TEXTILES IN WEST AFRICA TRADE RELATIONS: THE POLITICS OF STATE DEVELOPMENT AND ECONOMIC INTEGRATION

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Abstract

Attempts to improve regional ties and economic development prompted the economic integration in West Africa, but not without its challenges. This study interrogates the extent to which textiles trade has operated within the sub-region despite a rich history in textiles and the potential for a buoyant trade. The study is set in the interaction between economic liberalism and economic nationalism. It employs data from secondary sources that were content analysed. The study finds that West African states respond with protectionism in the face of economic challenges despite the existence of ECOWAS. Thus, the study calls for a review of the regional agreement to afford greater cohesion and an accessible regional market.

Keywords: Textiles, Trade relations, Economic integration, West Africa, Development

Introduction

The prominence of textiles goes beyond the physical and cultural to the socio-psychological existence of man, with implications for the economy of a state and the society in general. This makes textiles veritable articles of trade among nations as well as having an intimate relationship with humans. Being one of the first manufactured items of the industrial economy, textiles played an important role in the

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emergence of trade, trade routes such as the Silk Road, as well as trade relations on the different continents of the world. It is considered the first step into industrialisation (Gereffi, 1999; Kemau, 2010). It was North England's first phase of the industrial revolution that began (Hobson, 2004). And the Newly Industrialising Countries (NICs) in East Asia also sparked an industrialising process with the industry. The West African sub-region accounts for about thirty-two percent of the African Population. Though balkanised into different states, once pooled, this population presents a large market for economic exchanges. However, there are questions about the sub–region's robustness as a market, given the level of poverty, informalisation of work, low levels of agro-processing and manufacturing as well as periodic food shortage (UNDP, 2009).

Although its geography and economic structure are largely the results of colonial policies (Ellis & Morgan, 1984), the sub-region has the potential for economic integration if the states consider a shared colonial experience and a long history of pre-colonial intra-regional trade in the sub-region. Also, the diversity of the ecosystem – humid coastal zones, northern drylands, arid Sahel and deserts, central Sudan semi-humid regions- makes it possible to trade products based on ecological complementariness. Also, West Africa is one of the world's great textile-producing regions before it was colonised. Thus, textiles trade can help achieve this integration because it has been traded in the sub-region for centuries, with moral, spiritual, and cultural values attached to it. Besides, the textile industry seems a viable channel to industrialisation, possessing the potential to improve intra- regional trade by creating decent work and reducing poverty, since it spills out to agriculture (cotton growing). This paper, therefore, seeks to interrogate the textile link informal trade relations within West Africa; and how the quest for development by member-states impacts the economic integration experiment in the sub-region. The framework of the paper is rooted in the interaction between Economic liberalism and Economic Nationalism.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

The literature on economic integration in West Africa is vast. Ekpo (2020) showed how the vulnerability of West African economies is a challenge to economic integration in the sub-region. Earlier studies on intra-West African trade relations such as Amoah (2014), Golub (2012), and Brunelin and Portugal- Perez (2013) have explored the need for policy harmonisation, while others focused on the adverse effects of inadequate infrastructure (Ekra, 2010; Brunelin &Portugal- Perez, 2013, Acclassato, 2013) and how the ECOWAS Trade Liberalization Scheme (ETLS) has not improved the level of intra-regional trade in the sub-region (Akims, 2014; Aribasala, 2014; Muhammed, 2010; Acclassato, 2013). To Muhammed (2010), the non-operational ETLS is a result of the fact that many ECOWAS members possess as a major source of state income, the revenue accrued from tariffs and customs duties, leading to a resurgence of protectionism, one of the elements the scheme is meant to eliminate.

This study adopts the theory of international integration which refers to the process of replacing national bodies with supranational institutions. This is explained by functionalism – "the growth of specialised technical organisations that cross national borders" (Goldstein & Pevehouse, 2008). Economic integration as a process begins with the creation of a free trade area in which tariffs among the member-states are eliminated. A free trade area is supposed to increase trade among member- states but free trade areas can be easily infiltrated. A state outside the organization could simply export goods into the member-state with the lowest tariffs. Once that is done, the goods could be exported from the infiltrated member-state to the other members of the organization thereby escaping the tariffs of the other states as if they had come from within the free trade area. An obvious solution to this problem involves the adoption of a common tariff by the states in the organization, to be applied to all imports coming from outside. If this is accomplished, the organization reaches the status of a customs union. The next step up the ladder of economic integration is to establish a common market that allows the free flow of capital and labour across national boundaries. If the member-states jointly plan monetary, fiscal, and social policies, they form an economic union. When the planning of these policies is turned over to a unified, supranational body such as the European Commission, total economic integration is accomplished. According to neo-functionalism, once economic integration reaches this advanced stage, the emergence of a "new state-like entity" is a possibility (Goldstein & Pevehouse 2008; Karbo & Ray 2011).

