

African Colonial Borders: Fragmentation and Integration, 1960 - 2011

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ABSTRACT

African borders from its inception were crafted and designed to represent European aspirations. Its modes and procedures were precipitous and considered arbitrarily. In the process, pre-existing political groupings were partitioned and distinct pre-colonial groups were brought together. In post-independence Africa, colonial borders metamorphosed to meet new challenges and exigencies. The paper therefore argues that, African colonial borders did not only fragment pre-existing political groupings but also brought different ethnic groups with different cultures, languages and religions together. Evidence is seen through the numerous civil wars, political instabilities, social unrest and secessionist attempts experienced in most of the African states after independence emanates due to vague border. The paper concludes that at independence African states have been making formidable efforts through the Organisation of African Union (OAU) and later African Union (AU) and at regional and sub-regional groupings to promote economic, social and political integration of African states. Policies have been adopted by individual states to knit fragmented political groups through economic, political and social integrations.

Keywords: Africa, Borders, Fragmentation and Integration.

Résumé

Les frontières africaines héritées de la colonisation répondaient essentiellement aux aspirations européennes. Leur tracé se réalisa sur fond de précipitation et d'arbitraire, fragmentant des organisations politiques préexistantes, ou regroupant des composantes sociologiques hétérogènes dans les mêmes espaces. Après les indépendances, ces frontières coloniales se métamorphosent pour répondre à de nouveaux défis et exigences. L'article montre que les frontières coloniales africaines n'ont pas seulement fragmenté les groupements politiques préexistants, mais qu'elles ont également rassemblé différents groupes ethniques ayant des cultures, des langues et des religions différentes. Les nombreuses guerres civiles, l'instabilité politique, l'agitation sociale et les tentatives de sécession qu'ont connue la plupart des États africains après leur indépendance en sont la preuve. L'article conclut qu'au moment de l'indépendance, les États africains ont déployé des efforts considérables au sein de l'OUA, puis de l'UA et de groupements régionaux et sous régionaux pour promouvoir l'intégration économique, sociale et politique des États africains. Des politiques ont été adoptées par les différents États pour souder les groupes politiques fragmentés par le biais d'intégrations économiques, politiques et sociales.

Mots-clés: Afrique, Frontières, Fragmentation et Intégration.

INTRODUCTION

African colonial borders at face value were meant to divide political and territorial entities. The initial objectives of these borders were to distinguish European economic and political spheres of influence. Recently an unprecedented scientific attention has been given to borders by scholars and international communities because of its dynamics. In the past as well as in the present, human societies and socio-political entities in general, have made borders a key issue in their relations on various scales. The African fragmentation goes beyond the colonial

arbitrary boundaries. According to Nkrumah, “some of us are Moslems, some Christians, some believe in traditional tribal gods, some of us speak French, some English, some Portuguese, and not to mention the millions who speak only one of the hundreds of different African languages”.¹ Therefore, physically and ideologically this has affected the cultural, economic and political integration of Africa.

Borders, whatever its facet, remains a constantly shifting, evolving, dynamic and therefore changing reality. This constant can be seen when we try to explore the history of this complex variable, the border, particularly in the area of international relations. In the context of this theme, we will make use of three theories: the theory of complex interdependence, transnationalism and finally the theory of functionalism. First of all, we started from the idea that “scientific theories put into form, order and organisation verified data on which they are based and are thus systems of ideas, constructions of the mind which are applied to the data in order to be adequate to them”.²

The theory of complex interdependence is pioneered by scientists such as Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye. In their book titled: *transnational relations and world politics*, published in 1972, these two thinkers analysed the consequences of the permanent contact not only between nations, but also between economies and societies as a result of changes in the international environment following the closure of space after the Second World War.³ According to this theory, the distribution of power no longer depends exclusively on politics. It therefore implies that the national interest can no longer be expressed through the general interest embodied in the power structures of the state alone. Relations between nations can therefore no longer be reduced to diplomatic-strategic relations alone and must be understood from different levels of analysis that challenge the traditional hierarchies based on the omnipotence of the public sphere.⁴

The Theory of Functionalism further laid down roles of cooperation and integration among societies. The first advocate of this theory was David Mitrany.⁵ He predicted non-territorial functional agencies to replace the states system. He contended that the “Major impediment to global society was the ‘worship of political borders’”. According to him, the alternative consisted of a functional integration of material activities on an international scale and cultural devolution on a regional basis”.⁶ Transnationalism on the other hand is referred to social relations and groups that extended across the borders of states. Transnationalism gained currency in the social sciences in the 1990s.⁷

Given this observation, and taking into account the socio-political upheavals and their corollaries, African borders will not remain in their current configurations and therefore what will be their place in the process of African integration? In an attempt to answer this question, our modest study will be structured around three major axes, namely: fundamental generalities on contemporary African borders, then borders as ferments of fragmentation and finally the border variable will be analysed as a perspective of African integration.

