

**UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH
Edinburgh, U.K.**

**2012 Annual Conference of ABORNE
June 5-8, 2012**

**TRANSFRONTIER REGIONALISM IN AFRICA: REFLECTIONS ON
POLICY ADVOCACY WITH FOCUS ON NIGERIA AND LIMITROPHE
NEIGHBOURS IN WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICA**

Keynote Presentation

By

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Introduction

Regional Integration demands the effective devaluation of barrier functions and effects of the boundaries between participating partner States¹. Whether the **region** is a sub-division of a continent or an entire continent, depending on the level or unit of analysis in focus, the elimination of the border as **barrier** and its systematic promotion as **bridge** between the limitrophe states constitute a critical condition of success.

One commonly expressed criticism of the approach in Africa is :

That, for far too long, relevant policy making has been so much more an affair of governments 'above' than of the people 'below';

That policy initiatives have been almost exclusively an activity of conservative states and their supernationalist bureaucracies, holding on tenaciously to weird and obsolete doctrines of sovereignty and inviolability or 'intangibility' of state boundaries; and,

That particularly ill-ignored have been such critical stakeholder constituencies as the local border communities and territorial authorities²

The upshot is a grievous policy disconnect that has robbed initiatives 'from above' of the opportunity of being provided secure foundations in realities of cross-border flows and wider regional dynamics of local cultures and histories that operate all the time 'from below' and, most especially, in cross-border areas³.

A **transfrontier region**, on the other hand, has been aptly conceptualized and operationally defined as *'regions that although traversed by international borders nevertheless constitute a unit'*.⁴ **Transfrontier Regionalism** is, therefore, about promoting the integration of cross-border proximities as strategy for deepening and thereby strengthening a wider regional integration process. It is about steering limitrophe states away from obstructionist negative habits of deadly collisions and tragic conflicts into the more welcome positive alternative path of conflict prevention and cooperation over shared interests in human and natural resources, often time of great strategic and security importance, that straddle common international boundaries and overlapping cross-border areas or borderlands. In the language of the 2012 ABORNE Conference, *transfrontier regionalism* is about promoting 'regional integration from below' and bridging the gap in between integration 'from above'.

Though a prominent feature of the extensively researched subject of 'informal policy making' across the U.S-Mexico border,⁵ the most spectacular in the world where *'North Meets South'*⁶, formalisation and consolidation of **transfrontier regionalism** is a phenomenon more of post-War Europe where it has ranked, perhaps, among the most important catalysts of the regional integration project, the most successful in the modern world. Its development and practice in Europe constitute the most critical underscoring of the transformation from an old supernationalist Europe of States and Governments to a new and integrating Europe of peoples and regions.

The admiration of the history and operation in the European Economic Community and, more recently, European Union, is manifest in several of this presenter's writings, notably his **Artificial Boundaries** (1984) and, more specifically, the essay recently revised and published as *'Transfrontier Regionalism: European Union Perspective on Postcolonial Africa, with Special Reference to Borgu'* in Heather N. Nicol and Ian Townsend-Gault, Eds. (2005), **Holding the Line: Borders in a Global World** (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press)⁵. The deep impression made by the admirable workings of the *Euregios* (European Regions) and remarkable contributions of the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR) to the deepening of the

European integration process has formed the basis of the policy advocacy that has been mounted for Africa since the late 1980s.

Research and Advocacy Focus on the Nigerian Sub-Region

We have asked to take the floor as keynote presenter at this year's ABORNE conference for two closely inter-related reasons'. First is the irresistible attraction of the conference theme of 'African Borderlands: Regional Integration from Above and Below', which fits so nicely into the specific aspect of the subject, that has engaged our attention over the years, namely: the problematization of the conceptual and operational inter-connections between African Borderlands Studies and African integration at one level and at another level, between the historical processes in post-War Europe and post-colonial Africa.

