

# Editorial

War and conflicts in Africa are usually linked to artificial borders, a lasting heritage of the colonial times<sup>1</sup>. In fact, about 70 % of the continental borderlines were settled – only among European powers – in less than 25 years (1885-1909). By the end of the Scramble for Africa, the geometrical lines (parallels, meridians and straight lines between points) accounted for more than 40 % of African borders – in Europe, the equivalent borders are 5%. Furthermore, only 11 % of African border-making decisions were based on human geography while this factor accounts for 50 % of the European borders (Bougetaia, 1981: 28; Foucher, 2014: 14; 18; 21).

From these statistics, we clearly see that the “ethnic” factor was irrelevant not only in the colonial agreements but also to the new African states. The respect for “territorial integrity”, that is, for colonial borders became the official standing of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) since its 1963 Chart (Art. 3<sup>rd</sup>, § 3<sup>rd</sup>). In the Addis Ababa summit of 1963, a large majority of African states agreed to maintain the colonial borders arguing that those border lines represented an “overcoming of tribalism”. In 1967, an African author wrote that they had become *intouchable, parce que correspondant à un sentiment national profond* (M’Baye, 1967: 14). In Europe, too, it was recalled, the state-building process had followed a similar pathway.

But there was a catch. The OAU also stood for the people’s right of self-determination – how could it not be so if in 1963 the whole Austral Africa was still under colonial control? There was now the issue of how the border’s *statu quo* could coexist with the self-determination principle. Administrative practices in post colonial Africa managed to get a solution but only by ranking the two principles, that is by relegating the latter to a second class-rhetorical regulation. This explains why when it comes to the causes of African territorial tensions, most of them are considered as inter-states conflicts (in fact, most are presented as “ethnic”) rather than intra-state conflicts (Ikome, 2012: 10). And they are not few: Foucher estimates that in 2012 62 % of the debates at the UN Security was spent on “African crisis” (Fucher, 2014: 53).

Is this an outcome of the OAU “wisdom” in preserving the colonial borders or of the African States practice of preserving the *colonial state* itself? The connection of a vertical, centralised, foreign interest-conveyed state apparatus to so many current civil wars extending from Mali to Ivory Coast, Nigeria, Cameroon, Sudan (Darfur and South Sudan, Ethiopia (Tigray), Mozambique, etc., is now plain to see. If we add rent exclusion of a large majority of peripheral population living in areas rich in oil, natural gas, diamonds, etc., then it is a matter of time to find intra-state conflicts in the record of the African ruling class.

In this sense, the South Cameroons conflict may be considered as an African “fait social total” in which the main variables are present. Besides, it only became an “intra-state” conflict after it had been merged with the Republic of Cameroon without fully exercising the self-determination principle, in spite of the 11<sup>th</sup> February 1961 plebiscite. Still, the two newly independent states agreed on a federal system of government until 1972, when the then President of Cameroun (Ahmadou Ahidjo) dissolved the federation and formed a

1 For the long debate about African borders, among others, Bougetaia, Boualem (1981), *Les frontières meridionales de l’Algérie*. SNED; Foucher, Michel (2014) – *Frontières d’Afrique*. Pour en finir avec un mythe. CNRS Éditions ; Ikome, Francis, *Africa’s International Borders as potential sources of conflict and future threats to Peace and Security*, Institute for Security Studies, Paper 133, Taylor& Francis. Available at: [www.informaworld.com/rasr](http://www.informaworld.com/rasr).

unitary state known as United Republic of Cameroon. In 1984, Cameroon's 2<sup>nd</sup> president (Paul Biya) renamed the country "Republique du Cameroun", the name French Cameroon got at its independence. After decades of political exclusion, on 1<sup>st</sup> October 2017, the leader of the newly formed Governing Council of Ambazonia declared the Anglophone regions' independence. The government reacted harshly by killing hundreds of protesters and by detaining others. At this point, the population decided to pick up arms against the state. From then till today, calls for a ceasefire are a far cry, and the government is unable to defeat the armed groups. In 2019, Amnesty international declared that over 3.000 people have been killed, thousands internally displaced and others fled to Nigeria as refugees. Very little has been done by the international community to resolve the crisis and the government believe that it can defeat the arm groups militarily. While most Anglophones see an independent state of Southern Cameroons as the only permanent solution to their problem, others are divided between maintaining the unitary state or restoring the federation that existed before 1972.

In order to discuss the results of recent research about another African reality forgotten by the media, this issue of *Africana Studia* focuses both on the genesis of the conflict in Southern Cameroons and on the ongoing war. If the Southern Cameroon's case contributes to the understanding of African societies, it is probably because it clearly shows that it is not the borders neither the "ethnics" which are to blame: just the African inherited Leviathan, the colonial state.

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