Chapter 3

Regionalism, regional integration and regionalisation in West Africa

Chapter 3 reviews the implications of the enlargement of ideas of regionalism since the 1990s and calls for more systematic monitoring of the diversity of region-building institutions and cross-border interactions in West Africa. It highlights that specific attention needs to be paid to the historical development of West Africa's regional institutions and their distinctive architectures and cultures. The dynamics of cross-border interactions that provide diverse contributions to integration are then analysed, along with the implications of "defragmentation" policies and processes that should enhance the regional and global integration of African economies. Against this backdrop, the conclusion draws attention to the importance of deepening understanding of the policy-networks that operate both within regional institutions and across borders.

Key Messages

- Regional integration in West Africa mirrors the diversity of interactions between formalised institutions (regionalism) and economic and social processes (regionalisation).
- The mitigated achievements of West Africa's regional groupings are often in stark contrast with the dynamism of cross-border interactions, which, paradoxically, often thrive due to the preservation of frontiers.
- The multiplicity of regional groupings has historically been as much of an asset as a hindrance and thus region-building efforts must take stock of the diversity of genealogies, institutional cultures and network-led regionalisation processes.

RESURGENCE OF REGIONALISM AS A GLOBAL PHENOMENON

The resurgence of regionalism in the late 1980s followed two decades of disillusion towards European construction and integration theory as a whole (Duffy and Feld, 1980; Haas, 1975). The reassessment of regionalism was originally prompted by the crystallisation of world trade and investment flows around North America, Europe and Northeast Asia.

In North America, the Regional Trade Agreement (RTA) signed with Israel in 1985, cleared the path for negotiations that resulted in the Canada-United States Agreement (CUSA) and, following its enlargement to Mexico, the conclusion of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1992 (Payne, 1996: 104–107). The agreement established a free trade area that straddled across the north-south divide and ambitioned to be the nucleus of a Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA).

In Europe, it was the Single European Act that, in 1986, set the basis for the revival of European construction. By the time the Single European Market (SEM) programme was completed in 1992, the dissolution of the communist bloc in East and Central Europe conferred a new geopolitical dimension to the process. Debates on federalism and the constitutionalisation of integration (Weiler, 1998) went along with the formalisation of the Copenhagen criteria (transition towards democracy and a market economy) that were required for aspiring new members. In Asia, regionalisation was initially driven by the fear that the European Union (EU), already a powerful trade bloc, might turn into a "fortress". In 1992, the Association of South Eastern Nations (ASEAN) adopted its own programme for a free trade area. Across the world, the number of RTAs were expanding at a rapid pace (World Bank, 2005: 28–29), along with the endorsement of trade liberalisation as a universal norm (Mansfield and Milner, 1999: 589–627).

In Africa, as in Latin America and the Asia Pacific, this momentum prompted fresh interest in the design and patterns of region-building that had been previously ignored or were treated as irrelevant since they did not prioritise state-led integration through transfers of sovereignty. Policy makers and scholars alike became progressively aware that the "world of regions" (Katzenstein, 2005) was entangled with "a world of regionalisms" (Bach, 2016), shaped by distinctive policy goals, specific institutional cultures and the engagement of a plethora of non-state players.

SHIFTING DEFINITIONS OF REGION-BUILDING

Andrew Axline (1977: 83) famously complained in the late 1970s that even though regionalism kept expanding in developing countries, research in the field was dominated by theoretical language drawn from the European experience. The substitution of the distinction between regionalism/regionalisation to the previous focus on integration/co-operation has been path-breaking in this respect. It is today generally established that regionalism refers to state-led projects and organisations, while regionalisation focuses on processes that are not necessarily driven by state actors. This analytical distinction has only marginally evolved since it was drawn by Bjorn Hettne (1994: 1–11) in his introduction to the United Nations University's World Institute for Development Economics Research (UNU/WIDER) "new regionalism" project.

A world of regionalisms: The diversity of goals and processes

The revival of regionalism in the 1990s drew inspiration from the achievements of the EU, to which was added the achievements of such new players as the Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation (APEC) Forum and ASEAN. Established in 1989, APEC developed its own brand of trade liberalisation, known as "open regionalism". This involved the extension of Most Favoured Nation (MFN) treatment to both members and non-members of APEC (Ravenhill, 2001: 2). By the early 1990s, APEC included key world economies and was celebrated as one of the world's most successful regional economic groupings and a model for Latin America (ECLAC, 1994: 11). The ASEAN experience simultaneously challenged the postulate that regionalism and region-building equate with loss of sovereignty, whether conceded voluntarily or through pressure, and pointed instead to a set of norms and practices that combined informality with non-intervention in the internal affairs of member states (Acharya, 2001). Sovereignty-enhancement and the consolidation of state power were the mortar of the so-called "ASEAN Way", contrasting with the EU's institutional culture of sovereignty pooling (Higgot, 1998: 52–53). The ASEAN path to region-building also challenged the widespread assumption that regional groupings could only prosper in "a quintessential liberal-democratic milieu featuring significant economic interdependence and political pluralism" (Acharya, 2001: 31; Aris, 2009: 452–3).