The second, which is key to the presentation, is to share with participants an uncommon experience in which strictly academic endeavours have been successfully combined with a sustained policy advocacy and actual involvement with relevant policy making at local, national, regional and continental levels and contexts. The presentation is the outline story of having practically operated at both ends of the policy spectrum, of having been involved in actively promoting African integration: 'from below' as a 'fronterizo', native and citizen of a typical African 'cross-border' area', that of the Ketu-Yoruba astride the Nigeria-Benin border in West Africa and a concerned borderlands scholar; and 'above' of active participation in local, national, regional and continental policy-making frameworks and arenas. The focus is on the foundation and still enduring experiences with Nigeria vis-à-vis limitrophe neighbours of strategic locations in both ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States) and ECCAS (Economic Community of Central African States), two of African Union's pre-eminent five pillar RECs(Regional Economic Communities).

The intellectual or knowledge base of this advocacy story has emanated from several antecedent and contemporaneous academic productions, notably;

- i. **Western Yorubaland Under European Rule, 1889-1945: A Comparative Analysis of French and British Colonialism** (London: Longman, 1976), the first known full-scale case history of a colonially divided African border community, that of the Yoruba astride the then Nigeria-Dahomey (now Benin) border, including the Ketu sub-group with which this keynote presenter is premodially connected;
- ii. **Partitioned Africans: Ethnic Relations Across Africa's International Boundaries, 1884-1984**, a well known edited volume based on a continent-wide survey and sample case studies, published in 1984/1985 simultaneously by University of Lagos Press in Lagos C. Hurst and Co. (Publishers) in London, and St. Martin's Press, New York, in the U.S; and
- iii. **Artificial Boundaries**, University of Lagos Press, Inaugural Lectures Series, 1984, which most explicitly pronounced on the policy option for Nigeria set in wider African and global context and frameworks.
- iv. **Boundaries and African Integration: Essays in Comparative and Policy Analysis** (Lagos: PANAF Publishing Incorporated, 2003)

As those familiar with these foundation studies may bear witness, the consistent and constant policy advocacy has been broadly three-fold anchored on the broad issues of *Transborder Cooperation Policy Promotion*, *Border Region Development* and *Capacity Building*; and the passion has been for five over-lapping policy concerns, namely:

- i. Radical reconceptualisation of African international boundaries for them to cease to be **barriers** and become **bridges** between limitrophe States;
- ii. Methodical transborder cooperation policy promotion;
- iii. Affirmative action programme for a special development focus on the generally structurally disadvantaged border regions and cross-border areas of disconnected infrastructure, borne out of traditional official perceptions as strategically vulnerable areas or even 'no man's land' ;

- iv. Promoting Cross-border areas as the **milieu** for pro-active integration of limitrophe proximities and the stimulation of *'Afreghios'* on the model of *'Eureghios'* ('European Regions') known for their roles as catalysts for driving and deepening the European integration process; and finally,
- v. The creation of appropriate policy instruments and mechanisms as well as supportive specialized training and research programmes, project and institutions.

It is a matter of great personal satisfaction these days when these **basic advocacy** issues and detailed policy concerns have become prominent and audible features of policy language and literature at national, regional and, most noticeably, continental levels, thus indicating a major policy paradigm shift that has resulted, at least in part, from the past twenty-five years of active engagement with advocacy work.

Gaining Inroad into African Policy Arena.

Nigeria became the door for gaining access to the wider African border policy environment; and the opportunity came with the positive response, rather surprisingly, of the Nigerian Government, then under military regimes, to the arguments as contained in the highly publicized professorial Inaugural Lecture of 12 December 1984. The lecture received extra-ordinary publicity on account of its timing, not just in the season of the centenary of the 1884-1885 Berlin-West African Conference; but more particularly because of the then prevailing policy sensitivity, particularly heightened by the exceptionally draconic decision of the then ultra-nationalist military regime of the then Major-General Muhammadu Buhari to close the nation's borders against all of Nigeria's limitrophe neighbours, including land-locked Niger and Chad, a decision that was maintained until the succeeding Babangida administration was persuaded to re-open the borders on March 1, 1986.

