Cartographic Violence: The Berlin Conference, Arbitrary Map-Making, The Structural Roots of Conflict and Political Discrimination in Africa

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Abstract
This paper examines how arbitrary cartography during the Scramble for Africa (1880-1914), institutionalized by the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885, created enduring structural vulnerabilities that fuel contemporary civil conflict and political discrimination. Historical methods of description and analysis are deployed for this study. Drawing on historical and secondary sources, it argues that borders drawn for European strategic convenience, with no African representation, were guided by geometric logic, misapplied natural features, and sphere-of-influence bargaining rather than indigenous political, economic, or ethnic realities. The study identifies two core structural outcomes. First, the creation of 16 landlocked states, the highest concentration globally, severed pre-colonial trade routes, imposed excessive transit costs, fostered dependency on coastal neighbours, and weakened fiscal capacity and state institutions. Second, the partitioning of over 230 ethnic groups, including Somali, Ewe, Bakongo, Hausa-Fulani and Tuareg, across 2-3 states, as documented by Michalopoulos and Papaioannou (2016). The paper demonstrates how these cartographic acts generate a minority trap, contested state legitimacy, institutionalized discriminatory citizenship regimes such as Ivoirité in Côte d'Ivoire, and resource-driven secessionism. It concludes within Walter Rodney's dependency framework that Africa's insecurity is not a product of primordial ethnic hatred but of deliberate underdevelopment through territorial engineering, requiring security sector reforms beyond policing to include regional integration and inclusive citizenship.

Keywords: *Berlin Conference, Scramble for Africa, Arbitrary Borders, Landlocked, Ethnic Partitioning, Civil Conflict, Political Discrimination.*

Background to The Study

The contemporary map of Africa is a colonial artifact. Prior to the late nineteenth century, the continent was organized around fluid kingdoms, empires, city-states, and stateless societies with porous frontiers defined by kinship, trade, tribute and ecological zones rather than fixed linear borders (Herbst, 2000; Asiwaju, 1985). The Sokoto Caliphate, Asante Empire, Oyo Empire, Lunda Kingdom, and Zulu Kingdom exercised sovereignty through networks of

allegiance, not cartographic exclusivity (Mamdani, 1996).

This indigenous political geography was radically disrupted by the Scramble for Africa (1880-1914). Driven by industrial capitalism's need for raw materials, markets, and strategic rivalry among European powers, European penetration accelerated from coastal enclaves to continental partition (Pakenham, 1991). In 1870, only about 10% of Africa was under formal European control; by 1914, this figure rose to nearly 90%, with only Liberia and Ethiopia retaining nominal independence (Michalopoulos & Papaioannou, 2016).

The legal and diplomatic foundation for this partition was laid at the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885, convened by German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck. Attended by 14 powers but with no African representative, the conference codified the doctrine of effective occupation, which required European powers to establish administrative presence to claim territory, triggering a rush for interior treaties (Craven, 2015; General Act of the Berlin Conference, 1885).The borders that emerged reflected European cartographic convenience, not African realities. Colonial officers, often with poor geographical knowledge, drew what Lord Salisbury famously described as lines where "we have been giving away mountains and rivers and lakes to each other, only hindered by the small impediment that we never knew exactly where they were" (quoted in Anene, 1970, p.3). This produced a map where 44% of African borders are straight lines following latitudes and longitudes (Alesina, Easterly & Matuszeski, 2011). The consequences were not merely symbolic. The imposition of fixed, sovereign territorial states created two enduring structural vulnerabilities. First, it produced the world's largest bloc of 16 landlocked states (UNCTAD, 2021). These states suffer 50% higher transport costs and 40% lower trade volumes than coastal states due to severed trans-Saharan networks and forced dependency on former colonial ports (Collier, 2007; UNCTAD, 2021). Second, it led to the systematic partitioning of over 230 ethnic groups across two or more states, with 40% of borders cutting through pre-colonial homelands (Michalopoulos & Papaioannou, 2016; Englebert, Tarango & Carter, 2002). While African leaders at independence, through the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in 1963, adopted the principle of uti possidetis juris respecting inherited borders to prevent further wars (OAU Charter, 1963; Touval, 1972), this preserved structural contradictions. Post-colonial states inherited borders that lacked cultural legitimacy, leading to weak states that rely on coercion rather than consent (Jackson & Rosberg, 1982; Rodney, 1972), chronic underfunding of civil institutions like the Nigeria Police Force, and recurrent cycles of civil conflict and institutionalized political discrimination over citizenship (Herbst, 2000; Mamdani, 1996). It is against this historical background that this study examines how late-19th-century map-making continues to shape internal security challenges in contemporary Africa, with Nigeria as a critical lens. The "Scramble for Africa" (1880-1914) was the most rapid territorial conquest in modern history. In 1870, only 10% of Africa was under European control; by 1914, it was 90% (Pakenham, 1991; Michalopoulos & Papaioannou, 2016). The central mechanism for this partition was arbitrary map-making, institutionalized at the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885 (Craven, 2015). Convened by Otto von Bismarck, Berlin established the principle of "effective occupation" but no African was present (General Act of Berlin Conference, 1885). The borders drawn were for European strategic convenience, not African realities (Asiwaju, 1985).

Statement of The Problem

The Berlin Conference of 1884-1885 institutionalized the arbitrary cartographic partitioning of Africa, dividing the continent into territorial units designed to serve European strategic and economic interests rather than African political, ethnic, or ecological realities (Craven, 2015; Asiwaju, 1985). This exercise in map-making, characterized by the use of geometric lines, disregard for natural and cultural landscapes, and buffer-zone logic, produced two enduring structural distortions that persist into the 21st century.

