REGIONAL INTEGRATION IN WEST AFRICA (1960-2015): BALANCE AND PERSPECTIVES

Mamadou Alpha Diallo[1]

To reflect about West Africa is always a pleasure, however, to write this article now is even better. First, because it marks the 40th birthday (1975-2015) of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS); second, because it marks the fifteen years of the existence of (2001-2015) the African Union (AU). At last but not least, it marks fifteen years of our important academic life in Brazil, which is a starting point for opening a new dialogue, reflections and exchanges among Brazilian Africanists and the world. Besides, it is the result of a long period of dedication researching, teaching and participating in extension projects of the Brazilian Center for African Studies (CEBRAFRICA) of the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul. That said, this article seeks, throughout a historical analysis of the regional West African integration process, to reaffirm the pioneering region in terms of socio-economic, political and cultural integration, but also to highlight the persistence of the difficulties and the challenges of the political unity consolidation in the region, especially after the internalization of colonial boundaries. The article has set as a goal the understanding of why, despite the enormous efforts and several attempts, the pan-Africanist dream of autonomy, unity and development is still below the expectations. It starts with the hypothesis that the difficulties are historical in nature (colonial heritage) and structural, connected to the difficult relationship between the internal processes of state-building and the inclusion of it in the international system dominated by the capitalist imperialism of the colonial and neo-colonial countries. In a nutshell, the low speed of the economic, political and socio-cultural integration process and, especially, the lack of autonomy are closely tied to the unfinished independence processes due to

1 Latin American Institute of Economics, Society and Politics, Universidade Federal da Integração Latino-Americana (UNILA), Foz do Iguaçu, Paraná, Brazil. E-mail: mamadou.diallo@unila.edu.br

endogenous and exogenous factors.

Historical analysis

After over fifty years of African independence and forty years of the main Organization of West African regional integration, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), it is important to measure the progress, the achievements, the problems and the prospects of the regional integration of the West Africa. The purpose of this section is to analyze the historical background of the different stages of African regional integration in order to show that integration is not a new theme in the political life of the West African region, and neither in the continent as a whole.

However, if, in the past, despite the lack of physical and political independence structures, there was some harmonization of ideas and actions leading to the independence of the region's countries in the 1960s, then, there has been a divergence between elites that led to the creation of multiple organizations non-viable in the political, economic and socio-cultural fields. This favored the deployment of imperialism and neo-colonialism, both in the region and in the rest of the continent, at the expense of the unity to socio-political and cultural development of the region.

The main idea behind African integration comes from the nationalist movements in general and, specifically, from Pan-Africanism, which through its mobilization, first externally and then internally, formed the basis for claiming political independence between the beginning of the 1960s and mid-1970s. In this regard, pan-Africanism can be defined as the expression of the aspirations of the of the African peoples' descendants (Nkrumah 1963; Wade 2005). In other words, it is a movement created by the Diaspora's Africans and transported later by the independency African elite, such as Kwame Nkrumah, Leopold Sedar Senghor and Cheikh Anta Diop, Senegal; Patrice Lumumba, Congo; Jomo Kenyeta, Kenya; Julius Nyerere, Tanzania - to name only a few that stood out for their dedication supporting the pan-Africanism and the construction of the African unity, on regional or continental level.

Therefore, the pan-Africanism can be defined in a simplified way as an aspiration of blacks from Africa and from the Diaspora who culturally identify themselves by their belonging to the black and African civilization, which seeks its strength in the blacks' long-term resistance to slavery and colonization. According to Wade (2005), this is the aspiration that is projected to the regional and continental political unity, first under

the form of regional integration and later under the form of the United States of Africa. Consequently, the origin of the African integration man be confused with the pan-Africanism, which was born in the Caribbean and North America (USA and Canada), in the late nineteenth century, as a result of a long and violent confrontation between, on one hand, the authorities and the slaves and, on the other, the free blacks and the slaves.

The current West African countries, along with the rest of the continent, thought about uniting in order to stand up both to the past of slavery and colonialism as to the domination of imperialism and of the Western neo-colonialism, besides to the challenges of development, socio-political and cultural emancipation of their people in a globalized world. It was facing the challenges and opportunities offered by a globalized world that they thought about economic, political and sociocultural integration in the 60's of the twentieth century, as a precondition to competitively participate in the international geopolitics. However, fifty years after the African independence, it is observed that, on one hand, regional integration among West African states is not new (N'Guessan 2010), and, on the other, that it can be said that this regional integration progress, efficiency and effectiveness is far below what was expected. This means that despite the progress and the important accomplishments by organizations such as ECOWAS, the main economic integration bloc in the region, the achievement of the pan-Africanist most important objectives and dreams is still far from happening.

