

ECOWAS at 50: Explaining Colonial State as an Enduring Debacle to Regionalism in West Africa

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Abstract

Former colonial rulers or post-war border agreements between major powers frequently produced monstrosities in which linguistic, religious, or ethnic groups were arbitrarily divided or thrown together without taking into account their unique characteristics and goals. It is of great concern that a larger percentage of African borders did not follow longitudinal and latitudinal lines. Political, economic, and social tragedies in Africa are largely caused by these colonial borders, which either divided the same people into neighbouring countries or created ethnically divided nations. In particular, most African states were built along colonial borders, except for a few, such as Ethiopia and Egypt. Therefore, the numerous issues that states in the ECOWAS sub-region face, though complex, are addressed through regional integration. The assumption behind this conclusion is that ECOWAS has not done much to meet its primary goals. This paper investigated the challenges of colonial borders (artificiality of state borders) to regionalism in the ECOWAS subregion, even as it attains the golden age of 50 years. The objective of this paper was to ascertain how regionalism in West Africa is affected by colonial borders, a tendency in which political borders do not align with the natural divisions of ethnic nationalities. The paper adopted descriptive and analytical methodology by making use of information from secondary sources. It found that ECOWAS has not succeeded in achieving core aspects of its mission objectives 50 years after its establishment because of colonial borders. It is, therefore, recommended that whereas it is appropriate for African integration initiatives to rely on sister integration initiatives like the European Union (EU), more African intrusiveness is necessary.

Keywords: State, artificiality, ECOWAS, regions, regionalism.

Introduction

It is undeniable that individuals with extreme and intense heterogeneity cannot integrate (Coleman, 2002; Rummel, 2003). It is highly unlikely that African states with significant differences would cede their sovereignty to integrate and work together like the Westphalian states of the Northern Hemisphere, which have been working together since 1648 with few or no conflicts among them (Babst, 1964; Gleditsch, 1992). The era heralding the emergence of regionalism and unionism in Europe (Berron et al, 2013) has been declared the age of regionalism and unions (Kant, 2012). This was attested to by Jean Monnet, in his memoirs, when he unequivocally stated that the current issues cannot be resolved by the independent nations of the past. They are unable to direct their own destiny or guarantee their own advancement. Furthermore, the community is merely a step toward the organised world of the future (Booker & North, 2005).

Indeed, regionalism and Pan-Africanism, which are manifestations of continental identity and coherence, distinguish African regional integration from regionalism in other developing

regions which have had a significant positive political impact on Africa. However, true regionalism among African states is inherently hampered by the fact that they are colonially created states, forceful creations of colonial endeavours or enterprises whose primary focus was solely on resource exploitation for economic purposes (Ewing, 1967; Ajala, 1983; Robinson, 1996; Martin, 2006).

As it may be recalled, agreements made by former colonial masters among major powers regarding borders frequently resulted in monstrosities where ethnic, religious, or linguistic groups were arbitrarily thrown together or separated without taking into account the unique characteristics and aspirations of those groups (Nwabueze, 2018). In the process of drawing African borders, European colonial powers overslighted and ignored certain geo-cultural rudiments, historical, and socio-economic core values that were identified and shared among African nations as essential to their mutual co-existence and interaction (Obiukwu, 1992). Therefore, it is concerning that a larger percentage of African borders did not follow natural longitudinal and latitudinal lines (Asante, 1982). Many academics believe that these colonial borders are the main cause of political and economic regional problems in Africa because they either created ethnically divided countries or, on the other hand, divided the same people into neighbouring states, except for Ethiopia and Egypt (Pakenham, 1991; Lefebvre, 2011).

Amidst this peculiar, daunting challenge, the mandate of ECOWAS was formed to raise the standard of living for the people in the region, expand and sustain economic growth and stability, coordinate improved relations among member states, and generally make a significant contribution to the development of Africa by fostering cooperation and development in economic, social, and cultural activities—indeed, in all spheres of human endeavour. The 1975 Treaty of Lagos, which served as the founding document of the ECOWAS, gave the organisation the authority to:

- a. abolish all customs duties and levies of similar effect on imports and exports between member states;
- b. eliminate all forms of quantitative and administrative restrictions on trade between member states;
- c. formulate a common tariff structure and commercial policy toward non-members;
- d. abolish any obstacles to free movement of people, services and capital between member states;
- e. harmonise agricultural policies and promote joint projects, particularly in marketing, research and industrial ventures between member states;
- f. coordinate and implement joint development schemes in transport, communication, energy and other infrastructures;
- g. harmonise economic and industrial policies of member states while eliminating major disparities in the level of development between them; and,
- h. institute a fund for cooperation, compensation and development.

Even as lofty as these objectives are, it is disheartening that 50 years later, regionalism in West Africa through the platform of ECOWAS remains a far cry. This was the same worrisome scenario Asante (1982) painted, that seven years into the formation of ECOWAS, the formidable obstacles bedevilling it do not allow it to fulfil its core goals as a regional integration organisation. Thus far, regionalism seems to be a daunting path to address the numerous issues confronting the ECOWAS sub-region. Colonial states in West Africa are primarily the culprit, barring the ECOWAS from attaining its goals.