First, it created 16 landlocked states, the highest concentration of landlocked countries in any continent, whose fiscal viability, trade access, and state capacity were structurally compromised from inception (UNCTAD, 2021; Herbst, 2000). Second, it resulted in the systematic partitioning of over 230 ethnic groups across multiple states, with 40% of African borders cutting through pre-colonial ethnic homelands (Michalopoulos & Papaioannou, 2016; Alesina et al., 2011). While the Organization of African Unity in 1963 adopted uti possidetis juris to freeze colonial borders in order to avoid interstate war (Touval, 1972), this decision preserved the contradictions. Post-colonial African states thus inherited territories that were simultaneously too large and too diverse to govern consensually, yet too weak economically to build legitimate institutions (Jackson & Rosberg, 1982).

The problem is that contemporary security analyses in Africa, particularly in Nigeria, tend to treat civil conflict, cross-border insurgency, and political discrimination as products of poor governance, corruption, or primordial ethnic hatreds, without adequately interrogating their cartographic origins. Consequently, there is a gap in understanding the causal pathway from 19th-century map-making to present-day security failure. How did geometric borders and ethnic partitioning specifically produce state illegitimacy, dependency of landlocked neighbours, institutionalized citizenship discrimination such as Ivoirité, and resource-based secessionism? And how do these structural vulnerabilities continue to render civil policing ineffective, forcing reliance on military coercion? This study seeks to address this problem by demonstrating that civil conflict and political discrimination in contemporary Africa are not accidental failures of the post-colonial state, but logical outcomes of a territorial architecture designed to be unviable, thereby undermining the very possibility of effective internal security and policing.

Research Questions

Main Research Question:

How did the arbitrary map-making institutionalized at the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885 create enduring structural vulnerabilities that continue to fuel civil conflict, political discrimination, and internal security failure in contemporary Africa?

Specific Research Questions:

1. What were the logics and mechanisms of arbitrary territorial partitioning employed during the Scramble for Africa and formalized at the Berlin Conference?
2. To what extent did colonial cartography produce structural vulnerability through the creation of landlocked geographies, and how does landlockedness impact economic viability, fiscal capacity, and state fragility?
3. How did colonial borders lead to systematic ethnic partitioning, and what are the patterns of conflict, irredentism, and separatism among partitioned groups such as the Somali, Ewe, Bakongo, Hausa-Fulani, and Tuareg?

4. What are the causal pathways linking arbitrary borders to contemporary civil conflict and institutionalized political discrimination, including the minority trap, state illegitimacy, discriminatory citizenship regimes, and resource-based secessionism?
5. How do these historical-structural vulnerabilities explain the crisis of internal security and the ineffectiveness of the Nigeria Police Force, and what alternative security architectures can address these contradictions?

Aim and Objectives of The Study

General Aim:

The general aim of this study, titled Cartographic Violence: The Berlin Conference, Arbitrary Map-Making, and the Structural Roots of Conflict and Political Discrimination in Africa,"* is to critically examine how the arbitrary territorial partitioning of Africa during the Scramble for Africa (1880-1914), institutionalized by the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885, created enduring structural vulnerabilities - particularly landlocked geographies and ethnic partitioning - that continue to fuel civil conflict, political discrimination, and internal security failure in contemporary Africa.

The study pursues the following specific objectives:

1. To analyze the logic and mechanisms of arbitrary map-making during the Berlin Conference and identify how geometric borders, misapplied natural features, and sphere-of-influence bargaining disregarded pre-colonial African political and ethnic realities.
2. To examine the creation of landlocked states as a structural consequence of colonial cartography and assess its impact on economic strangulation, fiscal weakness, dependency on transit states, and state fragility.
3. To investigate the extent and pattern of ethnic partitioning resulting from colonial borders and evaluate its role in producing irredentism, separatism, and cross-border insurgency, with examples including Somali, Ewe, Bakongo, Hausa-Fulani, and Tuareg populations. To establish the causal linkages between arbitrary colonial borders and contemporary forms of civil conflict and institutionalized political discrimination, including the minority trap, contested state legitimacy, discriminatory citizenship regimes such as Ivoirité, and resource-driven secessionism.
4. To relate these structural vulnerabilities to the crisis of internal security and policing in Nigeria, demonstrating how colonial territorial architecture undermines the effectiveness of the Nigeria Police Force and necessitates broader reforms including state policing, community policing, and regional integration.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Dependency Theory as propounded by Walter Rodney in his seminal work How Europe Underdeveloped Africa (1972). While dependency theory has several proponents including Andre Gunder Frank (1967), Samir Amin (1972), and Immanuel Wallerstein (1974), Rodney provides the most Afro-centric application relevant to cartographic violence.

1. Core Tenets of Rodney's Dependency Theory. Rodney argues that Africa's underdevelopment was not a natural condition or a result of internal deficiencies, but was actively produced and sustained through historical contact with Europe. Development and underdevelopment are dialectically linked - Europe developed _because_ Africa was

underdeveloped.

Key propositions relevant to this study:
a) **The Metropole-Satellite Relationship:** The capitalist world system creates a center (metropole-Europe) and periphery (satellite - Africa). The periphery is structured to serve the metropole through extraction of raw materials, cheap labour, and provision of markets, while being denied autonomous development.

b) **Underdevelopment as a Process, not a State:** Rodney distinguishes between lack of development and active underdevelopment. Underdevelopment is a verb - an active process where the productive capacity and economic viability of the satellite is deliberately destroyed and reoriented.

c) **Instruments of Underdevelopment:** These include slavery, colonialism, unequal trade, and crucially for this study, *territorial and political restructuring. Colonialism was not just economic exploitation but a comprehensive system of political control that restructured African societies to ensure dependency.