One possible explanation to this situation can be found by analyzing the history of the West African countries' groupings, especially when taking into account the context in which they started these processes. From the historical point of view, one can identify the origin of the first West African regional integration projects in the context of the French colonization of the nineteenth century, which, by looking for management convenience, set a standard and a common management structure of the region's political entities. Obviously, this administrative option was a way to save an inherited political structure of African administers from the Mali Empire, which makes even more incomprehensible and unacceptable the stagnation, or even the retrogression, of these processes, since the region is a pioneer on the implementation of integrationist ideas in Africa. Roughly speaking, we can see that attempts to establish a political, economic and unified cultural structure in the West African region begins with the traditional empires (Mali), continues in the French colonial administration (French West Africa-AOF) before being thought by the independence elites (Kwame Nkrumah, Sekou Ahmadou Toure, Leopold Sedar Senghor, Modibo Keita and others) in the decade of 1950-1960. In this sense, Nunes (2011) calls attention to the

fact that the region presents, throughout its history, ambitious cooperation initiatives for development before the globalizing liberal waves (1980-1990), considered the main bases of the current regional integration processes. In the African case, integration is an idea that arises as a form of resistance and struggle against external aggression that the continent and its people have suffered throughout history. That is, the idea of unity, regional and continental integration in Africa arises in the same way and with the same goals as the pan-Africanism and nationalism. These processes and movements seek to join forces and oppose external aggression; therefore, we must say that the importation of an integration model in Africa goes beyond the idea of "copy" and enters in the logic of historical heritage, and is justified by the necessity of opposing the domination and establishing itself as a nation (Diallo 2015). According to Ouadraogo (2005), globalization has been a strong motivation for the will of the African leaders in building a continental force based on pan-African cooperation. However, the historical origin of African regional integration dates back to the period of independence of the former colonized territories. Due to various problems and shortcomings inherited from colonization, the newly politically emancipated states have seen in integrating the ability to face and overcome the challenges of economic, political and socio-cultural development, to intend an effective and respectful participation in international geopolitics.

Thus, at the beginning of the independences, there were several uniting initiatives between the different states in order to find a complementary strength when looking for solutions to the different and huge security, socio-economic and cultural development problems. The countries of West Africa, from the 1960s, as the rest of the liberated and politically independent world, were, at that moment, facing the challenge of overcoming the development barriers that first appeared in the demographic and economic levels, in which the very small socioeconomic spaces obligate the new rulers to seek the extension of political and geographical borders (integration) to postulate any kind of development.

This broadening of political and geographic boundaries allows the reduction of the unitary cost of production, thanks to the economy of scale, to the higher degree of specialization and economic competition, to the access of technology and to a better sharing of ideas and experiences in all the levels of the economic activity. In other words, the first justifying element of the integration projects comes from the claim that the fragmentation of the region in small states constitutes an obstacle to socioeconomic development. This argument is based on the hypothesis of Balkanization (fragmentation) in 54 states, which relations can be the focus of potential conflicts, since they can be easily manipulated by rivals or opponents of the

pan-African idea. The second paradigm regards to the time factor, which, according to Nkrumah (1963), works against the formation of the African state, since the less fast the process is, the more consolidated is the national consciousness on the balkanization. The later, in turn, approaches the Africans'consciousness over the need of the continent and its islands to quickly become a territory of united people in a United State of Africa. This united continent should guarantee to all African people economic security, a common foreign policy and an economic and socio-cultural development (Tchuigoua 2007, 89).

In a nutshell, it could be stated that the great quantity of projects and movements, such as the Pan-Africanism and the nationalism, were generated outside the continent. Integration can also be considered an import; however, it was conditioned by the historical past of the continent, characterized by resistance and opposition to the colonial/neocolonial system and foreign domination (Dieng 2005). Consequently, from a historical point of view, it can be said that while the African state is one of the newest in the international system, the idea of regional integration can be considered as one of the earliest, since it began as a form of slavery resistance in the 19th century and was strengthened in face to the colonial system and to Western imperialism. Then, it became a symbol for the economic, political and cultural development in the 1990s. Within the African continent, the western region is a pioneer in this process, which was led by traditional leaders, known for their resistance to the processes of occupation and domination of Africa by the powers in the nineteenth century.

According to Wade (2005), the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885 set the division and occupation rules of Africa on the map, between the major colonial powers of the time - France, England, Germany, and Belgium. However, it lacked to these powers the occupation of the territories. On this second phase, despite the sophisticated weapon arsenal, the Europeans were faced with an organized resistance, especially located in West Africa, where black leaders had the opportunity to acquire weapons in Sierra Leone, since the nineteenth century, from former slaves, freed by the United States of America. The U.S, by the way, for not being threatened by the new wave of Western occupation in the region, has expressed a sense of solidarity with the region's traditional leaders (Chaka, Samory Touré, Ousmane Dan Fodio, Alboury Ndiaye, El Hadj Omar Tall, Ahmadou Bamba). Ouédraogo (2005, 69) argues that these are the traditional leaders who coined the first integration projects with the ambition of frightening against colonial occupation and rebuilding the vast supra tribal political groups that existed on the continent before slavery. Roughly speaking, the myth of unity that

remerges in the Americas, through the diaspora, supported by the pan-African ideology, is a recovery of the resistance spirit that existed on the continent before colonization and it is the same idea that will guide the mobilization of African elites both of the diaspora and of the continent in favor of regional and continental integration in the decade of 1960-70. That is, in terms of evolution, it can be said that the current state of the projects and African regional integration processes, contrary to what one thinks and says, was only accelerated by globalization and/or mundialization.