Intra-West African Trade Relations in Historical Perspective

Trade relations in West Africa had originally emerged along with other relations- ethnic, cultural, political, amongst others, between villages, kingdoms, and empires at various levels. The variation in geographical settings and stages of economic development necessitated trade relations. In essence, pre-colonial trade relations transcended geographical, territorial, and economic zones. The absence of distinct state boundaries encouraged trade networks across the sub-region (Ogunremi, 1996) because the boundaries were still fluid and state formation was ongoing (Olukoshi & Obi, 1996). Yet, there was some sort of restriction such as payment of tolls, levied to consolidate kingdoms' fiscal base. As the number and scale of the tolls increased, so did their impact on the content and direction of the trade (Olukoshi &Obi, 1996).

Trade relations took a different turn during the colonial period, following a vertical line, that is, between the colony and the metropolis for the economic advantage of the latter; in place of horizontal relations as had previously existed (Olukoshi & Obi, 1996). The sub-region had been carved up by Britain, France, Germany, and Portugal with artificial boundaries set up restricting people who had hitherto established socio-economic relations. Trade between neighbours under different colonial administrations had to go through the colonial authorities first. However, some form of trade connections grew between countries under the same colonial power-

French West Africa and British West Africa (Adejugbe, 1996). Trade in cloth between the different areas within Africa was one major fact of the pre-colonial period (Ajayi & Alagoa, 1999). Cloth-producing areas such as Benin and Ijebu Kingdoms imported cloth from one another. Ijebuclothes were relatively cheap and durable and thus well sought for (Isichei, 1983). By the 17th century, European merchants carried Ijebuclothes to Benin, the Gold Coast, Gabon, and Angola. Hausa towns namely Kano and Kura, in the 19th Century, were producing and exporting to Borno and Tuareg markets a Black cloth known as Turkey or Yankura (Candotti, 2008). Cloth from Kano and Jenne could be bought in Timbuktu, which was a commercial centre – the southern terminus of the Trans–Saharan trade (Ogunremi, 1996).

By the late 18th century, Oyo and Ijebu Ode were both singled out as prominent suppliers of the Alladah's market. In the Rio Grande and Sierra Leone, cotton clothing and raw cotton were exported from the Cape Verde Islands. These clothes called "quaqua" clothes were also found along Ivory Coast. These textiles were significant in regional trade and remembered in the oral traditions of the Jula trading families. The ports of Arbo and Lagos shipped textiles from the hinterlands to ready markets on the Gold Coast, the Gabon estuary, Angola, the Island of Sao Tome, and as far as the West Indies and Brazil (Kriger, 2005). From 1880 to 1930, most of the indigenous West African textile industry was lost. The presence of steamships reduced transport costs and brought an influx of small traders who moved inland to sell European textiles and other industrial goods in exchange for agricultural raw materials. European powers also began to connect West African markets to the needs of their national industries, and later annex them as colonies (Traub-Merz & Jauch 2006; Candotti, 2009).

Textiles and West African Trade Relations Since 1975

In 1975, the Economic Community of West Afr ican States (ECOWAS) was established to coordinate and promote trade, cooperation, and sustainable development throughout West Africa.

Trade development programs were adopted and these included the various protocols relating to products, trade, and the movement of people within the sub-region (Akims, 2014). These states began to develop their clothing and textile industries, especially through import substitution, which lasted till the 1980s. This entailed dictating cotton prices and imposing licensing and/or high tariffs on imported textiles (Baden& Baber, 2005). The strategy was successful: in the early 1980s, West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU) countries had 41 textile companies in total (Centre for Development of Enterprise [CDE], 2004). By the1960s, Nigeria had become West Africa's largest industrial producer of textile under import substitution. In the 1970s, the growth rate in the textile industry in the WAEMU was higher than in South-East Asia and in the early 1980s, some forty textile companies controlled most of the sizeable regional market for fancy and wax cloth (pagne). They also produced spun yarns and woven cloth, made synthetic fabrics, ready-to-wear garments, and textile articles for both the domestic and the export market (CDE, 2004).