FUNDAMENTAL GENERALITIES ON CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN BORDERS

In this first part, the general aspects of the problem of borders in contemporary Africa will be studied. Thus, the aim at this level will be to review the historical, political and legal modalities of the implementation of African borders and, if possible, their typological characteristics.

1- Conceptual approach and historical modalities of implementation of borders

We have noted above that the problem of borders, whatever the angle of analysis, remains complex to apprehend as a variable. However, it is necessary to take a conceptual approach to the issue. The sociologist and researcher

¹ K.Nkrumah, Africa must unite, Fredrick A. Praeger, New York, 1963, p.132.

² E. Morin, Science avec conscience, Paris, Fayard/Éditions du Seuil, 1982/1991, p.21.

³ R. Keohane and J. Nye. *transnational relations and world politics*, 1972,

⁴ J.J. Roche, *Théories des relations internationales*, 4^e édition, Éditions Montchrestien, Octobre 2002, pp.113-114.

⁵ T.Theiler, “International Functionalism and Democracy”, *European Journal of International Relations*, vol.28(2), p.315, 2022.

⁶ M. Alexandrescu, “David Mitrany From Federalism to Functionalism”, *Transylvanian Review*, Vol.xvi, No.1, March 2007, p.27.

⁷ Ludger Pries, *Transnationalism*, Working paper, July 2015.

Emile Durkheim reminded us that:

All scientific investigation concerns a specific group of phenomena that correspond to a definition. The first step (...) must therefore be to define the things it deals with so that it is clear what it is about. This is the first and most indispensable condition of all proof and verification.⁸

In this case, we will try to propose a conceptual (or definitional) grid for the key terms “border”, “integration” and “fragmentation”. Political scientist Hilaire de Prince Pokam defines a border as “a boundary between two or more states. It is (or can be) natural or artificial”.⁹

The dictionary *Le Petit Robert* sees the concept of integration as “an operation by which an individual or group becomes part of a community or a profession”.¹⁰ The Gabonese political scientist Marc-Louis Ropivia sees it as “a process or a set of processes aimed at or intended to harmonise elements of human, structural, institutional, social, political, legal and cultural components, etc., in a dynamic of common integration that can take on a local, national, sub-regional or even continental configuration”.¹¹ Far from being the only conceptual approach, it should nevertheless be noted that it helps to provide a synthetic overview of the concept in question. The work of researcher André Hubert Onana Nfegue is interesting in this respect.¹²

In addition, it is now a question of briefly exploring the historical framework of the implementation of African borders as they are currently presented. Indeed, the slave trade, then colonialism and neo-colonialism with their corollaries have been horribly destroying and even devastating factors for the evolution of the African continent and its populations. Borders have thus been arbitrarily drawn and have varied or evolved according to the multiple stakes of the forces at play. Mahatma Julien Tanzi K. Tien A-Be, reveals it to us in these terms:

The current African order is the result of colonisation. It is stato-centric. Everything is done by the state. The people are considered the subjects of the state. This state is delimited by borders. These borders have a particular character; they were drawn without any consideration of the socio-cultural values of Africa. They have fragmented communities and peoples. They have deconstructed the whole of Africa. They have balkanised Africa. They are supported by major principles of international law: sovereignty, intangibility, territorial integrity, etc.¹³

The author further stated that, nation-states were created in Africa on artificial bases. They brought together peoples of different cultures. This system has established artificial borders and this has created cross-border communities. This remains the main cause of the issues of recourse to identities.

2- The structural-political and legal modalities of the break-up of the Black continent

The historical factors mentioned above have fermented and marked out, in the long term, the process of institutional, if not politico-structural break-up, as the facts tend to show.¹⁴ The African states that gained official independence were quick to set up structural and politico-legal frameworks that strongly contributed to perpetuating and reinforcing the heavy legacy of the borders inherited from colonisation. Thus, in their various fundamental laws, all post-independent African states maintain the “intangible character” of the borders inherited from the colonial era. It could therefore be said that the legal framework of post-colonial states constitutes a springboard for the legalisation of borders that were nonetheless drawn by colonial arbitrariness.

⁸ E. Durkheim, *Les règles de la méthode sociologique*, Paris, PUF, 1999, p.34.

⁹ H. De Prince Pokam, *Les concepts fondamentaux en sciences politiques*, Edition de l'Espoir, Dschang, 2002, p.35.

¹⁰ Dictionnaire, *Le Petit Robert*, Edition de 1977, p.1016.

¹¹ M. L. Ropivia, *Géopolitique de l'intégration en Afrique*, Paris, l'Harmattan, 1994, p.117.

¹² A. H. Onana Nfegue, *Le Cameroun et ses frontières. Une dynamique géopolitique complexe*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2004.