This means that the processes that have led to the creation of organizations like the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in 1975 are something new, in form and in context. However, the idea of the creators is to rescue the historical memory in order to face the new strategy of balkanization and domination of the region by the new colonial system known as "Neo-Colonialism". The penetration and permanence of neocolonialism occurred through the state's creation according to borders and structures defined by colonization, which turned for example, the French West Africa (AOF), that was a federation of eight French territories in Africa, into eight countries (Mauritania, Senegal, French Sudan (now Mali), Guinea, Ivory Coast, Niger, Upper Volta (now Burkina Faso) and Dahomey (now Benin). This fragmentation has being indicated as one of the integration blocks, and, albeit the ideological and political differences among elites since independence, it has always been sought the regional integration as the most appropriate mean of achieving the African dream of the region's economic, political, and, especially, socio-cultural development. It is not only about the market expansion efforts, because, according to N'Guessan (2010, 142), in the case of West Africa, the size of the states is not the only blocker element of development. The size of the state can be totally secondary, since these small states know how to multiply and facilitate their relations with other countries in the region or in the world. That is, if on one hand the age of projects and federalist ideas facilitated the achievement of the independence of African countries and the grouping of them around the regional integration idea as a mean of strengthening their autonomy, on the other, the colonial heritage created endogenous and exogenous barriers that make West Africa and the rest of the continent to live cyclical periods of advances and setbacks, optimism and pessimism. Aware of this facts, and taking into account the forty years (1975-2015) of existence of the main regional integration block of West Africa, the next session of this reflection focuses on the analysis of endogenous and exogenous factors that prevent the development of West African regional integration , as well as block the balance of the achievements and challenges of ECOWAS.

ECOWAS and the barriers of integration: endogenous and exogenous factors

The West African region is characterized by other elements that prevent the development of the National States, where beyond the limited physical space, are highlighted the diversity and ethnic or religious rivalries, found in countries like Ivory Coast and Nigeria. At the regional level, a set of institutional, legal and infrastructural obstacles are seen as barriers for the socio-economic, cultural and political development. In a few words, they are considered as barriers for the development of regional and international cooperation, as West Africa is being increasingly marginalized on the world markets, technological networks, large telecommunications systems, and on the international community at large. Thus, the creation of a variety of regional organizations was the way in which the leaders sought to face these obstacles and challenges. A more detailed analysis could describe each of these integrationist initiatives in West Africa, to show that the major integration projects that emerged in this part of the region between 1950 and 1975 (see Table 1) were decisive in the history of regional integration in West Africa and in the continent as a whole. This is because the West African integration initiatives have been the source of convergence and divergence on the political and ideological agenda that guides, to the present, the inter and intra-African relations.

Table 1 - The several attempts of creating regional integration organizations in West Africa between 1959 and 1975

Creation date	Regional Organization	Intervention Area	Member countries
1959-1960	Mali Federation	Politics and economics	Mali, Senegal, Burkina Faso, Benin,
1959-1960	Ghana-Guinea Union	Economics	Ghana, Guinea e Mali.
1959-1962	West African Customs Union (SUDAN)	Economics	Cote d'Ivoire, Benin, Burkina Faso, Niger, Mauritania, Senegal and Mali (French Sudan).
1963-2001	Organization of African Unity (OAU)	Various	The 32 independent states of the continent

1964	Financial and economic agreement	Economics	Sierra Leone and Guinea
1966	Customs Union of the States of West Africa (UDEAO)	Economics	Ivory Coast, Benin, Burkina Faso, Niger, Mauritania, Senegal and Mali (French Sudan).
1966	West African Common Market	Economics and politics	Liberia, Sierra Leone, Côte d´Ivoire and Guinea.
1970	Economic Community of West Africa (CEAO)	Economics and monetary	Ivory Coast, Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Senegal.
1971	Economic Cooperation	Trade and social service	Sierra Leone and Liberia
1973	Mano River Union	Customs and Economic Union	Sierra Leone, Guinea and Libéria.
1973	West African Monetary Union (WAMU)	Economics	Benin, Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, Mali, Niger, Senegal, and Togo.
1973	Economic Community of West Africa (CEAO)	Monetary Integration	Ivory Coast, Benin, Burkina Faso, Niger, Mauritania, Senegal and Mali (French Sudan).
1975	Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)	Economic and monetary integration	Benin, Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Ivory Coast, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo

Source: Diallo 2015.

This table shows that regional integration has always been on the mind of West Africans since the first years of independence, a fact that owes much to the memory of the great empires (Benin, Mali, Songhai) that marked the region before the European settlement. Another important point

to note in this context is that only ECOWAS, established in 1975, resisted the difficult times of the Cold War, the liberal and neoliberal wave. These can be remembered by the difficulties of the lost decade that led to the adoption of the Structural Adjustment Programs (PAES) (1980-1990). The lost decade consequences were strengthened after the fall of the Berlin Wall, when the region and the African continent were challenged by the implosion of fragile states in National civil wars (Liberia, Sierra Leone, Rwanda, Burundi, Guinea Bissau). As Adebajo (2013) would say, the Berlin curse continues to haunt Africa's future, because, while conflicts and disputes such as those mentioned above had more immediate internal roots, conflicts and disputes between countries, such as the disputes between Ethiopia and Eritrea, Somalia and Ethiopia, Libya and Chad, Nigeria and Cameroon are the result of the colonial legacy between countries.

