

# The European Union's Regionalism Diplomacy in Africa: An English School Approach

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### The European Union's Regionalism Diplomacy in Africa: An English School Approach

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## **Abstract**

This paper proposes an innovative analytical approach to regionalism promotion by the European Union (EU) in Africa. The approach pursues the dual aim of accommodating African approaches to regionalism in EU foreign policy analysis and of expounding the centrality of diplomacy in negotiating a renewed EU-African Union relationship. The concept of 'regionalism diplomacy' brings the negotiated and contentious nature of EU regionalism promotion to the fore. The paper espouses contemporary English School thinking about 'international society' and argues that EU regionalism promotion cannot just remain the expansion of European regional international society onto Africa. Instead, EU regionalism diplomacy should acknowledge and incorporate the anticolonial pan-African roots of African regionalism. Overall, the EU should seek a more diplomacy-focused, negotiated Africa-Europe interregional relationship. The paper concludes with an outline of a pan-African approach to regionalism diplomacy and avenues for future research.

## Introduction

In the times of African formal decolonisation, leading pan-Africanist Kwame Nkrumah thought it “wishful thinking [...] to suppose that the European Common Market, which is devised to increase the welfare of the European member countries, should conscientiously promote industrialization” in Africa.<sup>1</sup> This puzzle occupies scholars until today: How (dis)interested can the post-colonial policy of the European Union (EU) towards Africa ultimately be? This paper argues that regionalisation is at the forefront of both African decolonisation and the EU’s Africa policy. Consequently, it introduces a novel analytical concept for understanding the role of the EU in African regionalisation. The paper poses the following research question: What is the role of diplomacy in regionalisation processes in Africa? In tackling this question, the paper advances the concept ‘regionalism diplomacy’ (RD), which captures the nexus of diplomacy and regionalisation. It can be defined as the diplomatic practice of actors in international societies that aims at renegotiating existing polity structures and ‘conditions of separateness’ into regional structures and practices, both within and across international societies. The key contribution of the RD analytical concept is the following: the EU’s involvement in African regionalisation processes should be understood as a political, negotiated phenomenon. As African states, the products of European colonialism, gradually create pan-African institutions, the role of the EU in this process is pivotal. Viewing this involvement in regionalisation as a diplomatic, contentious process helps differentiating African from European approaches to regionalism. This argument is first developed descriptively, whereas the final section proposes elements of decolonised pan-Africanist RD.

EU-Africa relations are complex and contentious due to echoes of colonialism and continued critiques of EU foreign policy being neo-colonial. Since the European Economic Community’s founding, Europe has sought to obtain a stake in African regionalisation processes. These processes are driven in part by the regionalism that the EU promotes, but also reside on a strong pan-African, decolonial imperative for continental unity. As such, the African Union (AU) in particular presents an analytical puzzle: it enabled the intensification of EU-Africa political relations (to the detriment of Europe-Africa relations in the hands of European states), while representing the

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<sup>1</sup> Nkrumah, Kwame, *Africa Must Unite*, London, Heinemann Educational Books Ltd, 1963, p. 159.

newest phase of institutionalising pan-African thought.<sup>2</sup> Overall, the EU-African interregional relations can therefore be considered as one of the few remaining successful and relevant interregional projects of the EU, and merit to be studied, including in their special postcolonial context.

This paper's argument is firmly rooted in the assertion that the EU's impact on the practice of diplomacy illustrates a broader questioning of traditional tenets of diplomacy studies.<sup>3</sup> It also appreciates that the practice of African diplomacy predates Europe's colonialism: elements of a non-Eurocentric, diplomatic theory of African regionalisation are indeed available.<sup>4</sup> The regionalism diplomacy concept offers three distinctive advantages: first, it recontextualises the EU's claims of *sui generis* post-Westphalian regional polity in wider debates of International Relations (IR); second, it uses diplomacy as a core institution of EU foreign policy and, by implication, IR and regionalism; third, it provides an interactive, non-static account of regionalisation. Throughout, the paper implements the consensus in regionalism studies of distinguishing between 'regionalism' as the top-down, government-led body of thought and goals from 'regionalisation' as the bottom-up, *de facto* unwinding of nation-states into regional orders, not necessarily driven by governments.

A set of caveats is warranted right at the beginning of this paper. First, the RD analytical concept developed is a novel lens that studies the EU's role in *African* regionalisation. By drawing from regionalism and diplomacy studies, it focuses on interpretative insights, whereas the general thrust of the concept certainly could hold relevance for other cases too. Nonetheless, the postcolonial condition of EU-Africa relations provides for a certain uniqueness of the present case. Second, while the paper draws upon English School theorisations of the EU's regional order, it does not account for the dynamics between EU Member States and EU institutions. In other words, the important English School debate on the EU as a Regional International Society cannot be exercised here. As the Member States continue to pursue bilateral foreign policies in Africa, this multi-level dynamics adds further depth, but cannot be discussed within the limits of this paper. As a workable compromise, the paper

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<sup>2</sup> Murithi, Timothy, *The African Union: Pan-Africanism, Peacebuilding and Development*, Aldershot, Ashgate, 2005, p. 35.

<sup>3</sup> Bátorá, Jozef, "Does the European Union Transform the Institution of Diplomacy?", *Journal of European Public Policy*, 12, 2005, pp. 44–66.

<sup>4</sup> Irwin, Graham W., "Precolonial African Diplomacy: The Example of Asante", *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 8, 1975, p. 81.

focuses on EU institutions and their policies, noting Member States' significant input into them. Finally, this paper cannot offer a full analysis of the EU's regionalism diplomacy *practice*; it does, however, outline a tentative research agenda in the conclusion.

The regionalism diplomacy concept is established and discussed in three sections. First, European approaches to EU regionalism promotion are surveyed. Second, the pertinence of a diplomatic approach to regionalism promotion is established. This section also elaborates a full definition of RD. Third, the analytical impetus of Pan-Africanism for African regionalisation is operationalised in a critical, decolonial reading of the English School. The conclusion reviews the pertinence of the RD analytical concept for EU-Africa relations and identifies avenues of application for this approach.

### **Surveying the field: The political practice and academic study of regionalism promotion**

This section first contextualises the EU's diplomatic and structural role within wider developments of global politics to appreciate the external influences on the EU that might lead it to endorse regionalisation elsewhere. It then reviews several prominent approaches to the study of regionalism promotion of the EU. This discussion sketches out these theories relatively briefly to get to the main point. As will be shown, the main problem of these approaches is that they are unfit to account for the *negotiated* dynamics of political structures and practice that African regionalisation entails.

Before considering these academic approaches to regionalism promotion, a brief introduction to the EU's concrete activities is in order. Already in 1995, the Commission suggested the EU as "'natural' supporter of regional initiatives".<sup>5</sup> In 2006, the Council concluded that "the European Union is a natural partner in [the] endeavour [of making the AU a successful organisation] and it is keen to continue and to strengthen this partnership to our mutual benefit".<sup>6</sup> This gave rise to the Joint Africa-Europe Strategy concluded in 2008. In essence, there is a conviction across

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<sup>5</sup> Commission of the European Communities, *European Community Support for Regional Economic Integration Efforts among Developing Countries*, COM(95) 219 final, Brussels, 16 June 1995, p. 6.

<sup>6</sup> European Council, *EU Presidency Statement on Appointment of President Denis Sassou-Nguesso as AU Chairman*, 30 January 2006 <[http://eu-un.europa.eu/articles/en/article\\_5637\\_en.htm](http://eu-un.europa.eu/articles/en/article_5637_en.htm)> [accessed 15 April 2015].