Following this introduction, the remainder of the paper is organised as follows: Section 2 makes a theoretical underpinning of the paper, Section 3 undertakes a conceptual discourse on the artificiality of colonial states, and Section 4 identifies a myriad of explanations traceable to colonial states that are culpable in hindering the ECOWAS from ensuring genuine regionalism in West Africa. The paper is concluded in Section 5.

State Artificiality (SA)

This paper's theoretical underpinning is state artificiality (SA). As a theoretical model, SA was popularised by the pioneering scholarly works of Alberto Alesina, William Easterly, Janina Mataszkeski, Martti Koskenniemi (1994), and Roman Kwiecieri (2013), amongst others. In their scholarly endeavour, Alesina et al (2011, p. 2) define state artificiality as when "political borders do not coincide with a division of nationalities desired by the people on the ground", usually created or imposed by colonial authorities. Essentially, therefore, SA is simply a political entity that is not formed through the organic, historical processes typically associated with the development of nation-states. Instead, it is often conceived, designed, and declared, frequently lacking widespread international recognition or established territorial control in the traditional sense. These entities can arise from a variety of motivations, ranging from political protests and artistic expressions to philosophical experimentations and the desire for self-determination outside existing frameworks.

The question of SA borders on two measures of the degree to which state borders may be artificial. One measures how borders split ethnic groups into two separate adjacent states. The other measures the straightness of land borders, under the assumption that straight land borders are more likely to be artificial. It is the condition of being the product of intentional human manufacture (by artifice), rather than occurring naturally through processes not involving or requiring human activity.

Artificiality often implies being false, counterfeit, or deceptive. These descriptions compel Aristotle (2004:121) to state that:

Naturalness is persuasive, artificiality is the contrary; for our hearers are prejudiced and think we have some design against them, as if we were mixing their wines for them. It is like the difference between the quality of Theodorus' voice and the voices of all other actors: his really seems to be that of the character who is speaking, theirs do not.

Contrary to the depiction of artificiality on the corridors of negativity, such as in falsehood, deception or counterfeit, Carus (1891: 22-23) in his classic, "*The Nature of the State*", argues that:

It may be objected that sometimes States have been artificially established with conscious deliberation by mutual agreements which were fixed in laws. This is quite true: conscious efforts are made and have to be made to give a solid shape to a State. The Constitution of the United States, of Belgium, and of the German Empire are instances of this. Conscious efforts indeed serve and should serve to regulate the growth of States; they determine the direction of its advance, and bring conflicting principles into agreement. Thus, struggles are avoided, and questions which otherwise would be decided by the sword, are settled in verbal quarrels, more peacefully, quicker, and without loss of life. When the fathers of our country came together to form a bond of union, they did not create the nation as a federal union, or, so to say, as a State of States, they simply regulated its growth and helped it into being by giving obstetrical assistance.

He further posits that:

The union agreed upon by the representatives of the thirteen colonies was not, however, the product of an arbitrary decision, but the net outcome of several co-operating factors, among which two are predominant: (i) the ideas which then lived in the minds of the people as actual realities, and the practical wants which, in the common interest of the colonies, demanded a stronger unity and definite regulations as to the methods of this unity. The representatives themselves were not mentally clear concerning the plan of the building, which they laid the foundation.

Conceptualising Colonial State Artificiality

Borders are in fact the edge of a razor on which the contemporary issues of war and peace, of life or death to nations, hang, or are suspended (Lord Curzon in Ahmad, 2013). This suggests that borders serve the dual purposes of bringing about peace and causing war, as well as determining the sovereignty of a state or when states turn to war in order to resolve. However, African states are artificial and arbitrary, in contrast to the Westphalian state models. But first, what are colonial states? Colonial states (i.e., state artificiality) tend to occur when people are randomly gathered without their consent by external forces or authorities.

Belien (2006) argues that colonial states are created through violence or developed at conference tables that bring together people from various cultural, linguistic, religious, and ethnic backgrounds. They are by definition multinational states. They are states in which the division of nationalities that the local populace desires does not align with political borders. Ethnic, religious, or linguistic groups have frequently been thrown together or divided without regard for the aspirations of the people due to the actions of former colonisers or post-war border agreements made by the victorious parties. Eighty per cent of African borders are not drawn along longitudinal and latitudinal lines. Many academics think that these colonial (artificial/unnatural) borders are the cause of the economic woes of Africa because they make ethnically divided nations or, on the other hand, divide the same people into neighbouring countries.

Colonial (artificial) states are rare in the global North because they are products of the Westphalian state apparatus, which created states from within with a conscious awareness of ethnic, linguistic, racial, religious, and geographical homogeneity and harmony. In a classification by Belien (2006), non-colonial (non-artificial) states are those that have been: (a) grown and developed naturally over an extended period of time, like Britain, France, Portugal, Sweden, and Switzerland; (b) re-established at a specific time and location where they previously existed as states, like Poland (1919), Ireland (1922), or the Czech Republic (1993); or (c) formed at a specific time as a state that unites a people bound by a common culture or identity, like Greece (1830), Italy (1861), Germany (1871), or Croatia (1991).

