

Border Mythogenesis

Colonial Borders as Risk Surfaces, Narrative Weapons, and Proxy Conflict Triggers in Pan-African Futures (1884–2023)

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Version: 2023-12-20

Disclosure / stance: This paper does not seek external approval or symmetry of comfort. It advances falsifiable claims about risk, institutional vulnerability, and predictable escalation mechanisms. We distinguish moral preference from measurement. Arguments stand or fall on definitions, observable indicators, and disconfirmations.

Abstract

Colonial borders are not only lines on maps. They are jurisdictions that distribute protection, movement, land access, and political voice. When state capacity is uneven and historical literacy is thin, border disputes become ignitable through narrative operations that convert ambiguity into mobilizable certainty, often accelerating coercion or proxy violence. This paper models that ignition pathway as Border Mythogenesis (BM): a codeable set of claim motifs (restoration, priority, othering, delegitimation, and security laundering) that predictably intensify under specific conditions. To remain consistent with prior work, we treat these motifs as a domain expression of the Entitlement Cascade and its allied selection dynamics (ISM/PDI): when beneficiary systems face accountability stress or perceived loss of dominance, they frequently deploy portable entitlement scripts (priority claims, credit seizure, universalization, and victim inversion). We refer to this operational motif family as Colonial Entitlement Rhetoric (CER), not as a separate theory but as a measurable surface form of the same cascade logic across border disputes and privilege-defense contexts. CER does not replace material drivers such as resources, security fragmentation, or elite rent capture. It functions as an accelerant that lowers moral cost and raises mobilisation capacity, and it becomes most visible under credible weakness signals. Methodologically, we provide preregisterable codebooks, low-tech replication protocols using public sources (official speeches, parliamentary records, broadcaster transcripts, archived newspapers), and a worked empirical pilot template with falsification conditions. The paper closes with circuit-breaker recommendations for heritage institutions, educators, and civic actors

that increase epistemic thickness, expand non-violent pathways for boundary settlement, and reduce the conversion of narrative spikes into coercion.

Keywords: colonial borders; Pan-Africanism; narrative warfare; proxy conflict; irredentism; epistemic infrastructure; colonized dark tetrad; entitlement cascade; diaspora wedge governance; conflict forecasting

1. Introduction

African borders inherited from colonial partition were preserved after independence as a pragmatic stabilization device. This choice reduced immediate interstate war risk, but it did not resolve the underlying questions that borders compressed: identity, jurisdiction, mobility, resource governance, and historical legitimacy. In many contexts, borders became a permanent container for unresolved disputes rather than a solved problem. The result is a paradox: the continent's most visible lines were stabilized in international law, while the continent's everyday belonging, memory, and jurisdiction were not stabilized with comparable investment.

This paper treats colonial borders as a long-duration risk surface whose ignition mechanism is narrative warfare. When civic history literacy, archival access, and cross-border compacts remain underdeveloped, border zones become vulnerable to border mythogenesis: the production and circulation of simplified entitlement stories ('this province was historically ours') used to mobilize publics, legitimate coercion, and launder extraction aims as 'restoration' or 'security.' Border mythogenesis is not a synonym for disagreement about history. It is a functional script that reduces complexity into mobilizable slogans, converts uncertainty into certainty, and reassigns moral status so that coercion can be framed as necessary and clean.

Our central wager is methodological: border escalation is not random. It has recurrent discursive motifs, recurrent institutional moderators, and recurrent downstream action patterns. We therefore ask: (i) what motifs reliably precede escalation; (ii) what institutional gaps predict susceptibility; (iii) how do platform architectures amplify or dampen the conversion from narrative spike to coercion spike; and (iv) what non-state circuit breakers can interrupt the process even when states are fragile, captured, or short-horizon.

1.1 Why the 'border question' never ended

The post-independence bargain to keep inherited borders is often narrated as a settled consensus. In reality it was triage. Newly independent states faced immediate threats: coups, fiscal collapse, foreign-backed destabilisation, and the urgent need to build basic

administrative capacity. A continent-wide border redrawing project was politically and militarily infeasible. Yet the cost of postponement was not zero. By freezing borders without building shared historical literacy, shared identity frameworks, and cross-border civic mechanisms, many states converted a short-term firewall into a long-term fuse. The fuse is cognitive and institutional: people living in borderlands experience authority as inconsistent, and memory as contested or inaccessible. That combination is an open market for narrative entrepreneurs who offer certainty, dignity, and protection through simplified territorial myths.

1.2 Borders are infrastructure, not only cartography

A border allocates jurisdiction, and jurisdiction allocates the right to tax, police, educate, issue titles, regulate land, and distribute public goods. When borders cut through precolonial political ecologies, trade routes, and kinship networks, the result is not merely symbolic injury. It is institutional ambiguity: citizens experience overlapping claims, uneven protections, and competing narratives of legitimacy. The same border can be rigid for passports but porous for weapons; strict for farmers but flexible for rent-seekers. This is the material meaning of ‘risk surface.’ In such environments, the concept of ‘belonging’ is not a neutral identity question. It becomes a governance resource.

1.3 Pan-Africanism as risk engineering

Pan-Africanism is commonly framed as moral or ideological. In this paper, it is also technical: a prevention strategy for reducing systemic risk produced by partition, epistemic capture, and proxy manipulation. Pan-Africanism, operationally defined, is any institution or civic practice that increases the cost of intra-African coercion and reduces the payoff of grievance-based mobilisation. This includes non-governmental cross-border cultural compacts, shared archival infrastructures, common vocabulary standards for journalism and education, and shared norms for how disputes are narrated to the public. This reframing matters because it moves debate from ‘who is right’ to ‘what reduces violence and extraction.’ A prevention science does not require perfect agreement on history. It requires agreement on evidence standards, dispute procedures, and the rejection of humiliation as civic entertainment.

A simplifying lens helps connect border cases to privilege-defense cases without collapsing them. We use Colonial Entitlement Rhetoric (CER) as an operational label for a portable entitlement script family that prior work already theorizes under the Entitlement Cascade and allied selection dynamics (ISM/PDI). When a beneficiary class (or would-be beneficiary class) faces accountability or loss of dominance, it often deploys priority claims (“we were there first”), credit seizure (“we built the country, be grateful”), universalization (“everyone did it”), and victim inversion (“we are under

attack"). This portability explains why similar surface rhetoric can appear in settler-privilege defense and in external border activation narratives. In this paper, CER is treated as a measurable accelerant, not as a stand-alone explanation and not as a competing theory to earlier frameworks.

1.4 Scope conditions and what the model does not claim

This manuscript is a prevention-science model paper. It specifies measurable mechanisms, codebooks, and preregisterable tests. It does not claim that every African conflict is caused by border narratives, nor that narratives are always the primary driver. Rather, it claims a conditional: when a dispute involves territorial entitlement, belonging, or jurisdiction, and when epistemic thickness is low, border mythogenesis becomes a high-leverage ignition pathway.

We explicitly exclude or treat as out-of-scope: (i) conflicts that are primarily interpersonal or purely criminal without jurisdictional claims; (ii) elite rent-seeking disputes with no meaningful public mobilisation layer; (iii) interstate wars driven by conventional security dilemmas where irredentist narratives play no operational role; and (iv) non-territorial political violence where borders are irrelevant. These exclusions are not moral judgments; they are scope boundaries needed for falsifiability. If a case lacks the core ingredients (claim script + mobilisation), the model should not be forced onto it.

2. Definitions and Scope Conditions

2.1 Colonial border regime as risk surface

By colonial border regime we mean the partition lines, administrative categories, and legal-bureaucratic templates imposed through imperial governance and later inherited by postcolonial states. As a risk surface, borders matter less as geometry than as infrastructure: they allocate coercive power, taxation, education, land title systems, security jurisdictions, and the social meaning of belonging. We use 'risk' in the engineering sense: a combination of hazard (structural vulnerability) and likelihood of activation given plausible triggers.

