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## **“This Berlin Wall that Runs through Me”: Making Sense of the Postcolonial African Alienation**

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### **Abstract**

This Berlin Wall that Runs through Me sheds light into the legacies of the European colonization of Africa, chartered at Berlin in 1884-1885. The violent, crude invasion alienated Africans and criminalized intra-African mobilities by re-engineering Africans into rightless “natives” and “alien natives,” controlled within the new colonies in violation of their social, political and economic realities. Independence reified these “tribalizing” Berlin walls into national borders. The Ghana-Nigeria transborder expulsions (1960s-80s) illustrate the legacies of this alienation. The Berlin walls continued the immobilization, alienation and criminalization of invented intra-African difference, rationalizing Afrophobic violence that still afflicts Africans today.

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"In Africa, we live inside so many walls that were not made by us,  
but in Berlin." -Hugh Masekela

Ye independent States of Africa, rise.

Ye are not free, no not free.

Ye have changed one kind of chains

For a more degrading kind of chains;

Rise and fight for freedom ye slave

-Dennis Osadebay

This paper argues that the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885 wrought havoc on African lives by creating artificial borders and hatreds, which the African independent states reified rather than resolved. By recycling these unreformed logics of power into notions of national sovereignty, African leaders reinforced the balkanization of the people and buttressed the criminalizing regimes of the invented borders. Balkanization is an act of dividing a region into smaller mutually hostile groups. This is what Europeans did when they divided and cut up the African continent into numerous colonies. The invented intra-African differences have manifested in what sociologists have called "tribalism" but also, more importantly, intra-regional conflicts and secessionism. This paper utilizes the retaliatory expulsions between Ghana and Nigeria in 1969 and 1983, which caused so much suffering to citizens of both countries, to illustrate the continued deleterious impact of this Berlin Afrophobia. I draw upon the works of such scholars as Mahmood Mamdani, Adu Boahen, Aimé Césaire, Patrice Malidoma Somé and Toyin Falola to analyze the sociological and psychological impacts of this mayhem.

This mayhem started with German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck inviting his fellow European rulers to attend a conference on Africa in his capital, Berlin, in 1884. This was the infamous Berlin Conference, by which the European powers formalized their vying "spheres of influence" in Africa, producing the odd patchwork of lines and shapes that we call countries today. The United States sent a representative, and Ethiopia was the only African country that had a representative in an observatory capacity. There, Bismarck set out and defined the rules of what Africans have since experienced as a radical, violent impact on their lives. Berlin formalized their conquest, occupation and arbitrary balkanization, seizures of lands and other resources without paying any heed to what the Africans felt or thought. All the participating European

countries, principally Germany, Britain, France, Belgium, Portugal, Spain, and Italy, signed the Berlin Act on February 26, 1885.

In the main clauses of the Act, the European powers pledged to observe a few crucial rules. Firstly, they would establish free trade to avoid charging each other any taxes. For example, the Berlin Act declared: "The navigation of the Congo shall not be exposed to any landing dues, to any station or depot tax... or for compulsory entry into the port." This precept illustrates the Europeans' key economic objective, which excluded Africans who owned this waterway. Secondly, the Act declared that the Europeans work to uphold the abolition of the slave trade in the newly acquired territories. It is important to note here that, as Patrick Brantlinger writes, "Abolitionism contained the seeds of the empire... Britain found in abolition a way to work against the interests of its rivals who were still heavily involved in colonial slavery and plantation economy." The Berlin Conference was a cornerstone to drive Europe's Industrial Revolution, with Africans now having to work in neo-slave conditions producing raw materials for export on the continent itself.

The Europeans perpetuated this slavery by another name, deploying the myth that they were coming to "civilize" Africans by bringing them Christianity, commerce, and education. As Brantlinger observed, Victorian era pioneer missionaries and "explorers" such as David Livingstone, tended to see Africa as a center of evil, a part of the world possessed by demonic "darkness" or barbarism, represented above all by slavery, and cannibalism, which it was their duty to exorcise. Of course, this was mere justification for colonial conquest and exploitation. The missionaries were key agents for perpetrating African cultural disarmament and softening occupation. The British arch-imperialist in Southern Africa, Cecil John Rhodes, was very clear about this agenda. In his book, *African Music, Power and Being in Colonial Zimbabwe*, Mhoze Chikowero argues how Rhodes deployed the missionaries to Zimbabwe to "epistemologically revolutionize and spiritually disarm Africans for empire." Europeans therefore used Christianity as a mechanism to disarm Africans of their strongest weaponry, their African consciousness in their effort to re-engineer them into subjects of empire.