The region as a socially constructed reality

Regionalism, as commonly understood, refers to the implementation of a program and the definition of a strategy. It is often associated with institution-building and the conclusion of formal agreements. Regionalism also draws attention to socially constructed processes, mental maps and identities (Adler, 1997), and is a departure from past definitions of region that are based upon the interplay between territorial proximity, interdependencies and geography.

Regionalisation is a more encompassing notion than regionalism since it takes into account processes and configurations in which states are frequently not the key players. Regionalisation is evocative of the contrast between *de jure* (institutionally driven) and *de facto* processes, a distinction originally associated with the work of Charles Oman (1996) and the hybrid processes at play in Northeast Asia during the 1990s. There the dynamism of diasporas, cross-border trade networks, individual entrepreneurs, companies and non-governmental organisations managed to circumvent institutional and bureaucratic constraints through the establishment of network-led and open-ended regionalisation processes (Mittelman, 1999; Breslin and Hook, 2002). Andrew Hurrell (1995b: 38) already observed at the time that, with the loosening of the classic emphasis on geographic and territorial criteria, the concept of "region" was in disarray (Box 3.1).

Within multilateral institutions, the agreements that fall under the category of RTAs, blur the traditional definitions of regions. RTAs are defined as arrangements that are apposite to multilateral agreements. Accordingly, RTAs include free trade or customs arrangements that range from bilateralism to quasi multilateralism, referred to as "multicountry" and "plurilateral" by the World Trade Organisation (WTO) (Sindzingre, 2014: 4; World Bank, 2005: 28). Similarly, current plans for the formation of "mega-regional" RTAs bond individual countries from across the world that may not necessarily share geographical borders. Negotiations of the US-led Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and the Free Trade Area of the Asia-Pacific (FTAAP) grew out of the quest for a more familiar structure, at a time when the prospects of achieving global multilateralism had stalled. Such quasi-multilateral arrangements have also become mired in geopolitical tensions due to the nature of the players involved, and their ambition to become global norms makers (Draper and Ismail, 2014; Capling and Ravenhill, 2013: 553–575).

The regional focus of these agreements is misleading, however. In reality, the agreements share little more in common than the inclusion of countries that account for a major share of world trade and foreign direct investment (FDI), or which serve as hubs in so-called global value chains (GVCs) (Meléndez-Ortiz, 2014: 13) that are less about region-building than about the defragmentation of markets (Bach, 2016). Under the direction of multinational firms, the emergence of GVCs aspires to restructure and outsource activities including design, production, marketing and distribution. The outcome is the negotiation of a new generation of trade agreements, designed to promote "deep" integration through packages that go well beyond WTO obligations so as to cover services, competition policy, investment, technical barriers, regulatory compatibility and intellectual property protection. Not surprisingly, the classic definition of a region as "a limited number of states linked together by a geographical relationship and by a degree of mutual interdependence" (Nye, 1966: vii) is severely challenged by the association of regionalism to quasi-multilateral agreements.

The diversification of what regionalism stands for, from an institutional, ideational or material standpoint, was highlighted by the rise of the "new" regionalism literature in the 1990s and early 2000s. A diversity of scholarly agendas was regrouped under the new regionalism umbrella, stimulating the study of regionalism from a comparative standpoint. The shift away from a more restrictive notion of comparative regional integration challenged the prevailing readings of European integration on regionalism (and what it should stand for) in relation to the rest of the world (Söderbaum, 2005: 231; Acharya, 2012: 12). The new regionalism literature also called for greater attention to be paid to parallel economies, social networks and non-state agencies.

At the same time, the introduction of an "old" versus "new" regionalism dichotomy tended to side-track institutions and institutional cultures frequently labelled as outdated and dysfunctional. This was particularly the case whenever references were made to the EU. As the EU was losing its importance as the global prototype for region-building, the new regionalism literature was often prone to draw normative implications that were not empirically proven. The fresh inspiration that the revised treaties of most of the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) drew from the EU (Bach, 2016) was overlooked; the idea of an old versus new regionalism dichotomy also gained currency at the expense of historical contextualisation (Lorenz-Carl and

Box 3.1

Scales and nature of regional integration

The term “regional” deserves some clarification due to its distinctive usage by different disciplines.

“Regional” can refer to supranational organisations at the continental or subcontinental scale. Subcontinental regions constitute the privileged scale of regional blocs such as the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), or the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

The term “regional” is also used to refer to administrative subdivisions between states and local authorities, or to functional areas in which social and economic interactions are particularly developed, possibly across borders. From Senegal to Chad for example, 19 such potential cross-border regions have recently been identified (OECD/SWAC, 2014) in which local traders attempt to take advantage of variations in price differentials, exchange rates between currencies, taxes between countries, and bans of imports and exports.

“Regional” can also be used to describe a social and historical construct characterised by a territorial and symbolic shape, a number of institutions, and an established identity anchored in social practices. The Dogon country in Mali is a good example of a region that encompasses a rather homogeneous ethnic group with a long history of resistance against enslaving states. Such regions approximate micro-regions, i.e. entities that “exist between the ‘national’ and the ‘local’ level” and can be subnational or cross-border (Söderbaum and Taylor, 2008: 13).