According to this classification, states in categories (a) and (b) are old states. However, because they existed before the French Revolution, category A states did not require an independence movement or nationalist ideology to assert their statehood. States that require nationalist ideology in order to become states fall into categories B and C. The distinction between categories B and C, however, is that states of the latter group are made up of newly formed nations that only developed a sense of national identity in the 19th century. Conversely, group (a) comprises former nations that are also former states; group (b) comprises former nations that are currently new states; and group (c) comprises newly formed nations that are currently new states (Belien, 2006).

The late 1950s and early 1960s saw the rise of arbitrary colonial African states on the international scene as a result of agreements reached between colonial European powers (Britain, France, Portugal, etc.) that had started before the Berlin Conference, which Otto von Bismarck convened from November 1884 to February 1885. Despite popular belief, the Berlin Conference only regulated the process by which the imperial powers divided up African territories through effective occupation, a process previously characterised by conflicts among the colonising European powers (Asante, 2004; Ahmad, 2013).

In fact, thirty per cent of African borders are straight lines, which can be explained by the fact that, aside from Egypt and Ethiopia, most of Africa is made up of states with arbitrary colonial borders that were drawn arbitrarily by European colonising powers without giving proper consideration to geography. The lack of a thorough examination of African linguistic and cultural ties further complicated this process, as evidenced by the split of Yoruba speakers between Nigeria and the Benin Republic (Adedeji, 1970), the split of the Sanwi, an Akan tribe, between Ghana and Cote d'Ivoire, the split of the Ewe tribe between Ghana and Togo, and other examples (Nwabueze, 2018). Explaining the arbitrary colonial nature of African boundaries, Lord Salisbury, former Prime Minister of Britain, signing the Anglo-French Convention on the Nigeria-Niger border in 1906, noted that:

We (the British and the French) have been engaged in drawing lines upon maps where no white man's foot ever trod. We have been giving away mountains and rivers and lakes to each other, only hindered by the small impediments that we never knew exactly where the mountains, rivers, and lakes were (Anene, 1970: 3).

In the case of the disputed border between Nigeria and Cameroon, a British officer said:

Back then, we just took a blue pencil and a ruler and we put it down at Old Calabar, and drew that blue line to Yola...I remember thinking that it was fortunate that the Emir of Adamawa was unaware that I had drawn a line through his territory with a blue pencil while I was seated in front of his tribe for an audience (Anene, 1970: 3).

Fisher (2012, p. 2) claimed that the arbitrary post-colonial borders drawn by Europe left Africans grouped into countries that do not represent their heritage, a contradiction that still bothers them today. He also discussed the effects of these artificial colonial boundaries, including the division of the same peoples, segregated cultural areas, and displacements. The British carving of Nigeria was likewise described by Hailey (1957: 307) as "perhaps the most artificial of the many administrative units created in the course of the European occupation of Africa". To exacerbate the situation, the British claimed a sizable portion of West Africa with a relatively large population that was marked by a high degree of cultural diversity. They also made significant contributions to the continuation, even the reinforcement, of these distinctions over the majority of the colonial era (Post, 1968).

President Julius Nyerere, a leading African nationalist, said, "It is impossible to draw a line anywhere on the map of Africa which does not violate the history or future needs of the people" (Hartmann, 1978, p. 534). According to Boggs (1966), the map of Africa in the 1880s was very different from the current one, which has, in fact, strengthened boundary disputes. These disputes

stem from the competition between colonial powers during a period when geography was not well understood, as well as the division of Africa, which even endangered European peace. He came to the conclusion that the European division of Africa was hastily completed by signing boundary agreements without taking into account the interests of the aborigines or conducting a thorough survey of the region.

But there are drawbacks to the coloniality of African states, which creates plural societies with ingrained disparities in their traditional political, social, and economic structures (Furnivall, 1948; Smith, 1965). First, African states are denied stateness, which is the ability to achieve sovereignty through decolonisation or recognition. Second, African nations are denied nationhood, i.e., they are colonial constructs without shared ethnic, tribal, religious, or linguistic identities. Third, weak economies dominated by primitive agriculture, a large white-collar urban working class, and an externally controlled industrial sector have stifled African states and continue to do so (Sorensen, 2008). Lamb (1985) characterised the bleak statehood of Africa as being divided into colonies by arbitrary borders that disregarded ethnic ties. As Seton-Watson (1977) claimed, the result of such indiscriminate boundary configuration is that African states are merely lines on the map, occasionally taking into consideration regions that form natural units and that divide peoples and languages. Similar to this, African leaders noted during the Pan-African Conference held in Accra from December 8–13, 1958, that colonial borders and barriers created by imperialists to divide African peoples harm Africans and should be removed or modified; borders that cut across ethnic groups or divide peoples of the same stock are unnatural but colonial and do not promote peace or stability. Belien (2006) insists that leaders of neighbouring states ought to work together to find a long-term solution to these issues.

