

## The regional map of Africa

### Identity and ambivalences<sup>1</sup>

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#### Abstract:

Maps are the most relevant contribution of geography to the interpretation of human presence in space. The Cartography of Africa is a central issue in the global order. The continent projects importance in several different themes, including the dynamics of the continental economy and its insertion with the regionalization. The cartographic production centered on the African experience is largely unknown. Commonly it is omitted due to the almost atavistic disqualifying perspective surrounding the continent, its peoples, and cultures. Therefore, the Africa Map demands fair debate and recognition. In May 1961, when the continent was witnessing the emergence of a veritable flood of independences, the UN Economic and Social Council initiated the United Nations Regional Cartographic Conference for Africa. Intending to standardize geoinformation in the continent, the Regional Map of Africa is one of the most relevant developments of this initiative. Approved in February-March 1976 at the 26th Ordinary Session of the Council of Ministers of the Organization of African Unity, the Regional

#### Keywords:

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“Any shock, anywhere in the world, is immediately transmitted to the other side of the globe” [...] “The universal set, therefore, presents the characteristics of an international system: all events, wherever they happen, provoke mutual reactions” (Raymond Aron)

## Introduction

*Par excellence*, according to a broad segment of specialists, maps are a powerful reference to decode the inhabited space and simultaneously a premise to inducing transformations or reinforce a spatial framework anchored in specific social, cultural, historical, and geographical processes.

Overall, the maps, as the main products of cartography, are graphic representations and interpretations of the real world, and in that way, they are practical tools to the apprehension of territorial architecture.

Maps or geographical charts reveal the space's natural features and, especially, the socio-spatial arrangements. In this sense, they highlight and evidence spatial-temporal mutations, the functions of the social structures, and the range of contradictions intertwined within the geographic *phenomena*.

As such, maps enable us to geographically understand the axial dynamics of societies, a notion increasingly indispensable as a bridge linking different levels of reality. Maps use a specific communicational codification, known as cartographic language, associated in a conceptual sphere to the spatial representations of the societies and the cultural imaginary.

Given these particularities, maps unveil ideological, topological, and iconological spatial indicators inextricably related to the *weltanschauung* of the societies (Waldman, 2017a, 2017b, 1997 and 1994; Tuan, 1980; Anjos, 2009, p. 12; Oliviera, 1968). In an objective approach, maps provide clues and directives to action plans (political, economic, administrative), legitimize decision-making and problem-solving. In that manner, as a tool and knowledge field (and more precisely, in a geographical prospect), cartography has been robust, strategic, and efficient support in the grandiose constellation of graphic description and visual information of the ecumene (*apud*, Anjos, 2009, p. 12).

This paper aims to analyze an emblematic African cartographic piece: the *Regional Map of Africa*. The focus of this map is a continent that is the world's second-largest and second-most-populous continent, around 30,4 million km<sup>2</sup> (including adjacent islands), covering 6% of Earth's total surface and 20% of its land area.

A byproduct of pan-African ideas in times post-colonization, the main goal of this chart has been identifying spatial macro-sets, taking into account the geographic dynamics to be translated in terms of a technically possible regionalization. The

starting point of the Regional Map of Africa was the independence processes of the new Africa's countries. In 1960, the *annus mirabilis* of Africa, no less than 17 new sovereign states, began to interact in the political geography of the continent.

Three years later, on 25 May 1963, the Organization of African Unity (OAU) was founded by 32 newly independent nations in Addis-Ababa, Ethiopia, summit spearheaded by Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie. The OAU was replaced by the African Union (AU) on 9 July 2002, and like the previous entity, its headquarters is in Addis-Ababa. In common, the binomial OUA-UA shares the same goal: the integration and the progress towards an African Unity.



Figure 1. Political map of Africa, 2021.  
(Mauricio Waldman's cartographic elaboration. Peters Projection. Scale 1: 53.125.000)

Nowadays, the political map of Africa displays 54 sovereign states (Figure 1), the most significant number of independent countries located in a single continent. On

purpose, it should be noted that the African bench in the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), which represents almost a quarter of the member states, is the most significant group of this world entity. For this reason, also, Addis-Ababa is an influential diplomatic pole, a prestigious decision-making center of the global order.