The nature of regional integration is also interpreted in very different ways, depending on whether the focus is on institutions or socio-economic actors. On the one hand, regionalism is a process of voluntary agreements between states and other public or private bodies that aim to address the negative consequences of national segmentation and promote political and economic integration between countries. In Africa, its overall objective, envisioned in the Treaty Establishing the African Economic Community, is to establish a continental common market by 2025. African states are all, to varying degrees, institutionally integrated in regional bodies such as the African Union (AU) or the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA). This process is also known as formal integration (Söderbaum, 2011), institutional integration (Sohn et al., 2009) or policy-driven integration (Perkmann, 2007) because it mainly involves the state and the conduct of political and policy affairs.

On the other hand, regionalisation refers to the social and economic relationships that develop between individuals and firms across time and space and which lead to the emergence of functional regions. In Africa, some regions have achieved an exceptional level of integration, due to the intense interactions between traders. The rapid growth of border markets such as Katima Mulilo and Oshikango in Namibia or Malanville in Benin (Zeller, 2009; Dobler, 2016; Walther, 2015) illustrates how regional integration can also come from the activities of a skilled community of traders. Sometimes referred to as informal, functional or market-driven integration, regionalisation refers to what was already described in the 1990s as de facto processes and outcomes (Hettne, 1994; Oman, 1996). Regionalisation takes place through the build-up of interactions that are not necessarily related to an explicitly asserted or acknowledged regionalist project.

Mattheis, 2013: 5). Genealogies were ignored or discarded as irrelevant.

The related expectation that network-led processes would provide a substitute to the shortfalls of institutions, norms and designs did not materialise either. As the trajectory of regional groupings in Asia (Acharya and Johnston, 2007) and in Africa (Bach, 2016: 77–114) confirms, regional institutions and their specific cultures still matter. It retrospectively appears that in Africa as in Latin America, the new regionalism literature was prone to discuss what regionalisation should look like rather than what it actually looked like. As a result of the lack of clarity in the goals and purposes assigned to new regionalisms, the dynamism of regionalisation as a structural force was overlooked (Phillips and Prieto, 2010: 118–119; Bach, 2016: 52–76).

REGIONALISM AT PLAY

In West Africa, the revival of regionalism did not signal the departure from the past that was expected by students of new regionalism who anticipated that the rise of cross-border network-led processes would downgrade the significance attached to regional institutions. Rather, emphasis on the need to diversify away from the traditional focus of region-building on inter-state co-operation and integration, went hand-in-hand with a re-assessment of the relevance of European construction since these were seen as ideally suited to contribute to the refoundation of pan-Africanism.

UEMOA and the CFA zone: The legacy of integration

The legacy of colonial policies and politics contributes to shaping the landscapes, topographies and mental maps associated with region-building in West Africa. Continuity with the past is illustrated by regional groupings and institutional arrangements where integration proceeds from the continuation (integration through "hysteresis") of institutional arrangements initiated during the colonial period. Two such examples are the Southern African Customs Union (SACU) and the CFA (*Communauté financière africaine*) currency zone in West and Central Africa (Bach, 2016: 21–30). Their integration did not result from transfers of sovereign competencies to supranational institutions, but from renunciation to sovereignty in specific areas at the time of independence. Most member states of the franc zone and the BLSN (Botswana, Lesotho, Swaziland, and Namibia) countries never exercised sovereignty in the sectors that are today subjected to sovereignty pooling. Regional integration ultimately progresses from the domination and stabilisation of these customs and monetary unions by the same "core" states (France in one case, South Africa in the other) as during the colonial period.

The CFA zone and the West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA), bear testimony to the processes triggered by Britain and France's early and converging concern to rationalise the management and exploitation of their sub-Saharan empires. The stability of the CFA currency zone, the backbone of UEMOA, is still guaranteed by the French Treasury, although the governance of the currency zone is ultimately supervised and regulated by the European Council, acting on the advice of the European Central Bank (ECB) and the European Commission.

ECOWAS: Pan-African ideals and holistic agendas

Institutional continuity in West Africa also stems from the revival of pan-African ideals that, in the early 1990s, prompted a revision of the ECOWAS charter inspired by the experience of the EU. At a time when many regional groupings were consciously avoiding the institutional and bureaucratic model represented by the EU (Hurrell, 1995a: 332), West Africa's transformative agenda explicitly aspired to emulate the European experience which was perceived as neither outdated nor marginalised. The EU model was instead viewed as conducive to the reassertion of bold and broadened transformative regionalist agendas that coincided with a reinvention of the goals and ideals of pan-Africanism (Murithi, 2005). One of the most tangible outcomes of the rejuvenation of pan-African ideals was the ascription of ambitious holistic goals to the RECs and, finally in 2001, the adoption of the Constitutive Act that established the AU (Map 3.1).

The revised ECOWAS treaty signed in Cotonou in 1993 set the basis for the agenda.