To Adebajo (2013), if during the Cold War in Africa they feared international intervention, in the post-apartheid period the marginalization was the major concern. This occurred because the continent progressively called less attention, the foreign investment was transferred to the emerging democracies of Eastern Europe and, later, the resources began to be diverted from African countries in conflict to boost the reconstruction efforts of countries like Afghanistan and Iraq until 2003. From this analysis, it can be stated that it is the perception of this "abandonment" of the continent by its traditional partners that motivated the African reaction, which resulted in the African renaissance, by the replacement of the Organization of African Unity for the African Union (2001) and the establishing the New Partnership for Africa's development (2002). This led to a phase of strengthening of the African Regional Integration organizations, including ECOWAS. This phase was seen as the first step in overcoming the colonial heritage, major exogenous barriers of the state formation and of the strengthening of regional integration, but according to Adebajo (2013, 03):

> Africans have not overcome the colonial legacy of Berlin. As economic and political systems, they were still tied to the legacy left by the imperial political leaders in Berlin. African leaders also have failed to create effective regional integration schemes to overcome the legacy of the Berlin conference. It is, thus, a metaphor to describe colonial and post-colonial Africa experiences, as well as its continuous challenges to break the links of the political, economic and cultural legacy chains of the colonial state.

The colonial legacy continues, as we can see, to be one of the main obstacles to state's formation and the regional integration of the African continent's processes. When we analyze the endogenous and exogenous factors of West African Integration, we realize that both emanate from the

same source. That is, both endogenous as exogenous barriers are the result of the colonial legacy, which gained more sophistication and deepening with the political elites who administered and managed African states after independence.

What would be these barriers? How to attribute them to colonial heritage? Does it mean that colonization is responsible for all the ills that affect West and the continent as a whole? Here are some questions that mobilized the West African Community between 2006 and 2010, with support from UNESCO and from the different governments of the fifteen membership states of ECOWAS, in order to analyze all the problems, successes and possibilities or potentials of the region and to triage new pathways to integration, socioeconomic, political and cultural development of the region.

Among the barriers identified by the collection of books produced in the period above indicated, are the political fragmentation of the region because of the adoption and internalization of borders drawn by colonization and major milestones of nation states. The rest of the barriers of the West African regional integration revolve around the states, especially in the way they are managed, and the way dictatorial governments and parties somehow annihilated some kind of internal dialogue, fueling corruption and clientelism (Sanankoua 2007, 16). Other elements ,identified in Bamko Congress (2007) as the regional West African integration problems, are, among others, national egoism, the transposition of the operating modes of the states in regional bodies, the lack of democratic culture, the preponderance of individual and ideological ambitions and the weak involvement of civil society in regional affairs (Sanakoua 2007; Sidibe 2007). These are some of the explanatory elements of the malfunction of institutional mechanisms of integration that demonstrate the weight of the nation state in the region, its role in the failure to comply with Community decisions, as well as the weak linkages between regional and national structures. It may be added in these elements set the lack of the so-called rule of law culture and of democratic culture, which suggest the urgent need of reform of regional integration organizations, such as ECOWAS. It is important, at this point, to say that these lacks highlighted above may not be noted as an Africans' normal and common thing, but rather, as a heritage that elites received from colonial school and that was reinforced by neo-colonial pacts and the international context of the Cold War.

The consequences of these internal practices supported by international partners, "the famous Friends of Africa" also known as traditional continent's partners (France, England, Portugal, United States of America), are seen today in terms of lack of infrastructure, ineffective management of

resources and socio-political, economic and cultural problems of the states. All of it ends up increasing rivalries among states and among elites, which generated, despite of the problems, the proliferation of regional integration organizations. However, the integration has always been on the priorities of states and of the political elites of Western Africa. Following this logic, Sanankoua (2007) states that regardless of the problems and difficulties encountered in the way, regional integration remains a central element in the discussions due to the ongoing globalization, but, mainly, because of the African governance issues, crises and armed conflicts, economic problems, poverty and the failure of states. Thus, it is recommended to leave aside at least part of the sovereignty principle to allow the autonomous functioning of community structures and the effective implementation of the decisions taken under the supranational organizations. We have to agree with Kamian (2007) when he states that integration is an indispensable condition for the development of the continent and when he wonders if the African Union, the latest version of integration at the continental level, managed to triumph in the face of the diversity and complexities of the problems to be surpassed, such as the language issue, which in our view is wrongly seen as a barrier to integration. Considered as one of the elements of domination and colonial influence, the language is of fundamental importance in African culture and consequently in the regional West African integration process. However, from the official adoption of the Western languages, the African linguistic diversity came to be regarded as brakes to the approximation of Africans in the context of regional integration processes. In this sense, there are important considerations to the importance of language before it is seen as a barrier to integration as well illustrates Diop (1960), in the following lines:

> The influence of language is so important that the different European countries think they can, without great harm, pretend to politically withdraw from Africa, but continue in a real way in the economic, spiritual and cultural domain (Diop 1960, 26).