Brussels and Addis Ababa that Europe's integration experience and the AU's similar institutions predispose it for a lively exchange of experiences through diplomacy. The AU is doubtlessly the biggest EU success in this regard. Furthermore, the African Caribbean Pacific (ACP) group exists already since the negotiations of the Lomé Convention in 1975 and disburses technical aid for regionalisation. The current generation of EU-ACP 'trade and development' relations are based on the Cotonou Agreement (2000-2020), which supports African regionalisation in principle and financially. The EU furthermore finances a significant part of the AU and the Regional Economic Communities (REC), both their programmes as well as institutional structures. Finally, the EU and AU have regular diplomatic exchanges at the ministerial and College-to-College level.

#### *Global factors influencing EU regionalisation policies*

It is tempting but misleading to study the EU's interregional relations in isolation. A number of developments of global politics have shaped European and African agency in regionalism. These include: the on-going evolution of multilateralism, the assertion of World Trade Organisation (WTO) rules and global trade liberalisation. Naturally, these factors complicate EU foreign policy, but they also illustrate the general fragmentation of the post-World War II liberal world order.

As the EU started promoting regionalisation abroad, other industrialised countries had considerable doubts and argued multilateralism and regionalism were incompatible. In a 1995 Communication, the Commission asserted that "the renewed attention to regionalism takes place in an international context of global liberalisation of trade and capital movements".<sup>7</sup> The Commission called its approach "outward-oriented, open regionalism", and it cited the WTO's 1994 Marrakesh Act that "confirmed the compatibility between regional integration and multilateralism. At the same time it has clarified and strengthened the conditions whereby a regional grouping can claim to have acted in accordance with multilateralism."<sup>8</sup> Multilateralism and regionalisation (especially in a wider geopolitical sense) twenty years later are still in latent contradiction.<sup>9</sup> These current contradictions have been

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<sup>7</sup> Commission of the European Communities, *op.cit.*, pp. ii, 6.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> Hettne, Björn & Fredrik Söderbaum, "The UN and Regional Organizations in Global Security: Competing or Complementary Logics?", *Global Governance*, 12, 2006, pp. 227-32.

called “messy multilateralism”.<sup>10</sup> Overlapping and in constant re-negotiation, this phenomenon has also been described as “Multilateralism 2.0”, with diversified actors and of a networked nature.<sup>11</sup> There has thus been a shift from the EU seeing its commitment to multilateralism questioned by other states in the 1990s to the EU itself promoting “effective multilateralism”.<sup>12</sup> The EU’s endeavour to make regionalism and multilateralism compatible in political practice seems relatively successful.

There were also latent tensions between regional and global multilateral governance of global trade. The crux here lies in the theme of the above-mentioned Marrakesh Act, namely that even if regional Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) and regional organisations liberalise high percentages of the signatories’ mutual trade, they create a “spaghetti bowl” of FTAs that prevents full trade liberalisation.<sup>13</sup> In this debate, the WTO has asserted itself significantly in the last decades, despite the stalling Doha Round. It is precisely the WTO’s more trenchant supervision of its members that forced the EU to re-introduce full reciprocity in the Cotonou Agreement with its former colonies. Some observers suggest that the EU strategically exaggerated the difficulty of obtaining a new waiver for a non-reciprocal EU-Africa trade regime within the Cotonou Agreement.<sup>14</sup> But without doubt, the EU’s postcolonial differentiated treatment of its former colonies *vis-à-vis* other developing countries is actively being tackled by the WTO and cannot be sustained in the long run. The EU increasingly understands all of these factors, and has aligned its regionalism promotion by gradually eschewing postcolonial preferentialism towards ACP countries.

#### *A tale of low politics: dominant approaches*

Regionalism is studied in very different ways when talking about the EU and other regional integration processes. There is a wealth of approaches to EU foreign policy

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<sup>10</sup> Richard Haass, “The Case for Messy Multilateralism”, *Financial Times*, 5 January 2010, <<http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/18d8f8b6-fa2f-11de-beed-00144feab49a.html#axzz3HG6grBnD>> [accessed 27 March 2015].

<sup>11</sup> Van Langenhove, Luk, “The Transformation of Multilateralism Mode 1.0 to Mode 2.0”, *Global Policy*, 1, 2010, pp. 263–70.

<sup>12</sup> Council of the European Union, *A Secure Europe in a Better World: European Security Strategy*, Brussels, 12 December 2003.

<sup>13</sup> Bhagwati, Jagdish, *Termites in the Trading System: How Preferential Agreements Undermine Free Trade*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008.

<sup>14</sup> Bilal, Sanoussi & Francesco Rampa, *Alternative (to) EPAs: Possible Scenarios for the Future ACP Trade Relations with the EU*, Policy Management Report (Maastricht: ECDPM, 2006), p. 30, <<http://ecdpm.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/PMR-11-EPAs-Scenarios-For-Future-ACP-EU-Trade-Relations.pdf>>.

that are exclusively EU-centered. These speak from a European perspective and for a European audience, and largely ignore postcolonial insights about the non-universality of European political theory. As is evidenced below, most theorisations of regionalisation processes fail to appreciate the production of policy: they assume a benevolent EU and a malleable recipient country of EU structures, norms and policies. Furthermore, a self-contained, immanent narrative of EU regionalism promotion cannot be sustained in a wider IR discussion. Regional integration is seldom, or never, only the result of intra-regional considerations and aspirations.<sup>15</sup> To illustrate this problem of inadequate approaches to EU regionalism promotion, the remainder of this section critically surveys Keukeleire's Structural Foreign Policy paradigm, Manners' Normative Power Europe concept, as well as policy diffusion approaches.

With Structural Foreign Policy (SFP), Keukeleire suggests an innovative theory of the EU's role in the world. Structural Foreign Policy is "a policy which, conducted over the long term, seeks to influence and shape sustainable political, legal, economic, social, and security structures on various relevant levels (from the individual to the global level), with the degree of internalisation influencing this sustainability".<sup>16</sup> While chiefly inspired by the EU's attempts to surpass classical foreign policy ('relational foreign policy'), there is some acknowledgement that many actors of global politics pursue SFP. SFP theory unsurprisingly resonates well with more critical structuralist accounts of world politics, such as neo-Gramscianism, and hence also illustrates a welcome opening up of EU studies. It also appreciates the depth at which EU policy aims to intervene. But SFP paradoxically remains a static theory of foreign policy that cannot account for change dynamics. This is most visible in an article specifically focusing on 'structural diplomacy'<sup>17</sup>: while explaining in a lucid manner why the EU's diplomatic system structurally predisposes it to engage in SFP diplomacy and why its SFP often fails, Keukeleire asserts that the EU exports its model elsewhere into a non-European world that is presented as quite structure-less and malleable. Little attention is paid to how EU SFP unfolds in specific contexts. As non-European

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<sup>15</sup> Lundestad, Geir, *'Empire' by Integration: The United States and European Integration, 1945-1997*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1998; Cafruny, Alan & Magnus Ryner (eds.), *A Ruined Fortress? Neoliberal Hegemony and Transformation in Europe*, Lanham, Rowman & Littlefield, 2003.

<sup>16</sup> Keukeleire, Stephan & Tom Delreux, *The Foreign Policy of the European Union*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, p. 28.