The West African member states flagged their commitment to fast-track integration and the achievement of a single currency (the "ECO") along with an economic and monetary union based on the harmonisation of economic and fiscal policies. Europe's Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) naturally served as a template (Ekpo and Udoh, 2014: 72; Kufuor, 2006: 37). The new ECOWAS Treaty also sought to enhance the financial autonomy of the Community, by conferring to the Council of Ministers the authority to establish a levy on goods imported into the Community (ECOWAS, 1993: article 72). A new organ, the Community Court of Justice, was now entrusted with the implementation and interpretation of the provisions of the Treaty. European institutions such as the European Parliament or the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) similarly served as a model for such new organs as the ECOWAS Parliament and the Economic and Social Council.

ECOWAS's holistic approach to region-building was not confined to economic integration. ECOWAS was the first among the RECs to develop a juridical capacity to operate in the full cycle of conflict management, spanning from prevention to post-war reconstruction (Tavares, 2010: 37). This would later serve as a model for the AU/African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA). ECOWAS had acquired valuable experience with preventive diplomacy, based on its engagement in West African conflicts in the 1990s. This experience was later formalised through organs designed to promote mediation and conciliation – along with an operational capacity to intervene in armed conflicts and violent domestic civil wars.

As a result of these evolutions, ECOWAS was the first African regional grouping to depart from the norm of strict non-intervention in the internal affairs of member states (Hulse, 2014: 555). The revised ECOWAS Treaty boldly endorsed this new culture of intervention. Peacekeeping forces, the creation of an observation system and the establishment of election monitoring missions were authorised (ECOWAS, 1993: article 58, § e, f and g.). The Treaty also committed member states to the establishment of mechanisms designed to prevent and resolve conflicts both within and among states. The consolidation of democratic governance within member states was asserted as an integral component of the promotion of peace, economic co-operation and development. Another institutional innovation introduced by ECOWAS stemmed from the subsequent adoption of the Protocol on the Permanent ECOWAS Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security (ECOWAS, 1999). The protocol took the right of intervention one step further, as it now applied to a much broader range of circumstances, both within and among states. Intervention without state consent was authorised in specific situations, an option interpreted as an invitation to reconceptualise interactions between sovereignty and intervention (Gandois, 2013: 46) (Box 3.2).

By the late 1990s, ECOWAS owed its international visibility and legitimacy to the establishment of a collective security system that was then unique in Africa. Since then, peace and security have become "the core business of ECOWAS, as member states [have] had a strong incentive to organise themselves to prevent the regionalisation of wars and conflicts and related damage" (Bossuyt, 2015).

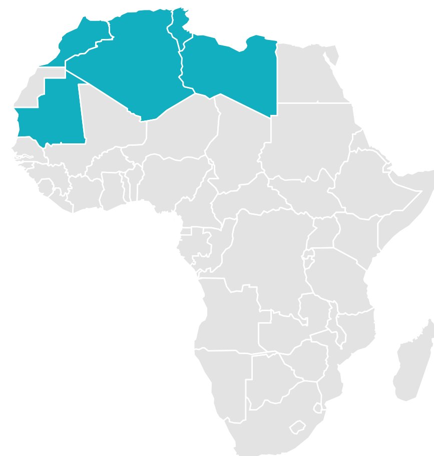
The other side of the coin is about pledges towards economic and monetary integration that are yet to secure a sustained and effective policy commitment on the part of all member states. In accordance with the trade liberalisation programme re-launched on 1 January 1990, the implementation of the ECOWAS Customs Union was meant to start within ten years. By mid-2016, implementation of the ECOWAS trade liberalisation scheme was still being awaited, while import restrictions were also adopted by West Africa's largest economy, Nigeria, as the newly elected administration struggled to preserve dwindling foreign exchange reserves as the price of oil underwent an unexpected and brutal fall (Dikko, 2015; Fick, 2015). The ECOWAS program to create a single monetary zone has similarly been delayed (Box 3.3).

Map 3.1

Regional organisations in Africa

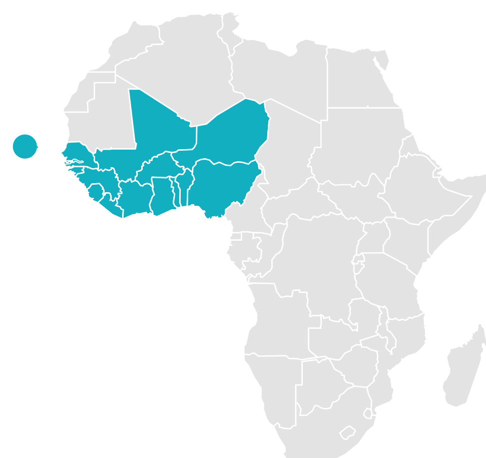
Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD)

Arab Maghreb Union (AMU)

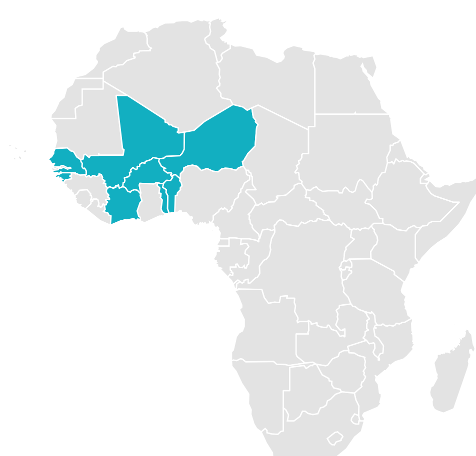


African Union (AU)

Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)

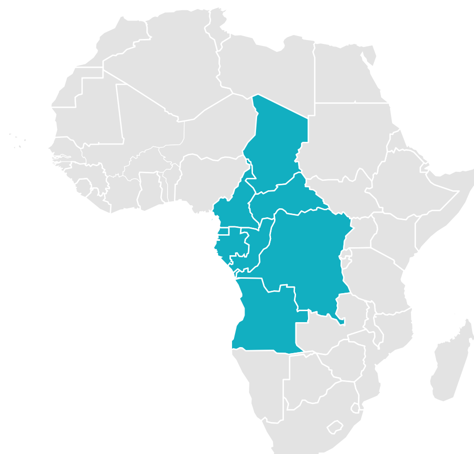


West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA)

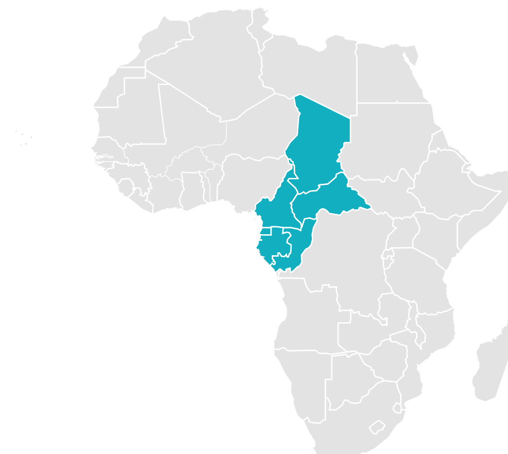


Source: OECD/SWAC 2014

Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS)



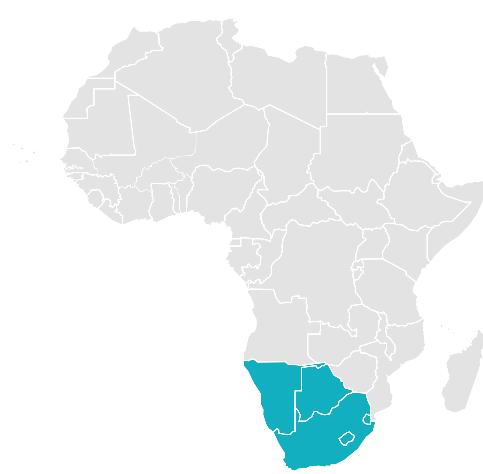
Central African Economic and Monetary Community (CEMAC)



Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA)

Southern African Development Community (SADC)

Southern African Customs Union (SACU)



Box 3.2
ECOWAS Peace, Security and Good Governance Architecture

The ECOWAS Peace and Security Architecture focuses on the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts, both within and between states. Conflict prevention is addressed through the establishment of an early-warning system based on the collection of data by four observation and monitoring centres. Conflict resolution is the task of the Mediation and Security Council (MSC), assisted by the Defence and Security Commission and the Council of Elders. This gathering of elder statesmen is appointed by the president of ECOWAS to promote mediation and conciliation in conflict situations. The Authority of Heads of States and Government remains the highest decision-making body of the mechanism, but it can delegate its powers to the nine members of the MSC so that it may function as a kind of equivalent to the UN Security Council at subregional level. The MSC is elected for two years and can function at head of state, ministerial or ambassadorial levels. The MSC is also entitled to authorise intervention in internal disputes that "threaten to trigger a humanitarian disaster" or constitute 'a serious threat to peace and security in the subregion' (ECOWAS, 1999: article 25). Peace support operations are also authorised in situations of "serious and massive violations of human rights and the rule of law" and "in the event of an overthrow or attempted overthrow of a democratically elected government" (ibid.). The ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) was established as a de jure organ of ECOWAS, and has formed a component of the African Standby Force (ASF) since 2004.

The Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance that was adopted by ECOWAS Heads of States in 2001 prescribed the respect of constitutional principles that include the separation of powers within member-states, the empowerment and strengthening of their parliaments, the independence of their judiciaries and the guarantee of "free, fair and transparent" elections. The protocol's first article also reasserted a policy of "zero tolerance for power obtained or maintained by unconstitutional means", demanded popular participation in decision making and strict adherence to democratic principles. Armed forces were also required to be "apolitical and ...under the command of a legally constituted political authority" (ECOWAS, 2001). Signatories also pledged to respect the "secularism and neutrality of the state in all matters relating to religion". More generally, they undertook to enforce "the rule of law, human rights, justice and good governance" and agreed to ensure "accountability, professionalism, transparency and expertise in the public and private sectors" (ECOWAS, 2001: article 34 sections 1 & 2). These prescriptions addressed more specifically the provision of electoral support and monitoring, while unconstitutional changes of government in West Africa would be sanctioned.