Colonists aimed to destroy African consciousness. Sovereign African cultures were a threat to colonial administration. To portray themselves as "civilizers" and "saviors," European colonizers had to forcefully make Africans believe they were worthless and inferior, paving the way for submission and dependency. Language played a prominent role in defining Africans as inhuman--"natives" and "kaffirs." As British historian Arnold Toynbee explained in 1934, "When we Westerners call people 'natives' we implicitly take

the cultural color out of our perceptions of them. We see them as trees walking, or as wild animals infesting the country." By equating Africans to animals and trees, European colonists are consigning them to an evolutionary primitive or savage nature, "thingifying" them, in Aimé Césaire's language. The British administrator in Nigeria, Frederick Lugard, reinforced this psychological degradation of Africans in the Dual Mandate, a virtual blueprint for colonization: "His mind is far nearer to the animal world than that of the European or Asiatic, and exhibits something of the animal's placidity and want of desire to rise beyond the state he has reached." Here, Lugard sets up a dependency complex by suggesting that Africans are awaiting a savior to help them with their "desire to rise beyond." Violated through brutal "native" policies governing inter alia, education, labor, and economics, some Africans would internalize these inferiority complexes that manifested in transgenerational psychological self-hate and other desires to approximate whiteness.

Missionary schools demonized African spirituality and other customs such as marriages, medical practices, healing, initiation, and mortuary rituals. These customs were integral to African identities. This epistemicide had many layers, one of which was the kidnapping of African children from their homes at an early stage and forcibly enrolling them into missionary schools. Recommending modes of schooling, the Southern Rhodesia Native Committee of Inquiry of 1910-11 suggested that "It is best to get them as young as possible in order to mould their characters from start." The committee even suggested doing away with the demand that Africans pay for the schooling because "fees... put more difficulties in the act of the very education we wish to encourage." The government had set up the committee to explore ways to effectively govern Africans in that territory. Boarding schools were a crucial structure for achieving this engineering of African children into compliant colonial subjects. Writing from Nigeria, Lugard recommended that:

The first object then must be to see that the pupils are brought continuously under the right influences. This can best be effected by boarding school, in which a boy lives wholly in the atmosphere of the school and is removed from the subversive influences of his normal environment. The boarding school must not be too near to a native town.

These schools were social laboratories for cloning colonial subjects. Malidoma Patrice Somé is an African healer from Burkina Faso, whom French missionaries kidnapped and boarded at their seminary as a child. Fortunately, he was able to escape after years of heavy indoctrination. Somé recounts that after he escaped from missionary school, "he had acquired something different and

infinitely more dangerous: literacy... he had returned as a white man." At the missionary school, the French missionaries demonized his Dagara culture, symbolized by his name, Malidoma, which they banned and replaced with Patrice. They beat his mother tongue out of him, forcing him to learn French, among many other alien cultural habits. After this extent of brainwashing, many Africans could not retain their African identities. In the words of Orlando Patterson, they had died socially and culturally, even as their bodies survived. After his daring escape from the seminary and return to his village, Somé had to undergo a month-long initiation to counteract the cultural violence and alienation.

In addition to the psychological assault on African identities, cultures and bodies, the Berlin system manufactured what Nigerian philosopher Chinweizu aptly calls Lugardist states, after key colonial administrator Frederick Lugard. This was the philosophy that gave Africa Nigeria and the other artificial colonies whose alienating borders ran through communities and cultures, causing displacement and socio-economic and political dysfunctionality. For example, two Berlin borders split and scattered the Ewe people who were one community into Ghana, Togo and Benin. In African Perspectives on European Colonialism, Ghanaian historian Adu Boahen gives examples of other African states that were similarly splintered, such as "the Bakongo... divided by the boundaries of the Congo, Zaire, Angola, and Gabon... the Akan [who] are found in the Ivory Coast and Ghana. The Somali [who are] shared among Ethiopia, Kenya, and Somalia." Despite linguistic and cultural similarities, the arbitrary destruction of societies through this European balkanization placed these African communities under different European colonial administrations which led to the emergence of new, fictional and frictional cultural and national identities.