This Diop's statement makes clear the strategic importance of convincing Africans to embrace English, French or Portuguese as an official language, on the pretext that it is the only way to unite Africans. However, one wonders: how? Surely, the only right answer to this question would be to admit that the languages of the former colonial powers unite Africans in suffering, in submission and in the perpetuation of cultural, economic and political alienation (Diallo 2015). In this light, we hear that the language and cultural diversity are the main problems of building the nation-state in Africa, and unfortunately, this idea was internalized and accepted by Africans in

general and particularly by the ruling class. Therefore, to be eloquent and to well express ideas and thoughts in French, Portuguese or English are factors that have become synonymous of intelligence, intellectuality or simply the main element of symbolic power as Pierre Bourdieu would say. This author believes that there is a symbolic power, on which the ruling classes are benefiting from a symbolic capital, disseminated and reproduced through institutions and social practices that enable the exercising of power. For Bourdieu (2001), these symbols are instruments of social integration and make it possible to achieve consensus on the meaning of the social world, which fundamentally contributes to the reproduction of the dominant order.

In the case of West Africa, despite the language differences and "dialects" that exist in the region, there is the existence of vehicular cross-border languages that enable communication between the different peoples of the region. According to Sangare (2009, 217), the concept of vehicular language applies to languages that have crossed their regional berths and are used to compensate for inter-ethnic communication needs, while the cross-border language applies to those who, even though within its regional birthplace, are found at least in two neighboring countries. These two types of languages are characterized by the fact of presenting themselves as the place or element in which are based national and ethnic differences. Applying these concepts to the region, we find several vehicular languages among which may be mentioned the Akan, Mandinga, Dioula, Ewe, Fula, English French, and Portuguese. Therefore, if we consider that only the colonizer's languages are spoken by all, to make the Portuguese, English and French the official languages of different West African States, we will see that there are other African languages that are regional and therefore could likewise serve as means of communication between the majority populations. Thus, one can agree with the idea of much of the literature that argues for the promotion of African languages and which claims it is never practical to advocate the use of simultaneous French, English and Afrikaans, and that there is also no reason to advocate for the exclusive use of French or English (Diop 1960; Sangare 2009).

Regarding the cross-border languages, considering the ECOWAS space that occupies the former space of the Mali Empire, there are, today, among the thirteen languages[2] recognized as national by the current state of Mali, ten that are spoken beyond the country's borders. Among these may be mentioned the Mandingo language (Mande), which is spoken in Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, Gambia, Guinea Bissau, Guinea Conakry, Mali, Senegal and therefore more spoken than any other European language of the region,

2   São Bamananka, djula, Dogā, Fula, Hasanya, Maninkankan, Soninké, Synara, Senoufu,Kassonké etc.

not only in geographical terms but also at the level of society. French is the official language of most countries in the region, eight of the fifteen ECOWAS countries, but it is a language used by the educated minority while the Mandingo is spoken by both French ex colonies (Ivory Coast, Mali, Burkina Faso Guinea Conakry), English ex colonies (Gambia) and Guinea Bissau (Portuguese colony) and is used by most of the population, whether literate or not. In this case, it appears that there is more than one reason to adopt an African language instead of opting for one inherited from colonization. The latest, besides being accessible only to a minority in their country, creates beyond the physical borders one cultural and dialectic border, and hinders, in one hand, the approach of its own elites with the population and, in the other, allows the continuation of foreign interference of ex. colonial powers. This rivalry is presented in the region since before independence until today, and can be illustrated in the following words of Cheikh Anta Diop:

> "We should be extremely suspicious of the discrete attempts to 'saxonisation' of black Africa, due to the width of the British colony territories." The combined effort of England, and especially the United States of America, tends to disrupt the habits of "intellectuals" and thus bring the old French, Portuguese colonies etc. in opting for the English so that linguistic unification is done from this language. But the linguistic unity on the basis of any foreign language, regardless of a point of view or angles, that preconizes would be a cultural abortion. It would hopelessly consecrate the death of authentic national culture, the end of our deep spiritual and intellectual life, to reduce us to the role of eternal shepherds who have failed in their mission in this world (Diop 1960, 24).

This text shows that the intention of creating a linguistic unit in West Africa based on English or French would not, in any way, have the desired effect, which is to facilitate regional integration and closer ties between Africans, but it also makes clear the existence of rivalries between Anglophone and Francophone in the region. This rivalry transposed on these terms reinforces the differences between Africans and hides the real problem of the matter that is the rivalry between individual and selfish interests of the ruling elite of the internal and external point of view, besides the antagonism between the interests of the former metropolises to maintain its influence in the region and the local need to build a viable economic space, politically and socially.

Thus, considering that, in general, the critical point of economic integration is the promotion of trade and welfare within member countries. Egoscozábel (2004) states that, for developing countries in general, and particularly for Africa, the key factor of integration is not so much the

commercial expansion which growth potential is limited by other factors, but the stimulus effects of other variables, such as investment on the objectives of growth and human development. Thus, it can be said, from the historical analysis that regionalism results in sub-Saharan Africa, although positive, continue to face enormous challenges and problems forty years after the creation of the ECOWAS (1975-2015).

However, it is noteworthy that the West African integration, as well as integration blocs in other regions of the continent, gained more momentum after the creation of the African Union (AU) in 2001 and the New Partnership for African Development in 2002. These two facts (creation of the AU and NEPAD), on one side symbolize the African Renaissance and on the other reaffirm African loyalty to the principles of Western countries. It is in this perspective that Otávio and Cardoso (2014, 45) state that:

> On the one hand, the AU is the expression of African adaptation to the post-Cold War world, as it turns to points advocated by Western countries such as the enhancement of democracy, human rights, good governance. On the other, the AU also represents the response of Africa to its challenges, such as conflict resolution and peace on the continent.

