



photo by S. Pecio

REGIONAL INTEGRATION OR REGIONALIZATION IN AFRICA

“ ONE OF THE FEATURES EXHIBITED BY CURRENT TREND IS THAT REGION BUILDING IS NOT NECESSARILY TAKING PLACE THROUGH THE ESTABLISHED INSTITUTIONS WE IMMEDIATELY THINK ABOUT, (...) WHICH BASICALLY HAVE BLUEPRINTS THAT SEEK TO EMULATE THE EUROPEAN UNION'S PATH TOWARDS CONSTITUTIONALISED INTEGRATION. (...) IT IS NOT SURPRISING THAT WHAT WE ARE FINDING DIFFICULT TO DO IN EUROPE IS PROVING TO BE IMPOSSIBLE TO ACHIEVE IN AFRICA WHERE STATES JUST DON'T WANT TO TRANSFER THEIR SOVEREIGNTY TO SUPRANATIONAL BODIES.” – CLAIMS PROFESSOR DANIEL BACH, A RENOWNED SPECIALIST ON REGIONAL INTEGRATION IN AFRICA FROM UNIVERSITY OF BORDEAUX, INTERVIEWED BY RAFAL WISNIEWSKI FROM THE R/EVOLUTIONS EDITORIAL TEAM.

INTERVIEW WITH **DANIEL BACH**
BY RAFAL WIŚNIEWSKI

Considering that there is a growing interest in political and economic cooperation with the African states on the part of such rising powers as China, India, Japan or Brazil, could you confirm that there is a new “scramble for Africa” going on?

There is definitely an unprecedented interest in Africa since, I would say, the end of the Cold War. But I think the term “scramble” has to be used with great caution. That is because it refers to 19th century post-Berlin attempt by European powers to grab as much territorial control of Africa as possible and therefore it conveys the idea that African agency is now as was the case then, being marginalized in the process. I think that one of the key features of what is going on at the moment is that we see elements of the lure of Africa – as illustrated by global rush for African commodities and markets – goes along with the reappraisal of African agency due to initiatives that range from the real of business entrepreneurship to opportunities for African states to renegotiate their status and position in the international system. That is why the term “scramble” is confusing.

Do you see elements of rivalry between these new players and states which traditionally exerted strong influence on Africa, like France or the United Kingdom, concerning for example mining contracts?

There are elements of rivalry of course. This is not new as well. In the 1990s for instance there were acute rivalries between French and American companies over access to oil in Congo. But I would not qualify what is happening now as a new form of “great game” another 19th century phrase used to qualify rivalries, this time in Central Asia. The 21st century is about a global game, which means that the key players are not necessarily states. The states are still party to this “game” but they have to contend with other key players like multinational corporations. We see it very clearly in Africa that these are global operators which may compete with Chinese, French, German or Polish companies in some parts of the world, but at the same time collaborate in other regions. The outcome is a ‘landscape’ that is becoming increasingly complex to decipher.

Current manoeuvres to secure privileged access to Guinea Conakry's mining resources illustrate the volatility of alliances that, ultimately, appear primarily driven by business considerations.



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You would claim then that there is less competition between states but rather one between multinational companies?

I would claim that just like “scramble” refers to situations that leave little room for African agency, what is at stake today is less a revival of “great game” rivalries than the ambivalent implications of a broadening of the range and ‘reach’ of participants- they are both a more diversified and globally connected group. Here we have not only states but also companies or diasporas which are extremely important in Africa. The Indian diaspora in East Africa is a good example. Its members that have Kenyan, Uganda or Tanzanian citizenship play a very important role regionally and globally as entrepreneurs. The same goes for the Chinese diaspora which is much more recent but extremely active in Africa. The “Chinatowns” are springing up all over the continent. All these players and their African business partners contribute to a new “flavor” so to speak in the interactions between the African and the global system.

What is the influence of this “global game,” as you called it, on regional integration in Africa? Does it support it, creates an impediment or doesn't it play that much of a role?

I think it does play a role but not in a conventional way. You may have noticed the underlying assumption according to which Africa is treated as a sort of a global entity by investors. The future of Africa, when it is discussed by emerging countries engaging with it, is seen as that of a unified continent. Perhaps this is because, after all, Chinese or Indian investors are used to dealing with political fragmentation – different provinces in the case of China, or different

states in the case of India can have very different economic policies. The colonial and post-colonial fragmentation of the continent is also confronted with the investors' pressure for what is being referred to as “defragmentation” of African markets. That is because, obviously, the markets of African states as individual markets, if you take aside Nigeria, South Africa and a couple of other countries, are not very attractive. What is attractive basically is the prospect of these markets becoming more closely tied to each other.