2.2 Border mythogenesis

Border mythogenesis is the process by which simplified, selective, or fabricated historical narratives are produced and normalized to support territorial claims. It is not identical to legitimate historical debate. It is a functional script: it reduces complexity

into mobilizable slogans; it converts archival uncertainty into entitlement certainty; it reframes aggression as recovery; and it uses moral inversion so that those resisting coercion can be framed as the aggressors.

2.3 Diasporic wedge governance

Diasporic wedge governance refers to identity scripting that weakens African–diaspora solidarity by emphasizing separation and hierarchy while simultaneously treating Western umbrella identities (for example, ‘the West’) as coherent and normative. Our focus is not identity formation per se, which can be legitimate and emancipatory. The focus is identity formation operationalized as a wedge: to degrade solidarity, normalize imperial alignment as default maturity, and delegitimize cross-border African belonging. A hallmark is asymmetry: fragmentation is demanded from Africans, while cohesion is claimed for Western blocs.

2.4 Language risk: ‘tribe’ and the cognitive downgrade

We treat the term ‘tribe/tribalism’ as high-risk when used as a default explanatory category for African politics. It can function as a cognitive downgrade: it naturalizes othering, reduces legitimacy of indigenous political epistemologies, and makes violence appear expected. In high-stakes contexts, vocabulary is a governance technology. Precision is not pedantry. Precision is a containment measure against collective blame and the conversion of administrative disputes into identity wars.

2.5 The inherited-border bargain and uti possidetis

African leaders, through the Organization of African Unity (OAU), adopted a principle of respecting borders existing at independence in order to prevent unlimited territorial conflict. The 1964 Cairo resolution on border disputes emphasized the tangible reality of inherited borders and warned about extra-African maneuvers aimed at division. This bargain reduced immediate interstate war risk, but it also produced predictable side-effects: disputes became chronic, episodic, and proxy-friendly; and borders were policed as sacred lines without equal investment in the civic work of belonging and shared memory.

3. Related Work and Positioning

3.1 Borders, stability bargains, and their unintended afterlives

International-law and African-institution scholarship has examined the OAU/AU commitment to territorial integrity and its relationship to *uti possidetis juris*, highlighting the tension between inviolability of boundaries and the political realities of identity, self-determination, and borderland governance. Work on the ‘intangibility’ or ‘inviolability’ of inherited frontiers emphasizes that the African norm became more than a legal doctrine: it became a political survival pact among elites who recognized that endless boundary revision could become a continent-wide legitimacy crisis. At the same time, the AU Border Programme frames pragmatic border management as an integration tool rather than purely a security tool, pointing toward the approach we prioritize: reduce activation risk without requiring immediate redrawing.

3.2 Borderlands scholarship: borders as barriers and conduits

Borderlands research in African studies complicates the idea that borders only divide. It documents how border zones become ‘conduits’ and ‘opportunities’ in everyday life, as communities build informal governance, trade routines, and kinship mobility across state lines. This matters for our model because border mythogenesis often overrides the pragmatic peace of borderland life by importing high-stakes entitlement scripts from capital cities, external patrons, or diaspora media. In other words: many borderlands already contain endogenous peace technologies, but these technologies are fragile when the state is weak, archives are inaccessible, and sensational media can reframe ordinary cross-border life as infiltration or betrayal.

3.3 Partitioned groups and the empirical conflict literature

Empirical political-economy research operationalizes the ‘artificiality’ of borders and documents correlations between partitioned ethnic homelands and higher incidence, severity, and duration of political violence. This literature provides a quantitative baseline: borders that split communities are not only symbolic scars; they have measurable conflict correlates. However, correlation does not specify ignition. A partitioned group can remain peaceful for decades. The key question is why certain periods convert latent partition into violence. Border mythogenesis supplies a mechanism: it explains how ambiguity can be actively manufactured into certainty and mobilized under stress.

3.4 Narrative warfare, propaganda techniques, and escalation

Propaganda research emphasizes repetition, scapegoating, dehumanization, and moral inversion as techniques that prepare publics to tolerate expanded harm. In many contexts, territorial entitlement claims operate like propaganda: they compress uncertainty into certainty, convert grievance into moral permission, and shift attention from material incentives (rent capture, corridor control) into identity drama. A practical implication follows: to counter propaganda, it is insufficient to argue ‘be nicer.’ One must change the information geometry and the institutional payoff structure. Heritage institutions and platform friction are therefore not optional add-ons; they are core prevention mechanisms.

3.5 Decolonial epistemology and the ‘tribalism’ frame

Decolonial scholarship has long argued that colonial categories did not merely label African societies; they reorganized how Africans were taught to interpret themselves. The ‘tribe/tribalism’ frame is a durable example: it makes indigenous governance appear pre-political and makes externally imposed templates appear universal. Our model treats this as measurable vulnerability: higher exposure to cognitive-downgrade vocabulary predicts higher susceptibility to othering, collective blame, and mythic simplification. This does not mean that ethnolinguistic difference is irrelevant; it means that the explanatory shortcut ‘tribalism’ functions as a permission slip for cynicism and intervention.

3.6 Positioning and contribution

This paper adds a prevention-oriented bridge between border-structure and conflict outcomes. We introduce border mythogenesis as an operational mechanism; specify codebooks and measurable downstream signatures; integrate proxy-selection dynamics (colonized dark tetrad / incentive alignment); and treat Pan-Africanism as a risk-engineering program with testable circuit breakers. Our strategy is to be precise enough that the work cannot be dismissed as rhetoric, while being direct enough that it cannot be domesticated into harmless language. We name the hazard, define indicators, and provide disconfirmations. If the indicators fail, the model fails.

4. Theoretical Frame

4.1 Entitlement cascade and system-level perpetrator pathology

The entitlement cascade model treats durable harm not primarily as isolated bad actors, but as patterned institutional outcomes. When entitlement is challenged, escalation often proceeds through denial, minimization, blame shifting, victim inversion, humiliation, and punitive reenactment (Nsiangani, 2020). In border contexts, the cascade appears when territorial claims are questioned: historical debate shifts into threat framing and punitive symbolism, often followed by harassment, coercion, or paramilitary action. The key point is functional: the cascade is a technology for re-establishing moral dominance when accountability becomes costly.

We use clinical language at the system level. We do not diagnose individuals from text. The claim is structural: certain environments select, reward, and reproduce repertoires of behavior that are instrumentally rational for power even when they are socially destructive.

4.2 Proxy selection, colonized dark tetrad, and deniable aggression

Proxy conflict environments reward actors who can escalate without accountability. The colonized dark tetrad framework proposes that certain leadership repertoires are selected and stabilized under external alignment pressures, and that institutional environments can reward narcissistic grandiosity, Machiavellian manipulation, psychopathic disregard, and sadistic humiliation as tactics. In this paper, the value of the lens is predictive rather than moralizing: in stress windows, we expect selection pressure toward narrative manipulation, humiliation signaling, and threat inversion, especially when external patrons benefit from persistent instability.

4.3 Epistemic infrastructure and colonial mentality

A central amplifier of border risk is epistemic infrastructure: the capacity of a society to maintain shared, accessible, and trusted accounts of its own past, and to translate that past into civic identity without coercion. Colonial governance typically degraded epistemic sovereignty by relocating authority from local knowledge systems to imperial archives, categories, and schools. The long afterlife of that arrangement is colonial mentality: the reflex to treat Western categories as universal and African categories as parochial or ‘tribal.’

