The Norms of African Diplomatic Culture:

Implications for African Integration

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The norms of diplomatic culture are an emerging field of study in International Relations among English School and Constructivist scholars. However, there exists a more neglected piece of IR scholarship dedicated to diplomacy. While Africa has always had trouble finding a home in the school of IR, the lack of research on African diplomats and their practices is a glaring hole in IR, especially considering the rich recent history of the international movements associated with the continent. The actions of transnational movements connected to independence movements, development aid, and human rights deserve study by scholars to understand if Africa is still on the receiving end of norms from the West or whether the continent is a source of new practices and norms in IR. This paper will put forth an argument that there are diplomatic norms that have taken hold on the continent, which have connections to the Pan-Africanist movement which now resides in the African Union. These norms have had significant impact on the integration movement on the continent from the Organization for African Unity to the African Union. This paper will outline the diplomatic norms and explain how they impact the push for continental integration. I will also investigate a potential actor in the integration process that has yet to be identified in this process: the African Diplomats, or Afromats, in Addis Ababa that have the power to influence African integration.

Pan-Africanist Union

When the independence movement of Sub-Saharan Africa finally broke through the barrier of European rule in 1957, the liberation leaders of the newly independent countries sought to join together to purge the continent of all colonial rulers and to bind

their collective power into an organization that would represent the new Africa to the world. The leaders who sought this integration of the continent came to be seen by later generations as the fathers of the Pan-African movement, which still continues today, though in different forms. Figures such as Nkrumah, Sékou Touré and Senghor led this movement, but eventually came to have significant disagreements about the way to integrate liberated African countries[1]. This debate has continued unresolved until present day, and Pan-Africanism's current form is the African Union (AU). However, the current integration of the continent is significantly less than comparable supra-national organizations with the European Union (EU) the body the AU is most often compared to. Europe's nation-state is often traced back to the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, giving Western Europe a 300 year head start over the African state, who only emerged in the middle of the 20th Century. Westphalian sovereignty was a norm passed on to African states at independence and one enshrined very quickly in the Organization for African Unity (OAU) (cite). Maintaining the borders of colonial states has become a hallmark of African IR, which was primarily motivated by leaders seeking to consolidate their sovereignty as a way of compensating for their weak power or legitimacy within their country. African leaders at the time of independence sought to "thwart any move towards supranationality on for the continent, as their main objective was to reinforce the Westphalian state system." (Regionalisms 198)

The dreams of a union government for Africa, are often attributed to the speeches by Kwame Nkrumah, an advocate for this structure early in his tenure as Ghana's first president. In fact, the idea of collective action on a continental level dates

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[1] These two sides were referred to as the Casablanca Group (the integrationists) and the Monrovia Group (the gradualists)

back to the first Pan-African Congress held in Paris in 1919[2]. This idea was intertwined

with the themes of economic development, political freedom, and social welfare that

remain prominent in African Union discourse today[3].

With Nkrumah the leading voice for a continent government, his reasonings hold

particular interest because of their applicability to present day Africa. First, Nkrumah

saw the need for continental economic planning that would maximize the benefits of

African resources for African people. Second, a unified defense and military strategy

was necessary to protect the micro-states that had emerged during the independence

era who could not resist the neo-colonial advances of external powers. Third, the ability

to unify foreign policy and diplomacy would amplify political coordination in the areas of

defense and economic development[4].

While Nkrumah's vision for union government was defeated by those leaders

who sought a more incremental approach to integration, the significant evolution from

the OAU to the AU in 2001 signaled a shift in goals for the organization. While the OAU

was seen as a 'dictator's club', the AU is meant to shift the goals of the regional body

from total liberation of the continent, to a regional agenda that focuses on

"institutionalizing norms and standards of democracy, human rights, and rule of law"

while also increasing the speed of economic development[5]. This is an important shift for

the study of African diplomacy, because the 'norm' agenda allows for an enhanced role

of diplomats on the continent. Afromats have the potential to be entrepreneurs in this

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[2] Adejumobi & Olukoshi 2008, 5

[3] Adejumobi & Olukoshi 2008, 6

[4] Adejumobi & Olukoshi 2008, 7

[5] Adejumobi & Olukoshi 2008, 9

new regional body to advocate for this new agenda of African integration. Before

exploring the role that diplomats could have for integration, it is important to highlight the

current diplomatic norms that formed during the OAU that still have resonance today.

Diplomatic Norms

The role of diplomatic culture has received more attention in recent years and

Geoffrey Wiseman's thesis that diplomatic culture is widely accepted by all players, both

state and non-state, in the international system is meant to be a global application of

these norms that he identifies. However, Wiseman's norms are notably derived from the

Westphalian system and provides examples of these norms in Cold War and Iraq War

contexts. There is no mention of those states who found themselves in the Non-Aligned

Movement of the Cold War, or those of the developing or emerging world today. In fact,

he fails to draw on any possible examples that would support his five diplomatic norms

from any region other than those intertwined with the Anglo-Saxon sphere of geo-

politics. Africa, Asia, and South America are all omitted from these norms and raises

questions about the norms applicability to these culturally vastly different regions of the

world. In respect to Africa, these norms certainly did not originate from the continent and

thus don't take into consideration the regional and cultural norms that may be specific to

the region. While Wiseman's norms may eventually come to be accepted and legitimate

in Africa, I would put forth a separate set of diplomatic norms that are more rooted in the

African experience.