However, by the mid-1980s, most West African countries changed their trade policies, despite the growth of their domestic industries under import substitution. This policy shift was due to worsening balances of payments, inability to service their foreign debt, and protected firms becoming less efficient than expected. For example, capacity utilization in Ghana fell from 60 percent in 1970 to just 10 percent for textile and 20 percent for garment factories by the early 1980s (Association for Ghanaian Industries (AGI), 2008). Furthermore, these states had to withdraw from the industry and open their borders to meet the requirements of the IMF/World Bank structural adjustment program. Structural Adjustment Programmes were based on the principle that exposure to global competition would expose firms that were unable to compete. By 2004, only 6 companies were operating at full capacity in the WAEMU countries, and only 3 of these with satisfactory levels of performance (CDE, 2004)

As of 2011, reports showed that most West African states had no textile policy vision and little or no enabling infrastructure or support measures. What most depended on was the duty-free export to EU and US and the Advantageous or Negotiable status of Least Developed countries with China. Thus, most countries produced textiles for the other countries beyond the sub-region and domestic consumption with little regard for the sub-regional market despite the existence of the ECOWAS protocols, with multilateral trade frameworks such as AGOA, the EU's GSP, and the Cotonou preference programs (Gherzi, 2011). Nigeria limited the items of trade with ECOWAS members to those that are produced by member-states without foreign content, hence fabrics could only be imported from Cote d'Ivoire or Senegal (Clark, 2014). As a result, smuggling tends to be concentrated in textiles, which are highly protected and/or subsidized in Nigeria and Senegal as both countries have protected firms. Counterfeit made-in-Nigeria textiles from China are smuggled in through a town, Maradi in Benin. These textiles are then repackaged and sent to Nigeria (Daily Champion, 24th January 2006). However, smuggling textiles through Togo was more successful due to its historical role as a regional centre for the textile industry (Golub, n.d). Hence, imports of cloth in Benin, Togo, and The Gambia far exceed those in Nigeria and Senegal, and the ECOWAS average levels of fabric imports of about $7 per person in the late 2000s.

In 1973 Benin and Togo both explicitly adopted policies to spur re-exports, with the goal of maintaining lower import barriers than those in Nigeria. With the implementation of the WAEMU Common External Tariff (CET) in 2000, Togo and Benin lost some of their competitive advantages vis-a-vis other WAEMU countries (Golub, 2012). Togo allegedly seeks to undercut Benin by lowering applied duties of imported goods below WAEMU levels to compensate for its geographical disadvantage in access to the Nigerian market. To contend with rising competition from Togo, Benin is said to permit under-invoicing of imports and flexible application of import duty rates (Golub, 2012).

Senegal followed highly restrictive trade and pricing policies during the first decades of independence in the 1960s, with very high tariffs and opaque non-tariff barriers. It later moved towards more market-oriented economic policies as part of its structural adjustment policies in the late 1980s and 1990s, following serious fiscal and financial crises, culminating in the implementation of the CET in WAEMU countries in 1998-2000, which greatly reduced the infamous complexity and lack of transparency of Senegal's tariff structure. On the other hand, the Gambian government has sought to maintain a more liberal trade regime than Senegal to facilitate its role as a trading hub. The import tax differential in the 1970s through the early 1990s between Senegal and The Gambia was very large; with Senegalese import duties alone as high as 100 percent for goods such as textiles, while Gambian duties averaged around 30 percent. In 2000 and subsequently, in response to the implementation of the WAEMU CET, The Gambia simplified and reduced its customs duties (Golub, n.d).

Thus, while some states try to protect their textile industry, others seek revenue through the importation of textiles into the sub-region. The protectionist policy then becomes a cause of tension in trade relations (NewswatchTimes, 2015). According to Haruna Idrisu, Ghana's Minister for Trade, Ghanaian textiles are not allowed into the Nigerian market even when Ghana opened up to Nigerian products. In response, the then Nigerian Ambassador to Ghana, Ademola Oluwaseyi Onafowokan pointed out that Nigeria did not close its doors but that perceived malpractices from businessmen outside the West African region has hampered trade relations. He complained that some companies outside Ghana send their products to be registered in Ghana and re-exported into Nigeria (Anudu, 2014). On the other hand, the President of the National Association of Non-Metallic Products Employers Federation (ANMPEF), Mr. Devakumer Edwin stated that there is an anti-Nigeria disposition among neighbouring countries and this puts local manufacturers at disadvantage with the provisions of the ECOWAS treaty being frequently abused. He noted that goods from member-states flow into Nigeria with relative ease yet Nigerian exporters find it difficult to penetrate the markets in other West African countries through the imposition of high taxes and other fiscal measures. Consequently, Nigerian goods are stuck in the country and left to compete with other goods (Sotunde, 2014).