The actual penetration into the Nigerian border policy arena followed the 1984 Lecture rather quickly, beginning with the co-funding provided by the Ministry of Internal Affairs (now Ministry of Interior) in collaboration with the Ford Foundation for an International Conference on Issues of Borderlands in

Africa, hosted by the Faculty of Arts of University of Lagos in March 1985 in the tenure of the keynote presenter as Dean of the Faculty. The conference organisation secured the active participation of such world-class border scholars as Elwyn R. Stoddard and Oscar J. Martinez, renowned anthropologist and historian respectively of the U.S. Mexico borderlands; and Raimondo Strassoldo, reputed Italian expert in the European 'modern border studies'. Their star presentations are included in the edited conference volume published by the University of Lagos Press in 1989 as *Borderlands in Africa: A Multidisciplinary and Comparative Focus on Nigeria and West Africa*.⁷

The Conference was followed by a special invitational participation as a lead expert in the 'Border Security and Defence Research Project of the National Institute of Policy and Strategic Studies (NIPSS), Kuru, Jos, from 1985 to 1987, leading to a multi-volume report, including our own specific one on the western boundary with the Republic of Benin. A major outcome of the NIPSS research project was the enactment of December 1987 which led to the formal establishment of the National Boundary Commission in July 1988.

But before the Commission came, the direct campaign for Nigeria's transborder cooperation policy was spectacularly launched with the first in the series of Nigeria's Transborder Cooperation Workshop that had been planned with each of its neighbours, that with the then Republic Populaire du Benin, held at the Nigerian Administrative Staff College, Topo, Badagry in May 1988⁷. The entire workshop programme, one for each of Nigeria's limitrophe neighbours and lasting till 1992 with a concluding session planned for a wider West African participation, had been totally agreed for funding by the Ford foundation. However, the rest of the Workshop organisation was taken over by the National Boundary Commission, following one's appointment to the Commission in July 1988 and conferment of full-time responsibility to help organize the Commission's Secretariat and guide its over-all operations at this initial stage of the institution's operation.

Tenure as Nigeria's Commissioner (International Boundaries)

While appointment as a Member of the National Boundary Commission dated from July 1988, it was the full-time assignment as Commissioner (International Boundaries) from 1989 to 1994 that offered a life-time opportunity to fully apply to the real world of policy making theories and concepts that have been continuously canvassed in a preceding active academic research of well over twenty years in Comparative African Borderlands Studies and problematization with issues of Regional Integration.

The five-year tenure witnessed significant innovations in the three broad areas of policy drive already mapped out, as we have seen, in the preceding academic research output, namely: **Transborder Cooperation; Border Region Development;** and **Capacity Building**⁹. To start with, *transborder cooperation policy drive*, the mainstream activities engaged in included follow-up action on the workshop that had been held and the completion of the Transborder Cooperation Workshop programmes.

Organised in both plenary session as well as focused panel discussions and interactions by participants that included bilaterally selected traditional rulers and other local influentials, local and regional administrators, business operators, high level government functionaries and, of course, academic experts, the Workshops were held for Niger in Kano in July 1989¹⁰; Cameroon in Yola in May 1992; and Equatorial Guinea in Calabar in November 1992¹¹. The Chad programme, scheduled for Maiduguri, has had to be postponed for reasons of political instability in Chad and later, in Nigeria itself. The envisaged outcome was a series of bilateral transborder cooperation treaties, on the model of the innovative 1984 **European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Cooperation between Local Territorial Authorities and Communities**, so well elaborated upon in the argument for an African applicability in **Artificial Boundaries** (1984).

Other activities closely related to transborder cooperation policy drive were, therefore, works on the draft bilateral Transborder Cooperation Treaties to consolidate the gains of each workshop. To date, the most evolved of the bilateral transborder cooperation treaties was the one with the Republic of

Benin, recently endorsed by both states. Also achieved were the initiation and consolidation of a programme of regular transborder exchanges including, official visits and joint border tours by Ministers in charge of border issues, local and regional administrators, and notable traditional rulers; the strengthening of existing bilateral and multilateral joint institutions such as the Nigeria-Niger Joint Commission On Cooperation with a permanent secretariat in Niamey, Niger and the Lake Chad Basin Commission based in N'Djamena in Chad, as well as the creation of such a new initiative as the multilateral Gulf of Guinea Commission, and the conduct of confidence-building missions to each of the limitrophe countries, the most spectacular being the one led by Nigeria's Minister of External Affairs, to Cameroon in August 1991, to dowse rising tensions.

A very important point of emphasis in all these activities especially the Workshop organizations and the Ministerial Joint border tours, is the stress placed on grassroots consultations and mobilization which, as will be noted presently, eased the way for surveyors in respect of demarcation and re-affirmation of the international boundaries.