2. **Application to the Study:** Cartographic Violence as an Instrument of Underdevelopment. Rodney's framework is applied here to interpret the Berlin Conference map-making not as a neutral administrative error, but as a deliberate technology of underdevelopment:

i) **Cartography as Economic Control:** The creation of 16 landlocked states is explained by dependency theory as intentional economic strangulation. By severing pre-colonial trans-Saharan and Indian Ocean trade routes and forcing trade through European-controlled coastal ports, Europe created structural dependency. Landlocked states like Mali, Niger, Chad and Uganda were made permanently dependent on the metropole's transport infrastructure, ensuring that surplus value flowed to the coast and then to Europe. This aligns with Rodney's argument that "African economies were integrated into the world capitalist system in a subordinate position" (Rodney, 1972, p. 24).

ii) **Ethnic Partitioning as Political Underdevelopment:** Rodney argued that colonialism destroyed African political institutions and replaced them with artificial, weak institutions incapable of self-governance. The partitioning of 230 ethnic groups and the forced amalgamation of hostile groups into single states (example, Nigeria with over 250 groups) was a form of political underdevelopment. It created states that lacked cultural legitimacy and social cohesion, and therefore could not develop an independent, organic national bourgeoisie or state apparatus. Instead, they required continuous external support and military coercion to survive - what Jackson and Rosberg (1982) later called "quasi-states."

iii) **The Neo-colonial Continuity:** Dependency theory explains why the problem persists after independence. The OAU's adoption of _uti possidetis juris_ in 1963 to respect colonial borders was itself a dependency trap. African elites, having been co-opted into the metropole-satellite structure, preserved the territorial architecture that ensured continued underdevelopment, weak fiscal base, and reliance on military aid rather than effective civil policing. Thus, the failure of the Nigeria Police Force is not just administrative, but structural

- it polices an underdeveloped territoriality.

3. **Justification for Using Rodney's Theory. This theory is justified for three reasons:**

a) **Historical Specificity:** Unlike modernization theory which blames internal culture, Rodney directly addresses the Berlin Conference era as the formative moment of Africa's structural crisis.

b) **Explanatory Power:** It links seemingly disconnected phenomena - landlockedness, ethnic conflict, police failure, and political discrimination - into a single framework of active underdevelopment.

c) **Relevance to Nigeria:** Nigeria is a classic peripheral state whose amalgamation in 1914 by Lord Lugard was explicitly for British economic convenience, forcing Northern and Southern protectorates together without consultation.

4. **Critique and Limitations of the theory.**

The study acknowledges critiques of dependency theory: its economic determinism, its underestimation of African agency and pre-colonial inequalities (critics like Warren, 1980; and Smith, 1979 argue it ignores internal class exploitation). However, when combined with Herbst's (2000) work on state power and Michalopoulos and Papaioannou's (2016) quantitative evidence on ethnic partitioning, Rodney's framework remains the most powerful for explaining how cartography was used as a weapon of underdevelopment. In summary, this study uses Rodney to argue that the lines drawn in Berlin in 1884-1885 were not mistakes on a map, but the blueprint for Africa's continued structural dependency and insecurity.

The Logic of Arbitrary Map-Making

a) **Geometric Borders:** About 44% of African borders today are straight lines - astronomic lines (Alesina, Easterly & Matuszeski, 2011). The Egypt-Sudan border (22°N), or the straight lines partitioning the Sahara, were drawn with rulers in Berlin, Paris, and London (Anene, 1970).

b) **Rivers and Watersheds Ignored or Misused:** Colonial borders treated water as a line to divide, not a system to manage. Pre-colonial peoples used rivers and lakes as centers for fishing, trade routes, and seasonal migration around them. Europeans used them as edges. Three examples are cited below.

Lake Chad: Shared by Nigeria, Niger, Chad, Cameroon. Kanuri and Buduma fishermen followed the lake as it expanded and shrank seasonally. The borders now require passports to follow the water. Result: 2.5m displaced people cannot migrate freely, and Boko Haram exploits the unpoliced border waters.

Lake Victoria: Split between Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania. Luo and Baganda fishing communities once moved freely. Now overfishing and Nile perch collapse can't be solved because three different national laws govern one lake.

Congo River Basin: The 1885 Berlin Treaty gave tributaries to different colonies. But the Mongo and Ngala peoples navigate the whole basin for trade. The border cut their canoe trade network, forcing them into customs posts on a river that was once a highway. In other words, colonial powers split Lake Chad, Lake Victoria, and divided the Congo River basin without

understanding seasonal migration (Herbst, 2000).

c) **Buffer and Sphere-of-Influence Logic:** means borders were not about Africa, but about Europe avoiding war in Africa. France and Britain were competing for West Africa in the 1890s. To prevent clashes, they drew a line to mark "your trade zone" vs "my trade zone" - a buffer. The Niger-Nigeria border (1906) is the classic case: Lord Lugard wanted Hausa-Fulani Kano for Britain's groundnut trade; France wanted Hausaland for its route to Lake Chad. They split the map at the 1906-1910 Anglo-French conventions.

The Hausa people living astride the line were never consulted. As Miles (1994) showed, one family became "Nigerien" and the other "Nigerian" overnight - same language, same Islam, but different colonies to serve French vs British imperial interests (Anene, 1970; Asiwaju, 1985).

Structural Vulnerability I: The Creation of Landlocked Geographies.

The scramble created 16 of the world's landlocked countries in Africa - the highest concentration globally (UNCTAD, 2021).

i) **Economic Strangulation:** Pre-colonial Africa was outward-oriented via trans-Saharan trade. Colonial borders severed these routes (Amin, 1972; Rodney, 1972). UNCTAD estimates landlocked African countries pay 50% more in transport costs and experience 40% lower trade (UNCTAD, 2021; Collier, 2007).

ii) **Dependency and Clientelism:** Landlocked states became politically dependent on coastal neighbors (Herbst, 2000). Uganda's dependence on Kenya's Mombasa port, Rwanda and Burundi on Tanzania, Ethiopia on Djibouti after 1993 (established after Eritrean secession), gave transit states coercive leverage (Touval, 1972).

iii) **State Fragility:** Without customs revenue from ports, landlocked states had weaker fiscal bases, leading to weaker state capacity, inability to fund police and bureaucracy (Jackson & Rosberg, 1982).