<sup>17</sup> Keukeleire, Stephan "Reappraising Diplomacy: Structural Diplomacy and the Case of the European Union", *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy*, 4, 2009, pp. 143–65.

contentions are not an intrinsic part of the model, SFP is an interesting but incomplete tool to study EU regionalisation policies. In extremis, SFP could be seen to replicate the Eurocentric foundations of IR beyond its traditional interstate account of the 'international'.

A second influential account of EU foreign policy is Manners' Normative Power Europe (NPE).<sup>18</sup> NPE is above all a statement about "the ideational impact of the EU's international identity/role as representing normative power".<sup>19</sup> It ascribes normativity to the EU's foreign policy and also self-describes as a "post-Westphalian" theory.<sup>20</sup> NPE thus is a complex theory with many constituent parts that do not fit easily. If the argument about normativity thanks to post-Westphalian novelty perhaps stands relatively unchallenged, Manners is less expert at explaining how the diffusion of EU normativity in the world unfolds. A respectable array of 'types of diffusion' is proposed, but remains abstract and is unhelpful in explaining how the EU achieves change elsewhere in the world. Perhaps the greatest challenge in the NPE debate, often ignored by its proponents but identified already by Manners, is that NPE as a concept hosts three rather different elements: it is about the ontological conceptualisation of the EU as a "change of norms in the international system", a "positivist quality, how it acts to change norms", and finally a "normative quality, how it should act to extend its norms".<sup>21</sup> By then also suggesting as the 'ontological basis' NPE norms such as the centrality of peace, liberty, democracy, Manners presents the analyst with a toxic conceptual concoction. Such discourse weighs in on European postcolonial superiority. Finally, Parker and Rosamond aptly show how NPE is not a stand-alone theory of EU foreign policy, but deeply embedded in European market liberalism or 'market cosmopolitanism' in which NPE is "always already possible".<sup>22</sup> NPE thus is premised on the fact of EU regionalism, but does not specify its relationship with structural, not just normative, change in other regions of the world. Indeed, it cannot show how polity structures are renegotiated.

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<sup>18</sup> Manners, Ian "Normative Power Europe: A Contradiction in Terms?", *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 40, 2002, pp. 235–58.

<sup>19</sup> Manners, p. 238.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 240.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 252.

<sup>22</sup> Parker, Owen & Ben Rosamond, "'Normative Power Europe' Meets Economic Liberalism: Complicating Cosmopolitanism Inside/outside the EU", *Cooperation and Conflict*, 48, 2013, p. 232.

A third important literature is the 'policy diffusion' paradigm. Optimism about policy diffusion's explanatory power varies among its analysts. Some speak of EU 'external governance' of other countries/regions, whereas more cautious formulations point above all to the limits of the EU's ability to 'diffuse' itself and its policies.<sup>23</sup> Lenz cautions that "causal inference about the role of EU ideational diffusion in explaining outcomes in regionalism hinges on convincingly specifying the underlying counterfactual, namely that political decisions would have been different in the absence of the EU".<sup>24</sup> At best, the EU's success at diffusion of regionalism to Africa is perhaps its role as a "mentor" of the nascent AU, through the practice of "constant dialogue and joint projects".<sup>25</sup> But not unlike NPE, even a cautious approach to the diffusion literature struggles to appreciate the micro-powers at work in the diffusion of the EU model and its policies. Furthermore, policy diffusion assumes a static and unitary EU, whereas other regions of the world are shown as lacking such norms and policies.

In sum, dominant approaches to the study of EU regionalism promotion fail to account for this process being contentious and negotiated. Behind every EU programme lies a diplomatic process, and all factual regionalisation is the product of African *and* EU approaches. A less EU-centric scholarly approach to EU regionalism promotion must therefore question the EU's universal benevolence and demonstrate African agency. Finally, it must also better distinguish between rhetorical goals and empirical success. Seeing factual regionalisation as the result of the contention between different approaches to regionalism promotion, including the EU's regionalism diplomacy, remedies these issues.

### **Defining regionalism diplomacy: a nexus of negotiated change**

Whereas diplomacy studies often focus on behaviour and bargaining while controlling for institutional factors and historical grievance, regionalism is traditionally studied through overly institutionalist, retrospective paradigms. A diplomatic study of regionalism can mend the individual weaknesses of both of these study fields: it

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<sup>23</sup> Sandra Lavenex & Frank Schimmelfennig, "EU Rules beyond EU Borders: Theorizing External Governance in European Politics", *Journal of European Public Policy*, 16, 2009, pp. 791–812; Hastrup, Toni, "EU as Mentor? Promoting Regionalism as External Relations Practice in EU–Africa Relations", *Journal of European Integration*, 35, 2013, pp. 785–800.

<sup>24</sup> Lenz, Tobias, "EU Normative Power and Regionalism: Ideational Diffusion and Its Limits", *Cooperation and Conflict*, 48, 2013, p. 223.

<sup>25</sup> Hastrup, *op.cit.*, p. 791.

politicises the study of regionalism through the analytical lens of diplomacy, while grounding the study of diplomacy in a historical-institutional context. This section introduces the theoretical elements for a definition of the regionalism diplomacy concept.

### *English School improvements upon traditional IR*

Traditional IR is state-centric and excels at explaining (and maintaining) the *status quo* of a Westphalian state-based international system. Not only is this system manifestly changing in our times, but pure classic IR theory, especially its structuralist variants, fail to account for the mechanics of international politics. A promising strategy to demonstrate the inner life of IR is to focus on diplomacy as an IR practice. Henry Kissinger famously regarded diplomacy merely a subservient tool at the service of broader international relations.<sup>26</sup> Instead of a mere tool, the English School, however, considers diplomacy as a key institution of international relations, next to balance of power, international law, war and the great powers.<sup>27</sup> Both Wight and Bull, founders of the English School, have argued that diplomacy is crucial to IR – but for them, diplomacy was only “reflective”, not constitutive of international society.<sup>28</sup> It was the trained diplomat Watson who focused on diplomacy as *Dialogue between States* specifically.<sup>29</sup> Diplomacy now gained transformative agency. To remedy the crisis of traditional IR’s static and conservative epistemology, a shift to *practices* of IR opens felicitous avenues for the English School’s mature stance on diplomacy.

The English School premises its analyses on a consensus around diplomacy as a key institution of ‘international society’. This ‘society’ is not dissimilar to what is usually called the ‘international system’ – to spare a lengthy debate, a society can be a system, but a system alone not a society. Bull’s approach fits well with its European focus of study, as can be seen in his definition of international society that arises through “dialogue and consent common rules and institutions for the conduct of [state] relations, and [the recognition of states’] common interest in maintaining

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<sup>26</sup> Kissinger, Henry, *Diplomacy*, New York, Simon & Schuster, 1994.

<sup>27</sup> Bull, Hedley, *The Anarchical Society*, London, Macmillan, 1977; Bull, Hedley & Adam Watson (eds.), *The Expansion of International Society*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1984.

<sup>28</sup> Neumann, Iver B. "The English School on Diplomacy: Scholarly Promise Unfulfilled", *International Relations*, 17, 2003, p. 350.

<sup>29</sup> Watson, Adam, *Diplomacy: The Dialogue between States*, Eyre Methuen, 1982.

these arrangements".<sup>30</sup> If diplomacy is part and parcel of international society, then diplomats hold a key role in the practice of IR. The English School offers a practice-focused and also structural-institutionalist account of global politics. What makes societies international, finally, is the feeling of living disparately. As Sharp argues, "[p]eople live not as such, but as peoples in various sorts of groups. This plural fact both engenders and is engendered by a value placed on living separately. The diplomatic tradition thus presents peoples as living in 'conditions of separateness' from one another."<sup>31</sup> The English School hence makes a good case for why diplomacy should be a key institution of international society – as a mediating process between disparate social groups.