From this statement, one may wonder if indeed the creation of the AU can be considered a break with the historical past of the continent marked by colonial and neocolonial domination. That is, can we consider the creation of the AU and NEPAD as symbols of independence and self-assertion of the continent? The answer to this question may be positive if we consider the first decade of the AU and NEPAD (2001-2011) and negative if we look at the continent after the called Arab Spring in 2011.

In the first decade, we saw an Africa that seemed refreshed, more confident and optimistic which, through various initiatives and programs, could attract new partners without alienating old ones, thus generating a significant step forward in the realization of the Pan-Africanist dream of seeing the continent united towards the socio-economic, cultural and political development. In this line, it can be stated that the ECOWAS countries were ahead, with positive results in conflict resolution (Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea-Bissau) and in the imposition of peaceful and legal ways of accessing power, solving, this way, almost definitely the applicant issue of united scams, non-transparent or at least questionable elections (since they were always won by the ruling parties), and political instability in the region. This new wave started in Senegal in 2000 with the famous political change that occurred with the victory of the opposition party coalition, called the *Front pour l'alternance* (FAL), led by the candidate Abdoulaye Wade's of Senegalese Democratic Party (PDS). The victory of the FAL in the second round of the

elections on March 19, 2000, not only heralded the end of forty years of the Socialist Party rule (PS), but also marked an empowerment of African youth through the ballot box, another form of continue along the path of the pan-Africanist revolution, repeatedly confiscated by the elites and their Western allies. Thus, Senegal taking the direction of change exactly a century after the first pan-African conference in London (1900-2000), announces a break with the colonial past, the only party, the lifelong presidents (...), the end of what Bruno Jaffré (1989), analyzing the voltaic break (Burkina Faso) that brought Thomas Sankara to power in 1983, describes as a result of progressive wear of the political system inherited from colonization (Jeffre 1989, 11). Also were noted significant progress in the integration infrastructure, which somehow facilitated the socioeconomic development of the region, the advancement of democracy and respect for human rights.

Coincidence or not, it should be noted that the climate called for experts and African political commentators as le "vent du changement" (the wind of change) entered the region through the same door, where, about two centuries ago, came the French colonialism. To mark this symbolism, the new Senegalese government funded the construction of two monuments respectively symbolizing the African renaissance (a statue that have become a tourist attraction in the Senegalese capital) and the opening of the continent to the rest of the world, the work of the Senegalese architect Pierre Goudiaby, known by the nickname of Atepa (the builder in Diola), which also states that Senegal is the gate of Africa. Therefore, "l'Alternace politique" (the alternate policy) can be interpreted as the entry of a new era in the region and on the continent and, in this sense, one might expect difficulties and even confrontations between pro and against this new political climate.

This duality, a result of the polarization of inter-African relations (Diallo 2015), will be the cause or justification of the fall of this new optimistic phase of West Africa, effectively starting with the breaking of democratic rules, disregard to the results of the polls and redemption of the old rules of clientelism between African political elites and colonial powers, anxious to safeguard their interests and influences. It is in this perspective that arises Ivory Coast crisis, a direct result of the electoral deadlock in November 28, 2010, when the victory of opposition leader Alessane Ouattara, announced by the Independent Electoral Commission supported by the UN, was blocked by the President of Laurent Gbagbo who had in his support the Constitutional Council of the country, maximum legal organ of the state (Diallo, Kerr Oliveira and Silva 2011, 4).

The situation led to a national and international dead lock and mostly allowed the strategic resurgence of French neocolonialism, which

again managed to put the Africans against each other, not only in Ivory Coast - where the political debate ended with the Civil War - but also between the countries of ECOWAS, who have chosen (or not) for aligning the ideals of European intervention against the African version of trading, supported tacitly by the AU leading countries such as South Africa, Angola and Libya. Thus, it has begun the negative phase, not only of the African Union, but also of ECOWAS, making room for the new west interventionism (Ivory Coast, Mali, Libya, and Central African Republic) destructing African soils (especially ex French ones). Since then we are witnessing, in the framework of the ECOWAS, insecurity and instability policies with serious socio-economic consequences, the basis of the new wave of international migration in general and, particularly, the African migration towards Europe. The region is facing the same security dynamics of the Cold War period, characterized by internal political instability and the continuous French military intervention in its former colonies in favor of their interests. In this sense, Cardoso (2015) shows that, contrary to what was expected in the post-independence period, France increases its political influence and military strategy in West Africa through the defense pacts signed with other countries of the region.