As noted earlier, state sovereignty in mid-century Africa was a contested issue

due to the historical experiences with colonialism and neo-colonialism during the Cold

War. African states thus developed diplomatic norms and principles connected to their low standing in world politics and international relations. While the space does not exist to examine these norms in detail, it is important to understand them in relation to regional integration.

The first African diplomatic norm is anti-imperialism[6], the movement by African states to rid the continent of external and foreign forces that seek to exploit the African population. It is important to note that even though anti-European liberation movements ended with the political independence of Zimbabwe in 1980[7], the rhetoric of African leaders continued to advocate for economic autonomy in the decades after self-rule began. Anti-imperial rhetoric continues today, and while often used to cover domestic failings of autocratic or corrupt leaders, this usage and resonance with African constituencies in fact proves the longevity and pervasiveness of the norm[8]. This poses a challenge to integrationists, because small states may perceive the transfer of sovereignty to Addis Ababa as a neo-imperialist threat if they perceive the more powerful African states are forcing integration.

The second norm that integrationists at the AU must confront is the vehement adherence to the political borders left by the colonial powers. The OAU enshrined this norm of *uti possidetis* in its charter and in subsequent meeting, and has made a

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[6] The difference between colonialism and imperialism, while often used interchangeably, are important to note because many African leaders and the OAU Charter itself use the term neo-colonialism to describe the post-independence influence that European states used to maintain their advantages in former colonies. However, because of the influence that states like the United States, China, India, and South Africa now wield on the continent, imperialism is a more apt describer of the present situation.

[7] Zimbabwe was the last African state to achieve independence from Europeans, even though the Rhodesian government under Ian Smith unilaterally declared independence in 1963. Both Namibia (1990) & Eritrea (1993), countries that received independence after Zimbabwe, were administered by African states (South African & Ethiopia).

[8] Recently Robert Mugabe has been notable in his use of anti-imperialism in his political rhetoric.

substantial impact on the continent for the nearly 50 years[9]. This has meant the lines drawn on the continent by European powers in Berlin in 1884 and 1885 remain in place despite the irrationality of the borders. The consequences have been the inability of secession movements to gain support among other African states. The OAU supported the national sovereignty of state by working towards compromises retaining the integrity of the colonial borders[10]. African integrationists will confront African publics that see the lasting reputation of the regional body as stifling self-determination and political rights. The norm had the chance to evolve with the successful independence of South Sudan, but the coming AU-backed military invasion into northern Mali likely reinforces this norm.

The third norm of African diplomacy is the solidarity of African states on the world stage. The power of the region's voting bloc at multi-national organizations, numerically the largest in the world, remains a key feature of the Pan-Africanist movement. Nkrumah's belief in the need to speak with one voice was in an effort to make up for the diplomatic, economic, and political weakness of individual African states present at independence and remains today. Though a common refrain at regional meetings, this norm is best seen in action at the United Nations, where the bloc of African countries make up 28% of the UN membership. The solidarity in voting at the UN began very

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[9] The OAU Charter, signed 25 May 1963 in Addis Ababa, states the membership is "determined to safeguard and consolidate the hard-won independence as well as the sovereignty and territorial integrity of our states, and to fight against neo-colonialism in all its forms". The resolutions adopted at the first ordinary meeting of the OAU declared "that all Member States pledge themselves to respect the borders existing on their achievement of national independence"

[10] Notable secession movements include Biafra in Nigeria, Katanga in DR Congo, Somaliland in Somalia, and Azawad in Mali. None received support from the OAU/AU.

soon after independence, and extended to issues beyond those on the African agenda

(Hovet, 1964)[11].

This last norm bodes well for a potential AU foreign service. If all African

countries are committed to coordinating their foreign policies, then current Addis-based

Afromats would be permitted to shape more of the diplomatic agenda on the supra-

national level allowing them to put more comprehensive integration on the agenda.

There has been notable resistance of African leaders to norms that would threaten

sovereign prerogatives and territorial integrity since independence[12]. Therefore, the first

two norms, anti-imperialism and adherence to colonial borders, stand as significant

obstacles to African integration.

Diplomats in Europe

The importance that diplomats play in the move towards regional integration has

not been explored at the AU, but the role that this community can play has been

detailed by Mai'a Davis Cross at the European Union[13]. She identifies the European

diplomats as an epistemic community that uses their shared expertise and common

culture to increase collaboration that extends beyond their national mandate. Cross

sees this happening particularly in the area of security, drawing on the numerous

interviews conducted at The Hague with ambassadors, generals, and other experts.