Source: Bach 2016

THE DYNAMICS OF CROSS-BORDER INTERACTIONS

The mitigated achievements of West Africa's regional groupings are in stark contrast with the dynamism of cross-border interactions. Cross-border flows operate in a divergent manner, operating as impediments to region-building while thriving from the preservation of tariff and non-tariff barriers. These patterns of interaction coexist with policies and processes that promote regional integration through "defragmentation", namely the removal of "a range of non-tariff and regulatory barriers [that] ... raise transaction costs and limit the movement of goods, services, peoples and capital across borders" (World Bank, 2012: xv).

Regionalisation as an obstacle to region-building

In West Africa, the dynamism of cross-border trade integration owes much to the systemic

Box 3.3

Planning for a single monetary zone in West Africa

The five non-UEMOA countries (namely Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Nigeria and Sierra Leone) decided in 2000 to work towards the establishment of a second monetary union, the West African Monetary Zone (WAMZ) by 2003. Liberia originally participated in the union in an observatory capacity, joining formally in 2010. Due to the failure of member states to meet the required convergence criteria (Ekpo and Udoh, 2014: 66–68), the initial deadline was postponed twice, in 2005 and 2009. Initially, the plan envisaged the creation of a monetary union by 2015, before merging with UEMOA to create a single currency union for all ECOWAS member states by 2020. In 2014, the WAMZ countries decided against completing the first step, instead choosing to maintain the planned launch of a monetary union for all ECOWAS countries by 2020.

Source: Bach 2016

effects of a pattern of regionalisation that, paradoxically, thrives from the very preservation of frontiers. This issue is at the core of the "warehouse state" model, a metaphor coined by John Igué and Bio Soulé (1993) to describe the sophisticated instrumentalisation of cross-border flows by West African states in an attempt to capitalise on the edge effect of the frontier. Smuggling, also described as "re-exportation" or "transit" trade, was the backbone of the economy of warehouse states (mostly Benin, Gambia and Togo) who kept adjusting their import-export tariffs in order to maximise revenues drawn from the exploitation of cross-border differentials (Sindzingre, 1998; Igué and Soulé, 1993; Senghor, 2008; Golub and Mbaye, 2009). In practice, these policy orientations were little more than a succession of short-term measures, designed to capture the opportunities generated by the tariff and fiscal discrepancies between the eight West African member states of the CFA franc zone on the one hand, and Ghana and Nigeria on the other. The cross-border flows that this stimulated went along with the simultaneous penetration of territories and institutions by transnational players. Then as now, it was the ability of cross-border players to negotiate the goodwill of officers, bureaucrats and politicians on each side of the border that conditioned the size and scale of profits that were drawn from the exploitation of cross-border disparities.

Cross-border trafficking requires the ability to swiftly understand the interplay of changing tariff and fiscal measures, shifts in currency demand and supply, and international prices on export crops or on goods treated as illegal in other areas of (or outside) the continent. The resulting effect is a nexus of constant fluctuations in the composition and direction of cross-border flows and consequently in the articulation and impact of the networks at grassroots level. The pre-eminence of networks over policies can also take exacerbated proportions whenever, as in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo or in Nigeria's northeastern state, the exploitation of frontier "dividends" becomes a source of opportunity for insurgents who thrive from the erosion of state regulatory power and territorial control (Comolli, 2015: 85–86; Strazzari, 2015: 2; Lebovitch, 2013).

Cross-border trade in West Africa thrives from a combination of porous borders and the lure of tariff, fiscal and monetary incentives and, ultimately, negotiation with agents entrusted with border enforcement. Closure of a frontier is as much a risk as is its dilution within a customs union. Traders, border residents and those who benefit from bribes have a vested interest in the preservation of the territorial *status quo* (Bach, 1994; Bennafla, 2002; Walther, 2008). Warehouse states have much to lose from intra-regional trade liberalisation agendas. Re-exportation, noted a candid observer in the 1990s, "forbids that these small countries play the game of a large market within which it would no longer be possible to preserve pre-existing fiscal incentives" (Igué, 1995: 184). It is paradoxically where cross-border integration appears deeply established that institutionalisation is most resisted.

The 1970 and 1980s were a golden age for West Africa's warehouse states. The growth of their (illicit) cross-border transactions with neighbouring states seemed to reconcile public policy concerns with private activity, simultaneously contributing to the "confirmation of the border, the construction of the state and the perpetuation of national policies" (Bennafla, 2014: 1347; Bach, 2016: 56–62). Such a pattern was in sharp contrast with what was unfolding in Central Africa where the Democratic Republic of the Congo was becoming the epicentre of predatory forms of exploitation of cross-border disparities. These were, already then, associated with the fragmentation of national territory, the instrumentalisation of violence and insecurity, and situations of governance without government (Raeymaekers, Menklaus, Vlassenroot, 2008: 9; Raeymaekers, 2015; Lemarchand, 2003: 29–69; Bach, 2016: 63–66).

Integration through defragmentation

Since the 1980s, in Africa as in other regions, the momentum to eliminate import quotas, non-tariff barriers and customs duties has essentially come from national-based policy reforms. Closely related to this trend is the significant commitment of private investors and donors to defragmentation through the construction and improvement of infrastructure. Defragmentation is intrinsically characterised by the dilution of the frontiers between national, regional and global integration, and the adoption of leaner, functionally driven institutional architectures. In this sense, it represents a departure from policies that postulate the constitutionalisation of integration through sovereignty pooling and holistic agendas.