In the positive phase of the AU, there was a tendency to decrease the French military presence in the region, with the closure of one of the main French military base at the fifty years of independence celebration, on April 4, 2010 by the then Senegalese President Abdoulaye Wade. This decision, put into practice in 2010, was made in 2008 as a way to mark the rupture they have been waiting for fifty years. In the opinion of President Wade, the presence of the French army in Senegal after fifty years of independence was not understandable and acceptable anymore. Thus, Senegal would not be the last country to maintain French military bases in Africa, mainly because the justification for this military presence no longer holds itself, because "There can be no external damage to the country. I reflected a lot, I do not see who can harm Senegal". This Senegalese posture follows up the changes announced by the 2000's democratic alternation, followed by the African renaissance symbolized by replacing the OAU by the AU in 2001 and the creation of NEPAD in 2002. For the symbolism that Senegal represents in African international relations, an energetic reaction of France and its Western allies was expected, to halt the advance of these changes that reinforce the autonomy and safeguard the sovereignty of African countries. Therefore, we can assign the internal and external movements, mobilization of the press and of French and Senegalese media against the Senegalese regime as the first step of this reaction. In this sense, the creation of youth movements (Yana Mar), to fight against Wade and his

government in Senegal, will have the same political effect of the coup that overthrew Amado Toumani Toure (ATT) in Mali, the civil war that brought Alassane Ouatara to power in Ivory Coast and Gaddafi's Libya invasion by NATO troops, led by France. The strategic objective of all these facts is the same: to create chaos, to overthrow the pro change governments, to bring back the friends of France to defend the need for the French stay through the famous cooperation agreements as shown in the statement of Macky Sall, new president of Senegal, elected in the second round of the 2012 elections:

> "The application for the withdrawal of the French military base is a mistake, which came from a nationalist feeling which, in some extent, was misplaced. Without such bases in Africa, Mali would have disappeared from the map and our country would certainly have felt the negative consequences of terrorism advance. Yes, I declare to have signed a new cooperation agreement that allowed relieve devices, but we need that the French troops of Senegal can be strengthened to educate and train the Senegalese forces and their neighbors in the ECOWAS." (Sall 2013)[3].

This statement of the new Senegalese president, matches the profile of the new political leadership of the region, but also indicates a new phase of French Africa relations underway in the region with all the adverse consequences for regional integration processes, stability and West African security. Thus, just as in previous periods, named the Cold War (1960-1990) and post-Cold War period (1990-200) - the search for socio-economic and political development, the main objectives of ECOWAS creation, are no longer the focus of the regional organization that happens to prioritize the issue of regional security. According to Cardoso (2015, 115), this can be generalized to the other Regional Economic Communities (RECs) on the continent, as if everyone had, at the time of the creation of such organisms, concerns centered on the searching for solutions to the socio-economic problems of the Member States. With the end of the Cold War and the worsening security situation in the continent, we are witnessing the African RECs' agenda expansion to include issues related to defense and security. It's worth to remember that ECOWAS is a pioneer in this matter on the continent, taking as its starting point the ECOWAS intervention in the Liberian Civil War in 1990 (Cepik 2010; Cardoso 2015).

Elements such as the drastic deterioration of the continent's

---

3 Our translation, original text in french: « *la demande de retrait de la base française était une erreur qui relevait d'un sentiment nationaliste quelque peu mal placé. Sans de telles bases en Afrique, le Mali aurait disparu de la carte et notre pays aussi aurait peut-être subi les conséquences très néfastes de l'avancée des terroristes* », *a indiqué le chef de l'Etat sénégalais. Qui déclare avoir* « *signé le nouvel accord de coopération qui a permis d'alléger le dispositif* ». *Mais, a-t-il renchéri,* « *nous avons besoin que les "Eléments français du Sénégal" puissent être renforcés pour former et entraîner les forces sénégalaises et de ses voisins de la Cedeao*».

security situation in the 1990s, the abandonment of Africa by the old powers operating in the region and the uncertainty of the international community to intervene in African conflicts, the OAU's inability to solve the continent's security problems, increased regional powers interest (Nigeria, South Africa) to assume responsibility and leadership in stabilizing the continent, the growing UN acceptance of the regional security role and the success of the intervention of ECOMOG in the Liberia civil war, stand out as explanatory facts of the greater involvement of African RECs in the security and defense issues (Cardoso 2015) from the 1990s and its strengthening since 2001. In this context, it is worth mentioning the role of ECOWAS and its member countries in catalyzing the continental efforts in finding solutions to African problems, reinforcing, thus, the historical continuity of leadership and the west African pioneering in the revolutions and struggles for autonomy from the mainland along the story.

As already highlighted, certainly this pioneering and engagement explains why the West African region is also the prime target for international predators such as the imperialist and colonial countries (France and England mostly) and international terrorism (Boko Haram, Al-Qaeda Maghreb Al Sabab), which challenges constantly the ECOWAS. In this sense, one can say that forty years after its creation (1975-2015), ECOWAS, has a positive balance despite the difficulties and shortcomings found. The role of ECOWAS has contributed and continues to contribute not only in solving various problems of the region but also on the whole continent. However, there is a need to strengthen the union, harmonize positions and policies of countries in the region with the world in general, France and multinational companies from various fields in particular, to end the intervention cycles and foreign interference in the region, preserving its autonomy, independence and interests. Without the sacrifice, the union and the harmony the positive actions of ECOWAS will always be barred by globalizing systemic interests that are inexhaustible sources of political instability, economic inefficiency, socio-cultural issues, impoverishment and fragmentation that generate consequences as migratory crises. Fall (2012) sees the African and West African immigration, in particular, because of the inherent pauperization from the economic crisis and its many consequences. To address these crises and challenges that affect the periphery of the capitalist world system, the populations of southern countries ended up electing international migration as a survival strategy in the same way it was during the seventies (1970). However, the tireless thirst for evasion of the African youth, since 2000 clashes with the strengthening of protectionism in the El Dorados.