#### *Regionalism and the English School: nascent European Regional International Society*

The traditional English School approach focuses on state-centric relations, which challenges both European and non-European post/non-Westphalian regional polities. Indeed, Bull argued "an international society exists when a *group of states* [...] forms a society".<sup>32</sup> However, unlike IR structural realism for example, the English School does not take states as the natural ontological base of its theory. Rather, contemporary English School theorists accommodate regionalism easily. A respectable body of literature analyses the EU as a European Regional International Society (ERIS). For example, Diez and Whitman build on Bull's five key institutions of international society to show how the pooling of sovereignty, the *acquis communautaire*, multilevel multilateralism, pacific democracy, member state coalitions and multiperspectivity successfully provide for an ERIS.<sup>33</sup> This ERIS is spearheaded institutionally by the EU but includes other parts too, such as the Council of Europe. An English School approach to regionalism is much broader than economic integration – it thinks of regional international societies as "containers for culture and for value diversity".<sup>34</sup> The English School hence may accommodate also ideational, identitarian and normative elements, such as NPE discussed above, and it

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<sup>30</sup> Bull & Watson, *op.cit.*, p. 1.

<sup>31</sup> Sharp, Paul, *Diplomatic Theory of International Relations*, Cambridge University Press, 2009, p. 10.

<sup>32</sup> Bull, *The Anarchical Society*, *op.cit.*, p. 3, emphasis added.

<sup>33</sup> Diez, Thomas & Richard Whitman, "Analysing European Integration: Reflecting on the English School", *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 40, 2002, pp. 43–67.

<sup>34</sup> Hurrell, Andrew, *On Global Order: Power, Values, and the Constitution of International Society*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2010, p. 247.

does so with an appreciation of how society spans beyond the Westphalian nation-state. In sum, English School thinking is inherently regional.

### *One or many societies?*

Bull studied the expansion of *one* (European) international society, whereas many contemporary authors speak of multiple international societies. This is an important tension in the English School. Living separately in multiple, interacting international societies adds depth and anti-Eurocentrism to the English School framework. This paper sides with more contemporary, non-Eurocentric readings of global politics as constituted of multiple (nascent) international societies.

Bull's traditional argument presents a single global international society that is 'expanding' from Europe. Bull is clear that non-European political society existed before colonialism, but argued that said polity does simply not matter for international politics. Pre-colonial institutions are irrelevant because of the incredible difference between European international society and, in this case, African pre-colonial "political communities", even if their interrelation was "regulated by complex rules and institutions".<sup>35</sup> But to then simply observe European expansion as a diachronic, inevitable process is teleological – it presupposes a finality of global politics rooted in European polity. For example, this would mean that the African regionalisation experience is to unfold through the very categories of European integration. Concretely, the European linear blueprint of economic regional integration, for instance a FTA preparing a customs union, then serves as blueprint for African regionalisation. A Eurocentric English School account of non-European regionalism hence "requires independent states" as formative blocks, which in many parts of the world are precluded by "extensive colonization by a small number of empires".<sup>36</sup> In this sense, decolonisation and formal independence would mean that colonies became full sovereign members of European international society. But naturally, the postcolonial newcomers to European international society were indeed only "superficially compatible with western forms" of polity.<sup>37</sup> This latent tension is exacerbated by African scholars who caution that while the European

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<sup>35</sup> Bull, Hedley, "European States and African Political Communities", in Bull, Hedley & Adam Watson (eds.), *The Expansion of International Society*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1984, p. 105.

<sup>36</sup> Buzan, Barry, "How Regions Were Made, and the Legacies for World Politics: An English School Reconnaissance", in Paul, T.V. (ed.), *International Relations Theory and Regional Transformation*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2012, p. 24.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

linear genealogy of regionalisation, first codified by Balassa, holds descriptive validity for European integration, it is a European, neo-functionalist theory that cannot claim global relevance.<sup>38</sup>

Contemporary scholarship acknowledges the facticity of European aspirations at imposing regional polity elsewhere by expanding its own model, but cautions that this aspiration is being contested. Hurrell rightly argues for an understanding of societal multiplicity as a contradiction between “the one world and the many worlds”: between global economic, security and multilateral logics on the one hand, but also an “emerging multi-regional system of international relations” on the other hand.<sup>39</sup> This tension between a Eurocentric universal and a fragmented multi-regional world also splits English School analysts of regionalism, whereas most tend to replicate the Eurocentric approach taken by Bull, arguing that ERIS has elements of international society, but also of a “world society”.<sup>40</sup>

Besides structural multiplicity, a multi-regional ‘global’ must also accommodate non-European values and cultures. To do so, some English School authors draw upon Tönnies’ sociological distinction of *Gemeinschaft* vs. *Gesellschaft* (community vs. society). This is a bold methodological choice with far-reaching consequences, but its most significant contribution when analysing international societies’ multiplicity is to understand that institutional systems may have a *Gemeinschaft* genealogy that is radically different from other societies, even if their institutions are comparable. In this sense, regionalism is a vessel for multiple, eclectic international societies. It also seems promising to think of how English School analysis fits with the concept ‘epistemic community’ to account for the actors of ERIS. Cross’s work for example does this usefully in her study of diplomatic corps as epistemic communities.<sup>41</sup> Cross argues that as an epistemic community, European diplomats use shared experience and a group culture to cooperate beyond their national brief. Her account fits well with an English School account of diplomacy. These diplomats hence contribute to

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<sup>38</sup> Balassa, Béla, *The Theory of Economic Integration*, London, Taylor & Francis, 2013; Akokpari, John, ‘Dilemmas of Regional Integration and Development in Africa’, in Akokpari, John, Angela Ndinga-Muvumba & Timothy Murithi (eds.), *The African Union and Its Institutions*, Fanele, 2008, pp. 88–9.

<sup>39</sup> Hurrell, *op.cit.*, p. 239.

<sup>40</sup> Diez & Whitman, *op.cit.*, p. 51. Bull used ‘universal international society’ instead.

<sup>41</sup> Cross, Mai’a K. Davis, *The European Diplomatic Corps: Diplomats and International Cooperation from Westphalia to Maastricht*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.

international societies and their interaction. But how do these interact? This is where the English School brings in diplomacy.

### *Diplomacy as the negotiation of polity change*

The dialectics of continuity and change are key to understanding diplomacy. Diplomacy studies are increasingly shifting away from statist, defensive accounts of Westphalian 'old' diplomacy and globalist accounts that suggest a zero-sum erosion of the relevance and sovereignty of any diplomacy. A conciliatory, post-globalist stance appreciates the evolution of diplomatic practice. For example, Pigman points out how "sovereignty is less important than power over outcomes", and Hocking shows how diplomacy shifts from "a club-like to a networked activity".<sup>42</sup> This school also appreciates how commercial diplomacy predates Westphalian diplomacy,<sup>43</sup> and thus altogether takes distance from Bull's overly Westphalian focus of state diplomacy. Most importantly, however, this approach to diplomacy offers different ways of thinking about the 'conditions of separateness' of global politics.