After the Berlin Conference, European colonizers adopted multiple forms of governance, the two primary forms being what Mahmood Mamdani calls "decentralized despotisms." In his book *Citizen and Subject*, Mamdani argues that "direct and indirect rule are better understood as variants of despotism: the former centralized, the latter decentralized." He explains that for direct rule, a central colonial authority is established, and the local African people are only included at the lowest ranks of government. However, for indirect rule, Africans were given supervised positions of power (kingships and chieftaincies) to serve as intermediaries between the colonial government and the African population. While the direct system was mainly adopted by French colonizers, indirect form of rule was prominently used by the British. Lugard documented the indirect system in the Dual Mandate, outlining the process of choosing the said kings and chiefs. In societies with existing hierar-

chical systems, local leaders were appointed to be chiefs. However, chiefs were also imposed in communities where none existed. Lugard laid this out:

The first step is to hasten the transition from the patriarchal to the tribal stage and induce those who acknowledge no other authority than the head of the family to recognise a common chief. Where this stage has already been reached, the object is to group together small tribes, or sections of a tribe, so as to form a single administrative unit, whose chiefs may be constituted a "Native Authority" with defined powers.

This dysfunctional strategy of governance dismantled pre-existent systems and introduced different levels of power and authority while inventing new "tribes." Among others, Mamdani points at the "invention" of the Ndebele ethnic identity in colonial Zimbabwe as a "tribe" that was created to implement indirect rule. This worked to destroy a once powerful Ndebele state into the European offense of the state of a "tribe." As a result, African societies were fragmented into politically driven minorities who were governed by "customary law." Customary law consisted of rules that colonists created based on their understanding of African cultural traditions. When British administrators officiated customary law, tensions and conflicts were bound to occur. Multiple ethnic groups were forced to organize into what colonizers called "tribes." Therefore, Africans who were not in the same states in the pre-colonial era were now forced to adhere to whatever custom was chosen to create customary laws. Mamdani explains: "Freedom for one could only be at the expense of another... whose custom was considered law—the patrilineal rulers or the matrilineal subjects." These divisive techniques then created Africans who were forced or brainwashed to internalize the colonial mentality of superiority and began to believe they were culturally superior to the other cultures that were not privileged in the codification of customary laws, such as the southwestern Kalanga who were subordinated to the Ndebele.

As such, a petite bourgeoisie was created leading to elitism that laid the foundation for post-independence politics that would be pervaded with intra-elite power struggles and tyrannies of minority but privileged groups. Therefore, colonists purposefully created these inequalities to lay the foundation for transgenerational tensions among African communities, which then degenerated into what is now often called "tribalism." Tribalism has manifested itself in many ways. It has laid the foundation for other separationist ideologies such as regionalism and secessionism, which have emerged into barriers against African postcolonial transformation. Though tribalism was a negative consequence of colonial gover-

nance mechanisms, Mamdani argues that it could also be emancipatory as a resistance strategy. Some "successful" secessionist conflicts that can be argued to be emancipatory include Eritrea's secession from Ethiopia (1962-1993), and South Sudan's secession from Sudan (1963-2003). In 1967, the Igbos took up arms to forcibly break away from Lugardist Nigeria, arguing that the federal government marginalized them as a particular group. This resulted in the destructive and genocidal Biafra War. While some of these secessions gave victory to some, they also inflicted transgenerational traumas that Nigerians are yet to heal from today. In his novel *Sozaboy*, Ken Saro Wiwa, a Nigerian author and environmental activist, demonstrates the levels of trauma and uncertainty that the Biafran war wrought to Nigerians.

By the late 1950s, African countries began to attain independence. African independence was diluted with shallow anti-colonial methods that did not successfully decolonize the institutions, and structures that were set in place by colonists. Instead of creating new systems, postcolonial Africa saw a pattern of imitation and sustenance of social, economic, and political systems that were used by the colonial administration. Imitation of Western culture became a sign of colonial mentality that scholars like Frantz Fanon, and Albert Memmi have pointed out as characteristics of the aspects of violence brought on by the colonizer. The Berlin borders that were created by European colonists in 1884-1885 are examples of colonial structures that were maintained post-independence. Many Africans, especially Pan-Africanists, who believed in the power of the political solidarity of people of African descent, called for the rejection or adjustment of these colonial boundaries because they were living through the consequences.