At the same time, it is essential to note that there are still traces of colonialist interference in the continent (Waldman, 2019). This issue refers to the authority exercised by Europeans over tiny islands, archipelagos, and coastal citadels, which, despite their limited geographical expression, are highly strategic because they are in charge of maritime passages and guarantee access to vast maritime resources (Figure 2).

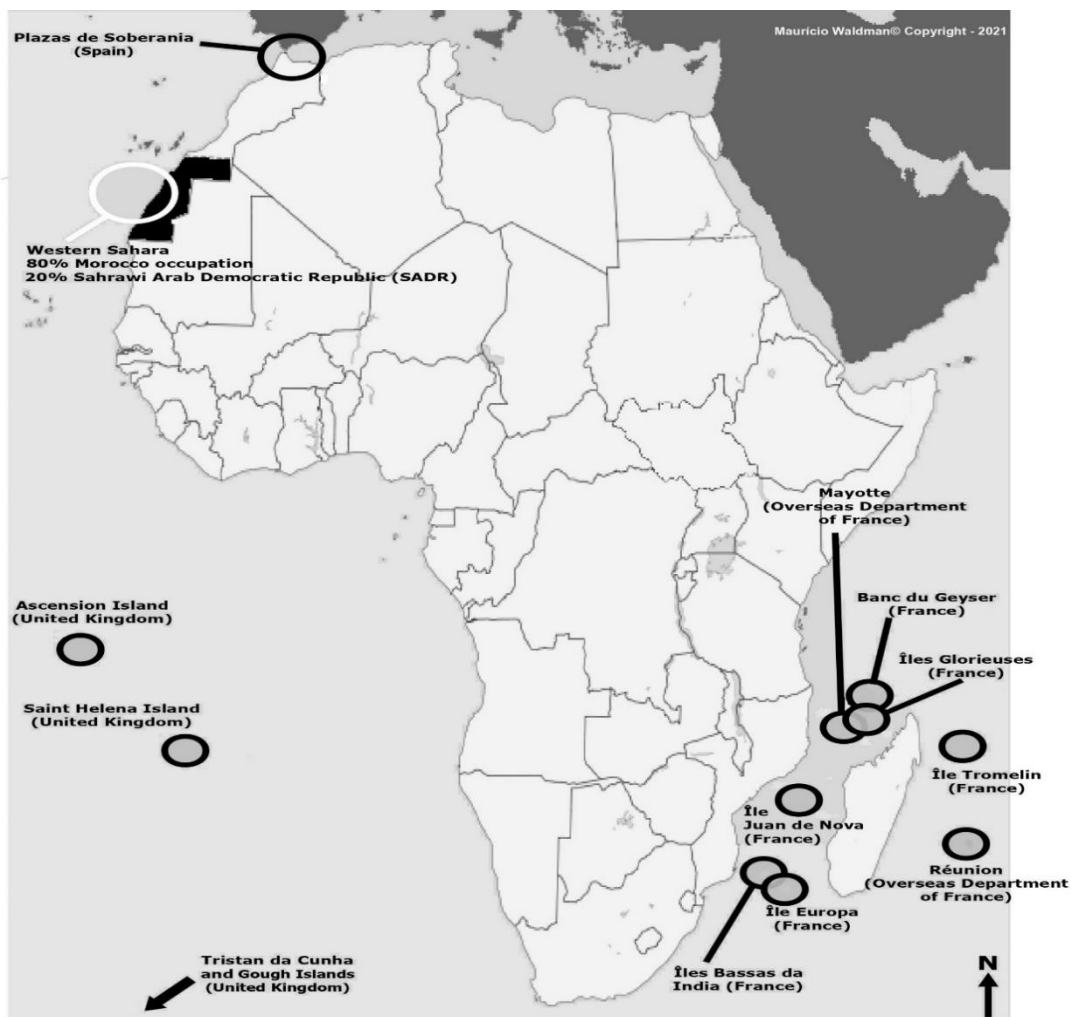


Figure 2. Map of non-sovereign territories in Africa, 2021.  
(Maurício Waldman's cartographic elaboration. Peters Projection. Scale 1: 53.125.000)

The former Spanish colony of Western Sahara is an exception to this rule. The Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic independence (SADR), on behalf of the indigenous population of the territory, was thwarted due to the Moroccan occupation in 1975.

