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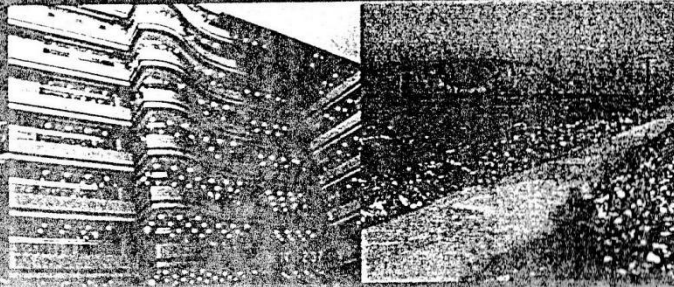
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Regional Political Economic Relations: The Ecowas and the Development of West Africa

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ABSTRACT

At various levels of the evolution of societies, attempts are often made to apply one or all of Talcot Parsons Pattern Variables AGIL acronym (Adaptive, Goal Attainment, Integrative and Latency Sub System) approach in tackling the problems arising in their environment. For ECOWAS, established in 1975, as a regional socio-economic formation in the West Coast of Africa, attempts have been put up by The Authority to fulfill certain development aspirations. This, then, serves as the anchorage of this paper; in taking a close look at the role ECOWAS plays in transforming the sub-region in the context of international development. The paper establishes that ECOWAS is fast moving towards realizing the dreams of its founding fathers within the frame of development. Development in this context is conceived in the commonplace social science parlance of orderly social change from pre-colonial primitive and primordial mode of production to attempts towards pulling resources for the greater good of the greatest number in the spirit of the utilitarian theorists. The Post-colonial state within the Sub-region is such that demands multi-disciplinary and multi-dimensional approach to the solution of the dynamics of underdevelopment besetting the region. And ECOWAS serves a useful springboard.

INTRODUCTION

Africa is the second largest continent in the world with a little less than 10% of the world's population. Between 70-90% of its population is engaged in primary production and agriculture contributes to a significant proportion of the region's Gross Domestic Products (GDP). Most of the nation states in the continent are small in terms of population and internal buying power and therefore African economies are hardly able to support import substitution industrialization. The imposition of arbitrary political boundaries following the Berlin Conference of November 1884- February 1885 and differences in colonial heritage in African nations have constituted over the years, massive barriers to realistic mutual interdependence. The magnitude of nationalism

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which developed in the continent in the 1950s and early 1960s were considerable especially when one recalls the artificial nature of African boundaries. The question then arises as to whether Africa will continue to remain as a large chess board with several small but unviable states or whether a possibility exists for the emergence of a 'United States of Africa' in the foreseeable future? In an attempt to answer this question, the several attempts made at forging economic, political and cultural development and unity in Africa and impediments in the way of these attempts are considered with particular reference to and as a benchmark for the current bid at economic unification or better still socio-economic and political development of West Africa through the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

Impediments In The Way Of African Socio-Cultural And Economic Unity

Although Africa has come to earn the title of the most fragmented and Balkanized of all the continents and even though a high level of internal nationalism has been generated in the past decades in African countries, Africa is ironically the foremost continent in the search for internal socio-cultural, economic unity and solidarity. This search has been based on the awareness among leaders of the various African nations of a common historical past that of imperialist domination and exploitation – and a common destiny – that of total freedom from all forms of imperialism and the development of their own potentials (economic and social) for the good of their own people and of the world community. Above all, there is also that sense of belonging to the African continent – a continent conventionally referred to as 'dark', not only figuratively, but also literally, because of the predominance of the black race in this part of the globe (Ekong, 1978:4).

Underlying these easily over-generalizable similarities among African states, however, is a fundamental uneven economic and social development brought about by "different capitalist penetration as well as the varying structure of western and or colonizing cum neo-colonialist interests in the different parts of Africa (Onimode 1983:1-8; Ake 1981:32ff). For a clearer analysis of the African experience, following Ekong Ekong (1978) Onimode (1983) and Ake (1978), its development can be divided into five or six interlocking evolutionary periods namely:-

- i. The Pre-Colonial Era (i.e. Pre-1800)
- ii. The Colonial Occupation Era – 1800-1900
- iii. The Pre-Nationalism Era – 1900-1945
- iv. The Nationalism Era – 1945 – 1960
- v. The Post Nationalism/Pre Unity Era – 1960 – 1975
- vi. The Unity Era 1975 to present

We should however note that these evolutionary periods are by no means mutually exclusive, but continuously overlap and has been identified in this article as a mere heuristic model. The dates may vary for various States

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(countries) in Africa, especially for the newest ones, but all of them seem to have passed or to be passing through these same stages.