¹³ M. J. Tanzi K. Tien.A-Be, “Du roi Nyoya à Ne Muanda Nsemi du mouvement politico-religieux Bundu Dia Kongo en RDC: même paradigme opératoire pour une Afrique nouvelle dans un monde mondialisé”, in *Colloque international Roi Nyoya, le Roi Nyoya. Créateur de civilisation et précurseur de la renaissance africaine*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2014, p.216.

¹⁴ A. H. Onana Nfegue, *Le Cameroun et ses frontières*, p.47.

Similarly, one could note, not without a certain amount of bitterness, that this question of “African borders” has not really been included in the structural construction agenda of the young post-independent African nations.¹⁵

To this end on this aspect, one of the major concerns and principles was and remains the logic of explicit or implicit centralisation of power. This implies that colonial borders are indeed “legitimised” and therefore perceived as intangible. For Marc-Louis Ropivia, federalism and integration have failed in Black Africa because they have no representativeness, act without any popular consent and enter into alliances to which the people are completely alien. In his view, the colonial generation of Africa’s political leaders remains fascinated by the myth of the military state. In fact, what these leaders are looking for is less national cohesion than a personalization (direct or indirect) of power.¹⁶ Beyond these remarks, it is perhaps appropriate to question borders as a variable of fragmentation, and then to close this reflection with its integrating aspect.

AFRICAN BORDERS AS A VECTOR OF FRAGMENTATION

At this level, our approach will essentially consist of analysing the reality of African borders as a ferment of socio-political or territorial fragmentation. The previous studies have certainly provided a modest overview of the conditions, or historical, then political-legal and structural modalities that have favoured the process of fragmentation that can still be observed today. It will probably be seen, in the lines that follow, that the process of fragmentation unfolds in diverse and varied forms and facets.

1- National Self-Centeredness

Few years after gaining independence, a certain number of African states seem to have shown a relative desire to “unite”, in accordance with the ideological federating principles laid down by the Organisation of African Unity in May 1963. To try to understand this, two variables should be taken into account: firstly, the division of the Pan-Africanist movement into two rival and antagonistic tendencies: the “Monrovia group” and the “Casablanca group”.¹⁷ Indeed, the Casablanca group militated for the abolition of African borders and a political unification excluding the scheme, the socio-political and unitary formula of the pan-African federation, supported by the Monrovia group. Nkrumah’s proposal for African unity was judged by other African heads of state more concerned with the consolidation of their own power and the durability of their presumed sovereign states to be too radical and dangerous. The fears of ossification of states within their colonial borders proved to be correct. The OAU, created in May 1963, not only enshrined the intangibility of colonial borders, but above all proved incapable of ensuring Africa’s real independence.¹⁸

The facts will quickly prove this passage to be correct. It should be noted that in the aftermath of independence, federal or “unionist” initiatives were launched, particularly in West Africa. This was the Monrovia Group that emerged and advocated for the unification of African states on the basis of the principle of a federation of states, which are large geopolitical groupings. Unfortunately, each of them was a stillborn enterprise. This was the case with the attempt at unity between French Sudan (Mali) and Senegal. The same was true of Nkrumah’s Ghana and Ahmed Sekou Touré’s Guinea-Conakry. It can be seen that at the very dawn of independence, the reflex to preserve at all costs the African borders inherited from colonisation was manifested. Yesterday as today, the situation, let’s say the burning need to preserve colonial borders remains largely alive. A Cameroonian historian and researcher Achille Mbembe reveals this in the following terms:

More than sixty years after independence, the form of state inherited from colonisation has proved to be more resilient than one might have thought. Its roots now lie in indigenous humus. As with other imported objects, Africans have managed to make something profoundly synergistic out of it. The borders, for their part, have remained more or less intact.¹⁹

¹⁵ M. Kounou, *Le panafricanisme: de la crise à la renaissance*, Yaoundé, CLE, 2007, p.169.

¹⁶ M. L. Ropivia, *Géopolitique de l’intégration en Afrique Noire*, p.145.

¹⁷ M. Kounou, *Le Panafricanisme : de la crise à la renaissance*, Yaoundé, Editions CLE, 2007, p. 289.

¹⁸ J. B. Goma-Thethet, *Histoire des relations entre l’Afrique et sa diaspora*, Paris, l’Harmattan, 2012, p.90.

¹⁹ A. Mbembe, “Quand le panafricanisme devient sectarisme”, in *Jeune Afrique*, n°3108, January, 2022, p.24.

The following facts will probably contribute to reinforce this reading of most African politicians and researchers.

2- Secessionist movements and the creation of new African states

The process of fragmentation of the states inherited from colonisation was constantly expressed in the form of demands, no longer autonomous, but by secessionist movements militating in a radical way for independence. This is where we will start.