This mentality is not only psychological; it is institutional. It increases the probability that populations will accept simplified identity scripts, imported vocabularies of othering, and externally useful narratives, while distrusting local sources. Border mythogenesis thrives in this gap: the legal line is fixed while shared understanding remains underbuilt.

4.4 Media and platform incentive structures

Narrative warfare requires distribution. Where media ecosystems reward outrage, humiliation, and repetition, border mythogenesis gains reach. Platform architecture does not create the myth, but it lowers the cost of performing it and increases its payoff through visibility, swarm dynamics, and reinforcement loops. For methodological clarity, platform effects are treated as amplifiers: the causal chain can be tested with official speech and major media alone when platform data access is limited.

4.5 The ‘timebomb’ conditions: when the system becomes ignitable

The border risk surface becomes a timebomb when five conditions coincide. (1) Epistemic thinness: weak civic history education, low archival access, and low trust in local knowledge institutions. (2) High grievance density: youth unemployment, land pressure, and unequal service delivery that can be reframed as identity harm. (3) Rent density: valuable resources or corridor infrastructures that raise the payoff of controlling territory. (4) External patron competition: multiple external actors who can fund, arm, or diplomatically shield local proxies while remaining deniable. (5) High-gain distribution: radio, TV, and platforms that can amplify entitlement scripts faster than institutions can inject context. The model predicts that escalation risk is highest when all five conditions stack, and that interventions which reduce any one condition can measurably lower conversion rates.

4.6 Epistemic Supply-Chain Capture in Education

Border mythogenesis thrives where epistemic thickness is low: where citizens cannot easily access trustworthy history, method literacy, and primary sources. One under-modeled upstream driver of low epistemic thickness is what we call epistemic supply-chain capture in education: the way funding dependencies, procurement pipelines, language-of-instruction defaults, and textbook publishing markets can systematically bias what is taught, what is printable, and what becomes ‘normal knowledge.’

The mechanism does not require an explicit conspiracy. It is often sufficient that (i) external funders set acceptable content templates, (ii) ministries select from approved vendor lists, (iii) imported series dominate the market due to price and distribution advantages, and (iv) local authors and local historiographies are structurally sidelined by accreditation, printing, and distribution constraints. In practice, this can yield a stable pattern: African students graduate with detailed Western historical timelines and minimal structured exposure to African border histories, regional polities, and local

epistemologies, including the procedural knowledge needed to evaluate territorial claims.

A practical illustration was documented in Nsiangani's EHESS conference communication (2005): in the Congolese school pipeline, Western history and European 'universal' narratives were materially present through imported materials, while the history of African borders, African political ecologies, and local cultural systems was absent or marginal. This asymmetry had downstream effects: (a) lower perceived legitimacy of local knowledge, (b) reduced motivation to read because reading was experienced as a foreign activity, and (c) higher susceptibility to simplified entitlement narratives because method literacy and local source familiarity were not built at scale.

This mechanism links directly to the paper's hazard model. Low epistemic thickness increases myth load and decreases correction capacity. When a claim shock occurs (a speech, a viral map, a 'restoration' slogan), populations with thin historical infrastructure face an asymmetric contest: myth entrepreneurs can deploy certainty cheaply, while institutions cannot rapidly inject method and context. Therefore, educational supply-chain capture is not a side topic. It is a structural amplifier that raises the conversion rate of narrative spikes into coercion spikes.

A related amplifier is the long afterlife of 'myths of orality' that frame African societies as naturally non-archival and therefore naturally ahistorical, a framing that can rationalize low investment in libraries, local publishing, and curricular depth. This interacts with imported religious and ideological ecosystems in heterogeneous ways. Some institutions may reproduce status-quo incentives by discouraging inquiry when inquiry threatens donor or political arrangements. Others function as epistemic counterweights by moralizing research, dignity, and liberation memory. Kimbanguist historical culture is one example of an inquiry-supporting counterweight: its liberation memory and spiritual leadership traditions often invite research and civic dignity work rather than erasure. The point is not theological adjudication but institutional function: which ecosystems increase method literacy and local knowledge legitimacy, and which ecosystems degrade them.

In Section 7 we operationalize this mechanism through measurable moderators (curriculum provenance, language of instruction, local author share, library access, and procurement dependence), and in Section 9 we propose circuit breakers that treat curriculum sovereignty as risk reduction rather than symbolic politics.

4.7 CER as an operational motif layer within the Entitlement Cascade (ISM/PDI)

Border mythogenesis focuses on how contested jurisdiction becomes ignitable. CER is introduced here only as an operational motif layer that makes the Entitlement Cascade (and its selection dynamics, ISM/PDI) measurable in discourse. It is not a new theory. It names a portable entitlement grammar that often accompanies BM ignition and also appears in privilege-defense contexts where borders are not the explicit object.

CER is operationalized as a compact motif family: (CER1) Priority claims ("we were here first"), (CER2) Credit seizure ("we built this country"), (CER3) Universalization to dilute specificity ("everyone did it"), (CER4) Victim inversion ("we are the victims now"), (CER5) Security laundering ("order must be restored"), and (CER6) Epistemic sabotage (falsehood floods that raise correction cost).

CER interacts with material drivers. In a resource-predation episode, coercion may precede rhetoric and CER appears as after-the-fact laundering. In a mobilisation episode, CER can appear early and functions as permission engineering: it lowers the perceived moral cost of unequal control and increases the perceived moral cost of accountability demands.

A central forecasting implication is the weakness-signal rule: when leadership weakness becomes salient (contested legitimacy, fragmentation, loss of deterrence), CER density and BM density tend to rise together in jurisdictions where territorial or civilizational entitlement is contestable. This is why CER is a useful early-warning lens in theaters such as eastern DRC. The claim is probabilistic and falsifiable, not universal.

5. Model: The Border Mythogenesis Cycle

We propose a five-stage cycle. Each stage has measurable signatures. The model is falsifiable: it predicts patterns and specifies disconfirmations. The cycle is not deterministic; it is a hazard model. The question is not 'will it happen.' The question is 'under what conditions does it become likely.'

Stage 1: Latent fault-line. Border zones carry unresolved identity and resource disputes; archival gaps and contested memories persist.

Stage 2: Myth production. Selective or fabricated 'ancestral territory' claims are generated; complexity collapses into slogans and maps.

Stage 3: Amplification and bonding. Myths are rewarded via outrage economics, humiliation play, and in-group bonding against an out-group.

Stage 4: Territorial rehearsal. Actors test boundaries (incursions, intimidation, symbolic acts), framed as defense or restoration.

Stage 5: Institutional capture or escalation. Institutions absorb the narrative (policy drift) or conflict escalates into violence; the cycle resets with new grievances.

5.1 Measurable signatures by stage

Stage 1 can be detected via institutional proxies: low textbook quality or contested curricula, low archival digitization, low cross-border civic program density, and repeated administrative disputes about land, citizenship, or policing. Stage 2 is detected by motif spikes (BM1–BM6) in speeches and media. Stage 3 is detected by coordination signatures and humiliation signaling: repeated map memes, burst reposting, quote-swarm dynamics, and laughter-coded mockery of deaths or displacement. Stage 4 is detected by ‘rehearsal’ incidents: non-fatal intimidation, checkpoint creation, symbolic flag displays, forced ‘identity proof’ demands, or targeted harassment of border communities. Stage 5 is detected by a shift in institutional language: official adoption of restoration or security-expansion frames and measurable increases in conflict events. These signatures allow early warning: one need not wait for war to know a cycle is activating.