The Pre-Colonial Era

This period or era embraces the period before 1800. It was largely a period of relative isolation for a greater portion of Africa. Contacts between Africa and other parts of the world was limited to the relationship of the northern Mediterranean boarders with Southern Europe coupled with occasional navigational adventures of such Europeans like the Portuguese, who traded in West African gold and later slaves. Internally, this was a period of internecine warfare and migration of peoples – of kings and kingdoms. Nation states were virtually synonymous with these kingdoms although they had no clearly defined strategies for mutual economic and cultural co-operation and hence development. Indeed, in this era, there may have been no need for such co-operation towards development as the overwhelming interest of one king was to subjugate the others. The search for economic development under such situation could merely have amounted to an admission of weakness and as invitation of the superior kingdom to annex the weak or inferior one. An excursion into Africa's past is replete with cases of kings with their kingdoms conquering vassal states and taking tributes from them for their defence and protection.

The Colonial Occupation Era:

This era is very closely related to the slave trade – a trade which was enhanced by internal wrangling and the need for subjugation then prevailing among the myriads of tribes (ethnic groups) in Africa. To the African, this period was a period of external defeat. Thus, it could be said that the first primary foreign trade commodity of note exported by Africans to the outside world was its manpower or labour force (i.e. slave trading). This exchange was grossly one – sided and could be said to have marked the beginning of the invertebrate imbalance in terms of trade between Africa and the rest of the world (Dike, 1956).

With the abolition of this obnoxious trade in humans in 1807, following Lord Mansfield's judgment came the intensification of missionary activities and commerce, which in combination paved the way for the colonial occupation of Africa, which began with treaty signing and later surrender – which themselves were consequences of the lack of solidarity and unity (integration) among the disparate states of Africa. A case in point being the surreptitious nature of the treaties between the Europeans and King Archibong in Calabar and of the feuds between Dosumu and Kosoko families in Lagos. The European occupation of Africa was however more difficult in areas like the west coast where the powerful coastal chiefs/kings and middlemen, in addition to poor climatic conditions prevented their early

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penetration than in places like the kingdoms of Kongo, Angola, Senegambia and South Africa. Any opposition to European occupation that may have existed was sporadic, localized generally unconcerted among the various tribes.

The Pre-Nationalism Era

The period following the European conquest and occupation was therefore spent by Africans in adjusting to the changing patterns of trade with the white man (from slaves to industrial raw materials) on the one hand, and to the changing patterns of political administration (from traditional – charismatic cum ethno-centric type to foreign imperialism and hence bureaucracy as typified by Max Weber the German Sociologist) on the other. According to Ekong (1978:5), cultural messianism, which was an equally strong motivator of European imperialism, also led to the establishment of churches and schools in some of the African colonies. Even though such institutions were established primarily in the British colonies, for example, to produce literate Africans who would assist the colonial administrators in their daily chores (as interpreters, catechists and account clerks), and by the French to produce, 'black Frenchmen', formal education gradually raised the political consciousness of the African. And as students of development studies, development of consciousness or Praxis in Marxian Parlance, is an important step to social, cultural, political and economic development of any society. Thus, the period between the first and second world wars could be regarded in most contemporary political economy in Africa as the pre-nationalism era. This was a period in the growth of desire among Africans to acquire the white man's formal education. Although a number of Africans who later became leaders in their countries may have met as students while studying abroad, the different stages in the development of the spirit of nationalism in their respective countries of origin made it impossible for them to develop any effective joint programme of action for the emancipation of their countries or for their future economic co-operation and hence integration. It should be noted that the development of nationalistic feelings in the 1930s in Africa was highly related to the number of educated individuals in the country concerned and to the attitudes of the colonial administrators. For instance, the inspiration to nationalism brought about by the educated elements like Dr. Benjamin Nnamdi Azikiwe, Dr. J. B. Danquah, Kwame Nkrumah, Dr. Dubois, Leopold Senghur, Prof. Eyo Ita – all of the west coast of Africa at this era should be well noted for subsequent eras in African development.