It has been noted that colonial arbitrariness had drawn borders without taking into account the socio-cultural and historical specificities of the peoples. Sometimes for political, identity, religious, ethnic reasons, etc., certain communities within the independent states mobilised to contest, if not to militate for the creation of a state of their own. As mentioned above, there were many reasons for this. To try to put some water in our mill, let us take a modest look at some examples.²⁰ Examples that left a lasting impression on African memories, because of the drama and pain that certain movements and populations suffered.

Nigeria gained independence in 1960 from England, the former colonial power. However, the year 1966 marked a particular turning point with the accession to power of General Ironsi, of Ibo origin. According to him and his colleague, Colonel Odumegu Ojukwu, a product of the English military school, triggered the war of secession of the state of Biafra, located in the East of the Federal Republic of Nigerian 1967. The war that broke out became known as the Biafran War. It lasted three years, from 1967 to 1970, leaving no less than 2 million dead, mostly civilians. General Yakubu Gowon, faced with the Biafran secessionist fighters and soldiers, made no effort to crush the rebellion in question. After three years of extremely deadly and horrific wars, the secessionist rebellion was brutally crushed.²¹

As can be seen, the dawn of independence was characterised by murderous conflicts of a secessionist nature. The Katanga conflict from (1960-1963) remains in everyone's memory. In a less spectacular register, the Casamance rebellion has been waging a separatist guerrilla war in Senegal for several years. The Polisario Front claims, on behalf of the Saharawi people, sovereignty over the Western Sahara, formerly Spanish Sahara, and is still opposed to Morocco's annexationist aims. Mauritania has abandoned claims to the territory. The northern region of Somalia has unilaterally proclaimed its independence not recognised by the international community, taking over the territory and even the non-Somali land of the former British colony, while the rest of the country had been an Italian possession.²²

The process of fragmentation of African borders has also been manifested through inter-state conflicts. These, however, have been limited to questions of rectification of boundaries, and have generally ended up before the International Court of Justice in The Hague, even in the most serious cases involving armed conflict. We can mention in passing the war between Upper Volta, which became Burkina Faso with the advent of Thomas Sankara, and Mali in 1974, the confrontations between Mauritians and Senegalese (1989-1990) which could have degenerated into open warfare, the settlement of the Libyan-Chadian dispute over the Aouzou strip (1994), and more recently the crisis between Cameroon and Nigeria over the oil-rich Bakassi peninsula. The decision of the International Court of Justice in The Hague was adopted and signed on 10 October 2002.²³

The irredentist conflict in the Horn of Africa came to a head in the 1970s, just as the fluid geopolitical structure of the region was undergoing major transformations. This fluidity is symbolised by the uncertainty of the Horn's location: geopolitically speaking, we do not know where it is. Although it does not belong exclusively to North Africa or Black Africa, nor to East Africa, the Middle East or the Indian Ocean region, it is partially included in each of these groups.²⁴

Although Ethiopia's size, military power and geographical position tend to make it the leading state in the region, its persistent underdevelopment and weak national unity have kept this role out of reach. Instead, relations

²⁰ G. Adji, *Le mal africain. Diagnostic et thérapie*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 201, p.77.

²¹ M. Gaud, "L'Afrique entre décomposition et recomposition", in *Questions Internationales*, n°5, January-February, 2004, p.8.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ I.W. Zartman, *La résolution des conflits en Afrique*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 1990, p.84.

around the Horn of Africa are structured, symbolically and practically, around a Muslim encirclement of the Ethiopian fortress empire. This stems from a potential and sometimes actual alliance between Sudan, Eritrea and Somalia, supported by various sources of reinforcement all found across the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden and the Sahara, including Yemen and Saudi Arabia but also Libya, Egypt and Iran. This pattern has prevailed for at least three decades, superseding even potential regional alliances, but there is also a global dimension, which also serves as a criterion for choosing partners. This pattern has prevailed for at least three decades, superseding even potential regional alliances, but there is also a global dimension, which also serves as a criterion for choosing partners. Within this structure, Ethiopia's strategic imperative is to break its encirclement, which can be done through various means. One of these is to transmute its isolation into autonomy by securing the largest army and various other independent power factors to make alliances redundant. Thus, after the revolution, its armed forces were increased six fold by creating a corps of 200,000 mobilised peasants. Another way would be to capture the element that determines, apart from ethnicity, the strength of the Arab alliance, by being sufficiently extremist or conservative to attract the support, in the name of ideological overlap, of a few Arab countries; this is what Mengistu did by cultivating extremist Arab support in South Yemen.²⁵