5.2 Diasporic wedge module: identity scripts as accelerants

Identity discourse can be used for liberation or for capture. The wedge module focuses on capture: identity scripts that normalize imperial alignment as the invisible default and treat African solidarity as irrational. One recurrent pattern is asymmetry in naming. Western publics can claim umbrella identities (‘the West’, ‘Western civilization’) without being accused of tribalism, while African publics are pressured into fragmentation and moral downgrade. A second pattern is selective ethnogenesis: the creation of identity narratives that primarily serve distancing and contempt, and that treat fidelity to white supremacy or imperial norms as the neutral background of ‘maturity.’ In diaspora settings, this can appear as a rhetorical move: claiming a special status that justifies contempt for continental Africans while continuing to benefit from Western umbrella protection. Operationally, we code this through IAS and DWG motifs and test for coordination spikes during border and resource-accountability windows.

5.3 Boundary cases: when narratives are not the main driver

Some border-adjacent violence is driven predominantly by resource predation, elite rent capture, or coercive entrepreneurship with minimal narrative content. In such cases, border mythogenesis may be present only as after-the-fact justification rather than as

ignition. The model predicts a measurable difference: low BM motif density in the lead window should coincide with violence that is organized through logistical opportunity rather than public mobilisation. This is an important disconfirmation channel: if incidents rise without any detectable BM spike in official speech or mainstream media, then narratives are not the primary lever in that episode.

Practically, we recommend a triage decision rule. A case is ‘high-fit’ for this model when at least two of the following are present in the lead window: (i) BM1/BM2 entitlement or restoration language in official or major media; (ii) visible othering (BM3) paired with jurisdictional claims; (iii) mobilisation artifacts (maps, slogans, mass meetings, diaspora fundraising calls); (iv) institutional language drift toward restoration/security-expansion frames; or (v) coordinated dissemination bursts. Absent these indicators, investigators should prioritize alternative mechanisms (rent-opportunity, security-force fragmentation, commodity shocks) rather than narrative ignition.

6. Operationalization: Motif Codebooks and Scoring

To move from rhetoric to measurement, we define preregisterable motifs. The unit of analysis is capped (e.g., ≤ 280 words for a post; ≤ 60 seconds for a transcript segment). A unit is coded positive when the motif functions to mobilize entitlement, othering, restoration, humiliation, security-expansion, or myth-load. Historical fact-checking alone is not sufficient. Conversely, a unit can be coded positive even if it contains partial truth, if it uses that fragment to mobilize coercion or legitimate expansion.

Table 1. Border Mythogenesis Motif Codebook (BM)

Motif	Function	Inclusion markers	Exclusions (false positives)
BM1: Ancestral entitlement	Converts contested history into territorial certainty.	‘X land is ours’ · ‘belongs to our kingdom/people’	Sourced debate with uncertainty; academic history
BM2: Restoration frame	Aggression reframed as recovery or justice.	‘take back’ · ‘restore’ · ‘reunify’	Legal petitions without threat language
BM3: Othering/dehumanization	Lowers moral cost of coercion.	‘invaders’ · ‘foreigners’ · collective blame; slurs	Neutral demographic description

BM4: Humiliation signaling	Bonding through mockery of out-group suffering.	memes; laughter at deaths; celebratory violence imagery	Satire punching up; victim coping humor
BM5: Security pretext expansion	Entitlement laundered as security necessity.	blanket ‘terrorist’ labels paired with claim expansion	Specific, evidenced security ops without entitlement expansion
BM6: Myth load	Floods discourse with falsehoods to exhaust correction.	debunked maps; fabricated quotes; invented borders	Minor errors corrected; genuine source ambiguity

Table 2. Identity Asymmetry and Diasporic Wedge Motifs (IAS / DWG)

Motif	Function	Inclusion markers	Exclusions
IAS1: Monolith-for-us	Umbrella identity claims for Western bloc coherence.	‘the West’ · ‘Western civilization/values’	Neutral geographic descriptors
IAS2: Fragment-for-you	Micro-fragment labels for Africans; legitimacy downgrade.	default infantilizing framing	‘tribalism’; ‘ethnics’
DWG1: Diaspora wedge	Severs solidarity via contempt/blame.	‘we are not them’ + stereotyping; ‘Africans sold you’ used as stopper	Respectful ethnolinguistic classification
DWG2: Exceptionalism default	Makes imperial alignment feel neutral and mature.	Western default treated as normal; pan-African ties framed irrational	Legit civic critique without supremacy default
DWG3: Weaponized ethnogenesis	Identity talk used to justify anti-solidarity.	ethnogenesis invoked to distance + hierarchy + contempt	Ethnogenesis used to build institutions

6.1 Severity scoring and ‘myth load’ index

Beyond binary coding, we recommend a severity score per unit. One practical approach is a weighted index: BM1–BM3 are moderate risk when presented without threat; BM4 and BM5 are high risk because they correlate with humiliation bonding and security expansion; BM6 is high risk because it consumes correction capacity and increases

cynicism. Myth load is defined as the density of claims that are contradicted by accessible primary sources or that shift scope to evade falsification. Myth load can be measured by sampling a subset of units, extracting factual assertions, and checking against a predefined source spine. Importantly, the goal is not policing disagreement; the goal is detecting the kinds of claims that predict coercion and swarm behavior.

7. Methods: Preregisterable Research Program

7.1 Data sources

(a) Discourse corpus: leader speeches, parliamentary debates, AU/REC documents, major broadcaster transcripts, and public platform posts keyed to border-claim lexicons; (b) Conflict events: geocoded incident datasets (UCDP-GED; ACLED) with district-level aggregation; (c) Institutional moderators: proxies for civic education quality, archival access, state reach, media trust, and cross-border integration density; (d) Network features: repost graphs, account churn, text reuse, burst dynamics, and coordination signals.

7.1.1 Educational supply-chain moderators (ETP inputs)

To test the educational capture mechanism, we add a set of preregistered moderators that feed the Epistemic Thickness Proxy (ETP). These variables are designed to be measurable with public documents, procurement records where available, and standardized content audits.

- Curriculum coverage ratio: proportion of history/civics instructional time devoted to African regional history (including border formation and regional polities) versus European/extra-African history, audited from official curricula and representative textbooks.
- Textbook provenance: share of textbooks and teacher guides produced by foreign publishers or foreign-funded programs versus locally authored materials; include edition and distribution constraints.
- Local author market share: share of accredited history/civics titles authored by local scholars, and the presence of local primary-source excerpts (treaties, maps, oral-history method notes).

- • Language of instruction mismatch: degree of mismatch between early-grade language of instruction and local languages; code as a literacy-friction proxy that can depress reading motivation and comprehension.
- • Library and archive access: per-capita school library availability, digitization access points, and public archival outreach (heritage institutions as epistemic infrastructure).
- • Procurement dependence proxy: proportion of textbook/curriculum procurement financed or conditioned by external funding streams (where observable), plus vendor-list concentration measures.

Prediction: lower ETP (thin epistemic supply chain, low local-author share, high mismatch) moderates the main effect by increasing myth load and increasing conversion from BM spikes to conflict events. Disconfirmation: if ETP measures do not buffer conversion rates or do not correlate with myth load, the educational capture pathway is weakened.

7.2 Sampling and reliability

Sampling is stratified by border region and month, with preregistered random draws for coding. A subset is double-coded using the BM and IAS/DWG codebooks. Inter-coder reliability is reported (e.g., Cohen's κ), and disagreements are adjudicated with a historian role. A public example bank (positive and negative exemplars) is released as a supplement after de-identification. To minimize cherry-picking, sampling and codebook are locked before outcome analysis.

7.3 Causal designs and estimation

Recommended designs include: (i) interrupted time series around claim shocks (major speeches, constitutional proposals, treaty disputes, publicized maps); (ii) event-study designs that measure motif prevalence and conflict incidents in lead/lag windows; (iii) difference-in-differences comparing exposed border districts to matched unexposed districts; and (iv) case-control comparisons of weeks with motif spikes versus matched weeks without spikes. Outcomes can include incident count, fatality proxies, displacement proxies, and 'harassment burst' proxies where platform data are available.