The Nationalism Era

With the end of the Second World War(1939-1945), Britain had become a weaker world power, thereby affording nationalists in her colonies the opportunity to intensify their nationalist activities and to press their demands

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for political independence and decolonization to daggers drawn levels. The success of India in this regard in 1947 through Ghandi's Non-Violent change approach raised the hopes of African nationalists in general. The era of nationalism in Africa was therefore marked by the intensification of the struggle against colonialism, the drawing up of development plans, the consolidation of national boundaries, constitutional conferences, formation of political parties and political activities culminating in the attainment of political independence first by the Gold Coast (Ghana) in 1957 with Dr. Nkrumah as the Torch Bearer and then by a number of other countries in the Eastern and Western parts of Africa in the 1960s.

The Post Nationalism/Pre-Unity Era

Internal consolidation of the political independence won normally followed. In this process, many new nations of Africa encountered and are still encountering a number of problems arising from the fact that the boundaries of these nations were arbitrarily drawn, with no regard to the compatibility of the various ethnic groups with their diverse languages and cultures. The entrenched diversities explain the existence of Yoruba speaking People in Nigeria and in Benin and Togo republics just as Hausa/Fulani in Niger, Chad Republics as well as Efik speaking and cultural affine in Nigerian Cross River and Cameroun.

Paradoxically, while African leaders were unable to unify the various ethnic groups in their countries in order to consolidate their sovereignty, some of them started to propound theories of continental unity and development. 'Pan Africanism', Negritude or African Personality and African Socialism were some of the most widely known ideologies of the nationalism/post nationalism era in Africa. As is known, Kwame Nkrumah is best remembered for his strides for Pan Africanism, Leopold Senghor for Negritude and Julius Nyerere for African Socialism. One could rightly observe that when the Organization of African Unity (OAU) came into being in 1963, it was mainly the brainchild of a few earnest and supra-optimistic African leaders with very weak infrastructural facilities and non-consolidated mushroom states. In recognition of its weakness as a unifying body rather than for the sake of diplomacy, the OAU adopted a policy of non-interference in the internal affairs of member states – internal affairs which may range from coup d'etat to civil wars.

Inspite of the OAU, the Post-nationalism/Pre-Unity era in Africa has had to witness a number of internal as well as inter-states conflicts and disunity ranging from border clashes, external incursions and repatriation of non-natives to petty personality clashes. A few examples will suffice. In 1969, while Nigeria was engulfed in a civil war and struggling to keep Nigeria one, the Ghanaian Government, in a bid to consolidate its economy and security, decided to expel non Ghannians – a great majority of whom were Nigerians. Those returnees were barred from taking out their assets

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away from Ghana. Cote d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Somalia, Burundi, Angola, Zambia, Zaire, Libya, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Sudan and others are instances of states with some inter and intra state conflicts. Border clashes are recorded between Burundi and Tanzania, Uganda and Tanzania, Ethiopia and Somalia, Nigeria and Cameroun.

Internal instability, weak economic base, neo-colonial influences and intrinsic mutual distrust have been identified as some of the factors accounting for the teething problems of the post-nationalism/pre-unity integration era in Africa. It has also been seen from the discussion so far that, in fact, very little desire or basis for unity existed right from the beginning. One would like to say here that perhaps the puzzling factor in intra-African relations and development is the fact that as pointed out by Ekong (1978:8) upon all the wrangling and disputes, only a few isolated cases have disputing nations gone to the extent of temporarily breaking diplomatic relations with each other and in no case has such severance of diplomatic relations been on a permanent basis. And this suggests a number of things to the political economist, students of International Relations and sociologist of a developmentalist bent namely that an intrinsic inclination towards eventual unity and being a brother's keeper exists among African States. With all of the above as a background to this discourse, it becomes imperative for us to delve into the substance of the journal article – that of Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the sub-region's development.