With regards to border region development, the most important activities were those relating to the initiation and holding of the first ever National Planning Conference for the Development of the Nigerian Border Regions in Lagos in August 1989¹². The conference led to the decision to establish a National Committee for the Development of Border Regions as a committee of the entire National Boundary Commission and the setting aside of a distinct fund for this purpose. The current Border Communities Development Agency, established recently in 2009, was a direct off-shoot of this initiative.

In respect of capacity building, perhaps the most telling illustrations of the innovative policy advocacy and impacts are:

- The creation of the National Boundary Commission itself;
- The organisation and structuring of it's operating secretariat;
- The institutional replication at state and local government levels through the creation of state and local government boundary committees;

- Publicity by way of organized reportage in print and electronic media and by systematically publication series, especially the books on the workshop proceedings, which have made widely appreciated additions to African borderlands research literature.
- The institutional affiliations with relevant national and international specialized research programmes and institutions, notably IBRU (International Boundaries Research Unit, Durham, U.K.) and the Association of Borderlands Studies (ABS) in the U. S. ;
- The creation of the Centre for African Regional Integration and Border Studies (CARIBS) at the University of Lagos in late 2000; and, finally
- the establishment of the African Regional Institute Imeko, Ogun State, Nigeria, in late 2005.

Practical Effects

The practical effects of the new policy drive were many and obvious. They include:

- The general dowsing of prevailing border conflicts and tensions.
- This has been so even in respect of Nigeria's exceptionally 'troublesome border' with Cameroon, where a full-scale war was successfully averted and a preference was made for a more pacific alternative of litigation at the ICJ;
- The National Boundary Commission quickly doubled its capacity to accommodate roles and functions as the national coordinating office for the legal defence in the colossally expensive eight-year marathon Case of the Land and Maritime Border Dispute at the ICJ in The Hague from 1994 to 2002 and, thereafter, the still on-going process of implementation of the court's verdict,
- The creation of the enabling environment for unprecedented progress made on the demarcation of the mostly land borders that have been delineated and the delimitation of outstanding ones, such as the maritime with Benin and, technically, Ghana in the high seas; and finally,

- The siting and actual execution of several border region development projects
- Grassroots-level awareness about the new policy initiatives.

Regional integration Policy Advocacy ‘From Below’

Apart from several positive localized effects of the policy initiatives at the national level, for example the numerous border region development projects at several locations across the nation’s border region, direct opportunity for complementing policy initiative at strictly local and community levels aimed at driving regional integration ‘from below’, is provided by the statutory mandate for States and Local Governments, including those in the 21 States abutting the borders and so formally listed in the Border Communities Development Agency Act, to create their own State and Local Government Boundary Committees that may engage in cross-border exchanges and collaborative projects jointly with counterparts in adjacent localities in limitrophe countries.

The practical effects are especially in evidence along and across the Nigeria-Benin border and cross-border areas in Ogun State, our own Nigerian home State, where the example and good practice of Ipokia Local Government vis-à-vis limitrophe Ifangni and Adjarra Communes in the Republic of Benin can be cited to illustrate grassroots-level drive for cross-border cooperation for wider regional Integration. There is a Nigeria – Benin Transborder Cooperation Treaty of bilateral level and, at level, there is also is a Memorandum of Understanding signed by the Chairman of Ipokia Local Government with each of Ifagni and Adjarra Communes in the Republic of Benin.

Apart from the effects at grassroots level of activities in the National Boundary Commission, one has also been privileged in Ogun State to play roles as a Member of the State Boundary Committee since its inception in 1997 and, indeed, as the State Boundary Commissioner from 2003 to 2011¹³. At this sub-national level, several vital initiatives have been undertaken to the end of connecting positively with counterpart territorial authorities and local communities in adjacent Oueme and Plateau Departements on the Benin side of the border. Thus, for example, the Governor of Ogun State was a star

dignitary at the formal enthronement of the new Alaketu of Ketu in December 2005 where virtually all the Yoruba **obas** and other important personalities from the Nigerian side were also prominently in attendance¹⁴.