Despite this, led by the Polisario Front (Frente Popular de Liberación de Saguía el Hamra y Río de Oro), the Sahrawi people grip their national liberation movement and the anti-occupation resistance. In 2020, the SADR government in exile maintained relations with 84 countries (36 are African Union states, 2/3 of the entity). The dispute remains a thorny issue mainly by materializing an indigestible case of colonialism in Africa exercise by an African country against the aspirations of another African population (See Besenyő, 2021, 2010, and 2009).

Since all cartographic thematic matrices in the continent take into account 54 sovereign countries (which, as we noted, could be 55), an essential observation would be to emphasize according to the continuously repeated argument about the artificiality of African borders. We can enhance that, except for Eritrea and South Sudan, the continent's national frontiers keep precisely the same for all countries since the 1960s. That is to say: the "tribalism" in Africa is less significant than "Afropessimists" imagine (Singoma, 2013).

As for the central proposition of the Regional Map of Africa - the quest for development - we must underline that in terms of African continentalism, referring only to "Africa" is a reductionism, unable to account for the continent's diversity. African reality points to thinking about the *countries* present in their political geography and also the *sets* to which they belong, an expression of heterogeneous interests, and the multiple paths and visions related to regional cooperation.

Thereby, to address the negative colonial legacy and promote African Unity, Africans need deliberate efforts at the regional and continental levels, carrying out programs to promote development. In this sense, a cartographic model is indispensable. Coherently, the Regional Map of Africa was an undertaking of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), as soon it is based and expounds on clear economic variants, essential to Africa's strides in management policies and development strategies.

At the same time, this chart exhibits an image that refers not merely to regionalism, regional spatial sets, or the new historical reality of the continent. In reality, norms do not exist in a vacuum. As the Brazilian geographer Milton SANTOS argued, "space is an unequal accumulation of times." (*passim*, 1978).

For that reason, a comprehensive understanding of this map foremost suggests unveiling an image rooted in Africa's history, cultures, and societies, intertwining the economy with the pulsations of the social sphere.



## ***Europeans Maps, Maps About Africa and The Unsighted Africans***

Geography is the science of territory. As noted by British geographer Denis Cosgrove, *landscape* and *map* are paradigmatic keywords of geography (2008, p. 1).

This fundamental component - the space in a broad sense - is an essential observation plan because it presents the signals and the perpetuation of spatial historicity, that is to say, recording the elements, social and natural, that act in the current territorial configuration, allowing forecasts about potential transformations, the natural unfolding of the socio-spatial dynamics, balanced by mutant and inertial factors (Anjos, 2009; Waldman, 2006 and 1997; Santos, 1978).

About the Regional Map of Africa, we need beforehand to consider two standpoints that frequently induce misconceptions and jeopardize the assessment nexus, basically aspects about the traditional African cartography and the studies centered in ancient African frontiers, correlated with one another.

Firstly, although this subject is not directly associated with Africa's regional map, we should remember that the modern maps about the continent have historical connections with traditional geographic knowledge. Despite the hegemony of Eurocentric thought, based solely on European maps of the continent and belittling the native cartographic record, we encounter, for instance, various evidence of African map-making in the nineteenth century in the reports of European explorers of the continent.

As argued by Thomas Bassett, an American specialist in the historical cartography of Africa, "most of the maps recorded in these travel accounts were solicited by explorers interested in the geography of areas unknown to Europeans [...] The ability and willingness of Africans across the continent to produce maps testify not only to their competency in map-making but also to Europeans' dependency on indigenous geographical knowledge for their own map-making" (Basset, 1998, pp. 33-34).