Attempts at Intra West African Co-Operation and Development – The Unity Era

While no one can tell exactly when the era of true African unity may have started, will start and whether or not a 'United States of Africa' will ever emerge, the pre-unity era witnessed a number of attempts at economic co-operation and development among African States – particularly on the west coast. Some of these were still born, while others were only short lived. Among the earlier attempts is the creation of a sort of British West Africa Federation which was to duplicate the East African Community established by the British East African Colonial Administration. Unlike the East African Community which was envisaged to have common services, a common market and possibly a common constitution, the West African British possessions were so far apart from one another and so interlaced by French possession, that no meaningful physical links, like railways or motor ways could be established. The Federation therefore limited its services and activities to some common institutional arrangement such as the establishment of a common Currency Board (The British West African Currency Board), the West African Airways Corporation (WAAC), the West African Institute for Oil Palm Research (WAIFOR, presently NIFOR in Nigeria), the West African Institute for Social and Economic Research (WAISER currently NISER), the West African Frontier Force (WAFF), the West African Examination Council (WAEC) and the National Council of

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British West Africa (NCBWA). These institutions, as could be easily discernible, in Political Economic and hence development parlance, were primarily designed to facilitate the exploitation and marketing of raw materials from these countries rather than to form a nucleus for their future economic co-operation. Apart from the great distances that separated the then West African possessions (The Gambia, Sierra Leone, Ghana and Nigeria), the British government's strategy of "dolling" out political independence to her West African colonies at different times also created a superiority/inferiority complex among these nations, thereby destroying any basis for the development of a common strategy for mutual economic co-operation and hence integration. This, with the attainment of political independence in 1957 by Ghana while the other West African States were still dependent, nearly all the common economic and institutional arrangements came to an end. Even after all the British West African colonies had attained political independence by the mid 1960s, the rivalry for leadership in championing the African case made it impossible nay difficult for these countries to establish any form of meaningful lasting economic, political or military cooperation.

Another significant attempt at mutual co-operation among West African States was the establishment of the Senegambia Permanent Secretariat in 1967. The British Colonial Office did not really consider her Gambia colony as particularly important nor viable and so had looked for the possibility of exchanging the Gambia for a more profitable territory in the French Empire long before the Gambia independence in 1965. Senegal's interest in the union with the Gambia was mainly for the sake of physical convenience as the Gambia almost divides Senegal into two thereby hampering smooth communication across all districts of Senegal. Senegal itself is at least twenty times as large as the Gambia and the five major ethnic groups in the Gambia are also represented in Senegal. Moves to integrate the two countries was not favorably received by all concerned and so the proposal for a Sengambia Union remained dormant until during some exchange of visits by both heads of states when they agreed to de-emphasize a physical merger in preference to a closer economic cooperation and socio-economic and political development. Joint Projects which the Gambia could ill-afford singly are now sited mainly around the Gambia River Basin. These include the Kereti and Sambangolot Dams which provides currently cheap electricity and the irrigational projects/activities for up to 150,000 hectares of farmland there.

The Lome Convention signed in February 1975 between 46 African, Caribbean and Pacific States and the EEC (European Economic Community) influenced in very fundamental ways the bid towards a common market in the West African Sub-region. It has in particular influenced such countries as Gambia in its attitudes towards economic co-operation with Senegal and this also makes her access to funds from the European Investment Bank/European Development Fund feasible. Another attempt at economic co-operation and hence development in the sub-region, has been that between

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Sierra Leone and Liberia, based on the development of the Mano River which forms a common natural boundary of some 250 kilometers between the two countries. The Mano River Union was established in 1973 to enhance co-operation on the basis of studies conducted by a number of United Nations agencies. Before the establishment of this union, large scale smuggling of diamond into Liberia and consumer goods into Sierra Leone had been a major economic issue. The Mano River Union is therefore aimed at harmonizing customs duties and produce prices so as to circumvent and possibly stem the tide of smuggling. The bridge earlier constructed and opened up in March, 1976 was to enhance necessary communication links between the two countries. The Mano River Union also made possible the hydroelectric and irrigation facilities available to the two countries. This of course, is a sure route to industrialization drive by the two countries (Ekong 1978).