Despite the foregoing concerns, worries and declarations, African borders have not been changed to account for the blatant shortcomings. Unfortunately, since gaining political independence in the late 1950s and early 1960s, Africa has not been a symbol of peace or stability. Individuals or clans who view the state as a simple processing mechanism for their own enrichment are likely to exploit those who are grouped together without any loyalty to their shared heritage. It is under these conditions that Chief Obafemi Awolowo, foremost nationalist and first premier of the defunct Western region of Nigeria, stated that Nigeria is:

not a nation, it is a mere geographic expression...On top of all this, the country is made up of a large number of small, unintegrated tribal and clannish units who live in political isolation from one another...But they are divided into a number of tribes and clans. (Audu et al., 2013: 113)

Elsewhere, Awolowo (1947:47–48) argued that Nigeria is not a country...It serves only as a distinguishing name to identify people who reside inside Nigeria's borders and those who do not". Similarly, Tafawa Belewa, former Prime Minister of Nigeria, noted that "Nigeria existed as one country only on paper. It is still far from being united. Nigerian unity is only a British intention for the country" (Audu et al, 2013:113). For Diamond (2007: 361), Nigeria is not a "nation but a political idea imposed by force of foreign arms".

Colonial borders, however, raise awareness of the need to defend or further nationalist goals at the expense of political and economic advancement. Compared to states that developed naturally, those people may find it more difficult to reach a consensus on the delivery of public goods and the establishment of institutions that accelerate economic development when states are formed by outside forces. Compared to non-colonial states, these groups might be less loyal to

different collective agendas in colonial (arbitrary) ones. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that nearly all of Africa today is affected by the so-called failing, fragile, or failed state syndrome, which is governed by inept and self-satisfied petty bourgeoisies or mafia clans that manipulate the state to suit their own interests (Belien, 2006).

The Challenge of the Colonial State to Regional Integration in the ECOWAS Region

Daniel Bach, a renowned scholar of African regionalism, noted that:

The diversity of African regionalisms remains largely overlooked. Far from being of marginal significance, what is at stake within regional groupings and across the borders of the continent helps to make sense of dynamics that are truly global (Bach, 2016: 13)

Bach (2016) effectively highlights the intricacy of diversity that has hindered and continues to hinder attempts by African regional groups to overcome. The colonial arbitrary state borders in the West African sub-region are so harsh that they have prevented ECOWAS from achieving true regional integration (Byiers & Dieye, 2022). As a result, African integration organisations turn to the European integration models as a solution. The coloniality of African borders, not an unsuitable model, is the root cause of the integration debacle on the continent. These setbacks are discussed below:

a. The Challenge of Overlapping Membership Organisations

There are many regional integration organisations (RIOs) in Africa. West Africa has the highest concentration of overlapping RIOs (see Figure 1) (ECA, 2004; Hailu, 2014). Therefore, the first obstacle to efforts of ECOWAS at regional integration is the multiple memberships, which the West African region is home to several RIOs (Salami, 2011). For example, Benin, Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea-Bissau, Niger, Mali, Senegal, and Togo are among the member states of the Union Economique et Monetaire Africaine (UEMOA) and the Mano River Union (MRU), which have been neighbours to the ECOWAS for a long time.

These coexisting regional integration organisations (RIOs), particularly the UEMOA, have had the negative effect of paralysing the ECOWAS. It is noticed that ECOWAS devotes an enormous amount of time to aligning its programmes with those of UEMOA (Adedeji, 2004). It is not surprising that UEMOA is being praised in the West as the most impressive cooperation entity yet seen in Africa, as it emphasises to the ECOWAS that the eight member states of UEMOA, which have a strong base of support from France and the European Union (EU), share a common currency, the Communauté Financière Africaine (CFA) franc (Adedeji, 2004). As it stands, UEMOA and the ECOWAS are more rivals than complementary regional integration organisations (RIOs) in West Africa (Asante, 2004).

This suggests that the ECOWAS-UEMOA disintegrative posture has remained strong despite the constant, unreconcilable challenges and disagreements in the application of procedures and decisions. In September 1998, former ECOWAS executive secretary, Lansana Kouyate, observed that 68 per cent of UEMOA programmes were implemented by UEMOA members, while only 45 per cent of ECOWAS programmes were implemented by the ECOWAS member states on average (Asante, 2004).