Despite the Pan-Africanist proposal for a borderless Africa that Ghana's first president Kwame Nkrumah proposed, African leaders still reified the regime of Berlin borders without resolving its known consequences on their people. In his book, *Nationalism and African Intellectuals*, Toyin Falola observed that "African nationalists accepted the pre-existing colonial boundaries as they inherited power and established control in their countries." Here, we see the divisive, elitist power struggles sown by the Lugards of the colonial world. Now, Article 4 (B) of the African Union's Constitutive Act calls for the effective management of these arbitrary colonial borders that have now become national frontiers. This rule first originated in the Organization of African Unity (OAU) before it became the African Union (AU). Unfortunately, African leaders had to choose between African solidarity and co-existence as separate entities, the OAU which was then one of the most important symbols of Pan-Africanism, defended co-existence.

Nationalism as a foundation for anticolonialism was successful in attaining independence, however, it failed in effective nation-building in Africa. Post-independence nationalism led many African leaders to prioritize national sovereignty; a level of power and authority they were deprived of during the colonial period, over African identity, and solidarity. The African pre-colonial identity of multiculturalism was replaced with colonial homogeneous/monotheistic national identities. As a result, Lugardist names such as "Nigeria" and "Kenya" that were constructed with no cultural significance, were accepted as the official African national identities. In addition to these continued identity crises, state formation led to stricter immigration laws and policies that portrayed immigrants as threats to the newly acquired sovereignty. The demarcations European colonists drew on the African map during the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885 became a reification of territorial sovereignty, a sense of belonging and legality of African alienated existence in space.

African migrants who threatened these adoptive national sovereignties were then criminalized and could be deported from "other" countries. Migration has always been an essential aspect of life in Africa. African people migrate to new vicinities across the continent due to many social, economic, and political push-pull factors. People could move freely across the continent until European colonists created the Berlin borders to stifle their mobilities across space. For example, historically, the nomads of Somali regularly made their livelihoods across space from what is now Kenya, Ethiopia, Djibouti, and Somalia. Most of these sovereign African mobilities were unfettered. Aderanti Adepoju, one of the leading African migration specialists reports that "The free movement of persons across frontiers in Africa has, historically, been facilitated by the cultural affinity of communities." So in fact, Africans were able to move freely across societies due to cultural similarities such as linguistic affinity. However, after post-colonial independence, these movements are now facilitated by rigid policed borders that continue to criminalize African mobilities to maintain the adoptive national sovereignties. Thus, colonial derogatory terms such as "alien," "foreign," and "illegal" were adapted to African languages inventing words like "Amanfrafo" (Twi for foreigners) and "Makwerekwere" that Black South Africans deploy to demonize and alienate other Black Africans. It is important to identify that the term "alien" is part of the colonial discourse that Europeans used to differentiate between indigenous people of different colonies. Colonial administrators such as Lugard, used these words when re-engineering Africans into

"natives," and "alien natives." This marked the beginning of what most identify as Xenophobia against immigrants, but which I call Afrophobia in this paper.

Xenophobia refers to resentment or prejudice towards those who are outcast because they are non-nationals. Afrophobia then means African resentment against other Africans with different nationalities. It is necessary to point out this difference because African immigrants are more targeted as victims of immigration prejudice, in comparison to other non-African immigrants in Africa. The problem here is that the colonized minds of African leaders are quick to criminalize African non-nationals as aliens but open their borders to non-Black people. African leaders perpetuated Afrophobic sentiments especially in electioneering campaigns. Adepoju notes examples of expulsions that have occurred across the continent. These include but are not limited to the Senegalese expulsion of Guineans in 1967; Ivory Coast's expulsion of about 16,000 Beninese in 1964; Sierra-Leone, Guinea and Ivory Coast, expelled Ghanaian Fishermen in 1968. As these examples illustrate, this is indeed a continental problem and not limited to Ghanaian-Nigerian bilateral relations. The following section focuses on the Ghana-Nigeria case study.

The history of the Afrophobic tensions in Ghana can be traced to Kofi Abrefa Busia's expulsion of Nigerian migrants from Ghana in 1969. On November 19, 1969, a month after he was elected to office, Prime Minister Busia enforced the Aliens Compliance Order that demanded that all undocumented immigrants had to leave the country by December 2, 1969. At the time, approximately 600,000 Ghanaian citizens were reported to be unemployed. As such, the Aliens Compliance Order was a response to the nation's economic insecurity. Many West Africans were also deported, but the majority were Nigerians. According to an interview conducted by the Nana Project, "Busia was not about unity, I guess he was a UP leader against Nkrumah... he was about separation." These were the words of Nana Aba Naaman, a Ghanaian citizen who was in secondary school when the Ghanaian government carried out these deportations. Unfortunately, these Afrophobic deportations from Ghana happened three years after Kwame Nkrumah, an influential advocate for a borderless Africa, was deposed in 1966.