However, the co-operation attempts in West Africa which could be categorized as still born include the 1958 Ghana-Guinea Union, later joined by Mali 1960; the 1961 Monrovia Group which was aimed at ensuring free-trade arch between Cote d'ivoire (Ivory Coast), Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia, and the numerous but sporadic West African States. Going by accounts in the highly and well informed bi-monthly news magazine *West Africa* (May 14, 1973: 623) before its demise, when the Francophone countries (Cote d'ivoire-formerly Ivory Coast), Senegal, Mali, Mauritania and Upper Volta) now Bukina Faso signed a treaty in 1971 for the creation of CEAO-Communauté Economique de l'Afrique de l'Ouest, it was argued by the Senegalese President that an agreement had to be reached and co-operation experimented upon between the Francophone West African nations before such co-operation was extended to include others in the sub-region.

The Republics of Benin, Mali and Togo thought that Lagos was closer to them than Dakar and so refused to sign a regional treaty which excluded Nigeria.

The Ivorian and Senegalese states opposed the admission of Nigeria into the CEAO because of their fear of domination coupled with other external machinations by their metropolitan mentor - France.

We will therefore deduce from the foregoing examples of attempts made towards intra-West African economic, political, cultural and military co-operation and hence development in a direction desired by the political front runners that the major motivating factors behind their being initiated included:-

- a. Physical or geographical convenience, as in the case of Senegambia and the Mano River Union and the land locked Francophone countries with their coastal neighbours.
- b. Ideological convenience, as in the case of Ghana-Guinea Union.
- c. A common colonial heritage and economic/cultural neo-colonialism as typified by Francophone countries.
- d. Economic convenience, particularly to stem or at least curb smuggling e.g. Mano River Union.

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- e. Political convenience where a country feels that it can use its partnership with other nations as a stepping stone to other political or economic advantages as in the case of Gambia and Senegal earlier cited.
- f. The bugbear or impediments noted so far in the way of successful implementation of these co-operative attempts can be said to include:
 - i. Fear of domination of the smaller nations by the larger nations.
 - ii. Fear of loss of identity in the event of a merger.
 - iii. The disparity in economic potentials and fear of excessive imbalance in the distribution of economic and social benefits.
 - iv. Personality conflicts (clashes) between leaders of these nations.
 - v. Ideological differences and unequal drive towards nationalism.
 - vi. Inadequate infrastructural facilities and absence of a distinct division of labour or product specialization across the region.

In the face of these difficulties, the question then arises as to the basis on which the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) was founded. This then becomes the thrust of our next focus bearing in mind all the attempts/efforts this article has made in tracing or locating the origin or background that gave rise to the role ECOWAS is currently playing in the social, cultural, political, military and economic development of the sub-region.

The Ecowas

Economic co-operation or integration can assume the forms of a free trade area, custom union, common market, economic union or complete economic integration. Onitiri (1963:27-53) and Olayide (1972:281-307) both maintained that in considering the political structure of West Africa, co-operation in the form of complete economic integration, economic union and a common market would be premature and unrealistic. Similarly, the impediments or bugbear alluded to earlier in this article would also make co-operation in a free-trade area basis impracticable. The ECOWAS has therefore been left with the use of the last alternative strategy of a customs union as the basis of co-operation and development.

We are quick to remind ourselves here that the protocol which established the West African Regional group was signed in Monrovia in 1968 by West African Heads of States. This group succeeded in identifying areas of priority for the rapid transformation or development of West African sub-region

through some forms or basis for co-operation among and between the component states but it failed in the process to draft a Treaty and protocol on customs union. With this initial foundation, however, the Heads of States of Nigeria and Togo in 1973 succeeded in bringing about the convention of the Lome Ministerial Meeting which became the nucleus of the ECOWAS. The formal treaty establishing the ECOWAS was signed in 1975 by fifteen nations including the Republic of Benin (former Dahomey), the Gambia, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Cote d'voire (former Ivory Coast), Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Togo and Upper Volta (Bukina Faso) Cape-Verde Island and Niger. The ECOWAS is a 16 nations association within the sub-region. As the name implies, ECOWAS, going by the philosophy or dreams of the founding fathers, is geared at uniting the countries in West Africa into one large economic community which can take advantage of the large market to promote regional development. Development itself as a concept has been variously defined. But the bottom line of it is in seeing to the social, economic, political and cultural, or institutional transformation or change in society in line with the thinking of modernization theorists.