7.3.1 Replication without platform access: 'low-tech' proxy protocol

Because platform APIs can be restricted (rate limits, deletions, paywalls), the design must remain replicable using low-tech proxies. We therefore define a minimum viable corpus that requires no privileged platform access: (i) official speeches and press releases; (ii) parliamentary transcripts; (iii) major broadcaster transcripts; (iv) widely

archived newspaper articles; and (v) public statements from regional organizations. Platform data are treated as an optional amplification layer, not as the backbone.

Operationally, analysts can code BM motifs in this low-tech corpus and run the same lead-lag and event-study designs against UCDP/ACLED outcomes. If the narrative ignition claim is real, it should remain detectable in official and mainstream channels because claim shocks that matter politically tend to surface there. A stronger version of the argument is therefore: platform data may sharpen measurement of coordination, but the core ignition signal should not disappear when platforms are removed.

7.4 Robustness checks and alternative explanations

Key confounds include seasonal violence patterns, commodity price shocks, election cycles, refugee flows, and changes in reporting intensity. Robustness requires: placebo shocks, alternative windows, controls for national media cycles, and sensitivity analyses using both UCDP and ACLED. Where platform data are used, migration and policy changes can confound trends; therefore platform analyses are treated as amplification tests rather than sole causal proof.

7.5 Minimal reproducible pipeline

Step 1 (Corpus build): define border regions and claim-shock lexicons (place names + entitlement verbs such as ‘belongs’, ‘restore’, ‘take back’). Collect units from official transcripts, major broadcasters, and platform APIs or public pages where permitted. Step 2 (Sampling): stratify by region and month; preregister random samples. Step 3 (Coding): double-code BM and IAS/DWG motifs; compute reliability; adjudicate. Step 4 (Linkage): join coded units to conflict-event windows (e.g., 1–6 weeks post shock) at district level. Step 5 (Models): estimate time-series shifts and event-study effects with institutional moderators and robustness checks. Step 6 (Publication): release codebooks, sampling frame, and aggregated outputs sufficient for replication.

7.6 Validation and replication plan

To make the work hard to dismiss, the analysis should be replicable by hostile reviewers. We recommend: preregistration (hypotheses, windows, outcomes), public release of codebooks and sampling frames, and multi-team replication with independent coders. Validation has three layers: (1) measurement validity (inter-coder reliability and stability under alternative unit definitions); (2) predictive validity (motif spikes predict incident spikes more than baseline discourse); and (3) intervention validity (adding friction or source-spine context reduces coordination bursts and myth

load). The strongest evidence is intervention: if circuit breakers measurably reduce conversion rates, then the model has practical truth even if ideological debates continue.

8. Case Vignettes: How the Mechanism Appears in Practice

We include disciplined vignettes not as definitive histories of each region, but as demonstrations of the mechanism and of measurement opportunities. Each vignette follows the same template: (i) the claim script; (ii) the institutional gap; (iii) the amplification pathway; (iv) the conversion pathway; (v) what data would confirm or falsify the predicted sequence. The goal is to show how the model guides data collection, not to settle each dispute inside this manuscript.

8.1 Great Lakes: claim shocks, memory competition, and proxy amplification

Borderlands in the Great Lakes region illustrate how territorial narratives can be converted into mobilisation. Claim scripts often pair BM1 (ancestral entitlement) with BM5 (security pretext expansion) and BM3 (othering). An important risk factor is memory competition: multiple competing narratives of past polities, migration, and administrative categories are circulated as certainty, while ordinary citizens lack access to primary sources or method literacy. This makes myth load cheap and correction expensive. Amplification pathways include elite speeches, radio ecosystems, diaspora channels, and platform swarm dynamics. Conversion pathways appear as intimidation campaigns, militia recruitment, and ‘defensive’ incursions framed as restoring order.

Test design: define a set of claim-shock events (public speeches, published maps, parliamentary debates) and build a time-series of BM motif prevalence in local media and diaspora channels. Link to conflict events in border districts using UCDP-GED and ACLED. Prediction: BM motif spikes precede measurable uplifts in incidents, after controlling for seasonal patterns and national news cycles. Disconfirmation: no lead-lag relationship after controls.

8.2 Sahel: administrative collapse, downgrade vocabulary, and grievance markets

In Sahelian contexts, multiple armed actors operate in environments of low state reach, high mobility, and intense competition over routes and rents. Here border mythogenesis can merge with grievance markets: administrative neglect and security abuse are

reframed through BM2 (restoration) and BM5 (security expansion). IAS2 vocabulary ('tribalism') can operate as an outsider narrative that naturalizes violence, reducing pressure for precise institutional diagnosis and enabling external interventions to be framed as inevitable. One prediction of the model is that where grievance is framed primarily as identity war, policy responses will ignore administrative repair and therefore increase chronic instability.

Test design: compare border districts with stronger cross-border civic compacts (trade mediation, joint market governance, shared language festivals) to matched districts without such compacts. Prediction: compacts reduce the conversion rate of narrative spikes into incident spikes. Disconfirmation: no difference after matching and controls.

8.3 Horn and Red Sea corridors: umbrella identities, fragmentation scripts, and diaspora wedges

In the Horn and Red Sea corridor environments, geopolitics, ports, and transit routes increase the rent value of territorial narratives. Here identity asymmetry becomes visible: umbrella identities are mobilized for powerful blocs, while local identities are fragmented and sometimes degraded. Diaspora wedge governance can be central because diaspora networks provide funding, media influence, and narrative legitimacy. Weaponized ethnogenesis motifs (DWG3) can be used to justify distancing from continental solidarity or to legitimate coercion as identity defense.

Test design: code IAS/DWG motifs in diaspora media during escalation windows and test for coordination signatures (text reuse, synchronized posting bursts) relative to baseline identity talk. Prediction: wedge motifs spike and show stronger coordination during claim shocks than neutral identity discourse. Disconfirmation: no measurable coordination difference.

8.4 Kongo cross-border compacts as a prevention test case

The Kongo historical and cultural space, distributed across modern state borders, is a useful prevention case because it naturally supports cross-border identity without requiring border revision. A Kongo-centered compact could focus on language, shared archival projects, shared festival circuits, and joint youth curriculum modules that teach method: how to read primary documents, how to treat oral history responsibly, and how to recognize myth load. The mechanism hypothesis is straightforward: when people share validated memory infrastructure, border mythogenesis loses its cheapest fuel. The same claim slogan becomes harder to sell because communities can check sources and because cross-border interpersonal trust makes othering less profitable.

Test design: pilot a compact in matched border communities and measure changes in myth load, humiliation signaling, and incident conversion rates relative to control communities. Even if the compact is culturally specific, the mechanism is general: shared epistemic infrastructure reduces mobilisation efficiency.

8.5 Worked empirical module (template): Great Lakes claim-shock pilot

To address empirical thinness, we specify a ‘worked module’ that can be executed with public data and modest resources. This manuscript provides the full template; the next version should attach the executed outputs (coded corpus statistics, model coefficients, and robustness checks). The Great Lakes region is selected here only because claim shocks and contested memory are visible and because conflict event data coverage is comparatively strong; it is not used to single-story the region.

Module steps (preregisterable): (1) Define a claim-shock register for 24 months (e.g., 2019–2020 or 2021–2022): public speeches, parliamentary debates, treaty disputes, widely reported map publications, or official ‘restoration/security’ announcements. (2) Build a minimum viable low-tech corpus for each shock: official transcripts + two national broadcasters + two regional newspapers per country + AU/REC statements (where applicable). (3) Draw a stratified random sample of units in a –6 to +6 week window around each shock. (4) Double-code BM motifs and compute reliability. (5) Link coded weeks to district-level UCDP/ACLED incidents within the same window. (6) Estimate an event-study: incident count and fatality proxies as outcomes; BMI as treatment intensity; ETP as moderator; controls for seasonality, election windows, and commodity shocks. (7) Robustness: placebo shocks, alternative windows, and a matched non-exposed border-district control set.