Structural Vulnerability Ii: Ethnic Partitioning

Michalopoulos and Papaioannou (2016) found that 40% of African borders partition ethnic groups, affecting 230+ groups. This is corroborated by Englebert *et al.* (2002) and Asiwaju (1985).

a)**Somali:** Divided among British, French, Italian, Ethiopian and Kenyan territories, producing irredentist wars - the Ogaden War (1977-78) Somali is the most classic case of pan-nationalism in Africa - one ethnic nation divided into five different colonial states. This created what Lewis calls the Somali problem of a nation without a state, and a state without a fully inclusive nation. It is imperative to note the Five-Fold Partition - 1884-1954. In the year 1897 the Somali Peninsula had been carved by imperial treaties into British Somaliland: North-west - present day Somaliland, protectorate established 1884-1887 for control of the Aden route; Italian Somaliland: South and central - present day southern Somalia, colonized from 1889 via Mogadishu and the Benadir coast; French Somali Coast: North - present day Djibouti, small enclave purchased 1862, dominated by Issa Somalis and Afar; and Ethiopian Somalia: West - Ogaden and Haud Reserve. Ceded to Emperor Menelik II by Britain in the Anglo-Ethiopian Treaty of 1897 and fully handed over in 1954, despite being 95% Somali nomadic pasture.

- **Northern Frontier District [NFD]:** South-west - Present-day North-Eastern Kenya, included in British East Africa as a buffer zone. Lewis notes this partition ignored the fundamental Somali social reality: a single pastoral, Cushitic, Muslim nation organized by clan lineages - Darod, Hawiye, Isaaq, Dir, Rahanweyn - whose diya-paying groups moved freely across these artificial lines (Lewis, 2002).

b) Ewe had to Split between Ghana and Togo, led to Ewe separatism (Asiwaju, 1985).

c) Bakongo, split among Angola, DRC, Congo, Gabon - fueling Cabinda conflict (Englebert et al., 2002).

d) Hausa-Fulani, split between Niger and Nigeria, creating cross-border corridors (Miles, 1994).

e) Tuareg, split across Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, Algeria, Libya - leading to cyclical rebellions 1963, 1990, 2006, 2012 (Lecocq, 2010). The Tuareg are not a secessionist minority within one state, but a transnational nation whose territory was partitioned by decolonization. This is the core argument of Lecocq's work. The Tuareg self-identify as Kel Tamasheq, put differently, the people who speak Tamasheq are a Berber pastoral people of about 1.5 -2.5 million organized historically in 7-8 major confederations. Namely, Kel Ahaggar and Kel Ajjer in Algeria/Libya; Kel Adagh, Kel Azaouak in Mali; Kel Aïr, Kel Gres in Niger; and small groups in northern Burkina Faso.

Pre-colonially they dominated the central Sahara caravan trade. Under French conquest [1900-1920] they retained relative autonomy under chiefs - the French ruled the Sahara as a separate military territory. At independence 1960-1962, France divided this space between 5 new states: Mali, Niger, Upper Volta [now Burkina Faso], Algeria, and Libya. The borders cut straight through seasonal pastures and confederations, without Tuareg representation.

Structural Causes of Cyclical Rebellion:

Lecocq identifies three permanent tensions that make rebellion cyclical to include political othering. In Mali and Niger, power went to southern sedentary majorities - Bambara in Mali, Djerma-Hausa in Niger. The Tuareg were cast as feudal, nomadic, and as a "vanguard of French neocolonialism". Traditional tribal structures were abolished and replaced by fractions, but local administration was staffed by southerners (Lecocq 2010).

Economic marginalization and forced sedentarization: Modibo Keita's government [1960-1968] attempted forced sedentarization, economic reforms, and taxation of herds that failed during the great Sahelian droughts of 1973-74 and 1984-85. Tens of thousands of Tuareg _ishumar_ [from French _chômeur_, unemployed] went into exile to Algeria and to Libya where Muammar Gaddafi recruited them into the Islamic Legion.

A culture of rebellion - Teshumara. In exile, a new generation of Tuareg intellectuals and fighters created a revolutionary culture based on guitar music, clandestine political cells, and the myth of return. This became the social base for all future rebellions. The result is a pattern: Grievance led to Armed Uprising which led to Brutal Repression led to Peace Accord. Failure to implement accord also led to New Rebellion.

The Four Rebellions.

1963-64 - First Rebellion / Alfellaga: Months after independence, Kel Adagh rose under Zeyd Ag Attaher, demanding autonomy. Keita's army brutally repressed it, poisoning wells, killing herds, and creating a collective trauma. Lecocq shows this is the foundational memory for all

later nationalism.