Research would be necessary to ascertain whether a high politics arena is available for

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[11] The Africa agenda in the 1960s was understood to revolve around self-determination, the independence of colonial areas, & the elimination of racial discrimination policies.

[12] Tieku 2011, 198

[13] For more, see Cross 2007a and 2007b in the annotated bibliography

Afromat's collaboration, or if the advanced European security apparatuses are unique to that region.

Africrats and Their Unlikely Opponents

The OAU was granted very limited supra-national power at its formation and struggled to become a meaningful regional body because of the resistance to deep integration by those countries in the Monrovia Group. This left the organs of the OAU, particularly the Secretariat, with weak mandates and packed with inept political appointees[14]. The reform of the organization resulted in the AU and the successor organ to the OAU Secretariat, the AU Commission, became a "vital source for developing policy ideas and formulating long-range strategic policies"[15]. Thomas Tieku traces the path the organ took to becoming a 'independent' actor, and shows the influence of African technocrats, Africrats, in setting policy directions for the organization.

This policy-setting extended back to the 1990s when a geo-political shift took place following the Cold War and Africrats sought the development of a single act to govern to two major organs of African integration: the OAU, and the African Economic Community. This essentially was a call to replace the OAU, and set in motion the reform that gave birth to the AU[16]. On paper, the political organ of the AU responsible for policy development is the AU Assembly[17], which the AU Constitutive Act[18] stipulates is the

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[14] Tieku 2011, 200

[15] Tieku 2011, 200

[16] Tieku 2011, 205

[17] The Assembly is composed of Heads of States and Government or their duly accredited representatives.

[18] The Act codified the framework for the AU's conduct. It was signed in Lomé, Togo in 2000.

supreme organ of the Union. Despite this new framework and the new policy organ,

Tieku argues that Africrats have continued to create and direct policy initiatives[19]. This is

due to the limited power given to the AU Assembly due to fears of an ambitious Chair

(an African state president or prime minister) who would seek to become 'president' of

Africa. Tieku connects this fear back to the concern in 1963 at the OAU's founding when

newly liberated governments sought to give up as little national sovereignty to Addis

Ababa as possible. This has resulted in the inability of the primary policy organ of the

AU to conduct any long-term strategic planning.

Tieku does not lay the blame for poor-policy planning on just the Presidents and

Foreign Ministers that make up the two major organs of the AU. In fact, he shows how

Afromats on the Permanent Representatives Committee (PRC) have become inhibiting

gatekeepers that have stifled innovation and ideas. In a clear contrast with Cross'

epistemic community at The Hague, Tieku shows how AU diplomats in Addis Ababa

have shortcomings in logistical support from their home country, modest technical

knowledge, and an aversion to policies requiring financial resources.

Tieku's central contention with regionalism as a whole is that the Euro-centric

view of supra-national organization assumes that states have the capacity to oversee

the technocrats operating the regional body. In Africa, it is those technocrats, rather than

Cross' diplomats in Europe, that have exceeded their mandate through agenda setting

and socialization in Addis Ababa. In distinction to Europe, the diplomats have a stifling

effect on integration, thus adhering to the anti-integration diplomatic norms that have

developed over the past 50 years, limiting the pull of sovereignty to Addis Ababa.

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[19] Tieku 2011, 205

Conclusion

The implications for diplomacy and integration described in this paper reinforce the belief that diplomats and diplomatic culture have strong effects on efforts to consolidate power in supra-national regional organizations. In Europe, they are the drivers of integration through the socialization of state representatives to The Hague. In Africa, the diplomats are a hand-brake to the more integrationist Africrats.

Still, the power of the diplomatic epistemic community as identified by Cross has great potential for Africa. A significant amount of Pan-African support at the highest levels of African governments has been a hallmark of the continent since the independence of Ghana in 1957. Discussions surrounding the concept of a union government has continued, displaying that the resilience of goal despite changes in governments and national policies. However, substantial challenges are posed to the epistemic community of Afromats and Africrats in Addis Ababa. Notably, the diplomatic norms of strict respect for state sovereignty and resistance to external powers, even African powers, pose obstacles to those in the African Union seeking a stronger supra-national organization. These obstacles are then combined with the obstructionist behavior Teiku identified in AU diplomats, who damper innovation on the continental level.

Despite this finding that Afromats are part of the impediment to further AU integration, their importance is still worth noting. In both African and European examples, diplomats assigned to the supra-national body have exceptional influence that go beyond the design of the body. In Europe, this has resulted in further integration,

in Africa the opposite is seen. However, both sets of diplomats appear to be the gatekeepers to innovative ideas. Future research in Africa should be dedicated to understanding how Africrats and those Africans who seek greater integration can aid Afromats in overcoming their objections to innovation and deeper collaboration. If Afromats can be turned into forces for integration, the fulfillment of Kwame Nkurmah's dream of a united Africa could be achieved.