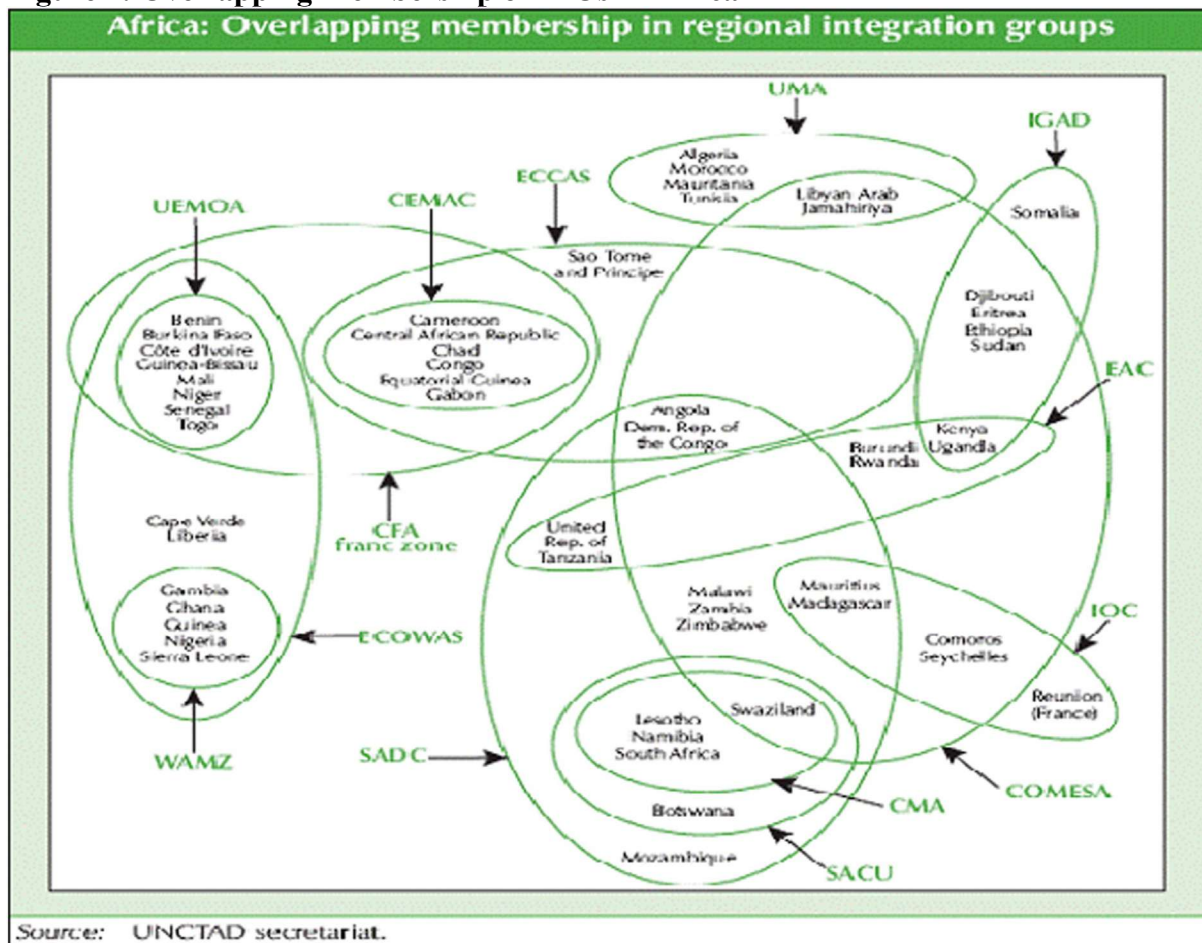
This trend has since triggered debate on what is commonly known as the variable geometry approach. In the African context, for instance, such an approach of variable geometry could mean

making genuine progress at the ECOWAS level while maintaining the accomplishments and benefits of UEMOA. Scholars like Lyakurwa (1997) see it as a progressive development. Conversely, having several regional group memberships impedes regional integration by causing duplication of commitments and efforts (Lipsey, 1957; Aryeetey & Oduro, 1996; Camara, 2001). In any case, it is a given that the goals and programmes of these regional economic communities not only clash but have also created operational difficulties for the governance and management of African integration initiatives (Yaya 2015).

b. The Challenge of Language Diversity

Like the transition/transformation of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) to the African Union (AU), which signalled a conscious change from a decolonisation-focused organisation to the AU, which is based on economic cooperation in an era of globalisation, ECOWAS realised that it must operate as a community of people rather than a community of states. In order to achieve this, the ECOWAS Agenda 2020 was announced, which prioritised several areas but ignored language. It is unthinkable for a group of people to disregard language, which is the medium or thread that connects the various cultures of the ECOWAS region. Lingual conflict is common in areas where the African integration process is based on foreign languages like French, English, Portuguese, etc. This is exacerbated by the conspicuous lack of a regional language planning policy (Metondji, 2015),

Figure 1: Overlapping Membership of RIOs in Africa



Source: Geda & Seid (2015, p. 21).

The following domains are just a few examples of how vast and enormous the challenge of language is for the ECOWAS subregion. First, the adoption of a suitable language policy is influenced politically by the type of regime in power. Among other things, the numerous jihads that overran most of Africa, where Islam is the predominant religion, led to the widespread use of Arabic as a language of communication. This also applies to the use and popularity of Swahili in Tanzania during the socialist rule of Julius Nyerere at the time (Akinwale, 2011; Bagwasi, 2012; Kanana, 2013). The fundamental implication is that state leaders in West Africa do not really care about language policy. The relationship between the elites and the people is impacted by this lack of political will, which is a major barrier to language use in the ECOWAS (Metondji, 2015).