1990-1996 - Second Rebellion: Returning ishumar from Libya launched attacks in Mali and Niger in 1990. In Mali this led to the National Pact of 1992 and Flame of Peace in 1996, promising decentralization and integration of fighters into the army. The accords were never fully implemented. Between 2006 and 2009, there was a third Rebellion. It was led by Ibrahim Ag Bahanga and the Democratic Alliance for Change [ADC]; ex-combatants rebelled again over the same unfulfilled promises - lack of development, integration, and rank in the army. Ended with the Algiers Accords of 2006, again not implemented.
The 2012 - Fourth Rebellion and State Collapse is worthy of note. The return of heavily armed Tuareg fighters from Libya after Gaddafi's fall in 2011 fused with the MNLA [Mouvement National de Libération de l'Azawad]. They declared the independent state of Azawad in April 2012. The rebellion was quickly hijacked by jihadist groups - AQIM, MUJAO and Ansar Dine - leading to French intervention in 2013. Lecocq's framework explains 2012 as not a new event, but the logical outcome of the unfinished decolonization process described in 1963-2006. In short, the Tuareg question persists because the colonial state left a nomadic nation inside five sedentary states, and none of the postcolonial peace deals resolved the fundamental dispute between state sovereignty and Tuareg self-determination. The Ideology of Greater Somalia _Soomaaliweyn failed to produce positive result. At independence, Somali nationalism demanded re-unification. The flag of the Somali Republic contains a five-pointed white star - each point representing one of the five Somali territories. On 1 July 1960, British Somaliland and Italian Somaliland united to form the Somali Republic, but three territories remained outside. The constitution declared "The Somali Republic shall... promote by legal and peaceful means the union of Somali territories." This irredentist clause guaranteed conflict with all neighbors. Irredentism produced Irredentist Wars such as the Shifta War in Kenya [1963-1967]. Kenya's Somali in the north attempted to secede to Somalia. Kenya declared a State of Emergency and fought a brutal counter-insurgency called the Shifta War. In Djibouti, French Somaliland remained under French rule until 1977, when after two rigged referendums, it became the Republic of Djibouti under Issa dominance. Ogaden War [1977-78] is the largest conventional war in Africa since WWII. It started in 1977 when President Siad Barre seized the opportunity of Ethiopian revolution and weakness. Backed by the Western Somali Liberation Front [WSLF], Somalia invaded Ethiopia's Ogaden, aiming to annex 350,000 sq km. Initially Somalia succeeded, taking 90% of Ogaden including Jijiga. Then the Cold War shifted: The USSR, which had armed Somalia since 1963, switched sides to Ethiopia, airlifting $1 billion in arms, 1,500 advisors, and 17,000 Cuban troops. The US began arming Somalia in response. By March 1978, Somalia was decisively defeated and expelled. For this reason, 500,000-1 million Ogadeni refugees flooded into Somalia, destroying the economy. Military defeat discredited Barre's regime, leading to civil war from 1981 and state collapse in 1991. It ended the dream of Greater Somalia by force. As Lewis argues, it proved that the colonial borders, however artificial, would be defended by the OAU principle of uti possidetis and by superpower intervention. Lewis concludes that the partition left Somalis with a permanent contradiction: they possess a strong sense of cultural nationhood but have never possessed a state that includes all Somalis, producing chronic instability both inside Somalia and in the Horn (Lewis, 2002; Touval, 1963).

How This Fuels Contemporary Conflict and Discrimination

a) **The Minority Trap:** Partition creates a group that is a majority nationally in one country but a discriminated minority in another. Tutsis majority in Rwanda but minority in eastern DRC, a cause of two Congo Wars (1996-2003) (Mamdani, 2001).

b) **Illegitimacy of the State:** Because borders lack cultural legitimacy, states rely on coercion rather than consent (Jackson & Rosberg, 1982; Herbst, 2000). Illegitimacy of the State means people don't see the state as theirs. When borders are drawn by Berlin 1884 without Africans present, they have no cultural root - they split Somalis, Ewe, Bakongo. So, the state cannot claim "we are one people with shared history."

Legitimate states rule by consent - people pay taxes voluntarily, obey laws because they believe in the state. Illegitimate states must rule by coercion - army, police, roadblocks.Examples:

- Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC): 250+ ethnic groups inside arbitrary borders. Citizens feel Luba or Kongo first, Congolese second. The state relies on FARDC and checkpoints to hold territory. The acronym, FARDC stands for Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo. It was formed in 2003 after the Second Congo War by merging the former government army (FAC) with rebel groups like RCD and MLC. Military might is used for coercion, because the DRC state lacks legitimacy in the east (where many see themselves as Banyamulenge, Nande, or Hunde first), the government has to rely on FARDC - plus UN peacekeepers and hundreds of roadblock taxes - to try to hold territory, rather than voluntary consent from the population.
- Nigeria: Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba, Igbo forced into one map. The 1967-70 Biafran War and today's Indigenous People Of Biafra (IPOB) separatism show lack of consent.
-Cote d'Ivoire: Northern Burkinabe-origin farmers were called non-indigenous, denied voting rights under Ivoirité - resolved by army, not by shared citizenship. This is why, as Jackson & Rosberg (1982) argue, Africa has many juridically sovereign states but weak empirical legitimacy.

c) **Institutionalized Political Discrimination:** Groups split across borders are often deemed "non-indigenous." In Côte d'Ivoire this is called the politics of autochthony - where groups whose territory was divided by colonial borders are reclassified as foreigners in their own country. This is the most violent form of partition legacy: not just being cut off, but being made politically non-existent. With regards to historical partitioning of Burkina Faso (Formerly Haute-Volta), the country was under French colonial rule, as a labor reserve for the cocoa forest of Côte d'Ivoire. From 1930-1990, French authorities and later President Félix Houphouët-Boigny encouraged mass migration of Mossi and other Burkinabè to the south-west. By 1998, 26% of the population in Côte d'Ivoire was foreign-born, plus millions of second and third-generation Burkinabè. Houphouët-Boigny's doctrine was "la terre appartient à celui qui la met en valeur" - land belongs to who cultivates it. Migrants got land through a customary tutorship system, but never ownership. The population was legally divided into three categories, Viz: the Autochtones - "Sons of the soil" example - Bété and Baoulé who lives in the south; Allochtones, Ivorian migrants from the north, example, Dioula and Senoufo; and Allogènes, or Foreigner, example, the Burkinabè and Malians.

Political discrimination was institutionalization through Ivoirité. When Houphouët-Boigny died in 1993 and cocoa prices collapsed, land became scarce and electoral competition

intensified. President Henri Konan Bédié invented Ivoirité - Ivorian-ness in 1995 to exclude his rival Alassane Ouattara, whose father was rumored to be Burkinabè. Marshall-Fratani (2006) noted that there was legal backing for political discrimination example of which is the 1998 Rural Land Code which states that only those recognized as autochthonous communities can own land. Allogènes and even allochtones can only have temporary use rights. This reversed 30 years of Houphouët-Boigny policy.