Minimum outputs to attach in the next version: (a) Table P1: Corpus size, sampling frame, coder reliability (κ). (b) Figure P1: BMI time series with claim-shock markers. (c) Table P2: Event-study coefficients (lead/lag) with clustered standard errors. (d) Table P3: Moderator interaction (BMI \times ETP) showing buffering (or null). (e) Appendix P: negative exemplars and adjudication notes. If these outputs fail to show a lead-lag relationship or moderation, the model should be revised or narrowed. This is the point of the worked module: it forces the theory to earn its claims.

9. Policy and Design Recommendations: Circuit Breakers

Our recommendations target conversion rate: reducing how often a narrative spike turns into coercion or violence. Because governments may be captured or incentivized, we prioritize non-governmental and community-anchored mechanisms. Each recommendation is phrased as a circuit breaker: it interrupts the cycle at a specific stage.

9.1 Heritage institutions as epistemic firewalls

Museums, archives, and libraries can be treated as security infrastructure. Their role is to reduce myth-load and raise the cost of fabrication. We recommend ‘source spine’ exhibits: a curated, multilingual backbone of primary documents, maps, and oral-history methodology that can be cited in public disputes. Heritage institutions can publish short ‘myth cards’ that explain why a viral territorial claim is incomplete or misleading and what evidence would be required to sustain it. Crucially, the tone should be civic and calm. The objective is not to shame citizens. The objective is to deprive escalation entrepreneurs of cheap certainty.

9.2 Cross-border civic compacts as non-state diplomacy

Cross-border cultural and economic compacts are the most scalable non-governmental circuit breaker. They reduce conversion to violence by building interpersonal and institutional trust that survives elite manipulation. Examples include: twin-school programs across borders, trader guild mediation, joint language exchanges, shared youth projects, and joint memorialization days. The design principle is non-partisanship and resilience to regime change. A compact is successful when local people treat cross-border relationships as normal and when outsiders find it costly to portray neighbors as invaders.

9.3 Vocabulary reform: retire the ‘tribalism’ default

Education and journalism guidelines should replace ‘tribe/tribalism’ defaults with precise descriptors: ethnolinguistic community, clan, polity, party network, militia coalition, or regional bloc, depending on the case. This is not semantic policing. It is risk reduction. Precision reduces othering, blocks cognitive downgrades, and limits the moral permission that ‘tribalism’ grants to outsiders seeking to portray African conflict as natural and therefore exploitable.

9.4 Platform and media design: anti-swarm and context injection

Where platforms operate, the goal is not censorship. It is circuit breaking. Border mythogenesis escalates through swarm mechanics: burst replies, quote-share pile-ons, meme replication, and humiliation signaling. Design interventions include burst throttles during claim shocks, friction for quote-sharing inflammatory content, contextual panels linking to source spines, and coordinated-behavior detection that prioritizes slowing reach rather than debating ideology. For broadcasters, the analogue is context-first framing: treat maps and entitlement claims as high-risk content requiring method explanation, not as entertainment segments.

9.5 Early warning: a lightweight Border Risk Observatory

We propose a lightweight, replicable observatory model that civil society networks can run: weekly monitoring of BM and IAS/DWG motif prevalence in a defined corpus; a public dashboard of spikes; and a rapid response playbook (heritage myth cards, mediator deployment, local radio explainers). The aim is not surveillance. The aim is early warning and rapid de-escalation before myth spikes become coercion spikes. The observatory can also produce annual ‘risk surface maps’ that identify which border zones have the highest stacked conditions (epistemic thinness + grievance density + rent density + patron competition + high-gain distribution).

9.6 Implementation templates (one-page tools)

To make adoption realistic, we recommend shipping the interventions as simple templates: (1) Source-Spine Template: a checklist for building a multilingual, primary-source backbone (maps, treaties, oral-history methods, archival links). (2) Myth-Card Template: a one-page format with claim, what evidence would support it, what evidence contradicts it, and what uncertainties remain. (3) Compact Charter Template: principles for cross-border civic programs (non-partisanship, youth focus, shared holidays, conflict-mediation procedures). (4) Claim-Shock Response Template: a 72-hour protocol for institutions to publish context and prevent swarm escalation. Templates lower the barrier to action and reduce dependence on state capacity.

9.7 Curriculum sovereignty as risk reduction

If border mythogenesis is an ignition mechanism, then curriculum sovereignty is a containment measure. The goal is not propaganda reversal. The goal is epistemic thickness: method literacy, local source familiarity, and shared competence in evaluating territorial claims.

- • Border-history minimum standard: a continent-wide baseline module that teaches (i) how borders were negotiated and enforced, (ii) how to read maps and

treaties, and (iii) what uncertainty means in historical method. This module is civic, not partisan.

- • Local author quota and distribution support: policy and philanthropic interventions that guarantee local historians and educators access to accreditation, printing, and distribution channels so local scholarship becomes materially present in classrooms.
- • Open ‘source spine’ curriculum inserts: short, printable primary-source packets (maps, decrees, oral-history method notes) published in multiple languages to reduce myth load and lower the cost of checking claims.
- • Reading as local dignity: redesign reading programs to include local histories, local biographies, and regional cultures so reading is not experienced as a foreign activity. This raises uptake and protects against myth entrepreneurs who exploit low reading engagement.
- • Institutional pluralism: engage religious and civic institutions as partners only under explicit ‘inquiry-protecting’ charters (no intimidation of researchers, no suppression of archives). Reward institutions that increase method literacy and local knowledge legitimacy.

These interventions are designed as circuit breakers that operate even when formal state capacity is limited. They reduce myth load upstream and therefore lower the likelihood that future claim shocks can be converted into coercion through cheap certainty.

9.8 Self-determination procedures as circuit breakers (referendums, autonomy, compacts)

If colonial borders function as risk surfaces, prevention requires non-violent release valves that can compete with coercive ‘restoration’ scripts. A disciplined self-determination pathway, including referendums under strict safeguards, can function as a circuit breaker: it converts zero-sum entitlement contests into legitimate choice mechanisms and reduces the incentive to launder domination through myth. This is not a call for romantic border erasure. It is a risk-engineering proposal: reduce ambiguity, increase legitimacy, and lower the conversion rate from narrative spikes to coercion.

This recommendation is procedural rather than ideological. The paper does not presume that borders must change. It argues that where border ambiguity has become a chronic ignition risk, legitimate, rights-locking procedures can reduce the probability that coercion becomes the default dispute-resolution tool.

To avoid the well-known failure modes of captured or intimidation-driven votes, any referendum-style mechanism should be treated as a protocol with prerequisites and locks. Minimum safeguards include:

- • Non-violence precondition: no vote under active militia intimidation or mass displacement; establish monitored demobilization windows.
- • Independent administration and audit: transparent voter rolls, third-party auditing, and published verification procedures.
- • Epistemic precondition ('source spine'): distribute short primary-source packets (maps, treaties, timelines, uncertainty notes) before the vote to reduce myth load and raise method literacy.
- • Minority rights lock: constitutional protections and enforceable guarantees regardless of outcome; prohibit 'winner-takes-all' exclusion.
- • Multi-option ballots: include autonomy, federation/confederation, special cross-border governance, and resource-sharing compacts rather than a single binary.
- • Cooling-off and deliberation: citizen assemblies and structured public debates to reduce manipulation and panic mobilization.
- • Regional legal pathway: AU/REC arbitration and implementation oversight to prevent unilateral coercion during the transition period.