Second, linguistically, the ECOWAS consists of three different spoken languages: English, French and Portuguese, with different currencies and a population of over 349 million people. It is a fact that parents and students will never want to learn in an African language; instead, they prefer to learn in the language of their former colonial powers, where English, French, and Portuguese are the most widely used in spoken and written languages. This suggests that these languages are used to write the subject curricula of the various school subjects (Ajulo, 1985; Omoniyi, 2007; Ndhlovu, 2008). Third, the economic resources needed to fund a language policy, if one is adopted, are underemphasised because the ECOWAS member states are so overwhelmed

with other pressing issues like hunger, poverty, infrastructure, insecurity, etc., that funding a language policy is given secondary consideration.

Lastly, the ECOWAS sub-region faces social barriers to implementing a clear language policy. The social challenge is how a common language policy is impeded by the unique cultural values of the different ethnic groups within the ECOWAS. The problem here is that minority ethnic groups appear to be suspicious of attempts by majority ethnic groups to impose their languages (Metondji, 2015). Therefore, it is not unusual for minority ethnic groups in Nigeria, for example, where in states like Rivers and Bayelsa States, different languages are spoken every kilometre. Where this is prevalent, radio listeners are prone to or often known for turning off their radio sets when news items are translated into languages other than their mother tongue.

c. ECOWAS Agreement-Implementation Debacle

Though regional organisations such as the ECOWAS have grown in number, the expected benefits of joining these organisations are either inadequate or do not match the expected benefits when the initial decision was taken to join the organisation (Oddih & Okor, 2020). The culprit for this is the poor implementation of trade agreements, treaties, protocols, and decisions made to remove tariff and non-tariff barriers in an effort to boost trade; however, there is a pitiful intra-member trade (Olarreaga & Rocha, 2003; Hailu, 2014). Regional groupings are further hindered by various limitations like currency barriers, in addition to the absence of institutional machinery and infrastructure to oversee the application of treaties, protocols, etc. As a result, members of regional groups generally have lower expectations and are depressed or disillusioned (Aryeetey, 2001).

d. The Challenge of Bretton Woods Institutions

The Bretton Woods institutions of the World Bank (WB), the World Trade Organisation (WTO), and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) continue to use colonial state arbitrariness as a divisive tool in West Africa and throughout Africa. Several member states of the ECOWAS are known participants in the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP) of the IMF. However, such participation hinders economic productivity due to various operational and environmental factors (such as currency devaluation). This continues to be a significant barrier to the regional integration processes of the ECOWAS bloc.

More concerning is the fact that the adoption of SAP in one state led to several distortions in other states. These distortions have been made worse by the continued existence of the Franc Zone, which results in fiscal and monetary policy disarray, and the widespread lack of reform policy harmonisation. The unequal treatment of Anglophone and Francophone members by the IMF and World Bank further weakened ECOWAS regional integration endeavours.

It is regrettable that while IMF/World Bank adjustment programmes were in place in Anglophone West African states, they were conspicuously absent in Francophone West African states. This is because France benefits from having a Franco-CFA zone. Even after the CFA Franc was devalued by 50% in 1994, Francophone states continued to maintain a fixed exchange rate, while the majority of the Anglophone states maintained a flexible and floating rate. These IMF/World Bank monetary policy differences are still noticeable (Obiozor et al., 1994).

e. The Colonial Factor

This element, which in the first place is the main cause of state arbitrariness in Africa, has continued to be a powerful source of division that prevents states in the ECOWAS bloc from integration (Bach, 2016). Little wonder that the pace of West African economic integration and

cooperation has remained abysmally slow. The growth of horizontal ties between sister West African economies has consistently been hampered by vertical ties with industrialised nations in the global North or former colonial powers (Obiozor et al., 1994). Notably, colonial imprints on the social, economic, and political aspects of Africans are permanent and irreversible, though colonial administrations have long existed in Africa (Simmons, 1972). The rise of various groups that are impacted by various political and economic factors exacerbated this even more. For example, former French colonies make up one such group. They have a lot in common, including being geographically close, having a French franc zone, having a common central bank, being members of the West African Customs Union, being associated members of the European Economic Community, and more. The other group is made up of the former British colonies, which are weaker than the former French colonies and geographically diverse. This situation could be explained by several factors. First, the former British colonies are geographically separated vis-à-vis the former French colonies, which are geographically adjacent (Simmons, 1972: 296). Second, the colonial policy of the past has contributed significantly to the current state of affairs (Simmons, 1972). Unfortunately, rather than withering away, the colonial factor is intensifying, primarily in the political rift where Francophone nations continue to be loyal to France under the assimilation system, protectionism by larger states to safeguard their markets, instability as a security threat, and a lack of institutional framework to promote economic integration (Forson, 2013:3).

