O Tangban, A. O. Anwana, and S. O. Onor inter alia are in agreement that the *Mgbe* is an Ejagham creation. Most fascinating is its spread and influence across the Cross River – Southwest Cameroon border area and even beyond. Until fairly recently, *Mgbe* performed several functions ranging from compliance enforcement of the general decisions reached local assembly, maintenance of social order, prevention of oppression of any kind as well as a machinery for the stimulation a healthy trading and commercial intercourse amongst individuals and groups (Onor 1994, p. 104). Despite such political influence across the border region, Anwana(2005, pp. 106-144) postulates that it was not unlikely, that, the British colonialists saw *Mgbe* as a major threat to their authority, in the same vein the missionaries described it as "satanic and anti-God." But it was still the *Mgbe* that the same missionaries used to compel compliance in their early attempts at conversion. Today,*Mgbe* halls are visible features in communities astride the border area.

The afore-mentioned characteristics of border culture and institutions account for the unique nature of the border area which dates back to many centuries ago; and based on that Erim (2000, pp. 1-26),supposed that the British Act of Amalgamation in Nigeria was guided by the realities of the existing geographical, historical, socio-economic and cultural antecedents for the eventual proclamation in 1914. However, Erim submits that "our leaders have failed to build upon the roots which our ancestors worked so hard to create for our unity." It is imperative, therefore, to note herein that the ethnic groups divided by the borderline speak the identical lingua franca for inter-ethnic communications across the borderlands and classified under the Benue – Congo language family; the Cross River branch comprises peoples of the language groups spilling over to Cameroon. Of the several languages straddling the border, the Boki, Becheve, Akwaya, Ejagham, Efik and Bette, share the Anglophone Cameroon province in the contiguous territory with their kith and kin in the Cross River, Nigeria (Bonchuk 2005, p. 48). These groups also share identical socio-cultural, political and religious institutions along and astride the border region. Hence, the cross-cultural communication problems resulting in crisis can only occur at the state-centric level. On the contrary, however, at the transboundary or transnational level, there seem not to be many problems astride the Cross River – Southwest Cameroon border region, given the reality of cultural interchange.

Indeed, it has become imperative, to underscore the argument that it is in the cultural milieu that the concepts of border cooperation, integration and conflict resolution are constructed and results realized and acceptable to the contiguous statesin the borderlands. Thus, the inescapable impression suggests that while natural characteristics, identity, culture, socio-political and religious institutions astride the border region under investigation enhances cross border interactions, it remains the nucleus that would continue to forge cross border integration and contribute immensely to ameliorating cross border security challenges in the border region.

Cross-border Neighbourhood Governance as a Panacea for Transboundary Cooperation and Grassroots Integration in the Cross River-Southwest Cameroon Border Area

The analysis on the meaning border inhabitants give to their collective action and the interest they attach to such action, reveals a certain number of expectations they place on cross-border governance. However, the satisfaction of these expectations depends on what might be labelled the social utility of cross-border governance. The analysis of this functional legitimacy through the means, procedures and goals of cross-border governance results in the identification of three types of functions that render it effective. However, there are undeniable shortcomings that revitalize cross-border governance in its international and national existence.

The survival of local cross-border governance on the Cross Ricer-Southwest Cameroon borderland, the routine of communal exchanges of good manners among borderlanders on both sides according to Hyden (1995)scheme of reciprocal relationships as a working governance structure. The functioning of cross-border governance in peacetime and wartime altogether refers back to the idea of responsive leadership. Contrariwise, their responsibility is doubtful, particularly at the Cross River (Nigeria)-Southwest Cameroon border where political and administrative authorities, and to less extent security forces, are overshadowed by statist ideology. The friendship of administrative personnelastride borderlands in local electoral politics also adds to the doubt of this responsibility.

Consequently, citizen oversight is a lifebelt for Senegal-Guinea border peoples, while in the area occupied by the Boki and Ejagham communities there is a relative state presence by way of the effectiveness of political and administrative institutions, citizen oversight and influence subsists on the approval of cross-border governance. Even though these observations are a basis

for empirical validation of the theoretical and comparative approach of cross-border governance, they say little about the practical effectiveness of cross-border governance in its political aspirations. On this score, the analysis has yielded instances where cross-border governance presents virtues in border management, social integration and conflict prevention.

Concerning border management as an effective modality of cross-border governance, this can be explained at two levels. Firstly, the administrative coordination between all civil and military institutions mostly on the Cross River (Nigeria)-Southwest Cameroon border areas, covers achievements such as facilitation and negotiation of borderland activities and events across the border constituencies. Cross-border inter-institutional cooperationwould contribute to the dynamics of pooling togetherneighbourhood structures across the Cross River (Nigeria)-Southwest Cameroon border, and to a great extent, inspire the local nobilities to deliberate on matters ranging from security, decentralized cooperation and environment management.

Secondly, the control of commercial flows across the borderwould elicit the sharing of security information and harmonisation of customs and immigration procedures. To this end, on both sides of the border divide, petty frustration and occasional quarrels between economic operators and the police would be drastically reduced to the minimum, while joint operations and forestry guards save the endangered flora and fauna in the sea littoral.

If properly managed, the social integration function of cross-border governance would consummate the promotion of good neighbourliness and peaceful coexistence in the borderlands. Granted that interdependence would alleviate the differentials imposed by the contrastive legal and fiscal policies of the core states, cross-border governance would permanently prevent any disruption of local peace and neighbourliness. Thus, the impact of socio-cultural solidarities, geographic and economic complementarities would be utilized to minimize the extant effects of low-intensity criminality in the borderlands. As a

strategic cultural diplomatic approach of neighbourliness and cooperative security system, cross-border governance would measure in "preventive diplomacy" that calls for accountability and transparency from the governing authorities including customary and religious elites. Indeed, structural prevention of social conflicts derived from the influence of the promotion of good neighbourliness among borderland communities through its patterns of cooperation, peace, neighbourliness and social integration, cross-border governance would also impose some level of restraints on inappropriate behaviour in the borderlands.

Conclusion

The paper examined the meaning of borders through the nature and potential of transboundary community initiatives, and consequently through the grassroots dynamics of self-government. The study elicits interest only when compared to national and regional challenges of cross-border and grassroots governance. Given the prevailing dynamics in the Cross River (Nigeria)-Southwest Cameroon border area, the need to embrace the contours of collective action of cross border neighbourhood governance as a result of locational disadvantage. The study identified cross-border governance as a new strategy in the management of inter-local borders which would suffice as political territories and characteristically significant to the dynamics of state borders transformation.

The three modalities of cross border action including administrative coordination, security cooperation and cultural diplomacy are suggested to engender the emergence of a pluralistic community in the border area. This would establish the relationship between border space and identity as a framework within which the legitimacy and efficiency of cross-border governance could be appreciated. It was indicated that the legitimacy of cross-border governance arises from the meaning of borderlands, which in turn is given by localism as an identity construct that re-appropriates cross border complementarities and differential constraints as well as intergovernmental

relations of Nigeria and Cameroon.At the grassroots level and the context of cross border integration discourse and identity construction, the study was oriented toward "border areas" as the neglected frontier of political and institutional renewal of inter-state relations. It was, therefore, appropriate to build on an empirical corpus and attempt an analysis that interrogates neighbourhood governanceas a paradigm shift in the management of cross border flows in the Cross River (Nigeria)-Southwest Cameroon border area.

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