The new Alaketu was the Governor's Special Guest at a State reception in Abeokuta in June, 2006; and in 2007 his visit to the Ooni of Ife, customary ruler of the legendary ancestral home of the Yoruba, was facilitated by the Local Government at Imeko on our advice. Earlier in 1989 and 1990, immediately following the May 1988 Transborder Cooperation Workshop with Benin, the Military Governor of Ogun State and the Prefet of the limitrophe Beninose Departement of Oueme exchanged highly publicised official visits into each other's areas of Jurisdiction across the border. There is today a regular exchange of visits by Yoruba traditional rulers, as individuals and groups, across the Nigeria-Benin border.

At strictly local community level, two very important initiatives illustrate the efforts undertaken to generate regional integration 'from below'. The first relates to the remarkably successful collaborative effort, jointly with an organised pressure group of local and regional influentials, to sensitize the entire border area of Ogun State, our own home State in Nigeria, to the need for a community-based support for the policy paradigm shift aimed at turning the structural disadvantage of proximity to an international boundary to discernible benefits for the people and the region.

The immediate effect was a mass mobilization for self-determination, based on a well organized programme of consultations and consensus building with all identified stakeholder constituencies. The result was the proclamation on July1, 1995, to change the area name from an existing ethnically biased label and connotation of 'Egbado' to a more geopolitically preferred alternative of 'Yewa'. The proclamation was officially approved and gazetted by the Ogun State Government in 1997. This successful advocacy for change of identity was inspired by findings of a specially commissioned study published on the occasion of the proclamation¹⁵.

The second, of a more transborder orientation, is the formal inauguration in 2001 of the Ketu International Region Development Association (KINTERREG), an umbrella organisation for all Ketu community development associations on both sides of the Nigeria-Benin border. It was

aimed at kick-starting African border region development associations that may in future federate into an African equivalent of the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR), known for its tremendous impact as a power house for European integration project. With its important office carefully allocated to elected holders in communities on both sides of the border, the KINTERREG presidency has since remained vested in the speaker.

There is, perhaps, no better indication of the peoples' appreciation of these and other efforts at grassroots level and benefits that have been derived from village level advocacy and policy action for integration 'from below' than the conferment of numerous chieftaincy titles by traditional rulers of so many Yoruba towns on both sides of the border. The most exciting of these honorary chieftaincy titles has been that of the *Asiwaju of Yewaland*, a regional honour collectively conferred in 2006 by the entire Yewa (formerly 'Egbado') Traditional Council, a body incorporating all the **oba** (Yoruba traditional rulers) with their '*areas of prescribed authority*' abutting on or contiguous to Nigeria's border with the Republic of Benin.

Policy Advocacy and Impact Outside Nigeria

The remarkable success of this initial application of the three-fold advocacy to Nigeria and its limitrophe neighbours in West and Central Africa could not have passed unnoticed by policy making in the wider area of the continent. First were the series of invitations by such U.N regional organs concerned with issues of African borders and borderlands, notably the Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa, Lome, Togo, regarding particularly its Ford-Foundation-granted Research Project on the Role of Border Problems in African Peace and Security from 1987 to 1992¹⁶, and the series of inter-related Training Programmes on Conflict Prevention and Resolutions in Lome in 1988 and Yaoundé in 1991; and the Centre for Regional Development Africa Office, Nairobi, Kenya, in respect of the Research Project on Border Region Development in Eastern and Southern Africa from 1994 to 1996¹⁷.

More far reaching, however, were the continual invitational participations in the border-focused regional integration work of the Paris-

based OECD Sahel and West Africa Club (SWAC) since 1989. These have offered the singular opportunity for acknowledged contributions¹⁸ not only to the articulation of Mali's now famous policy concept of 'pays frontieres' ('Border country'¹⁹ or 'Cross-Border Areas') in 2007, but also its adoption as ECOWAS Cross-Border Initiatives Programme (CIP) in 2005 and ultimate elaboration into the African Union Border Programme (AUBP) in 2007. Noticeable involvement with the AUBP caused invitations to make distinct contributions to relevant policy developments in other specific African countries and regions. Take two examples: the invitational presentations of the Nigerian comparative case studies to the Roundtable in Djibouti in February 2008 on the Research Project for Peace and Security Strategy in IGAD; and, since June 2009, to the creative Track-two Diplomacy work of the Cambridge-based Concordis International of the UK regarding peace and security on the North-South Sudanese border.