Politics of State Development and Trade Relations: Effects on West African Economic Integration Experiment

While the concept of development defies a single definition, it is generally perceived as progress or improvement of a current situation or condition. State development aims at improving the standard of living of its citizens, coordinating and harnessing all resources available, human and material alike. Trade and development are inseparable; trade providing for the exchange of 'specialised' goods of nations, hence increasing wealth accumulation, production, and therefore development. Thus, ECOWAS has concerned itself with intra-regional trade, harmonizing and strengthening the common market of its member states based on liberal economic development strategies. Though trade relations between ECOWAS countries have improved over the years, it is below optimum expectation. There are several factors responsible for this. First, West Africa has three official languages: English, French, and Portuguese. This multilingualism constrains communication among most traders who are likely to be proficient in only one of the languages especially taking into cognizance the sub-region's high level of illiteracy. Also, it has been noted that the level of education of the traders corresponds with the scale on which they operate and the majority of them especially women are not well-grounded in reading nor do they understand regional agreements, market information, and many transactions (Acclassato, 2013).

There is also the fact that West African countries are not each other's principal customers since most states operate mono economies with a high dependence on one or a few primary exports. Besides the fact that these products are hardly manufactured goods (Adewoye, 1986), they are also not for the community market and this structure tends to affect trade relations. Furthermore, the region's multiple currencies and pricing regimes raise challenges for managing exchange rates which in return affects the profitability of trade within the sub-region. Economic nationalism thus becomes prevalent in a bid to develop their state economy, despite the existence of the ECOWAS protocol. This also shows the impatience and the lack of trust in the existing economic integration experiment to provide economic prosperity for member-states. States began to fall back on protectionism, seeking to reduce dependence on imports and promote local manufacturing. For instance, Nigeria's trade policies became restrictive. Also, the completion of the Senegambia Bridge had only gradually opened up trade relations between Gambia and Senegal.

The inconsistency of trade policies and the implementation of instruments from the trade agreements, at national and regional levels, particularly due to the low volume of intra-Community exchanges remains a challenge, and these cuts across most sectors- agriculture, industry, energy, fiscal and monetary policies leaving the potential for trade integration and joint infrastructure projects unexploited, at least on the formal market (Clark, 2014). This inadequacy contributes to the decline in textile production in various West African countries despite the availability of raw materials- cotton and labour. For instance, while the Nigerian textile industry grapples with internal inadequacies, resulting in low-capacity utilization, most of the Ghanaian textile manufacturers refuse to produce for the West African market as "full economic integration in the sub-region has not been achieved" (Baden and Beber, 2005), making passage of goods across borders very cumbersome and difficult; particularly at the frontiers of Francophone countries". Ghanaian exporters complain mostly about the difficulties in accessing the Nigerian goods market due to unfavourable product registration process, trouble in transporting their goods across the borders of Benin and Togo, and also corruption in the Nigerian customs. These complaints run contrary to the existing ECOWAS treaties and protocols (Obaremi, 2014).

The ETLS launched in 1990 included the encouragement of entrepreneurial development by providing easily assessed markets (Akims, 2014). This was to create a business to business linkages such as private sector joint ventures, an enabling, environment to promote small and medium scale enterprise, a business-friendly legal environment, and the harmonization of standards and measures. The ETLS was going to affect a number of states' income especially revenues from tariffs and customs duties (Muhammed, 2010), though there was a compensation plan - affected governments would submit applications to a central fund which would be financed by members' contributions. This hampered its implementation. The ETLS equally suffers due to the neglect of the migration policies. While trade has been liberalized extensively, and resources poured into trade policy reform, migration remains an area of numerous restrictions and policy neglect. Movement particularly in pursuit of trade is highly problematic because treaties and protocols on free movement are honoured more in the breach (ARIA (IV), 2010). Mohammed Ibn Chambas, former president of ECOWAS Commission admits that the free movement of people and goods remains a big challenge (Okom and Udoka, 2012).