As a result of this tendency, ECOWAS member states also lack the political will to implement agreements or protocols or to actively work toward harmonising economic policies across national boundaries (Obiozor et al., 1994). Political leadership and ECOWAS as a whole must take a cue from their pre-colonial forebears to curb this disturbing trend. Their perspective on international borders between different ethnic groups was far less sentimental, less inflexible, and more practical than many African leaders today (Aghemelo & Ibhasebhor, 2006).

The colonial factor can also be seen in the way that the cultural gap between member states of Francophone and Anglophone in ECOWAS has undermined the unity of the organisation. Anglophone and Francophone Africans have harboured misgivings about their administrative prowess and way of life. This is, especially where Francophone members feel they are more sensitive to the refined French way of life (Bamfo, 2013). The nearly impossible integration of ECOWAS member states can be explained by the different colonial policies of France and Britain. For instance, the British had a purely commercial, conservative, and restrictive policy during World War I, while the French voluntarily integrated native African soldiers. As a result, France maintains a complex system of social, political, economic, and military ties with its colonies, more so than Great Britain (Le Vine, 2004).

The necessity of interfering in the Liberian civil war put this dichotomy between Francophone and Anglophone relations to the test. However, Mali, Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, and Togo rejected a military option because the Francophone group of states described the Liberian crisis as a strictly domestic matter that ECOWAS member states must respect, while Ghana, Sierra Leone, the Gambia, Nigeria, and Guinea (none of which had a close relationship with France after independence) supported a military action.

f. **The Influence of France and Britain**

A discussion of the unchecked actions of France and Britain in their former colonies is presented here, in more or less continuation of the colonial factor earlier discussed in impeding regional integration in West Africa. Since the relations of France with its Francophone states do not align with African integration interests, France continues to be a major obstacle to regional integration

in West Africa (Gambari, 1991). As a result, Nigeria made concerted efforts to erode the ties between France and Francophone states. In response to Nigeria's intentional actions that contradicted France's involvement in the West African subregion, France deliberately pushed Francophone nations to establish competing economic regional blocs in order to offset Nigeria's dominance in the region (Gambari, 1991).

Post-independence African presidents actively participated in the Nigeria-France hegemonic struggles in a variety of other ways. For example, it is worth remembering that:

On 17th January 1972, President Eyadema, who had earlier invited Gowon to attend Togo's twelfth independence anniversary, sent his Foreign Minister, Hundele, with a special message to Lagos. The message apparently informed Gowon of the proposed Communauté Economique de l'Afrique de l'Ouest (CEAO), which would exclude Nigeria and other Anglophone states and Eyadema's wish to attend its preliminary talks as an observer (Ojo, 1980: 590).

Concerned about the pattern of events unfolding, Gen. Gowon started an effort to integrate West Africa. In the process, he reminded Hundele of the mutually beneficial relationship between Nigeria and Togo, warning Togo to avoid any commitment or interest in the proposed CEAO that could endanger their relationship. In order to further his interest in regional integration, Gen. Gowon used the threat of isolation to entice Nigeria's immediate Francophone neighbours to join the Nigerian coalition by erecting a ditch between them and the other members of the proposed CEAO (Ojo, 1980:590). The actions of French President De Gaulle during the civil war of Nigeria, in which France openly backed Biafra in collusion with former colonial territories, demonstrated France's animosity toward Nigeria's regional advancements. It is not surprising that Chief Odumegwu Ojukwu, the Biafran warlord at the time, was given asylum in Cote d'Ivoire (Aldrich & Cornell, 1989; Anderggen, 1994). In all its consequences, the continued maintenance of bilateral agreements by Britain with its former colonies - Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone, and the Gambia undermines true integration among them (Yansane, 1977).

g. Protectionism of National Sovereignty by Member States

Regionalism requires states to derogate some aspects of their sovereignty to the emerging regional community in policy formulation in an attempt to achieve the set goals of the regional bloc (Qobo, 2007). However, member states of the ECOWAS region prefer to adopt unilateralism as a measure in protecting or guarding their sovereignty from being eroded by any means, including a regional bloc (Ezenwe, 1983; Emeka, 1990). Essentially, genuine regionalism has eluded the West African sub-region since unilateralism is incompatible with the fundamental principles and methods of regionalism, which call for states to make legally binding commitments to promoting free trade and to resolving any issues that arise from trade liberalisation (Charmely, 1977).

This suggests that when states engage in regionalism, their national sovereignty is anticipated to be compromised in certain ways, particularly in specific areas that pertain to the core of economic or political integration. However, it is regrettable that the attitudes, ideologies, and psychological compositions of the leaders of ECOWAS member states regarding national sovereignty continue to be unquestioned and sacrosanct (Bala, 2017). This unyielding stance of political leaders on regionalism is a result of the unwavering adherence of African states to their gained or secured political autonomy. Therefore, the emergence of numerous national currencies,

central banks, shipping lines, etc., within the ECOWAS region was not as shocking. Unfortunately, regionalism in the ECOWAS remained a mirage to the degree that these "outward manifestations of nationhood and sovereignty became symbols of attachment, eliciting loyalties that could not transcend the national borders" (Bala, 2017: 30).

h. Incompatible Economic and Political Systems

Geographical and natural resource diversity are further manifestations of state arbitrariness in the ECOWAS subregion. Geographically speaking, the member states of the ECOWAS region are either landlocked or near the ocean. While landlocked states in West Africa are less likely to want to engage in international export trade, their sea-accessible counterparts are typically not good trading partners.