A third possibility is to consolidate an existing gap in the encirclement by strengthening the alliance with Kenya, based on common defensive interests as expressed in the 1963 defence treaty reconfirmed in 1979. A fourth way is to overcome the encirclement by becoming a continental - and not just sub-regional - leader, as Haile Selassie was through his position in the OAU. Finally, a fifth way is to successively neutralise neighbours by blackmailing them on their own problems, as Ethiopia has occasionally done with Sudan by giving asylum to its opposition groups, and as it has tried to do with Somalia, for its part, is not in a position to confront Ethiopia on its own, and must therefore find allies, invoking principles "self-determination", ideology "scientific socialism" or nationality (it has been a member of the Arab line since February 1974, although it is not Arab). This has done nothing in Africa, where its irredentist cause appears eminently illegitimate and has alienated any potential support, but in the Middle East, Iraq, Syria, the PLO, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the Shah of Iran have offered it military support. Djibouti depended on French assistance to maintain its separate status, first as a colony and then, after 1977, as an independent state; its membership of the Arab League brought it additional allies. Eritrea's liberation movements benefited from Sudan's support and their links with the Somalis, but they also repeatedly obtained assistance from Egypt, Iraq, Saudi Arabia and Syria, depending on the Arab ideological constellations of the time. The Somali irredentist conflict is thus only one aspect of a larger ethnic and ideological conflict.²⁶

Superimposed on this regional structure is one of the Cold War fronts, which also seems to coincide with, and even be determined by, the irredentist front. Throughout the 1960s, Ethiopia's and Somalia's neighbours, themselves preoccupied with internal rebellions, such as Sudan, or with changing regional relations, such as East Africa, essentially left the two countries to deal with their conflict. This situation changed significantly in the 1970s. At the beginning of the decade, the Muslim encirclement of Ethiopia was much like the encirclement by Soviet allies of a US-backed regime. In addition to the extremist military regime in Sudan, which was supported by a Soviet-armed Egypt, and the extremist military regime in Somalia, which had been linked to Russia by a friendship treaty since 1974, there were at least two rival Marxist nationalist movements in Eritrea.

The case of Ogaden, an Ethiopian province but claimed by Somalia, is also illustrative. The president of the Somali republic at the time launched an old-fashioned nationalist conquest expedition against Ethiopia in 1977-1978. It failed. In Sudan, the populations of the South, mostly Christian and animist and victims of oppression by the Arab-Muslim regime in Khartoum and of abuses and other forms of violence and discrimination, rose up in 1983 under the leadership of the Southern colonel John Garang.²⁷

After a long, horrific and deadly war, interspersed with negotiations and numerous ceasefires, the outcome of the war was the birth of a new state: the Republic of Southern Sudan. This, with President Salva Kiir as its head of state, took place in 2011. This overview probably sheds light on the problem of borders as a vector of intra- or inter-state fragmentation in Africa. However, it would be just as interesting to analyse the cases of borders as

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ W. Zartman, *La résolution des conflits en Afrique*, p.86.

²⁷ W. Zartman, *La résolution des conflits en Afrique*, p.89.

a dynamic, driving force for integration.

BORDERS AS DRIVERS OF AFRICAN INTEGRATION

Here, our objective will essentially be to analyse the problem of borders as a springboard for integration for states, peoples, commercial goods and other exchanges.

1- African borders as a framework for national integration

It is true that colonialism, as we have seen, arbitrarily drew borders in its ferocious expansion for the conquest and exploitation of the black continent. At the same time, it cannot be objectively admitted, given the verifiable facts that colonial entities of varying dimensions have also contributed to bringing together sometimes scattered and disparate ethno-cultural communities. In other words, it must be borne in mind that colonisation, by erecting colonial empires and territories, contributed to some extent to a process of reintegration of African peoples.²⁸

One could distinguish a process of integration within the national framework. That is, within the states that emerged at the end of the colonial historical episode. In some respects, such a process was no less a vector for the broader integration dynamic of a federal nature, supported by the African champions of pan-Africanism such as Ahmed Sekou Touré, Kwame Nkrumah, Cheikh Anta Diop, Julius Nyerere, Modibo Keita, etc. In this regard, we must admit that African borders have recreated internal dynamics of integration. They have allowed peoples to become aware of belonging to new socio-political entities and to cultivate a spirit of communion and brotherhood within them.²⁹

In many cases, it is recognised that certain pre-colonial political entities were sometimes composed of small communities, sometimes even living in isolation. Today, however, the dynamics of continental integration is primarily due, to a certain extent at least, to the integration process within African states. Moreover, despite the erection of borders by the colonialists and the principles of the 'intangibility of borders' inherited from colonialism, the peoples of the black continent are experiencing significant on-going interactions. This does not fail to support the thesis of a certain desire for integration. In passing, we must agree that the colonial borders or those inherited from colonisation have not been able to totally annihilate the deep, multi-millennial awareness of the African peoples to go beyond them and even to limit somewhat the perverse effects of their unilateral and arbitrary tracing by the colonists.³⁰