Less than fifteen years later, Nigeria retaliated. In January 1983, President Shehu Shagari used the same justifications to sign an executive order for the deportation of all undocumented immigrants. Nigeria's oil boom economy plummeted that year, which was coincidentally an election year. Thus, when Shagari's government had to account for the corruption and mismanagement of oil revenue, immigrants became the perfect group to blame.

Suddenly, the Nigerian authorities blamed Africans who had supported the country working as farmers, traders, teachers, domestics, and in other well-respected professions for all kinds of alleged criminal and deviant activities that they used to justify the nation's new economic insecurity. The Nigerian government legitimized Afrophobic attacks when it encouraged Nigerian civilians to report or expose any Ghanaians in their communities, triggering the infamous "Ghana Must Go." A BBC interview with a Ghanaian immigrant, Charles Otoo recounted that "the minister handed over power to every civilian... that every civilian can do anything to any alien in the country once the deadline expired." As a result, many undocumented immigrants lived in fear because even their neighbors could be their worst enemy, so they rushed out of the country in fear for their lives. Therefore, it can be argued that African governments weaponized Afrophobia as a political tactic. Thus, armed by their leaders' rhetoric and policies, civilians wielded this divisive political mechanism to perpetuate violence against other Africans, reinforcing Lugardist indirect rule in the process.

The journeys "back home" for the expelled Africans posed a daunting question: where is home? Where is home for people whose entire existence have been in the same country that is ostracizing them as aliens? When Ghanaians screamed slogans such as "Mubeko" ("You are going") to other Africans, where were they to go? The traumas this expulsion wrought became imprinted in the infamous red and blue, cheap but tough and voluminous nylon bag, "Ghana Must Go." Rushed out of their homes, Ghanaians quickly stuffed their earthly belongings into these cargo bags and hit the perilous road. This bag now symbolizes tumultuous displacement and migration of the wretched of the earth around the world. The journey back to Ghana was brutal because Togo and Benin closed their borders in fear that their countries would suffer economically from the influx of millions of immigrants. Many were displaced and died of hunger or injuries attained during the journey, while others drowned when they opted to return by sea.

Both governments stressed that these immigrants did not have the proper documentation that allowed them to reside in the country legally. This western idea of proper documentation originated from the colonial period when passes were required in countries like Apartheid South Africa, Kenya and Rhodesia before Africans could leave their "native reserve" to go anywhere at all, including entering settler lands. At independence, many African countries did not have national identification systems beyond what they inherited from their colonizers. For example, the Nigerian government launched its first registration process to obtain a national identity card only in 2003.

Because of the absence of a fool proof national registration system, when the raids started in 1983, some "legal" Nigerians and Ghanaians also ran the risk of deportation. This was in part because the police and military were carrying out the raids based on cultural affinity. To protect themselves, many immigrants had to think of creative ways to provide alternative identifiers to evade deportation. For instance, Stephen Atta Owusu gave an account of an Asante immigrant in Nigeria who was advised by her Nigerian husband to get herself "tribal" marks so that she would look more like a Yoruba woman; she already spoke the Yoruba language. As such, symbols on the skin became identity markers that some inventive would-be targets of the deportation raids used as a text in place of official documentary paperwork.

To conclude, the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885 violently scattered African communities amongst power hungry imperialist and colonial governments. To effectively govern their African colonies, the Europeans demonized African cultures through missionization and other forms of epistemicide that invented and reinforced intra-African difference. This differencing criminalized and stymied African mobilities and belonging, creating Afrophobic hatreds. While African nationalist resistance and revolutionary wars earned them independence, many African states still suffer from the legacies of colonialism, including criminalizing intra-African immigration laws. Unfortunately, Africa, the continent that was once host to these extractive systems, has become dependent on and beholden to the divisive and parasitic systems. Even as the continent established the Organization of African Unity (OAU--now the African Union, AU) that helped rid it of continued direct European occupation, the continent has yet to effectively knock down the Berlin walls, reverse the brutal, Lugardist balkanization, and attain effective unity and freedom. The cultural baggage of intra-African cultural alienation still breaks out in the frequent Afrophobic attacks across the continent, more recently in South Africa. Africans are thus still gatekeeping the many walls that they did not build, in Hugh Masekela's words.

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