Defragmentation is often a shortcut for infrastructure rehabilitation and development-related projects. In West Africa as in East Africa, transport corridors are entangled with a history of cross-border rail, road and river linkages, a legacy of the common services established during the colonial period for the purpose of tightening, on a spoke-hub basis, the linkages between colonies and metropolitan centres. The establishment of a grid of infrastructure was guided by geo-political and strategic considerations as much as by economic motives. A good example in West Africa is the now defunct *Opération Hirondelle* (Operation "Swallow") that was originally designed in the early 1950s to export Niger's groundnuts without having to cross Nigeria (Box 3.4).

In West Africa, where two-thirds of the 10 000 km of railway tracks were built during the colonial period, railways are still primarily geared towards the transportation of minerals from the hinterland to coastal harbours and world markets (Bossard, Heinrigs and Perret, 2009: 134–135). However, a large railway revitalisation project is underway in the four neighbouring countries of Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire and Niger. According to the project specifications, two lines are planned: one on the western axis between Abidjan-Ouagadougou-Kaya-Niamey, including a Dori-Assango loop, and the other on the eastern axis between Cotonou-Parakou-Dosso-Niamey. The railways will cover 2 970 km in total, necessitating the construction of 1 794 km and the rehabilitation of 1 176 km of the existing rail network. Notable progress has also been achieved since independence with respect to the creation of a regional road network, but it is still expensive to travel on West African roads and it is "sometimes as expensive as travelling on the big European toll motorways" due to the multiplication of "informal taxes" and checkpoints (ibid.: 129). Opacity is increased by the complexity of rules and the multiplication of agencies that give approval and collect the taxes required to move legally within or across African borders.

Soft infrastructure issues, namely the cost incurred by bureaucratic procedures, checkpoints and the payment of bribes along the main transport corridors of the region, account for significant and costly delays, as they generate additional forms of insecurity such as harassment, bribery and extortion by bureaucrats, customs officials and military personnel (Chambers et al., 2012: 16). The Improved Road Transport Governance Initiative (IRTGI) reports that, by the late 2000s, the multiplication of roadblocks and checkpoints – between 1.3 and 3.2 per 100 kilometres – meant that a consignment of goods moving along the West African corridors incurred delays estimated between 18 to 29 minutes per 100 km, the equivalent of seven hours of delays per average trip (Ben Barka, 2012). The same study attributed the lengthy checks that hinder the flow of goods and vehicles at border posts and along corridors to the payment of bribes ranging from USD 3 to USD 23 per 100 kilometres, or close to USD 200 per average trip. These are the issues that the Informal Trade Regulation Support Programme (ITRSP), conceived by ECOWAS and adopted in Cotonou in 2013, aims to address through the simplification of taxation and customs procedures (Hoffmann and Melly, 2015: 28).

Innovation is another key component of the drive towards defragmentation. It adds substance to the expectations that technological leapfrogging can offer an alternative to Africa's weak financial and telecommunications infrastructure networks. Initially introduced in Kenya, M-pesa – a mobile money payment system – has rapidly spread across the continent. In West Africa, Nigeria is now a leader in the development of systems that enable peer-to-peer financial transfers between mobile phones and bank accounts (Livsey, 2015). As a result, access to finance is facilitated and partnerships are stimulated between banks (Ecobank, the Bank of Africa) and mobile phone companies (Vodaphone, Orange), both within and outside the continent (Manson and Weber, 2015; Thomas, 2014). Defragmentation and regional integration have also deepened as a result of the redeployment of banking and finance services beyond national boundaries.

Box 3.4

Opération Hirondelle (Operation "Swallow")

The now defunct *Opération Hirondelle* was established by the French in the 1950s to export groundnuts from eastern and central Niger without depending on Nigerian railways and harbours. Until 1953, Niger's ground exports, the country's main source of revenue, had been exclusively transported to the coast through Nigeria's Kano-Lagos railway. In December that year, traffic congestion on the railway forced the establishment of an alternative route that involved transportation by lorries to Parakou (Benin), and from there by railway to Cotonou. *Opération Hirondelle* was particularly costly since the road to Parakou was not tarred and, at Gaya-Malanville, the Niger River had to be crossed by ferry until the construction of a bridge was completed in 1958. Once in Cotonou, shipments were further delayed by inadequate infrastructure – there was no deep water port and all traffic was handled through a single wharf. By Niger's independence in 1960, *Opération Hirondelle* was heavily subsidised and could only handle about one-third of the country's ground exports. The pursuit of trade relations through this corridor was nonetheless seen as strategic by all parties. Benin considered the operation to be vital for the survival of its railway and the construction of a deepwater port in Cotonou, while in Niger, it was believed that the operation would contribute to curb cross-border interactions between northern Nigeria and Niger's Hausaland.