2- The creation of the OAU/AU as a structural dynamics of integration

The Organisation of African Unity which endorsed the inherited colonial borders in one of its articles also made a formidable effort to encourage and fostered African integration. The clause states that African nations upon attainment of independence should maintain its inherited colonial borders, otherwise known as the principle of *Uti possidentis juris*.³¹ This Organisation was officially created in May 1963 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. It should be emphasised that it was as a consequence of the pan-African ideology that emerged in the United States among the black descendants of slaves. These precursors of this ideology included Marcus Mosiah Garvey, William Edgard Burghard Dubois, Georges Padmore, etc. According to Joachim Goma The thet, Garvey's main idea was the constitution of a great black state in Africa. This means that in his mind and in the pan-Africanist ideology, the borders resulting from colonial rule had to be challenged and in extreme cases abolished altogether.³²

Such an idea clearly suggested that, in the fundamental Pan-African vision, it is through the process of political, economic and socio-cultural integration and unification that will in the long term contribute to the delegitimisation of African colonial borders. Cheikh Anta Diop in his book entitled *The Economic and Cultural Foundations of a Federal State of Black Africa* advocated for the creation of a federation of Black African state.

²⁸ M. L. Ropivia, Géopolitique de l'intégration en Afrique Noire, p.134.

²⁹ Ouali Kamadini, Intégration africaine, Le cas de la CEAO, Paris, Economica, 1982, p.27.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ I. W. Zartman, Ripe for Resolution: Conflicts and intervention in Africa, New York, Oxford University Press, 1985, p.13.

³² J. G. Thethet, Histoire des relations entre l'Afrique et sa diaspora, p.73.

According to him, the Black continent must break from the former colonial metropolises and form a federal state whose borders would extend from the Tropic of Cancer to the Cape and from the Indian Ocean to the Atlantic.³³

In his vision, he invited the black African states that gained independence to go for unification, because unification within the borders inherited from colonisation would become a major obstacle to federation. His line of thoughts was in consonance with the vision of Kwame Nkrumah at the time of the creation of the OAU, who supported the immediate creation of a unitary African government, with a parliament, a foreign policy, a monetary zone and a central bank, a defence, a nationality and an economic development plan common to all states.³⁴ However, Kwame Nkrumah's project and vision did not last long but ground works for African integration were outline. Through the Monrovia Group that emerged, it clearly advocated unification on the basis of the principle of a federation of states, which are large geopolitical groupings.

Nevertheless, the process of continental integration was gradually initiated and driven forward in another perspective. However, Sub-regional Organisations emerged at all geopolitical levels of the continent to enhance integration. In Central Africa, the UDEAC (Customs and Economic Union of Central Africa) emerged in 1965. It was replaced by the CEMAC (Economic and Monetary Community of Central Africa) in 1996. In the same area, the ECCAS (Economic Community of Central African States) was created. In West Africa, two integrative dynamics were created: ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States) and UEMOA (West African Economic and Monetary Union), which essentially groups together the former French colonies except Guinea-Bissau. With a common currency for these countries which is the CFA franc. It can be assumed that this dynamic largely contributed to the reconfiguration of the perverse essence of African borders by encouraging and fostering grassroots and inter-states integrations. Moreover, sub-regional organisations have been instrumental in turning borders from obstacles into a source of socio-economic opportunities.³⁵

In the same vein, it should be noted that the establishment of a legal and economic framework for exchanges in geopolitical integration areas does not fail to make this variable a springboard for social interactions and fraternal communion between the populations of various countries. The principle of free movement of goods and people, so officially dear to many sub-regional integration organisations, has largely allowed for the gradual intensification of goods, merchandise and people. Not to mention the matrimonial relationships that has resulted. In the CEMAC zone, for example, the border markets of Kye-Ossi and Abang Minko'o are relevant examples in this respect. Despite the recurrence of xenophobic attitudes on the part of citizens of certain neighbouring countries, it is nonetheless true that these spaces contribute to integration and, one might say, to abolishing in a way the perverse essence and nature of these colonial borders.³⁶

Furthermore, in 1979 and 1999 ECOWAs and EAC Eastern African Community respectively established the rights of their citizens to entry, residence, and establishment in any other country within their respective regions as long as they had documentation proving their nationalities.³⁷ Besides the regional levels, some individual countries made milestones on African integration moves. In 2014, Rwanda, Uganda and Kenya all agreed to allow their various citizens to travel freely across their respective shared borders using only a national identity card. In 2016, Seychelles began the first Visa-free country for all passport-holders in Africa. From this gesture nine other African countries had emulated either with Visa-free entry or Visa on arrival. Also in 2018, 32 African Countries signed the protocol on free movement as part of the African continental free Trade Area frame work. So far one country Rwanda ratified the protocol of free movement³⁸. These were some of the perspectives on African international approach laid down by the AU aspirations to roll out passports for Africans citizens within the continent by 2063.

³³ C. Anta Diop, *Les fondements économiques et culturelles d'un Etat fédéral d'Afrique Noire*, Paris, Préserve Africaine, 1974, p.39.

³⁴ J. B. Goma-Thethet, *Histoire des relations entre l'Afrique et sa diaspora*, p.90.