Like the European Economic Community (EEC now EU i.e. European Union), ECOWAS gears towards a common market of West Africa, a Sovereignty of the member states in economic and commercial matters. The goal of ECOWAS is the free flow of persons, property and capital within the community. One need to point out that the effort at creating this large community is premised on the belief that the individual economies of West African States are not capable of achieving development because of their weak bases. It is only through union or collective effort that socio-cultural and economic development of the sub-region could take off.

Specifically, as outlined in the Treaty setting up ECOWAS, the major aim of the community is stated as that of 'Promoting co-operation and development in all fields of economic activities particularly in the fields of industry, transport, telecommunication, energy, agriculture, natural resources, commerce, monetary and financial questions and social and cultural matters for the purpose of raising the standard of living of its people. It also aims at creating, increasing and maintaining economic stability in member states by fostering closer relations contributing to the progress and development of the African continent (Nigeria, 1975:56).

ECOWAS implies an integration of the economic policies and programmes of the members and also gradual indigenization of the ownership and control of capital in the sub-region.

Towards this end, firms, which are not indigenously owned and indigenously controlled will be subjected to tariff discrimination in the West African markets. The objective of this is to ensure that West Africans control the economy of the sub-region.

It needs however, be noted that to attain these levels of movement, ECOWAS as a regional development agency, uses two main organs. These are the Summit of the Heads of State which is the highest body in policy

making of the organization. The second is the Council of Ministers which saddles that responsibility on Foreign Ministers of member states.

The internal crisis that rocked Liberia and Sierra Leone has had to have ECOWAS military Unit-ECOMOG intervene to restore not only democratic settings to the polity but also civil order in these countries. The case of power struggle in Cote d'voire between Laurent Gbagbo and PM Quatara is another case in point, following the November 28, 2010 election in that country for which ECOWAS in collaboration with the AU and the international community have stepped in to stem the tide of conflict of btoehrly hates.

ECOWAS has meaningfully made impacts in the economic, political, cultural, social and military life of West Africans than could ordinarily be stated. ECOWAS has helped in solving a lot of problems which the OAU (now AU) would have been saddled with at the continental level of development in Africa.

Both citizens and governments in West Africa have tried their best in ensuring stability and unity within the sub-region.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Attempts at improved socio-cultural, economic and political gaps among the components states in the West African Sub-region did not start now. At the pristine time – before and during the hey-days of colonialism, the need for economic cooperation was felt and steps taken to crystallize same.

The ECOWAS as a regional integrating agency was formally "born" in 1975 when heads of state and government, during the tenure of our own Gen. Gowon came together to formalize its existence. Between then and now, a lot of strides have been taken to improve the lot of West Africans especially within the context of globalization. The ECOWAS – in military through ECOMOG – has salvaged many a state in the sub-region from the brink of collapse.

The global wind of democratization engulfed the political terrain of the sub-region which drove dictators like Gen. Abacha of Nigeria (1993-1998) and Gen. Guel of Cote d'voire into submission to the wind of change. On the cultural and economic fronts, ECOWAS, faces the greater prospect of integration – a move towards a common currency – some sort of historical replay of the defunct West African Currency Board under British hegemony. There is a greater prospect for unity amongst the nation states in the region than were under the balkanized French and English speaking political divides.

There, not withstanding, it behoves on member states to respect the individual sovereign rights of its members and dissuade citizens within the region to desert from engaging in tendencies that tend towards divisiveness than unity and cooperation and thus development as conceived by Rostow's

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The Stages of Economic Growth – A Non Communist Manifesto (1960) and other scholars in the modernization school.

The main thrust of the paper has been to examine the role which ECOWAS has played in the contemporary development strides of the West African sub-region. Its role becomes more apparent considering regional and or continental groupings in other regions of the world – like EAC, EU, LAFTA OAS, etc.

In the process, when one reflects upon Africa's colonial past and trade in humans, the role ECOWAS plays in ensuring cultural, socio economic and political proximate integration of the region within the African continent becomes of more interest to students of political economy, sociology and strategic studies. With the birth and moves towards consolidation of the European Union (EU), the strength already manifest in the North and South America, the closing of ranks in regional groupings in Asia, the paper believes that ECOWAS will move away from playing an essentially dominant economic role into other aspects of international or regional politics in this third millennium in which she is now an integral part thus opening more doors to studies in sociology of development and political economy of development and underdevelopment.

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