If this outside interest is actually encouraging economic integration of Africa, what factors could you name as the biggest obstacles towards closer regional integration on this continent?

First of all I would prefer to use the word “regionalism.” One of the features exhibited by current trends is that region-building is not necessarily taking place through the classic institutions we immediately think about, like the African Union or RECs (Regional Economic Communities) which basically have blueprints that seek to emulate the European Union. This is showing through ways that refer to what has been described, in the Asian context, as “lean integration.” There region-building has grown through sovereignty pooling but in close relation with a myriad of micro-regional initiatives, build around triangles of growth, harbours or common infrastructures. In Africa we already have Special Economic Zones, which are being promoted by (among others) the Chinese. Infrastructure rehabilitation is another key area. All this, in a way, contributes to a deepening of integration that is very much private-sector driven. Here it is not only extra-African players who matter but also the myriad of African entrepreneurs who are involved. So this is a process of region-building, but it is not really taking place through the institutions that are meant to perform such a function. The institutions – to answer your question – still try to emulate the EU model and promote transfers of sovereignty. It is not surprising that what we are finding difficult to do in Europe is proving to be even more difficult to achieve in Africa where states just don't want to transfer sovereign competencies to supranational bodies.

It can be claimed that in the times of European project's greatest crisis the EU is hardly considered a role model for other regions.

That is a very good point you are making. I think it is also contributing to shift in representations of what region-building may be about. If a model doesn't appear to be a model any more you are really not that much attracted by it.

Following on the subject of regional integration. Do Africa's colonial legacies and particularly experiences with different forms of colonial rule (like the British Commonwealth or French attempts to build a Communauté Française) influence integration processes?

It did for a long time and it still does to some extent. Regional integration in Africa until – I would say – the 1990s was very much about block building, constituting alliances around anchor states, dispensing patronage through aid, etc. It was also tied to the colonial legacy in a sense that French speaking countries belonged and still belong in fact (most of them at least) to the CFA Zone (Franc Zone) which is nowadays de facto pegged to the euro. The outcome is a very specific situation for the CFA zone, which still remains the only case of monetary integration in Africa, apart from the SACU (Southern African Customs Union) created around South Africa. For many years this legacy had a deep impact on region-building. But I think that today it is not the case any longer: primarily because, if you take France, its main markets are not in Francophone Africa but in Nigeria or South Africa. So there is a clear interest in relations which go beyond the historic Francophone path and it is just the same for the Portuguese. In fact in Portuguese case there is a situation of quasi-reversal in the relations with Angola and, to a lesser extent, Mozambique. It's now the Portuguese who are queuing in front of the Angolan embassy in Lisbon to apply for visas that will enable them to work in that country. Also Angolans are simultaneously investing in Lisbon and the Portuguese economy in general.

We talked about the ties between former colonial metropolises and post-colonial states. Do specific past forms of internal colonial governance (like for example, British indirect rule and French more direct approach) influence the present ability of African states to integrate with each other?

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'Yes, that's an important question. Of course direct rule did exist, but it concerned only a minority of people, the elites. Just like the indirect rule practiced by the British was not entirely indirect. In other words, when an emir in northern Nigeria was not considered to be obedient enough there was always a way of side-tracking him. The distinction between the ideal types of "direct rule" vs. "indirect rule" should not be overblown. At the same time it is true that in France Africans held a number of prominent positions under the Fourth and Fifth Republics: for instance, Diiori Hamani (later president of Niger) was the Vice-president of French National Assembly in the late 1950s. A number of African heads of state then served as full members of parliament. Houphouët-Boigny, who would become president of Côte d'Ivoire, was appointed as health minister in De Gaulle's first government in 1958. So these people had very close ties with French elites and held on to them. That is why for a long time regionalism in Africa was impossible to disentangle from the continuation of Franco-African relations. There are still some institutional linkages due, for instance, the CFA Zone. But I think it doesn't carry the political implications, which existed in the late 1960s and early 1970s, when for instance Nigeria was seen as a threat to French influence in West Africa. This type of perception is long gone.

You have already mentioned that the inter-governmental institutions in Africa are trying to emulate the European Union. Could you identify other models that African regional organizations are following? Or rather they are following their own way?