The endowment of distinct natural resources exacerbates this situation even more, forcing member states to seek out compatible trading partners elsewhere. While the Niger Republic or Chad is blessed with cotton, tobacco, and other resources, Nigeria is rich in natural gas and petroleum. Their priorities regarding what they require from a potential trading partner are further reinforced by this incompatibility in resource endowment. ECOWAS member states are in dire need of technology, manufactured goods, computers, and cars, which always diverts attention from any trade relations and, consequently, prevents them from achieving true integration (Chingono & Nakana, 2009).

Politically, when ECOWAS member states gained their independence, they embraced a variety of ideologies that contradict genuine regional integration. Under former Prime Minister Tafawa Belewa, Nigeria adopted a moderate or conservative approach to governance, in contrast to the radical socialist policies in Ghana under Kwame Nkrumah (Mekuriyaw, 2016). Unfortunately, these differences in the political and economic structures of the ECOWAS states resulted in a disparity in their economic performance that threatens genuine regionalism. This political undertone was expanded upon and advanced. This is because newly elected African political leaders made decisions based on their own beliefs rather than the provisions of their respective constitutions (Bilal, 2013; Soderbaum, 2016).

Conclusion and Recommendations

The conclusion of this paper links a few working conclusions to the topic of colonial states in West Africa as a barrier to regionalism in ECOWAS at 50. First, the member states of ECOWAS have been characterised as colonial, arbitrary and artificial states, with borders of many countries being the product of processes that have little to do with whether or not people want to be together. While some groups have been split by colonially created borders, others have been thrown into the same political units despite their desire to be apart. The existence of established regional integration institutions, which slowed regionalism, the dominance of Islam and Christianity in West Africa, which has led to sporadic conflicts over doctrinal and lifestyle inconsistencies, and other factors, complicated state arbitrariness and artificiality in the ECOWAS region. Therefore, it is accurate to say that West Africa is the only subregion in the world where economic integration or the avoidance of disintegration is of the utmost importance.

Second, the crippling financial situation of ECOWAS member states has impacted their ability to assist the organisation in fulfilling its costly security and peacemaking missions. Therefore, for aid supplies in war-torn nations or even direct intervention, ECOWAS has relied on the United Nations, European nations, and states like the United States and France.

Third, the emergence of a regional institution is supposed to coordinate the so-called endogenous processes of regional integration of integrating states. However, colonial state borders

either cause or impede this endogenous process, and there is an increasing over-reliance on external partners such as the European Union that exacerbates the situation. To a great extent, African integration initiatives are modelled after the European integration model. The AU is a replica of the EU, and although this is regrettable, the majority of African regional integration organisations currently operate with legal frameworks that are replicas of those of the European Union. This partnership would be a misnomer for complete reliance on outside assistance, such as the European Union acting as a model and a source of financial aid, though it is not wholly incorrect in terms of involving and obtaining outside assistance in the integration process in West Africa. The immediate risk here is that the relationships of integrating African states would become strained as a result of complete external dependence. This is an era of unions, and as such, African states must respect regionalism and even cooperate with regional initiatives like the European Union. Although cooperation or partnership is appropriate, Africans alone must decide the future of regional integration on their continent.

Arising from the foregoing discourses and conclusions, the paper makes the following Recommendations:

- a. There is a need to streamline/downsize the numerous regional integration organisations (RIOs) in West Africa; to create room for a few RIOs that could work for regional integration, rather than the commonplace competition seen between the ECOWAS and the UEMOA.
- b. The necessity for handling the challenge of the use of English, French and Portuguese in the ECOWAS cannot be overemphasised. This is further hampered by the diverse cultural values in the West African sub-region. Adopting a definite language policy and implementation will establish an elite-people nexus in West Africa, wherein funding a definite language policy will be prioritised.
- c. There is an urgent need to encourage intra-member trade in ECOWAS, a sort of enforcing trade agreements, treaties and protocols among member states. Ensuring that this happens is definitely a harbinger of huge cooperation, expectation, etc., in ECOWAS.
- d. The overbearing influences of the Bretton Woods institutions have hindered regional integration in the ECOWAS. This is mostly noticeable in the diverse application of Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP) in ECOWAS member states, especially between Anglophone and Francophone states. Thus, there is a need for harmonisation of economic policies among ECOWAS states; and,
- e. There is a need to harmonise the seemingly impossible colonial policies of France and Britain in West Africa. This is more so that, as independent states, they must look and work beyond the undue influences of their erstwhile colonial masters.

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