These mechanisms pair naturally with Pan-African 'risk engineering' interventions in the rest of this section: curriculum sovereignty, archives, and cross-border civic compacts. In the unified framework used here, the function is the same as in the Entitlement Cascade: block the escalation steps by increasing constraint, increasing truth infrastructure, and expanding legitimate non-violent pathways for resolving jurisdictional tension.

10. Discussion

10.1 Main contribution

This paper advances a falsifiable model that links colonial border structure to conflict escalation via narrative mechanisms. The novelty is not the claim that borders matter, nor that propaganda exists. The novelty is an operational bridge: border mythogenesis as a measurable ignition process, tied to institutional moderators and downstream

signatures. We also formalize identity asymmetry and diasporic wedge governance as a measurable amplifier that can degrade solidarity and raise susceptibility to proxy manipulation.

10.2 Implications for Pan-African strategy

If Pan-Africanism is treated as risk engineering, then the most important ‘infrastructure’ is not only roads and trade treaties. It is epistemic sovereignty: the capacity to teach, archive, and mediate African history at scale, and to build cross-border civic compacts that make coercive mobilisation expensive and socially illegitimate. This reframes the border problem from ‘should we redraw lines’ to ‘how do we remove the ignition mechanism and reduce conversion rates.’

10.3 Diaspora: from wedge to bridge

The diaspora can be a bridge or a wedge. The wedge pattern is not inevitable; it is produced by incentives, status competition, and asymmetry in belonging. A bridge strategy requires two moves: (1) normalize continental–diaspora continuity as a legitimate identity option, rather than as a threat; and (2) expose identity asymmetry as a governance technique. In practice, bridge programs mirror the compact logic: shared curriculum modules, shared archival projects, and joint media standards that reward method over humiliation. An empirical prediction follows: where diaspora–continent bridges are strong, wedge motifs (DWG1–DWG3) should have weaker coordination and lower conversion into policy hostility.

10.4 Ethics and anti-misuse guardrails

Because this work studies mobilisation mechanisms, it must include anti-misuse guardrails. We do not provide operational guidance for incitement. We publish codebooks and designs oriented toward detection, prevention, and de-escalation. We avoid naming non-public individuals and avoid reproducing inciting content. Any observatory should maintain ethical review processes, protect targets of harassment, and publish only aggregated outputs when needed.

10.4.1 Adjudication rules for edge cases (anti-weaponization)

Motif systems can be misused to delegitimize dissent. To reduce this risk, we recommend adjudication rules that preserve good-faith critique and protect victim coping speech. First, code function, not merely vocabulary: a unit is positive only when it performs entitlement, othering, humiliation, security-expansion laundering, or myth-load. Second, treat power gradient as a gating variable for BM4 (humiliation).

Mockery ‘punching down’ at harmed groups is coded as high-risk. Satire ‘punching up’ at power or victim-group coping humor is not coded as BM4 by default.

Third, require corroboration for coordination claims: do not infer ‘organized swarms’ from a single viral spike. Use at least two independent indicators (text reuse similarity + burst timing; or shared link clusters + synchronized posting). Fourth, institute a ‘benefit-of-ambiguity’ rule: when coders disagree whether a unit is victim humor versus perpetrator mockery, code it as ambiguous and exclude it from high-risk tallies unless adjudicated by a mixed panel (historian + clinician + community reviewer). Finally, publish negative exemplars and false positives in the codebook so reviewers can see what is explicitly protected as legitimate dissent.

10.4.2 Mapping and forecasting: a practical early-warning lens

For applied prevention, the value of BM and CER is mapping and forecasting rather than retrospective moral debate. A high-fit jurisdictional theater typically shows (i) claim shocks that surface in official and mainstream channels, (ii) map warfare and selective history, and (iii) mobilisation artifacts (diaspora fundraising calls, ‘restoration’ slogans).

Forecast rule (probabilistic): when a credible weakness signal emerges in a contested theater, expect an increase in BM/CER density within weeks, followed by higher probability of coercive probing (proxy incidents, corridor capture attempts) within months. This pattern is consistent with entitlement-engineering under stress. The same lens applies outside explicit border disputes, for example when settler-privilege defense narratives harden under reform pressure, or when national credit-seizure myths are used to delegitimize repair claims.

Disconfirmation remains central: if weakness signals do not produce any detectable BM/CER spike in low-tech corpora, or if coercion rises with no prior narrative spike, then narrative ignition is not the dominant lever in that episode and investigators should prioritize alternative mechanisms.

10.5 Limitations

Conflict has multiple causes; narratives are one causal lane among others. Data quality varies across regions, and reporting intensity can bias trends. Some territorial claims contain partial truth. This is why coding focuses on function and downstream signatures rather than abstract debates about history. Finally, institutional moderators are difficult to measure. We recommend triangulation: multiple proxies, multiple datasets, and explicit sensitivity analyses.

10.5.1 Moderator measurement limits (ETP) and cross-region comparability

ETP is measured through proxies that vary by country, archive maturity, and transparency. This introduces comparability risk. To mitigate it, we require tier reporting (Section 7.2.1), publish the full proxy recipe, and treat ETP uncertainty as a first-class object via sensitivity analyses and missing-data protocols. A key falsification is practical: if results depend on a small subset of high-data countries or collapse under alternative ETP constructions, claims about ETP moderation must be narrowed.

10.5.2 Portability risk and focus discipline

CER is used here as an operational motif layer to capture portable entitlement grammar within the unified Entitlement Cascade / ISM/PDI line. However, extending CER beyond border-jurisdiction contexts (for example, into privilege-defense or secession movements) can dilute the paper if treated as the same empirical object. Accordingly, we treat non-border portability as a hypothesis class with separate validation modules: the border-jurisdiction module is primary in this manuscript; any non-border module should be tested with its own preregistered corpus, outcomes, and falsifiers.

10.5.3 Normative undertones and the vocabulary problem

Some recommendations (for example, reducing the use of ‘tribalism’) carry decolonial commitments and may attract ideological pushback. We therefore specify the recommendation in measurement terms: the claim is that certain vocabularies function as othering technologies that increase myth-load and lower epistemic thickness by treating historically constructed polities as ahistorical ‘tribes’. This is testable. A neutral alternative is to frame the intervention as ‘terminology precision’: replacing vague, pejorative categories with historically grounded identifiers (polity, ethnolinguistic group, lineage federation, kingdom, confederacy) and explicitly documenting the operational definitions used.

If reviewers reject vocabulary reforms on ideological grounds, the model remains intact: the core requirement is that coders treat vocabulary as a measurable exposure and evaluate whether it predicts downstream outcomes (mobilization intensity, othering, incident probability). In other words, the paper does not require ideological agreement; it requires transparent measurement and falsifiable links.

10.5.4 External validity beyond Africa

This manuscript is scoped to African colonial borders (1884–2023) because the historical production of border ambiguity, epistemic capture, and proxy conflict dynamics is unusually systematic in that setting. Analog partitions elsewhere (for example, the Balkans, South Asia, the Levant, or post-imperial Eurasian borders) are acknowledged as potential out-of-sample tests but are not deeply analyzed here. We treat external validity as a replication agenda: the same codebooks and low-tech corpus

protocol can be applied to a clearly specified non-African partition case to test whether BM/CER spikes precede escalation under weakness signals. Failure to replicate would imply the mechanism is context-bounded and should be stated as such.

11. Conclusion

Colonial borders are not merely lines; they are unresolved governance questions frozen into administrative geometry. Without an African epistemic and institutional project, those questions remain a durable risk surface. Border mythogenesis supplies the ignition. Proxy incentives supply the fuel. A preventive strategy is therefore not only diplomatic. It is cultural, educational, archival, and infrastructural.