Even Article 35 of the Electoral Code is discriminatiry. For instance, to be president you must be Ivorian born of a father and mother who are themselves Ivorian of origin. This rendered Ouattara leader of the northern Muslim population stateless. There was everyday discrimination in the form of National identity cards, roadblocks where a northern name or wearing boubou marked you as foreign; and expulsions of Burkinabè farmers from cocoa plantations. Discrimination resulted into Civil War in 2002-2011. Land tenure became a political order. In the open-economy era after structural adjustment, land could no longer be used as patronage to absorb migrants, so elites used exclusion as a new strategy to consolidate local power (Boone, 2007).

The outcome of this is that, in 2002 northern soldiers mutinied after being purged from army for suspected foreign origin, forming Forces Nouvelles and occupying the north. Secondly, the country split in two - South loyal to Laurent Gbagbo, North to Ouattara, separated by UN buffer. The 2010-2011 post-electoral war resulted into the killing of 3,000people with over 1 million people's displaced, when Gbagbo refused to accept Ouattara's victory claiming northerners voted as foreigners.

The war was therefore not tribal war. It was the direct outcome of labeling a partitioned, trans-border population - Dioula and Burkinabè - as non-indigenous to justify their political and economic exclusion. In Cote d'Ivoire, Burkinabe-origin populations were labeled allogènes leading to Ivoirité laws and civil war 2002-2011 (Marshall-Fratani, 2006; Boone, 2007).

d) Resource Curses via Geometry. This means the line on the map was drawn without knowing what was underground. Colonial rulers used rulers and latitude lines (22°N, and others). Those straight lines accidentally sliced through one geological deposit, putting it in two countries. Katanga is a good example because the Central African Copperbelt is one continuous ore body. The 1894 Anglo-Belgian border cut it in half, namely: Katanga Province, Belgian Congo - has copper and cobalt in the North side; while Northern Rhodesia (Zambia) - has copper in the South side.

In 1960, Congo became independent. Katanga had 60% of Congo's revenue from that copper, but felt culturally different and economically self-sufficient. Backed by Belgian mining company Union Minière, Katanga seceded under Moïse Tshombe (1960-63), leading to civil war and UN intervention. Same logic today, just as gold belt split between Ghana and Burkina Faso fuels smuggling; oil in Lake Chad basin split between Nigeria, Chad, Niger fuels conflict. Borders cut through mineral belts. Katanga copper belt split between Zambia and DRC, fueling secession 1960-63 (Larmer & Kennes, 2014).

In conclusion, as dependency theorist Walter Rodney (1972) argued, Africa was not underdeveloped but actively underdeveloped through such processes. The Berlin map did not just partition land; it partitioned economic viability and social cohesion, creating states that are geographically unviable and sociologically contested. Restructuring State institutions without addressing this territorial architecture and regional integration like ECOWAS free movement - treats the symptom while the structural map remains (Rodney, 1972;

Wallerstein, 1974).

Summary

This study examined how the arbitrary map-making institutionalized at the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885 created enduring structural vulnerabilities in Africa. The study established that the Scramble for Africa (1880-1914), during which European control expanded from 10% to 90% of the continent, was driven by cartographic violence rather than legitimate state formation. The study analyzed three logics of arbitrary mapping: geometric borders (44% of African borders are straight lines), misuse of natural features, and sphere-of-influence bargaining to separate European powers. It then examined two major structural outcomes:

1. **Landlocked Geographies:** The creation of 16 landlocked states, leading to economic strangulation with 50% higher transport costs, dependency on coastal transit states for port access, and fiscal fragility due to loss of customs revenue.
2. **Ethnic Partitioning:** The splitting of over 230 ethnic groups (40% of borders partition groups) including Somali, Ewe, Bakongo, Hausa-Fulani, and Tuareg, leading to irredentism, separatism, and cyclical rebellions.

Using Walter Rodney's Dependency Theory (1972), the study argued that these borders were instruments of active underdevelopment, creating states that lacked economic viability and cultural legitimacy, and thus rely on military coercion rather than consensual policing. This framework was applied to explain contemporary civil conflict, the minority trap, institutionalized citizenship discrimination such as Ivoirité in Côte d'Ivoire, and the crisis of the Nigeria Police Force.

Findings and Observations

1. **Finding on the Speed and Mechanism of Partition.**

The study finds that the Scramble for Africa (1880-1914) was the most rapid territorial conquest in modern history. European control expanded from 10% in 1870 to 90% by 1914. The central mechanism was arbitrary map-making institutionalized at the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885. A critical observation is that no African representative was present at Berlin, yet the principle of "effective occupation" was established to legitimize partition.

2. Finding on the Logic of Arbitrary Map-Making. Three logics were observed:

a) **Geometric Borders:** About 44% of African borders are straight astronomic lines. The study confirms Alesina, Easterly and Matuszeski (2011) and Anene (1970) - borders such as Egypt-Sudan at 22°N latitude and the Sahara divisions were drawn with rulers in European capitals, not through field surveys.

b) **Disregard for Natural and Human Geography**: Colonial powers split unified ecological systems including Lake Chad, Lake Victoria, and the Congo River basin. This ignored seasonal migration routes and pre-colonial trade networks.

c) **Buffer and Sphere-of-Influence Logic:** Borders were drawn to separate European rivals, not African peoples. The Niger-Nigeria border is a prime example - drawn to separate British and French interests while splitting Hausa populations.

3. Finding on Structural Vulnerability I: Landlocked Geographies.

a) Scale: The scramble created 16 landlocked countries in Africa, the highest concentration globally.

b) **Economic Impact:** Landlocked states suffer structural economic strangulation. UNCTAD (2021) and Collier (2007) estimates were validated: 50% higher transport costs

and 40% lower trade volumes compared to coastal states, due to severance of trans-Saharan routes noted by Amin (1972) and Rodney (1972).

c) **Political Dependency:** Landlocked states became client states of coastal neighbours. Uganda's dependence on Kenya's Mombasa port, Rwanda and Burundi on Tanzania, and Ethiopia on Djibouti after Eritrean secession in 1993, gave transit states coercive leverage, as argued by Touval (1972) and Herbst (2000).

d) **State Fragility**: Without port customs revenue, these states have weaker fiscal bases, leading to weaker state capacity to fund bureaucracy and public institutions, corroborating Jackson and Rosberg (1982).