Ironically, this kind of geographic information, the so-called *solicited maps*, frequently drawn by the autochthones on the ground in the presence of the explorers, contributed to the improvement and accuracy of a *layout* of the continent hinterland that ultimately was recruited by the conquerors to dominate, oppress and divide Africa among alien powers (Waldman, 2018: 78; Basset, 1998, p. 33).

Secondly, due to western historiography's tendency to ignore the African continent as a civilization center (Waldman et al., 2007; Breton, 1990), the accounts regarding African cultures were continuously based on multifarious taxonomy of bias, invariably emphasizing "African barbarism" and consequently, accuracy lacunae concerning spatial notions, understood as dominated by non-rational understandings. Assuredly, when we study the African frontiers, all modern charts show us borders drawn by "ruler, protractor, and compass," disobeying natural roughness, and likewise, they are

frequently rectilinear, clear clues denouncing possible alien interference in map-making of the continent.

As remarked by several specialists, the African continent compound around 80,000 km of continental frontiers lines today (M'Bokolo, 2012, p. 651; Silva, 2008 and Döpcke, 1999). Howsoever, 87% of this total, corresponding to almost 70,000 km, resulted from agreements between colonialist European powers. Consequently, these numbers would convert the Regional Map Africa into an irrefutable western geographical product. Then, this perception implies in reviews and enlightenment that follows:

1. Traditional communities in the continent created multiple guidance systems and a wide variety of cartographic pieces, exhibiting abundant documentation concerning borders. In retrospect, Africa's traditional governance has always endeavored to clarify the spaces under their leadership, alias, an imperative *proviso* for the functioning of the indigenous political order (Evans-Pritchard and Fortes, 1977, p. 8). The native royalty preserved a comprehensive collection of cartographic products defining areas under diversified taxonomy of power structures, later co-opted by western colonizers.
2. On the contrary to common sense narratives, in addition to the fact that Europe did not disseminate ideas appropriately pioneering about boundaries postulates, the former traditional limits traced along with the centuries-old and millenary history of the continent ended up being reshaped by the European officials. Although this fact is essential for understanding the maps of Africa drafted by European colonizers, on the other hand, this *modus operandi* of colonial political geography has not received the attention it deserves in academic studies 3.
3. Historically, African traditional political patterns reveal extremely resilient pivoting tendencies. Consequently, the absorption of political entities before colonialism as regional circumscriptions in the spaces reorganized by Europeans was a usual occurrence. For example, England incorporated the Bunyoro Kingdom as an administrative division within the borders of the Uganda Protectorate and assimilated the Ashanti Confederation area into administrative borders of the British Colony of the Gold Coast (Nowadays the Republic of Ghana); France integrated the Bamoun Empire as a district in the Kamerun Protectorate and the nuclear area of Merina heartland into the departmental map Madagascar Colony. Beyond that, the borders of traditional political formations as the Mossi Kingdoms, Ngoyo (Cabinda), Rwanda, Burundi, Zanzibar, Lesotho, Comoros, Eswatini, Dahomey, Morocco, Kanem-Bornu, and Ethiopia, were tout court revalidated by the western authorities since the arrival of first troops (Waldman, 2018).



4. Moreover, spaces politically structured do not axiomatically define continental territoriality. Frequently, anthropogenic arrangements inherited from the long-standing work on nature by successive local community generations become *territorial compartments*, eventually impacted by occasional acting of one State apparatus. These geo-spatial frames, stimulating historical-spatial homologies to take over by lineages, clans, and ethnicity, were essential to shaping the contemporary geography of Africa. For instance, the Fezzan, Cyrenaica, and Tripolitania, spatial compartments of late antiquity were the cornerstone to demarcate the borders of Libya. The binomial Kush/Nubia, an ample segment of the Nile valley hinterland delineates in ancient pharaonic geography, became the reference to demarcate the Egypt-Sudan border. The old Rif and the mountainous crest that surrounds it became the axial area of the Spanish Morocco Protectorate (Waldman, 1997; Maull, 1959).
5. Finally, the ancient space flows that cut across the continent from coast to coast carried out a pivotal role. Trade routes have always interconnected the continent, associating politically more structured territories to the others and the lands outside Africa (Waldman, 2006). Herewith, the tracing of the colonial boundaries, annulling the *niemandsland*, "empty areas" without direct state governance, incorporate the induction of the spatial lines of force that magnetized the movements in the African space. Based on these lines of force, German colonialism in East Africa drew the borders of Tanganyika, a space articulated by immemorial ties that bound the Swahili cities on the Ocean Indian shoreline with the peoples of the Great Lakes region of the interior. In the same way, France divided the territories of the Sudanese belt according to the direction of the old caravan trails that connected the Sahel and the kingdoms of Africa humid to the coast of the Mediterranean Sea.