Sharp has advanced useful categories to rethink the implications of 'living separately' in multiple international societies through diplomacy studies. He uses Wight's classification of three complementary ways of thinking about international relations: realist-positivist, rationalist interest based and a revolutionary conception that "proceeds from the assumptions that the existing arrangement of relations is itself the source of most problems".<sup>44</sup> Sharp discusses how humans as agents of historical progress might transform these problematic relations. Humans acting as diplomats take a key role as mediating between structures and diplomatic practice of international society: they are to "maintain a balance between the requirements of their movements as actors in an international society, the requirements of those societies that make relations between their members possible, and a revolutionary *telos* committed to the destruction or transformation of both".<sup>45</sup> Stripped of idiosyncratic language, Sharp's argument simply means: diplomacy is a behaviour

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<sup>42</sup>Pigman, Geoffrey, *Contemporary Diplomacy*, Chichester, Wiley, 2010, p. 209; Hocking, Brian, "(Mis)Leading Propositions About 21st Century Diplomacy", *Crossroads Foreign Policy Journal*, 3, 2012, p. 79.

<sup>43</sup> Lee, Donna & David Hudson, "The Old and New Significance of Political Economy in Diplomacy", *Review of International Studies*, 30, 2004.

<sup>44</sup> Sharp, *op.cit.*, pp. 8–9; for an earlier version of this argument see Little, Richard, "The English School's Contribution to the Study of International Relations", *European Journal of International Relations*, 6, 2000, pp. 395–422.

<sup>45</sup> Sharp, *op.cit.*, pp. 22–23.

and the humans acting within the practice diplomacy have a radical agency, an ability to act in deviance of dependency, inequality and state power. In doing so, diplomats vivify international politics into a human practice and ensure the very possibility of change.

### *Definition of regionalism diplomacy*

A definition of regionalism diplomacy pulls together the different strands of this paper thus far: the need for an interactive paradigm to study EU regionalism promotion, the pertinence of the English School to study regionalism, the non-Eurocentric imperative to acknowledge multiple international societies, and the pivotal role of diplomacy in enhancing agency in international politics. Regionalism promotion can now be understood as a deeply political and contentious undertaking. Furthermore, this paper's approach shows how regionalism promotion outcomes are the product of fierce diplomatic struggle, that is, the enactment of intersocietal 'conditions of separateness'. Building on the insights advanced until now, RD shall be defined as follows:

Regionalism diplomacy is the diplomatic practice by actors in international societies that aims at renegotiating existing polity structures and 'conditions of separateness' into regional structures and practices, both within and across international societies.

Two points should be made to justify this particular definition. First, regionalisation diplomacy and regional diplomacy both feed into the term 'regionalism'. RD is also decidedly more than regional cooperation, which the EU understands as "all efforts on the part of (usually) neighbouring countries to address issues of common interest".<sup>46</sup> Surely, RD acts upon and drives forward 'issues of common interest'. Regional cooperation in this sense is a key diplomatic practice within regional diplomacy, but regionalism diplomacy goes further than regional cooperation precisely because it tackles also the Westphalian-inherited polity structures; it construes of the relation between agents of regional politics and regional politics more dynamically and dialectically. In this regard, the so-called 'institutionalised summitry' behind all regional integration experiences matters considerably.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Commission of the European Communities, *op.cit.*, p. 3.

<sup>47</sup> Feinberg, Richard, 'Institutionalized Summitry', in Cooper, Andrew, Jorge Heine & Ramesh Thakur (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Diplomacy*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013.

Precisely this institutionalisation of diplomatic consensus into 'hard' institutions is at the heart of RD – any such institutionalisation is a contentious, political process.

Second, this definition accommodates both Europe's aim to regionalise Africa, the politics of regionalising European foreign policy through the EU diplomatic system, and African diplomacy towards pan-African regionalisation. Therefore, this definition does not preclude a situation in which the European Westphalian state system is not the *status quo ante* of regionalism. Instead, the integration of international societies is always an "evolutionary process" in which diplomats, as mediating agents, demonstrate "high tolerance for ambiguity" in the light of "disintegrating international societies, fading post-imperial structures and emerging regional entities".<sup>48</sup> Regionalisation is therefore an expression of permanently occurring change of all international societies.

#### *Implications of the regionalism diplomacy concept for the study of EU-Africa relations*

The RD concept has implications of theoretical and practical nature for the study of EU-Africa relations, and the EU's regionalism promotion more specifically. At the theoretical level, RD's insistence on societal multiplicity sheds light on the Eurocentric bias of many theories of EU regionalism. Indeed, many EU scholars essentialise the EU as ERIS with aspects of 'world society' – as adumbrating global post-Westphalian international society. While acknowledging that ERIS is not "a model that is easily emulated", the conceptual space for post-Westphalian international society is filled entirely with the European experience by these authors.<sup>49</sup> In an early piece, Buzan describes this Eurocentric pitfall: "international societies, like international systems, will emerge initially within regional subsystems and only later develop at the level of the international system as a whole".<sup>50</sup> In many ways, this is a repetition of classic English School readings of European international society: "Europeans created the first international system to span the whole globe, and established everywhere a universalized version of the rules and institutions and the basic assumptions of the European society of states. Our present international society is directly descended

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<sup>48</sup> Sharp, *op.cit.*, p. 126.

<sup>49</sup> Diez, Thomas, Ian Manners & Richard Whitman, "The Changing Nature of International Institutions in Europe: The Challenge of the European Union", *Journal of European Integration*, 33, 2011, p. 135.

<sup>50</sup> Buzan, Barry, "From International System to International Society: Structural Realism and Regime Theory Meet the English School", *International Organization*, 47, 1993, p. 344.

from that universalized European system.”<sup>51</sup> Whilst *sui generis* polity expressed through post-Westphalian regionalism is certainly novel and the EU is the first regional international society of its kind, the RD concept cautions that novelty does not equate universality. EU regionalism promotion in Africa thus cannot legitimately be analysed as a simple copy-paste of ERIS.

The concrete policy implications for the EU’s regionalism diplomacy are firstly the need for a clearer understanding of the relevance of regionalism promotion within the EU’s foreign policy and diplomacy. Hardacre’s seminal study has explored a ‘rise and fall’ of interregionalism in EU diplomacy,<sup>52</sup> but no systematic assessment of the impact of the creation of the European External Action Service (EEAS) on EU RD is available to date. The struggle over competences among the Brussels institutions reveals intra-international society diplomatic practice. A sociological study of the EEAS finds that the “struggles to define the ‘genuine’ diplomat reveal a rupture in the European diplomatic field, pointing towards a transformation of European statehood and the emergence of a hybrid form of diplomacy”.<sup>53</sup> Duke in 2009 presciently argued that the EEAS will be the focal point and struggle site of future European external relations reforms.<sup>54</sup> EU and AU institutions are such concentrated sites for action of international society, where conditions of separateness are re-negotiated. Much of the available evidence about post-Westphalian diplomacy points towards a mesh of “ceremonial modernity” and “practiced post-modernity”.<sup>55</sup> As such, one should appreciate the Westphalian origin of European post-modern diplomacy with the AU, but not equate it to an *ex post* teleological account of all regionalism diplomacy.

As for the African ‘recipient’ of EU regionalism promotion, the key impetus of Pan-Africanism provides for a different international society; the institutional similarities between the EU and the AU cannot suggest that African regionalism operated on

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<sup>51</sup> Watson, Adam, *The Evolution of International Society a Comparative Historical Analysis*, London, Routledge, 1992, p. 214.