Free movement protocol - of goods and people– is hindered due to fear of irredentism and invasion or unemployment and other forms of socio-economic problems. In April 1984, Nigeria closed all its land borders. This was justified in terms of the exercise of changing the national currency which was ongoing- an anti-smuggling policy and response to other criminal practices that were sabotaging the Nigerian economy (Nwoke, 2010). Nigeria also banned food export to ECOWAS counties, the impact of which was painful particularly for Benin, Togo, and Ghana because Nigeria's trade with these countries which was vital to their economies was virtually brought to a halt. Barely a year later, in May 1985, there was a mass expulsion of about 1 million "illegal" aliens, mostly Ghanaians. This took place about 2 months before the crucial ECOWAS summit at which arrangements for the second stage of ECOWAS free movements were to be finalized. These acts were setbacks in the trade relations among

West African countries. It looked like Nigeria was retaliating for the Ghana Aliens Compliance Order of 1969 which gave immigrants in Ghana, (many of whom were Nigerians), fourteen days to leave the country (Okom and Udoka, 2012).

In 1999, many ECOWAS citizens were expelled from Cote d'Ivoire. That year, there were about four million immigrants in that country. There was a groundswell of anti-immigrant sentiment which manifested in violence. Anti-immigrant sentiment also simmered in Ghana leading the government in March 1999, to request all aliens in the country to get registered and obtain identity cards. The sentiments did not abate until 2010, when Globacom a Nigerian company, threatened to close its Ghana office because of hostile economic policies aimed at "alien" businesses. Many aliens, (including ECOWAS citizens), were forced by the harsh development, to leave the country (Okom and Udoka, 2012). In August 2019, Nigeria also closed its land borders with Benin, Cameroon, Chad, and Niger with the objective of curbing the smuggling of rice. Since then, various meetings have been held with Nigeria to change its stance.

The West African Economic Integration experiment is still ongoing. The hope is that by integrating the markets of several countries, their collective economic systems will benefit from economies of scale and firm access to the enlarged market that may help the members develop economically to deal better with what they see as unfair competition from industrialized countries. However, ECOWAS, like many of the regional cooperation efforts in the developing world is only functional, in that collective state action on certain issues is determined by the state governments as national governments serve as the gatekeepers between the national and regional level. Therefore, each state is suspicious of interdependence, with the fears that this may compromise its sovereignty and security. Thus, the necessary initiative to achieve greater cohesion is unavailable. This is because, as Karbo and Ray (2011) noted when developing countries get together in an integrating way, they create the same kind of market pressures and advantages for the relatively developed states inside these organizations that exist in the outside world. For instance, industries attracted by commercial opportunities inside a new customs union tend to gravitate towards the most economically advanced state.

Conclusion

With centuries of traditional trade relations within the sub-region disrupted by the colonial experience, West African countries have gone beyond just trading with one another to creating a common market. However, there remain the challenges of inherited colonial laws, artificial boundaries of colonial origin, and instituted colonial commercial relations which had resulted in a distorted political economy of the sub-region. Besides these internal challenges, there is a global trend to contend with especially in the textile sector that pits relatively weak national industries of the sub-region against those of the developed states.

This study finds that states turn inwards in the face of challenges to formulate policies without consideration for other ECOWAS states. Most governments resort to protectionism to preserve the textile industry, one of the largest employers of labour after the government and agriculture against the influx of foreign textiles especially since some studies show an inverse relationship between increases in imports of textiles and decreases in average manufacturing capacity in the textile industry (Nmadu, 2006). However, these protectionist policies only amplify re-exports and smuggling of textiles in the sub-region. Thus, textile production in West Africa is geared towards the Global North and for domestic consumption, with little regard for the sub-regional market despite the existence of the ECOWAS protocols. Multilateral trade frameworks take precedence over the sub-regional platform, for instance, the high demand for apparel inputs such as yarn and fabric is due to the AGOA, the EU's GSP, and Cotonou preference programs.

However, these multilateral frameworks and the individual State's efforts to address the decline in textile industry and trade hinder West African trade and cooperative initiatives as both compete for loyalty. A strong political will of states needs to be invoked to surmount these challenges. Until then, West African states continue to sabotage any sub-regional policy perceived at the slightest turn to be adversarial. This study recommends that a textile policy - production and trade- be implemented in the sub-region since textiles can be produced and traded within and without the sub-region, unlike primary commodities such as cocoa, groundnuts, etc. Experimenting with textiles will open up intra West African trade to other indigenous items that are locally produced.

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