³⁵ M. Kounou, *Le Panafricanisme : de la crise à la reconnaissance*, p. 253.

³⁶ M. Ouali Kamadini, *Intégration africaine*. La CEA, Economica, 1982, pp.33-34.

³⁷ W. Williams, "Shifting Borders: African Displacement crisis and its security implications", African Center for Strategic Studies, Research paper No.8. Washington DC, 2019, p.29.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p30.

a- Synoptic overview of the state of transport infrastructure in the CEMAC zone

With a few exceptions, the road network, both internally and on the axes linking the countries, has not always been reliable, that is judiciously designed and practicable in all seasons. Until recently, travelling from one capital to another by road was more of a safari or an adventure than a pleasure. This means that the generally poor state of the transport infrastructure is still a real bottleneck for the development of our area.

In fact, the almost permanent state of disrepair of the roads contributes greatly to reinforcing, in many respects, the constraints and imbalances of all kinds due to the isolation of certain CEMAC States, and severely handicaps the free movement of goods, as well as the interpenetration of cultures and the mixing of peoples. As a result, intra-community trade remains hopelessly insignificant. At present, it is estimated at less than 5% of the external trade of the States.³⁹

One could also underline the poor fluidity of road traffic, which leads to longer journeys and untimely increases in the price of products on the markets, thus giving a boost to the spiral of inflation, not to mention the dry losses, as well as stock-outs of strategic goods such as fuel and butane gas. However, we should not fall into a kind of pessimism because the gloomy picture I have just sketched deserves to be qualified. Indeed, this paper would like to point out that considerable progress is currently being made in the physical integration of the area through the development of transport infrastructures with the eminent assistance of the European Union.⁴⁰

b- Current progress and future prospects

On the Cameroon-Equatorial Guinea regional route, a bridge over the Ngoazik River, 145 metres long and 10 metres wide, will soon be built. Also, on the Congo-RCA route, it is essentially a question of developing the Oubangui River waterway that joins the Congo to Brazzaville. The objective here is to make this waterway navigable at all times by blasting the rocks, installing beacons to guide the boats and, if possible, building a low-water dam. Other assistance will consist of equipping the joint waterways maintenance service with various equipment. In total, for the period 1998-2003, the projected completion date of all these works, the European Union will have devoted nearly 226 million euros to the development of transport infrastructures in the CEMAC zone.⁴¹

The clearly improved situation I have just described has led CEMAC to think further ahead. Thus, after having developed a road network that was more ambitious and denser than that of the structuring axes, the Council of Ministers adopted in July 2000 a network known as the CEMAC integrating priority road network. This network was defined according to five criteria:

- 1- The search for a minimum network, based on the choice of what is most immediately feasible and at least cost;
- 2- Taking into account the complementarity of multimodal transport rail-road-waterway, with particular emphasis on the possibility for landlocked countries and remote regions of coastal countries to access sea ports;
- 3- The adoption of a policy that allows capitals to be linked to each other by paved roads;
- 4- The opening up of CEMAC (its member states) to the large surrounding countries or regions (Nigeria, DRC, Angola, Sudan, etc.);
- 5- The protection of forest ecosystems in the development and construction of these roads.⁴²

³⁹ D. Mouiri-Boussougou, "L'intégration Physique à Travers le Développement des infrastructures", in *L'intégration régionale en Afrique Centrale*, sous la Direction de Harim Ben, Bruno Bekolo-Ebe et Touna Mama, Paris, Karthala, p.297.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p.298.

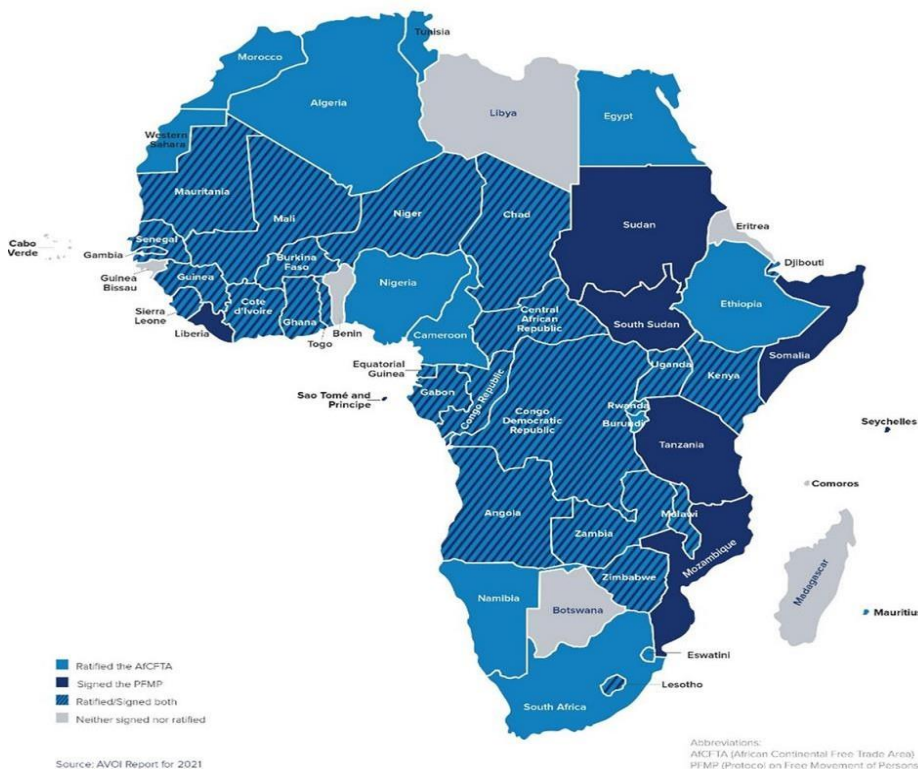
⁴¹ D. Mouiri-Boussougou, "L'intégration Physique à Travers le Développement des infrastructures", p.298.