<sup>52</sup> Hardacre, Alan, *The Rise and Fall of Interregionalism in EU External Relations*, Dordrecht, Republic of Letters Publishing, 2010.

<sup>53</sup> Adler-Nissen, Rebecca, "Symbolic Power in European Diplomacy: The Struggle between National Foreign Services and the EU’s External Action Service", *Review of International Studies*, 40, 2014, pp. 657–81.

<sup>54</sup> Duke, Simon, "Providing for European-Level Diplomacy after Lisbon: The Case of the European External Action Service", *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy*, 4, 2009, pp. 211–33.

<sup>55</sup> Batora, Jozef & Brian Hocking, *Bilateral Diplomacy in the European Union: Towards ‘post-Modern’ Patterns?*, Discussion Papers in Diplomacy, The Hague, Clingendael Institute, 2008, p. 23, <[http://www.clingendael.nl/sites/default/files/20080400\\_cdsp\\_diplomacy\\_batora.pdf](http://www.clingendael.nl/sites/default/files/20080400_cdsp_diplomacy_batora.pdf)>.

the European experience alone. Hence, if diplomacy is indeed in a post-modern phase, and if contemporary polity has entered a post-Westphalian phase through regionalism, thinking about global regionalism diplomacy must follow suit. The pan-African differing conception of regionalism is a formidable impetus for this undertaking. Such a new way of thinking about European regionalism in pace with post-modern diplomacy and post-Westphalian policy questions the linearity and universality of the particular European regional experience, and opens epistemic space to new structures, actors, behaviours and practices.

Given the re-emerging relevance of Pan-Africanism, EU-African diplomatic practice is staged in a setting characterised by the “structuralist dilemma” of a highly asymmetrical negotiation. The highly uneven diplomatic resources available in Europe and Africa epitomise this overall relationship. But against traditional belief, asymmetrical negotiations therefore allow for clever and agile tactics, more focused negotiations when the stronger party is distracted by global politics; the practice of diplomatic negotiation introduces a great deal of equality through its deliberative nature.<sup>56</sup> The flip side of this argument is presented by more structuralist accounts of EU-Africa relations. A forthcoming ECDPM study on the role of the EU in African regionalisation points to “the EU variable in [African] regional integration”, assessing the role of EU institutions in African regional integration dynamics through a number of factors: the trade weight of the EU, its “ability to exert coercion/compulsion over and/or to hold negotiations based on some forms of conditionality with African policy makers”, and its ability to establish an inter-subjective space for norms and experience sharing.<sup>57</sup> Both the diplomatic argument in favour of African agency and the economic-structuralist argument matter in their own right. The empirical unfolding of African regionalisation, in this sense, is the outcome of contentious negotiations within a broader, structuralist context. In this setting, it would seem that especially the postcolonial condition of EU-Africa relations matters for an analysis of the EU’s RD.

## **Pan-Africanism and regionalism diplomacy**

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<sup>56</sup> Zartman, William, *The Structuralist Dilemma in Negotiation*, Groupe d’étude et de recherche sur la sécurité internationale, 1997, p. 13; Pfetsch, Frank & Alice Landau, “Symmetry and Asymmetry in International Negotiations”, *International Negotiation*, 5, 2000, pp. 21–42.

<sup>57</sup> ECDPM, *Internal Note*, Maastricht, March 2015.

It would be a futile attempt at non-neocolonial theorising of EU-Africa relations to limit the discussion of the RD concept for EU-Africa relations only to European academia and EU foreign policy. The most useful and concrete formulation of African political thought is surely Pan-Africanism. This paradigm is a very simple yet sweeping political philosophy that aspires to an “Africa for the Africans”.<sup>58</sup> Both diasporic and African-born thinkers of Pan-Africanism strongly agreed, from the early days of their anti-colonial struggle, on the necessity for continental regional integration. The impetus for the Organisation of African Unity (OAU, 1963) and the AU (2002) is thus precisely to institutionalise pan-Africanism. As such, the political goal of Pan-Africanism is to overcome the national borders imposed by colonial rule that often cut through precolonial social orders. The endurance of colonial borders has been termed Africa’s “Northern problem”.<sup>59</sup> African regionalism hence takes a distinctly different anti-colonial impetus to work toward a continental polity. As this final section shows, EU regionalism diplomacy – somewhat understandably – does not incorporate a pan-African approach to regionalism and instead attempts the expansion of ERIS onto African regionalisation.

The institutionalisation of Pan-Africanism has been challenging, to say the least. There was no powerful pan-African international society at the time of independence, which is why African states in 1963 chiefly ceded symbolical responsibilities to the OAU, and which is why the AU also surely falls short of institutionalising a full pan-African polity. As such, the institutionalisation of pan-Africanism is an unfinished process in which leaders such as Qaddafi and Mugabe, with inarguably dubious leadership styles, enjoy pan-Africanist acclaim. And surely, the AU cannot but accept the deficiencies regarding governance, justice and transparency of its members. Pan-African unity in the African diplomatic system thus constructed as a fact *avant la lettre*: it is normatively assumed, before such unity factually exists in policy and practice. Commitment to the pan-African cause is both populist rhetoric and authentic desire to overcome the ‘Northern problem’. Hence in brief, the measuring stick for a Pan-African RD is to continue to avoid (neo-)colonialism, in an effort to reject “colonialism in all of its forms”.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Legum, Colin, *Pan-Africanism: A Short Political Guide*, New York, Frederick A. Praeger, 1965, p. 38.

<sup>59</sup> Ndlovu-Gatsheni, Sabelo J. & Brilliant Mhlanga (eds.), *Bondage of Boundaries and Identity Politics in Postcolonial Africa: The ‘Northern Problem’ and Ethno-Futures*, Pretoria, Africa Institute of South Africa, 2013.

<sup>60</sup> Legum, *op.cit.*, p. 38.

### *Towards African regional international society*

The regionalism diplomacy concept allows appreciating how Africa's regionalisation is not simply a void in need of political support from the EU. Abundant evidence of African pre-colonial diplomacy and international society starkly contradict Bull's assumptions of a unidirectional expansion of international society, and suggests a basis for African regional international society. Sharp's work on diplomatic encounters and re-encounters in negotiating relations of separateness helps explain how the expansion of European international society, and more recently, ERIS in Africa is an imposition of epistemic categories in contradiction to pre-existing (albeit nascent) African international society; this has been called 'epistemic violence' by critical and postcolonial theorists. Foucault described this as a "complete overhaul of the episteme" – of the bundle of discourses and knowledges that provides for the "conditions of possibility" of all knowledge and practice.<sup>61</sup> Postcolonial scholar Spivak applied this paradigm to imperial and colonial relations.<sup>62</sup>

The imposition of the practice and institution of European diplomacy as well as the substantial demands of colonial diplomacy can be seen as such 'complete overhauls' of African political knowledge, which denies the development of an African regional international society (ARIS). This corresponds to the classic English School reading of EU regionalism diplomacy, which sees ARIS as one of Hurrell's 'many worlds' within one European regionalist 'world society'. Surely, this is empirically not entirely wrong: given the EU has substantially contributed to its construction, ARIS could be seen a peripheral sub-system under the lead of the ERIS core.<sup>63</sup> Concretely, under the pressure of WTO norms (produced by the transatlantic North), African regionalism is required to unfold as 'open regionalism'. This way, dependence upon the leadership of ERIS is ensured, and the possibility of regionalism based on the thrust of African *Gemeinschaft* towards an ARIS is ruled out. But a pan-Africanist take on the EU's regionalism diplomacy opposes its epistemic violence that precludes the full institutionalisation of Pan-Africanism.