As a result, the break-up of the *Afrique occidentale française* (AOF) federation in 1959 did not seal the fate of *Opération Hirondelle*. Its continuation and expansion were instead organised through the establishment of an intergovernmental organisation, the *Organisation Commune Dahomey Niger* (OCDN), entrusted with the management of the Niger-Benin transport corridor. Both countries also committed themselves to equally sharing any deficit that would arise. In effect, the priority conferred to the preservation of this francophone transport corridor had no real development impact. OCDN activities had to be heavily subsidised and failure to secure international funding for an extension of the railway was eventually compounded by political tensions. These crystallised, in late 1963, when the expulsion of Beninese civil servants working in Niger was followed by a conflict over the ownership of the tiny island of Lété, located near Gaya-Malanville, on the Niger River. OCDN traffic was then interrupted until June 1964 and this made landlocked Niger suddenly aware of the risks of total dependence upon a single outlet to the sea.

Source: Bach 2008 : 173–174

West Africa's Ecobank, has become the leading pan-African bank with USD 20 billion in assets, 1200 branches and pre-tax profits of over USD 380 million (Wallis, 2014). The United Bank for Africa also claims to have a presence across 19 African states, while Access Bank, already engaged in seven African countries, expects promising opportunities from the expansion of Nigerian businesses (England, 2014).

The rehabilitation of transport corridors or the dissemination of cell phone technology contributes towards improving Africa's integration in the world economy. It is, however, unclear whether this will translate into a build-up of enhanced regional capacity. The rise of a generation of globally connected African entrepreneurs is certainly changing the business climate. Accumulation no longer exclusively revolves around the capture of state resources or the privatisation of public functions by their incumbents (Bach and Gazibo, 2012). The personal trajectory and truly global investment strategies pursued, within and outside the continent by such figures as Nigerian billionaire Aliko Dangote, who provides a perfect illustration of this new trend (Wallis, 2013). For these entrepreneurs and others from the diaspora who have returned to Africa, the world economy is on the horizon (Taylor, 2012; McDade and Spring, 2005).

The drive towards defragmentation is rarely associated with regionally-endorsed programmes to stimulate integration at the grassroots such as the West African Borders and Integration (WABI) network launched by ENDA Diapol, the Malian National Direction of Borders and the Sahel and West Africa Club/OECD (2003). In 2004, following the second meeting of the WABI network in Abuja, ECOWAS announced the creation of the Cross-Border Co-operation Programme (CBCP) that was endorsed by Ministers of Foreign Affairs one year later. The CBCP aimed to foster regional integration through "cross-border initiatives and projects defined and implemented by public and private local actors" (ECOWAS, 2005). These initiatives were meant to be complementary to pre-existing sectoral programmes of cross-border co-operation to the extent that "all of the aspects of West African life are involved" (ibid.).

The establishment of decentralised cross-border micro-regions, known as *pays-frontière* (Konaré, 2004: 32) subsequently led to the inauguration of the Ouarokuy-Wanian health centre between Burkina Faso and Mali in 2011, along with the creation of a cross-border health service that includes 14 villages and serves a population of over 11000 people (AU, 2013: 87–88). Initiated by the Municipal Development Partnership (PDM) and sponsored by ECOWAS, the pioneer Sikasso, Korhogo, Bobo Dioulasso (SKBo) Border Programme, also cuts across borders between Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire and Mali and similarly seeks to create common infrastructure such as transborder community schools, health centres, and rural radios designed to cater for the populations in the borderlands. Both initiatives build upon the enabling institutional environment created by common membership to UEMOA. In addition to the ease of circulation across international borders, the trade dynamics at play within the SKBo triangle capitalise upon genuine trade complementarities, due to the operation of the three cities as regional markets between southern coastal cities and rural hinterlands. The triangle also coincides with cotton farming, a shared productive activity (Dahou, 2004; Dahou, Dahou and Gueye, 2007).

TOWARDS A REGIONAL ECONOMIC AND GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK?

Region-building is constrained by the need to take stock of the diversity of genealogies, institutional cultures and network-led regionalisation processes. The multiplicity of regional groupings has historically been as much of an asset as a hindrance and the influence of overlapping memberships on Africa's international relations should not be minimised (Bach, 2016). This very asset has also become a source of institutional paralysis with the adoption of plans for a shift from free trade areas towards customs unions – due to mutually exclusive common external tariffs (CETs) (AfDB, 2014: 15).

Unlike what is being observed in other parts of the continent, substantive progress has been made in West Africa. In January 2006, the Conference of Heads of State and Government adopted the common external tariff (CET ECOWAS) by extending the UEMOA CET to all Community member states. This CET comprises five categories and has been in force since January 2015.

However, the ability of ECOWAS to implement policy remains hampered by deeply-rooted regionalisation dynamics, promoted by both state and non-state actors. For Nigeria and its neighbours, in particular, certain established practices could be difficult to overcome, even if a regional economic and governance framework is introduced to encourage exporters and importers to abandon the networks and their informal border activities (Hoffmann and Melly, 2015: vii).

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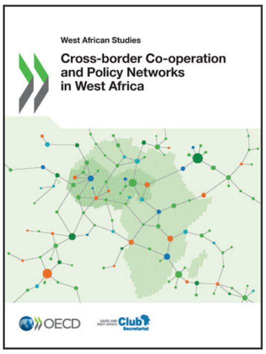

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