⁴² *Ibid.*

3- African countries' free trade and mobility

The full implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA), which seeks to operate as a significant stimulus recovery package, is a critical step towards an integrated African continent. With the potential to increase Africa's regional economy by US\$450 billion and elevate 30 million people out of extreme poverty by 2035 if fully implemented, the AfCFTA has all the components to make that happen. The free movement of people and goods is also critical to the successful implementation of AfCFTA. Thus, African Union (AU) Member States bear a significant duty to ratify the accord and unlock the continent's social and economic potential by rethinking how to work, trade, and communicate across borders. By October 2022, 44 of the 55 African Union (AU) Member States had ratified the Agreement, leaving 22% of African countries unintegrated. All Member States that have not yet ratified the AfCFTA must do so immediately so that the region can fully benefit from increased intra-African commerce.

Similarly, the capacity to freely travel inside Africa is a significant advantage for promoting goods commerce, cross-border and regional investments, and encouraging labour mobility and skills transfer across African countries. Countries must sign and ratify the Protocol on the Free Movement of Persons (PFMP) in order to realise the AU's Agenda 2063 vision of an integrated Africa. This will allow students, tourists, investors, and business people to freely and easily transit, reside, and establish themselves across the continent. The PFMP protocol had been signed by 33 of the 55 AU Member States as of January 2022. The continental coverage is depicted in Map 1 below.



Map 1. Continental coverage of the AfCFTA and PFMP

Source: The African Visa Openness Index (AVOI) Report 2021.

Regional Economic Communities (RECs) are key “players” in Africa's integration process. They promote intra-African trade and regional growth. Figures from intra-REC trade suggest that there is much to be gained by better cooperation among RECs, and from there, through the AfCFTA. The Arab Maghreb Union (AMU) and the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), for example, have the lowest intra-REC and intra-continental trade levels, whereas the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the largest trading bloc in Southern Africa, accounts for approximately 20% of their global trade. RECs demonstrate potential improvements in human mobility. The formation of the Economic Community of West African States

(ECOWAS) passport and the operationalization of the East Africa Community (EAC) visa have facilitated the movement of persons living in those regions. ECOWAS has a long history of intra-regional migration movements, with over 90% of migrants arriving from other countries in the region, 70% of whom are linked to regional work opportunities.⁴³

ECOWAS and SADC have higher intra-regional commerce than other African RECs. They also have the highest African Visa Openness Index (AVOI) score among RECs. Both AMU and ECCAS have the lowest openness scores in comparison. These findings suggest a significant relationship between regional community openness and intra-REC commerce. On the continental level, low openness may prevent proper implementation of the AfCFTA, given that 51 percent of Africans require a visa before visiting another African country, up from 46 percent in 2020.⁴⁴

CONCLUSION

From our modest investigations, the problem of African borders never ceases to provoke debate in scientific circles and in African social and political bodies. The fragmented and arbitrarily nature of the borders from its inception is consequential for the integration of the continent and had been a course for concern. Our first articulation consisted of analysing the modalities of implementation of African borders, notably with colonisation, then with the official accession to independence. After an overview of a few key concepts, we examined the historical conditions, then the structural-political and legal schemes that have established or contributed to the break-up of the black continent. We then investigated the second aspect, which consisted in demonstrating that African borders are a driving force, a key vector of socio-political and territorial fragmentation of the Black continent. This can be seen, in particular, through national egoisms and the belief in the 'intangible' character of borders inherited from colonisation. This process has also been radically boosted by the emergence of secessionist movements and in some cases, the creation of new African states. However, African borders are still seen as stepping stones to integration. The emergence of Pan-Africanist ideology and integrationist or federalist currents have not failed to curb, despite everything, the somewhat perverse nature of this colonial legacy.

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