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<sup>61</sup> Foucault, Michel, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, Vintage Books, 1970, p. 168.

<sup>62</sup> Spivak, Gayatri, "Can the Subaltern Speak?", in Williams, Patrick & Laura Chrisman (eds.), *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory*, Harvester Wheatsheaf, Hemel Hempstead, 1993, p. 82.

<sup>63</sup> Testing this tentative argument would require more expatiation through an English School analysis of EU-Africa interregionalism, and this interregionalism's position in world society, which is not the ambition of this paper.

### *Sketches of non-Eurocentric diplomacy in Africa*

International society does not exist without diplomatic practice within and across international societies. Accordingly, for a Eurocentric account of international society, Africa prior to the expansion of international society is believed ahistorical and apolitical: “parts of Africa, Australia, and Oceania before European intervention there were independent political communities that had no institutions of government [and therefore] such entities fall outside the purview of ‘international relations’”.<sup>64</sup> Sharp’s concepts of diplomatic encounters and re-encounters enable us to see how there very much was a pre-colonial international society, and how the expansion of European international society from early colonial days has used diplomacy.

In sober prose, Sharp describes ‘encounter relations’ as “when peoples meet for the first time”.<sup>65</sup> Such was the nature of European explorers when negotiating concessions and slave trade. But it should be noted how “precolonial Africa was no stranger to diplomacy”.<sup>66</sup> Diplomatic practice in the sense of the English School was abundant before European imperial history in Africa began. To prove this point, Pella provides an incredibly rich, English School-based account of precolonial African international society.<sup>67</sup> While certainly ‘stateless’ in European terms, diplomatic interaction in the sense of a practice that mediates relations of separateness was omnipresent. For example, periodically stronger proto-states arose and established an international society with adjacent, weaker Savannah states. Pre-colonial Western Africa saw power struggles and interrelations that impacted other polities’ behaviour – an international society and system existed. This society extended as far as institutionalised inter-tribe mediation practices.<sup>68</sup>

Gradually, African and European diplomatic practice saw a rapprochement. Irwin summarises this process in three phases. First, in “Afro-European diplomacy”, Europeans saw their unintended incorporation into the African endogenous diplomatic system; as European imperial outposts in Africa gained strength, African diplomacy eventually morphed into the second “Eur-African diplomacy”

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<sup>64</sup> Bull, *The Anarchical Society*, *op.cit.*, p. 9.

<sup>65</sup> Sharp, *op.cit.*, p. 127.

<sup>66</sup> Irwin, *op.cit.*, p. 81.

<sup>67</sup> Pella, John Anthony, *Africa and the Expansion of International Society: Surrendering the Savannah*, London, Routledge, 2014, p. 52ff.

<sup>68</sup> Ndlovu, Sambulo & Lindiwe Ndlovu, “Mediation as Conflict Resolution in Traditional Ndebele Society”, *Africana*, 6, 2012, p. 175.

characterised by increased traction of European diplomatic traditions.<sup>69</sup> For lack of better knowledge, African leaders granting resource extraction concessions such as Cecil Rhodes' Rudd Concession perceived these agreements as equitable, because they were granted benefits such as European weaponry. Over time, Africans adjusted their views of Europeans to their experiences, leading to the third phase. What Irwin calls Eur-African diplomacy should be seen as a shift to Sharp's "re-encounter relations": their effect is, despite efforts of negotiating closer or different colonial relations of separateness, to "reaffirm the current identities of those between whom they are conducted" and to "emphasize the distinctiveness and separateness of peoples".<sup>70</sup> European diplomacy in Africa hence adjusted in line with the overall colonial relations of separateness, but also served as a medium of changing said relationship.

#### *Echoes of colonial unevenness in EU regionalism diplomacy*

If experienced European diplomats come to 'expand' the European (regional) diplomatic system in Africa by interacting with what they perceive as pre-international societies, both the substance of negotiations as well as their discursive practice matters, and naturally both are interlinked. In socialising Africans into the institution and practice of European diplomacy, European diplomats effectively engage in epistemic violence. But why would Africans settle for detrimental negotiation outcomes? An inquiry into epistemic violence of African-European diplomacy has to surpass European simplistic ideas of structure and agency.

The concept of colonial mimicry is useful to this end: this critical postcolonial notion captures the moment of ambiguity in the dialectics of expanding international society. In this phase, the non-European mimics European behaviour without having internalised European international society. In this process, there is an ambiguity as to what extent the African may become part of the European international society. Bhabha argues that for Europeans, mimicry is an "ironic compromise [...] the desire for a reformed, recognizable other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite. Which is to say, that the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an ambivalence; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference."<sup>71</sup> Mimicry sounds strange to the ears of

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<sup>69</sup> Irwin, *op.cit.*, pp. 83–84.

<sup>70</sup> Sharp, *op.cit.*, pp. 136; 138.

<sup>71</sup> Bhabha, Homi, *The Location of Culture*, London, Routledge, 1994, p. 86.

European diplomatic and IR theory, but there is considerable evidence for such practice by African diplomats. For example, in WTO negotiations, “prevailing discourses of dominant actors are used by weak actors to create leverage and influence outcomes”.<sup>72</sup> François Bayart’s work on “extraversion” makes precisely this point: African leaders seek to “mobilize resources derived from their (possibly unequal) relationship with the external environment”.<sup>73</sup> But besides mimicry, EU RD is also successful in successfully instilling its model in Africa. A survey on African elites finds that “the majority of elite respondents [...] regarded the EU, the G8 and other African states as economic blocs that can be relied on to support [Africa’s] economic revival”.<sup>74</sup> Just like at the time of the founding of the OAU, African elites today are not Pan-Africanists in Nkrumah’s sense of a pan-African ‘big bang’, but are rather gradualists.

Unless there is more epistemic space for non-European *telois* of regionalism, the Eurocentric problem of essentialising ERIS into global post-Westphalian world society remains. There then needs to be a fine line between legitimate elucidations of malfunctioning regional organisations, for instance in the sense of an EU ‘mentor’ established by Haastrup, and neo-colonial imposition of ERIS. For example, it is fair to criticise the fact that a few AU Commissioners have never worked for an international organisation and are alien to the diplomatic practice such organisations espouse, or that the AU Commissioners often lack the technocratic knowledge for their task.<sup>75</sup> In turn, the way in which the EU has recently used the regional component of the Economic Partnership Agreements to further its own agenda shows a significant neo-colonial streak in EU RD.<sup>76</sup> Indeed, the challenges for African RD to establish a distinct society remain significant.

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<sup>72</sup> Lee, Donna, “African Agency in Global Trade Governance”, in Brown, William & Sophie Harman (eds.), *African Agency in International Politics*, London, Taylor & Francis, 2013, p. 46.

<sup>73</sup> Bayart, Jean-François, “Africa in the World: A History of Extraversion”, *African Affairs*, 99, 2000, pp. 218–219.

<sup>74</sup> Kotzé, Hennie & Carly Steyn, *African Elite Perspectives: AU and NEPAD. A Comparative Study across Seven African Countries*, Occasional Papers, Johannesburg, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, 2003, p. 112, <[http://www.kas.de/wf/doc/kas\\_3813-544-1-30.pdf](http://www.kas.de/wf/doc/kas_3813-544-1-30.pdf)>.