For the time being, it is still the EU which is providing the overall model with some elements (when you discuss the African security and peacekeeping architecture) that are drawn from the UN (its Security Council and so on). But the EU still remains the overarching model for the stages which are supposed to be leading towards a single African market in the framework of the African Economic

Community by 2028 under the Abuja plan of action. So the overall blueprint is still pretty much drawn from the EU. But parallel to that I think that perhaps because it is driven by pragmatic considerations, entrepreneurs, investors (among them the influence of Asian investors, or the soft power that the experience of ASEAN can carry in terms of investment), we see this patterns of this mire in pragmatic cross-border interactions. The success of the Maputo Development Corridor initiative offers an emblematic illustration of this trend. It is being highly successful, although there was a lot of initial criticism of the highly asymmetrical relationship upon which it rests. Another case is the increasing emergence of Kenya as a hub, due to the attractiveness of Nairobi for global and local investors and companies who want to benefit from the East African Community's dynamism. So here we have a case where regional integration is explicitly computed in the picture because there is this long standing legacy of the past and there has been a rehabilitation of EAC's objectives. I think that at the moment we have a broadening range of initiatives which operate on parallel but converging tracks in many ways.

Following on our previous exchange on the attractiveness of the European model, could you see in Africa that, after three years of Euro zone crisis, this example is somewhat fading? Considering your remarks about Asia-Africa ties, is the so-called "ASEAN way" of integration enjoying some attention in Africa?

Recent years have shown that the political costs of emulating the European model cannot be underestimated. But there is also, as a result of what has been going on in Mali and now in Central African Republic, an awareness of the inadequacy of the African conflict resolution mechanisms. The consensus around capacity building or ways of finding African ways of resolving African problems is confronted to hard realities: African troops should be doing what French troops have been asked to do in Mali and the Central African Republic. That's one point. The second is that ASEAN as a model also carries its limits: its remarkable capacity to take advantage of diasporas or multinationals to basically build integration coexists with extremely poor political relations between member states. Border claims threaten to spill over into major conflicts in this part of the world, as we can see right now. ASEAN has used such innovative formulas such as ASEAN+3 or ASEAN+6 to keep at arm's length

countries like China, Korea and Japan that, besides their dominance, have complicated relations with each other. ASEAN can provide some lessons but as a model it has its limits as well.

How do you assess the future of the African Union on the continent and as a global actor.

The AU has unquestionably been gaining importance and relevance in recent years. First of all as a forum associated with the emergence of African consciousness. The "invention of Africa" (to use Mudimbe's famous phrase) as a community has progressed tremendously over the last 20-30 years. But the capacity of the AU to go forward is basically tied to the quality of the policies implemented within member states. In other words, there is no way the AU can offer an alternative to poor governance in some of its members. One would therefore argue that progress within the AU remains tied to improvement of governance within the member states. It's a paradox but I think that this is a central and key issue politically: the AU has been and is contributing to an improvement in state-society interactions, along with the entrenchment of such principles as the R2P (responsibility to protect). The AU has endorsed in its new Constitutional Act (CA) the principle of intervention in the internal affairs of members in case of gross violations of human rights or genocide, etc. Whether the AU has the capacity or the willingness to do so remains a pending issue. There may also be incentives for side-tracking this sort of agenda due to diversification of players – non intervention in the internal affairs of member-states is cherished by the BRICs in general. As we have seen recently in the case of International Criminal Court, the AU has been, recently, cautious in the implementation of its agenda. In many ways the African Union and its agenda are at a crossroads right now. The engagement of non-African troops in Africa highlights the challenges that confront AU and Africa-driven agendas.

Do you see a potential in the AU for this organization to become a global actor in the future?

Well, it has been a global actor already on the anti-apartheid struggle. The OAU (Organization of African Unity, precursor to the AU),

played quite an important role within the UN in pursuit of sanctions against South Africa and the push for isolation of regimes who wanted to maintain white minority rule. That has been the positive contribution of OAU. At the moment the AU gathers a very broad range of countries. You have the role models offered by Botswana, Ghana and Mauritius, but also the prototypes of state failure that the Democratic Republic of Congo, Central African Republic or Somalia represent. The capacity to craft public policies and define 'national interest' (as distinct from the interests of the ruler and his cronies) varies considerably. Also the interests of these states are very different. This affects the ability to craft agendas and pursue common goals in global negotiations. There is certainly much more happening now than twenty years ago, but much more needs to happen given the challenges that confront the continent.

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