REFERENCES

Adebajo, Adekeye. 2013. *The Curse of Berlin: Africa after the cold War*. Oxford University.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 2001. *O poder simbólico*. 4ed. Rio de Janeiro: Bertrand Brasil.

Cepik, Marco (Org). 2010. *Segurança Internacional: práticas, tendências e conceitos*. São Paulo: Hucitec.

Diallo, Mamadou A. 2015. "África Ocidental: Oportunidades e Desafios da Integração Regional frente as Relações Interafricanas." Thesis, Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, Porto Alegre, Brazil.

Diallo, Mamadou A. 2011. "A construção do Estado no Senegal e Integração na África Ocidental: os problemas da Gâmbia, de Casamance e da Integração Regional", Master's Thesis, Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, Porto Alegre, Brazil.

Diagne, Madiambal. 2010. « Senegal: Les vraies raisons du retrait militaire français de Dakar », *Quotidien*, 24 Fev.2010.

Dieng, Amady Aly. 2005. "Nacionalismo et panafricanismo", In *Intellectuels, nacionalisme et idéal panafricain: perspective historique* edited by Bah Therno, 57-68. Dakar : CODESRIA.

Diop, Cheikh Anta. 1974. *Les fondements Économiques et Culturels d´un Ètat Federal d´Afrique Noire,* Paris : Presença Africaine.

Kamian, Bakari. 2007. « La dynamique des integrations de la periodo coloniale à nos jours. » In *Les États- Nations face à l´intégration régional en Afrique de l´Ouest: le Cas du Mali* edited by Sanankoua, Bintou, 47-80. Paris : Karthala.

Nkrumah, Kwame. 1963. *Neocolonialismo-último estágio do imperialismo*, Brasília: Civilização.

N'Guessan, Donald Jean Marc. 2010**.** « Developpement et integration regional en Afrique de l´Ouest : analyse des contribuition de l´HOHADA et de l´UEMOA, 2009. » Thesis, Ecole doctorale de Science de l´Homme e de la Société, departement de Droit Publique, Université de Reims-Champagne Ardenne.

Nunes, Lito Fernandes. 2011. "Economia política da integração regional na África ocidental: a União Econômica e Monetária do Oeste Africano (UEMOA) como estratégia para o desenvolvimento regional" Thesis, Programa de Pós-Graduação em Economia, Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS), Porto Alegre, Brazil.

Otávio, Anselmo and Cardoso, Nilton C. F. 2014. "Reflexões acerca da

primeira década da União Africana: da transformação à atuação no Burundi, no Sudão e na Somália", *Revista Conjuntura Austral* 5 (26).

Ouédraogo, Ra-Sablga Seydou. 2005. "Trajectoire historique, actualité et perspectives du panafricanisme » In Intelectuels, nacionalisme et ideal panafricain edited by Bah, Thierno (org), 69-87. Dakar : CODESRIA.

Sall, Macky. 2013. « La Fermeture De La Base Francaise «Une erreur qui relevait d'un sentiment nationaliste quelque peu mal placé», *Seneweb*, Accessed December 14, 2015 http://www.seneweb.com/news/Politique/fermeture-de-la-base-francaise-a-dakar-laquo-une-erreur-qui-relevait-d-un-sentiment-nationaliste-mal-place-raquo-selon-mack_n_99280.html

Sanankoua, Bintou. 2007. *Les États- Nations face à l´intégration régional en Afrique de l´Ouest: le Cas du Mali.* Paris : Karthala, Paris.

Sidibe. 2007. « Ousmane Oumarou. L´intégration en Afrique de l´Ouest : evolution des questions instituicionnelles et politiques » In *Les États-nations face a l´intégration régional en Afrique de l´Ouest : le Cas du Mali* edited by Sanankoua, Bintou (ed), 13-42. Paris : Karthala.

Tchuigoua, Bernard Founou. 2007. « Panafricanisme et lutte dans un monde multipolaire. » In *Integration régionale, Démocracie et Panafricanisme: Paradigmes anciens, nouveaux défis* edited by Adandé, Alexis B. A.(dir.), 89-114. Dakar : CODESRIA.

Wade, Abdoulaye. 2005. *Un destin pour l´Afrique: l´avenir d´un continent.* Ile de la Jatte, Michelle Lafon.

ABSTRACT

This article seeks, through a historical analysis of the regional West African integration process, to reaffirm the pioneering region in terms of socio-economic integration, political and cultural, but also to highlight the persistence of the difficulties and challenges of the political unity consolidation in the region, especially after the internalization of colonial boundaries. The article has set the goal to understand why, despite the enormous efforts and several attempts, the pan-Africanist dream of autonomy, unity and development is still below expectations? It starts with the hypothesis that the difficulties are historical in nature (colonial heritage) and structural linked to difficult relationship between the internal processes of state-building and the inclusion of it in the international system dominated by capitalist imperialism of the colonial and neo-colonial countries. Namely, the low speed of the economic integration process, political and socio-cultural process and especially the lack of autonomy is closely tied to unfinished independence processes due to endogenous and exogenous factors.