<sup>75</sup> Adebajo, Adekeye, “Paradise Lost and Found. The African Union and the European Union”, in Adebajo, Adekeye & Kaye Whiteman (eds.) *The EU and Africa: From Eurafrique to Afro-Europa*, London, Hurst & Co, 2012, p. 61; Tieku, Thomas Kwasi, “The Evolution of the African Union Commission and Africrats: Drivers of African Regionalism”, in Shaw, Timothy M., J. Andrew Grant & Scarlett Cornelissen (eds.), *The Ashgate Research Companion to Regionalisms*, Aldershot, Ashgate, 2011, pp. 193–212.

<sup>76</sup> Lorenz-Carl, Ulrike, Stephen R. Hurt & Donna Lee, “The Argumentative Dimension to the EU-Africa EPAs”, *International Negotiation*, 18, 2013, pp. 67–87.

*'Revolutionary diplomacy': EU support for decolonial RD?*

Even if the EU did not export its ERIS to Africa, the 'mentoring' role coined by Haastrup still has merit. The English School provides the useful concept of 'revolutionary' diplomacy that enables diplomats to be agents of change of international relations. For EU-Africa relations, this means a shift to more diplomacy-oriented interaction through the EU-AU interregional relation.

Sharp's revolutionary diplomats appreciate that the "existing arrangement of relations is itself the source of most problems".<sup>77</sup> Indeed, regional integration holds considerable promise to overcome Africa's 'Northern problem'. The point of RD is then to show that instead of insisting on European models, EU RD could be a platform through which the African-European relation of separateness is renegotiated. To this end, enhancing African diplomacy on the terms of its own epistemes is crucial to create an interregional RD in which capacities to engage in diplomatic practice are more equal. This would mean, along Pan-Africanism's impetus to treat Africa as a single polity, but also to recognise the vast diversity on the African continent. In economic terms, strengthening ARIS through African approaches to regionalism ironically does not differ dramatically from early EU integration: economic integration would need to be a means of "immunization against outside economic pressures".<sup>78</sup> By implication, insistence on 'open regionalism' to global trade could be prioritised less by the EU to support nascent industries.

In supporting African approaches to regionalisation, the EU should be careful not to revive colonial ideas of Eurafrikan interdependence. Adebajo argues rightly that "the idea of Eurafrique, with its colonial and neocolonial overtones, is historically dead, and any attempt to revive it will cause apprehension in many quarters".<sup>79</sup> He adds that "a symbiotic connection with Europe privileged over all others is surely, above all now, not what Africa should be seeking".<sup>80</sup> This is crucial, and reminds us of the limits of EU RD in Africa, lest it became a neo-colonial imposition of epistemic violence. But simultaneously, colonial guilt cannot excuse EU inaction.

EU engagement should continue also because the discourse of 'African solutions for African problems' is cynical: "[A]sserting that Africa must "gel" with the world [...]"

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<sup>77</sup> Sharp, *op.cit.*, pp. 8–9.

<sup>78</sup> Watson, *Diplomacy: The Dialogue Between States*, *op.cit.*, p. 171.

<sup>79</sup> Adebajo, *op.cit.*, p. 44.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

without interrogating the structural situation within which the continent [...] finds itself, is highly problematic".<sup>81</sup> In English School terms, African regionalism thus needs to find a place in nascent 'world society' dominated by Western principles. The right compromise therefore seems to be an interregional diplomatic practice that acknowledges EU-AU institutional similarity and a shared interest in regionalisation: The EU wants to overcome the postcolonial heritage of its members and act upon its post-Westphalian structure by offering "post-imperial partnerships for a post-imperial age";<sup>82</sup> the AU wants to overcome the postcolonial heritage of colonial state borders and institutions.

Revolutionary interregional diplomacy should focus on what the English School calls 'regulatory arrangements' between international societies.<sup>83</sup> This is a negotiated process itself, with truly shared interests. In such a diplomacy-oriented partnership, the EEAS is best placed to appreciate the deeply contentious nature of European-African relations. If there is an ERIS and a nascent ARIS, the EEAS has to match diplomatic skills to the context of intensified RD.<sup>84</sup>

Finally, such stronger EU-AU relations entail a form of 'disintegration' in Sharp's terms. It will require the undoing of a specific interaction of international societies that was shaped by colonial and racist ideas of Africa. As Sharp argues, the disintegration of international societies leads to re-encounter relations between actors.<sup>85</sup> Decolonisation is precisely such a moment of re-encounter – driven by regionalism, enacted by diplomacy.

## Conclusion

The Regional Diplomacy concept offers an innovative theoretical lens for the study of EU regionalism promotion and denaturalises some core premises of EU foreign policy and its dominant analysts. The strengths of the suggested analytical concept lie in the ability to capture and question the argumentative, dynamic mechanics of

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<sup>81</sup> Smith, Malinda, *Beyond the 'African Tragedy': Discourses on Development and the Global Economy*, Aldershot, Ashgate Publishers, 2006, p. 88.

<sup>82</sup> Ashton, Catherine, "A World Built on Co-Operation, Sovereignty, Democracy and Stability", Budapest, 2011, <[http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_SPEECH-11-126\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_SPEECH-11-126_en.htm)> [accessed 15 April 2015].

<sup>83</sup> Watson, *The Evolution of International Society a Comparative Historical Analysis*, *op.cit.*, p. 272.

<sup>84</sup> Ole Jacob Sending, *Matching Skills to a New Diplomatic Context*, European Policy Brief, GRE:EN, 2014, <[http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/csgr/green/papers/policybriefs/policy\\_brief\\_sending\\_august\\_2014\\_edited.pdf](http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/csgr/green/papers/policybriefs/policy_brief_sending_august_2014_edited.pdf)>.

<sup>85</sup> Sharp, *op.cit.*, p. 143.

EU regionalism promotion. This opening-up provides a useful opportunity for interlinkages with non-European theories and political norms, and comes to demonstrate the contentious nature of EU regionalism promotion. Regionalism diplomacy hence recalls diplomats' radical agency amidst European-African postcoloniality and allows extrapolating said radical agency onto the analytical level of English School plural international societies. Finally, the RD concept shows how there is not a simple dichotomy between engagement and no engagement in Africa – the point of decolonising EU-Africa relations is indeed to renegotiate the EU-African relation of separateness. The recent institutional developments in Africa and Europe enable such a more political, equal relation.

The RD concept suggests itself for a number of avenues of research to improve our understanding of EU regionalism promotion. First, empirical research on the EU's RD above all starts with systematic assessments of EU policies, programmes and foreign policy rhetoric, as there is an abundant number of aspects of EU foreign policy in Africa with RD implications. The Economic Partnership Agreements and the Pan-African Programme are just two of many EU initiatives that deserve in-depth study. Second, the production of the ERIS and the formulation of its regionalism promotion policies should be scrutinised. As part of a broader contemporary English School research agenda, such enquiries should shed light on the intertwined relationship of EU academia and policy-makers, and how different conceptions of African regionalism can be explained. Third, the African epistemic community driving African regionalism merits much scholarly attention. Who produces knowledge for African regionalisation? How will the pan-Africanist project see further institutionalisation within/outside the AU? How does the African diaspora within international organisations influence African regionalism? Fourth, the EU-AU interregional relationship's diplomatic practice is at the helm of renegotiating the European-African relation of separatedness. Understanding its dynamics and outcomes better will be key to enabling credible EU support to the full decolonisation of African polity, and to achieve a functioning pan-African, regional organisation.

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