4. **Finding on Structural Vulnerability II: Ethnic Partitioning.**

a) **Magnitude:** The study confirms Michalopoulos and Papaioannou (2016) - 40% of African borders partition ethnic groups, affecting over 230 groups, supported by Englebert et al. (2002) and Asiwaju (1985).

b) **Recurrent Conflict Patterns:** Partition directly produces cyclical conflict:

- Somali: Divided among 5 territories, produced irredentist Ogaden War (1977-78)
- Ewe: Split between Ghana and Togo, led to separatism
- Bakongo: Split among Angola, DRC, Congo, Gabon, fuels Cabinda conflict
- Hausa-Fulani: Split between Niger and Nigeria, creates cross-border corridors
- Tuareg: Split across 5 states, led to rebellions in 1963, 1990, 2006, 2012

5. **Finding on How Borders Fuel Contemporary Conflict and Discrimination.**

a) **The Minority Trap:** Partition creates groups that are national majorities in one country but discriminate against minorities in another. The Tutsi majority in Rwanda vs. minority status in eastern DRC contributed to the two Congo Wars (1996-2003) - Mamdani (2001), Autesserre (2010).

b) **State Illegitimacy:** Because borders lack cultural legitimacy, states rely on coercion rather than consent for governance, as argued by Jackson and Rosberg (1982) and Herbst (2000).

c) **Institutionalized Political Discrimination:** Partitioned groups are often labeled non-indigenous. In Côte d'Ivoire, Burkinabe-origin populations labeled allogènes led to Ivoirité laws and civil war 2002-2011 - Marshall-Fratani (2006), Boone (2007).

d) **Resource Curse via Geometry:** Borders cut through mineral belts. The Katanga copper belt split between Zambia and DRC fueled Katanga secession 1960-63 - Larmer and Kennes (2014).

Overall Observation: The article demonstrates that contemporary civil conflict and political discrimination in Africa are not accidental or purely due to internal governance failures, but are structural outcomes of a territorial architecture designed at Berlin for European convenience, validating Rodney's (1972) thesis of active underdevelopment.

Conclusion

The Berlin Conference did not just partition land; it partitioned economic viability and social cohesion. The borders drawn with rulers in European capitals were designed to serve European strategic convenience, not African realities, and as demonstrated by Alesina et al. (2011) and Michalopoulos and Papaioannou (2016), this artificiality is directly correlated

with contemporary civil conflict and weak state capacity. The persistence of these borders under the principle of uti possidetis juris after 1963 has ensured that post-colonial states remain structurally unviable and sociologically contested. The minority trap, where groups are majorities in one country but discriminated minorities in another, the dependency of landlocked states, and the institutionalized labeling of cross-border populations as foreigners, are not governance failures but logical outcomes of the territorial architecture.

Therefore, attempts to restructure internal security, particularly the Nigeria Police Force, without addressing this underlying cartographic architecture will only treat symptoms. Effective policing is impossible in a state whose territoriality was designed to be ungovernable. As Rodney concluded, Africa was not underdeveloped but actively underdeveloped, and the map remains the blueprint of that underdevelopment.

The author's concept of cartographic violence hypothesis is that more artificial borders means more conflict. Another researcher needs to test it statistically by turning artificiality into a number that can be measured in a map. If the author's hypothesis is true, one can find a statistically significant positive correlation: the more straight the border, the more Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED) conflict events cluster around it, providing the artificial colonial cartography still predicts contemporary violence. This will create an article which moves from Tuareg and Somalia cases to across 50 countries on 30,000 border events, artificiality predicts increase in conflicts.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made:

1. **Restructuring of African Policing Architecture:**

In all African States, policing model inherited from colonialism should be reformed. African governments should constitutionalize state police and community policing rooted in indigenous political geography, where policing units reflect pre-colonial ethnic homelands rather than arbitrary state lines, to restore cultural legitimacy and local intelligence gathering.

2. **Review of Citizenship and Indigeneity Laws:**

Constitution's provisions on indigeneity based on state of origin should be amended to replace discriminatory state-of-origin with residency-based citizenship. Similarly, AU should develop a continental framework to protect rights of partitioned ethnic groups, preventing them from being labeled as allogènes or foreigners as seen in Côte d'Ivoire.

3. **Deepening Regional Integration:**

ECOWAS and AU should fully implement and enforce the ECOWAS Protocol on Free Movement (1979) and the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) to mitigate economic strangulation of landlocked states. Special transit corridors with reduced tariffs for landlocked countries like Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso, and Chad should be established to reduce 50% transport cost penalty.

4. **Cross-Border Security Cooperation:**

Nigeria should formalize joint border patrol and intelligence-sharing mechanisms with Niger, Chad, and Cameroon for the Hausa-Fulani and Kanuri partitioned corridors. This should include creation of *Trans-Border Ethnic Peace Councils* comprising traditional rulers from both sides of the border to manage pastoralist-farmer conflicts.

5. **Curriculum and Policy Reorientation:**
The Ministry of Education and National Orientation Agency should integrate critical cartography and the history of the Berlin Conference into security training curricula for the Police, Military, and National Defence College, so security personnel understand the structural roots of conflicts they are deployed to manage.

6. **For the Academic Community:**
Future security sector reform research must move beyond technical solutions of funding and training, and engage with the structural territorial question, applying interdisciplinary approaches that link history, geography, and security studies.

Contributions to Knowledge

1. **Conceptual Contribution: Framing of "Cartographic Violence"!**
The study contributes a new analytical framework - Cartographic Violence - to African historiography and Political Science. It moves beyond the descriptive term "artificial borders" used by Asiwaju (1985) and Anene (1970), and operationalizes map-making as a deliberate technology of underdevelopment. It extends Walter Rodney's (1972) How Europe Underdeveloped Africa thesis into critical cartography, arguing the map itself was the primary tool of underdevelopment.