The AUBP, like the preceding ECOWAS CIP and Mali's Concept of 'Pays Frontieres', places emphasis, significantly, on the three-point policy advocacy agenda of a systematic **transformation** of African boundaries from colonially inherited negative postures as **barriers** into new postcolonial ideal roles and functions as **bridges**; **Cross-border Cooperation and Border Region Development** for driving and deepening the African integration process; and **Capacity building** in the areas of new supportive mechanisms and knowledge infrastructure. There is no better reward, so far, for our advocacy labour at the continental level than the recent endorsement by the 3rd Conference of African Minister in Charge of Border Issues held in Niamey, Niger, May 17. 2012 of the African Union Convention on Cross Border Co-operation, the African equivalent of the afore-mentioned 1984 European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Cooperation Between Local Territorial Authorities and Communities.

Ideas catch on only when there are ears willing to listen to them and when there are other like-minded influential individuals and groups in academic and policy circles, able and willing to key into them and collaborate in translating them into effective action plans. There is also a role for opponents even of an idea whose time has come because, as it often happens, the more persecuted the more it sinks roots and spreads its

branches. Time and space allocated to this keynote presentation would not permit detailed acknowledgement of those who have been collaborators and opponents in this account of a lived experience in advocacy for 'African Borderlands: Regional Integration from Below and Above'.

To be sure, there have been significant moments of powerful opposition, resentments and even occasional threats to personal and family life and security such as occurred, for example, at the initial stage of the occupation of the Bakassi Peninsula by Nigeria's armed forces.²⁰ But, over-all, It has been a success story because of a more overwhelming positive disposition and support in and outside Nigeria, including within the ABORNE leadership and the University of Edinburgh.

Concluding Remarks

I happened to be here in October 1996 as a Leverhulme Trust Visiting Fellow at the International Social Sciences Institute (ISSI) when the University's esteemed Department of Social Anthropology celebrated the Golden Jubilee of its foundation; and it is only natural to feel excited to be in Edinburgh again on the occasion of another sub-institutional Golden Jubilee, that of the University's Centre of African Studies (CAS), one of the most distinguished in the U.K.

The excitement is all the more for reasons of the coincidence of a common thematic focus on issues of boundaries and integration in the two golden-jubilee anniversaries: Anthropology 1996 on 'Boundaries and Identity' and CAS 2012 via ABORNE on 'African Borderlands: Regional Integration From Below and Above'! Nothing so vividly illustrates the conceptual link as the Monroe Lecture on the tantalizing topic of 'Boundaries and Connections' delivered to inaugurate the 1996 celebrations by Frederick Barth, acclaimed Norwegian anthropologist and editor of the scholarly influential volume, **Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Organisation of Culture Difference** (London: George and Unwin,1970).²¹

May I, therefore, seize the opportunity of this keynote presentation to warmly congratulate Nana Paul Nugent for being at the saddle at this auspicious occasion, both as our Paramount Ruler in ABORNE and Director of CAS. I want to thank him and the entire membership of ABORNE, Council of Chiefs for allowing me to be the keynote presenter at this year's Conference.

Notes and References

Notes

* *Emeritus Professor of History at the University of Lagos; Scientific Coordinator, University of Ibadan African Regional Institute, Imeko, Ogun State, Nigeria; Fellow of the Nigerian Academy of Letters.*

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20. For a background note, see Asiwaju, A.I. (1996/1998), '*The Bakassi Peninsula Crisis: An Alternative to War and Litigation*', presented to the 1996 Conference of IBRU, Durham, U.K., and subsequently included in as a chapter in the book of the proceedings titled **Boundaries and Energy: Prospects and Problems**, co-edited by Gerald Blake et al and published in 1998 by Kluwer Law International (London and The Hague). Though the difference in the position taken vis-a-vis that of the government led to a lull in relationship, nothing justify the stance taken than subsequent appointment not only as Leader of the Nigerian Delegation to the Sub-Commission on Affected Populations of the UN-Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission for the Implementation of the 2002 ICJ Judgment; but also Member of a reconstituted National Boundary Commission, from 2008-2011.
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