Forecast (preregisterable): as external competition for African resources and corridors intensifies, territorial claim narratives will increasingly serve as low-cost triggers for proxy escalation. We expect more claim shocks, higher myth-load, and more coordination signatures where institutional gaps persist. The prevention answer is not nostalgia for border revision, but building epistemic immunity and cross-border civic bonds that interrupt the cycle.

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Appendix A. Preregistration Checklist

- Define border regions and time windows; define claim-shock events ex ante.
- Publish corpus inclusion rules and keyword/lexicon sets.
- Lock BM and IAS/DWG codebooks; define unit boundaries and adjudication rules.

- Specify primary outcomes (motif prevalence; conversion rate; coordination indicators) and disconfirmations.
- Predefine matching and control variables for difference-in-differences designs.
- Publish sampling frame, reliability targets (e.g., κ threshold), and analysis scripts.

Appendix B. Adversarial Review Protocol summary

Roles and non-negotiables (what must be true for publication):

- Methodologist: add disconfirmations; separate mechanism from moral stance; avoid unfalsifiable forecasts.
- Historian: keep vignettes mechanism-focused; avoid single-story histories; do not turn disputes into propaganda.
- Platform analyst: treat platform effects as amplifiers; include migration/policy confounds; avoid one-platform overfocus.
- Clinician: keep ‘pathology’ language at system level; avoid diagnosing individuals; add anti-misuse guardrails.
- Hostile reviewer: pre-empt predictable attacks (‘you want redraw wars’, ‘you deny agency’, ‘you can’t quantify narratives’) with precise definitions and measurable claims.

Appendix C. ‘Hostile Reviewer’ Attack Surface and Replies

Attack: ‘You’re just arguing for redrawing borders.’

Reply: No. We model inherited borders as a risk surface and focus on lowering escalation conversion rates through epistemic and civic circuit breakers.

Attack: ‘This denies African agency.’

Reply: No. The model explicitly includes domestic narrative entrepreneurs and institutional choices; ‘proxy’ is a testable amplification pathway, not a blanket excuse.

Attack: ‘You can’t quantify narratives.’

Reply: We preregister motif codebooks, double-code samples, report reliability, and link to geocoded event datasets with disconfirmations.

Attack: ‘This is ideology, not science.’

Reply: We disclose stance but present falsifiable predictions, alternative explanations, robustness checks, and conditions under which the model would be rejected.

Attack: ‘The word tribe is harmless.’

Reply: We treat vocabulary as measurable: IAS2 can be coded, and we test whether exposure predicts othering and escalation acceptance. If not, the claim fails.

Appendix D. Extended Literature Notes

Border problems are often framed as purely cartographic, but the deeper literature highlights borders as administrative technologies: who counts as citizen, who can move, who can trade, who can hold land, and who receives state protection. This is why simple ‘redraw or keep’ arguments miss the key variable: the civic and epistemic infrastructure that tells people who they are in relation to the border, and what procedure exists for disputes. Borderlands scholarship emphasizes that communities frequently build pragmatic cross-border routines that reduce friction; these routines can be disrupted by capital-city politics or external patron agendas. Put differently: borderlands often contain endogenous peace mechanisms (trade mediation, intermarriage norms, shared ritual calendars). A prevention model should protect and scale those mechanisms instead of treating border communities as passive victims of state geometry.

The political-economy ‘artificial states’ literature is often used in a deterministic way (‘Africa is doomed because borders are artificial’). The more careful reading is conditional: certain border structures correlate with higher conflict risk, but only in interaction with state reach, economic opportunity, and political inclusion. Our contribution is to formalize one interactive mechanism: narrative ignition. Artificiality creates ambiguity; ambiguity creates a market for mobilizable myths; myths become lethal when institutions cannot inject method and when coercive entrepreneurs have material payoff. Therefore, even if borders remain fixed, measurable risk can be reduced by increasing epistemic thickness (archives, education, trusted mediation) and decreasing payoff to coercion (cross-border compacts, sanctions, stigma).

Legal scholarship on *uti possidetis* and boundary intangibility shows that the stability bargain is not morally neutral: it protects state survival but can also freeze injustices and compress self-determination claims into long-duration grievances. A prevention approach does not need to deny this tension. It needs to supply ‘pressure release valves’ that reduce the need for violent revision: autonomy arrangements, cross-border cultural rights, joint economic zones, and credible dispute procedures. These are not perfect substitutes for self-determination; they are de-escalation tools in a world where perfect solutions are politically infeasible.

Appendix E. Operational Metrics

Suggested composite indicators:

- Border Mythogenesis Index (BMI): weighted density of BM1–BM6 motifs in a corpus for a border region-week.
- Identity Asymmetry Index (IAI): ratio of umbrella identity references (IAS1) to fragmentation/downgrade references (IAS2) in the same corpus.
- Wedge Coordination Score (WCS): coordination signatures for DWG1–DWG3 (text reuse similarity, synchronized posting bursts, shared link clusters) relative to baseline.
- Conversion Rate (CR): change in conflict incidents (UCDP/ACLED) per unit increase in BMI within a predefined window (e.g., 1–6 weeks) controlling for confounds.
- Epistemic Thickness Proxy (ETP): composite of archival access (digitization, library density), civic history instruction quality, and trust-in-local-institutions proxies.

These indicators can be estimated with modest resources: manual coding + lightweight NLP + public conflict data. The purpose is not perfect measurement; it is consistent measurement suitable for replication and early warning.

ETP can be decomposed into an ‘educational supply-chain’ subscore (curriculum coverage, textbook provenance, local author share, language mismatch, library access, and procurement dependence) to directly test the capture pathway proposed in Section 4.6.

Disconfirmations:

(D1) If BMI does not lead CR (no lead-lag relationship after controls), the ignition claim is weakened.

(D2) If WCS does not increase during claim shocks, the coordination hypothesis is weakened.

(D3) If ETP does not moderate CR (no buffering effect), the epistemic infrastructure hypothesis is weakened.

(D4) If platform friction interventions do not reduce WCS or CR during pilots, the circuit-breaker claim is weakened.

Publishing disconfirmations is essential because it prevents the work from becoming ideology disguised as measurement.

Appendix F. Implementation Examples (ready-to-ship artifacts)

1) Myth Card (one page)

Title: ‘Claim: Province X has always belonged to People Y’

- What the claim asserts (plain language)
- What evidence would support it (primary sources required)
- What evidence contradicts it (sources + why)
- What remains uncertain (honest ambiguity)
- De-escalation note: why uncertainty does not justify coercion

Purpose: remove the emotional advantage of certainty by making method public and accessible.

2) Source Spine (curated backbone)

- Five to ten primary documents (treaties, administrative decrees, maps) with translations
- Oral history method notes (how to treat testimony responsibly)
- Timeline with uncertainty markers (where sources disagree)
- Glossary banning downgrade vocabulary by default (replace 'tribe' with precise terms)

Purpose: a public 'epistemic firewall' that lowers myth load and makes fabrication expensive.

3) Claim-Shock 72-Hour Protocol

Hour 0–6: identify claim shock; publish 'hold' message; activate heritage partners and mediators.

Hour 6–24: release Myth Card draft; coordinate local radio explainers; monitor swarm indicators.

Hour 24–72: convene cross-border compact leaders; publish joint statement emphasizing procedures and human protection.

Purpose: slow the conversion from narrative spike to coercion spike by injecting method and legitimate alternatives quickly.

4) Cross-Border Compact Charter (minimum viable)

- Non-partisanship and non-militarization clause
- Youth and education priority clause
- Joint market governance and mediation clause
- Shared memorialization and cultural calendar clause
- Rapid response clause for incitement and harassment

Purpose: create durable interpersonal and institutional ties that make othering and invasion narratives socially costly.