2. **Theoretical Synthesis of Dual Structural Vulnerabilities:**
Existing literature treats landlockedness (Collier, 2007; UNCTAD, 2021; Jackson & Rosberg, 1982) and ethnic partitioning (Michalopoulos & Papaioannou, 2016; Englebert et al., 2002) as separate research traditions. This study provides the first integrated analysis showing both are twin, interdependent outcomes of the same Berlin Conference logic of geometric and buffer-border creation. It quantitatively links the 44% straight-line borders to both 16 landlocked states and 230+ partitioned groups.

3. **Empirical Causal Mechanism Linking 1885 to Contemporary Conflict:**
The study establishes four clear causal pathways that link 19th-century cartography to 21st-century conflict and discrimination, which were previously fragmented in literature:

- **The Minority Trap Mechanism:** Where partition makes a group a national majority in one state and a discriminated minority in another (Tutsi case), explaining the Congo Wars (Mamdani, 2001).
- **Transit Dependency Mechanism:** Explaining how landlockedness creates political clientelism and coercive leverage for coastal transit states.
- **Institutionalized Discrimination Mechanism:** Explaining how partitioned groups are legally constructed as "allogènes" or foreigners, producing Ivoirité-type citizenship crises.
- **Geometric Resource Curse Mechanism:** Explaining how borders cutting through mineral belts like Katanga produce secessionism.

4. **Regional Contribution to African Border Studies:**
While most border studies focus on single case studies (Somali irredentism by Lewis, 2002; Tuareg rebellions by Lecocq, 2010), this study provides a continent-wide comparative synthesis of five major partitioned groups (Somali, Ewe, Bakongo, Hausa-Fulani, Tuareg) under a single framework, demonstrating that conflict patterns are structurally similar

regardless of region.

5. **Interdisciplinary Methodological Bridge:**
The study bridges three fields that rarely dialogue: African History (Pakenham, 1991; Anene, 1970), Development Economics (Alesina et al., 2011; Michalopoulos & Papaioannou, 2016), and Political Science on state formation (Herbst, 2000; Jackson & Rosberg, 1982). It shows how historical institutionalism, quantitative economics, and conflict studies can be combined to explain long-term colonial legacies.

6. **Policy Relevance for Continental Governance:**
By demonstrating that the OAU/AU principle of uti possidetis juris (respect for colonial borders) preserved structural vulnerabilities, the study contributes to ongoing debates on African integration. It provides academic justification for strengthening ECOWAS free movement protocols and AfCFTA as corrective mechanisms for cartographic violence, rather than merely economic tools.

Suggestions for Further Studies

1. **Quantitative Geospatial Analysis of Geometric Borders and Conflict Intensity:**
This article used qualitative and secondary quantitative sources (Alesina et al., 2011; Michalopoulos & Papaioannou, 2016). Future research should conduct a Geographic Information System (GIS)-based study measuring the correlation between border straightness (percentage of straight-line versus natural border) and conflict events using ACLED data from 1997-2025, to statistically test the cartographic violence hypothesis. GID is a software that can store, measure and analyse geographic data like QGIS, ArcGIS. ACLED is an acronym for Armed Conflict Location and Event Data. It is the largest public database for political violence in Africa; founded in 1997; covers 1997-2025 to present.

2. **Comparative Study of Landlocked Geographies and Economic Performance:**
A longitudinal econometric study comparing the 16 landlocked African states with 28 coastal African states on trade volume, transport costs, and Human Development Index (HDI) from 1960-2024, using UNCTAD and World Bank data, to isolate the specific economic penalty of colonial landlocked creation.

3. **In-Depth Oral History of Partitioned Ethnic Groups:**
While this study relied on secondary literature for Somali, Ewe, Bakongo, Hausa-Fulani, and Tuareg, future studies should conduct primary fieldwork and oral history interviews with elders and traditional rulers of these partitioned groups to document how partition disrupted pre-colonial trade, marriage, and pastoral migration systems, building an indigenous archive.

4. **Comparative Study with Other Artificial Border Regions:**
A comparative analysis between Africa's Berlin borders and the Middle East's Sykes-Picot Agreement (1916) borders. This would test whether the mechanisms of ethnic partitioning and resource-curse geometry produce similar patterns of civil war, irredentism, and citizenship discrimination across different continents.

5. **Impact of Climate Change on Partitioned Borderlands:**
Research on how climate change, desertification of the Sahel, and shrinking of Lake Chad are interacting with arbitrary colonial borders to intensify conflict among partitioned pastoral groups like the Tuareg and Fulani. This would link cartographic violence with environmental security.

6. **Legal Study of Citizenship and Ivoirité-type Laws Across Africa:**
A comparative legal study examining how post-colonial citizenship laws in Côte d'Ivoire (Ivoirité), DRC (Banyamulenge), and other states have institutionalized discrimination against partitioned populations. This could analyze constitutional amendments and court cases from 1960-2024.

7. **Effectiveness of Regional Integration as a Corrective to Berlin Borders:**
An evaluative study of ECOWAS Protocol on Free Movement (1979), AU Border Programme (AUBP), and AfCFTA in mitigating the effects of landlockedness and ethnic partition. It would assess whether free movement and trade corridors actually reduce conflict and economic strangulation.

8. **Pre-Colonial Frontiers vs. Colonial Borders:**
Archival research reconstructing pre-colonial African frontier systems using Arabic manuscripts from Sokoto and Timbuktu and colonial archives, to contrast flexible, zonal pre-colonial frontiers with rigid, linear colonial borders, and propose alternative models for border governance. These areas will deepen understanding of how the territorial architecture created in 1884-1885 continues to shape Africa's contemporary political and economic trajectory.

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