The Western civilization managed one process of globalization systematized by obstination to erase "the *vacuum*" in the planisphere 3. Therefore, this logic permeated the cartography of Africa as well the global mapping of the Earth. Nevertheless, this pretension has never entirely submerged the spatial processes inherent in the conquered spaces in Africa and other continents. The old processes remained actives and conditioned the colonizers' actions, a clear example of the highly inertial character that can mesmerize the territorial formation.

### ***Africa Regional Map: Between Spatial Resilience and Temporal Changes***

The map reflects space construction and is a technical process conditioned by history and whole social, political, and economic influences that organize territoriality.



Regarding the Regional Map of Africa, *the economic variable is the predominant note*, and as such, it is a measurement doable to plan and determine how the African economy is working.

Note that the United Nations Regional Cartographic Conference for Africa took place in Nairobi, Kenya, between 1-12 July 1963, event corroborated by the Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), pursuing Resolution 816 (XXXI) cast on 27 April 1961 by ECOSOC (hence before the OAU creating). The main focus of the conference was on African map-making, geodesy, toponymy, and standardization of the continent's geoinformation (ECA, 1963).

Moreover, there are manifest geographical imperatives to the economic sphere. The map of Africa proves that 16 states in the continent are land-locked countries: Mali, Niger, Chad, Ethiopia, Uganda, Rwanda, Burkina Faso, Central African Republic, Burundi, Malawi, Botswana, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Lesotho, Eswatini, and South Sudan (13 of these categorized by UN as least developed nations). Non-coastal countries make up 28,3% of Africa's total surface and 40% of the continent's population.

Many small, non-coastal countries face tremendous challenges trading internationally. Several reports show that poor road infrastructures account for 40% of transport costs in non-landlocked countries and 60% in the case of landlocked countries. The absence of security outposts and control checkpoints on the extensive dry borders is a source of serious disarray, favoring the terrorist movements, accelerating the migratory crisis, and the rise of religious extremism due to poverty. Obligatorily, the economic integration in the African economy/ global trade and the security issue of these nations imposes de facto, a modality of inter-state governance 4.

Interestingly, in terms of political history and cultural geography, the continent has a great potential for imaginary representativeness. Compared to what some studies identify as *asiatism*, African space, unlike Asia, was not conducted by “core states” or, in other words, by kingdoms or empires that politically, geographically, culturally, and historically imposed their command to a majority part of the continent (Liu, 2013). Objectively, this backdrop favored proposals to think of Africa from a continental unicity perspective.

In this scenario, the UNECA, created in 1957 by ECOSOC, became the cornerstone of African economic themes during the 1963-1973 decade. UNECA leadership was ensured due to the abandonment of the debate about the continental economy by the OAU itself. Although Article 20 of the OAU Charter had instituted an Economic and Social Commission to promote inter-African cooperation, the body met only twice, in December 1963 and January 1965, and then went into absolute lethargy.

The UNECA's performance was fruitful in creating spatial/regional clusters, organized to control conflicts between different branches of state management, stopping potential dangers posed to social and political stability, if not peace. This premise guided, for example, the implementation of Multinational Centers for Programming and Project Execution: known by the acronym MULPOC, a patent effort to draft a cartographic regionalization (Figure 3).

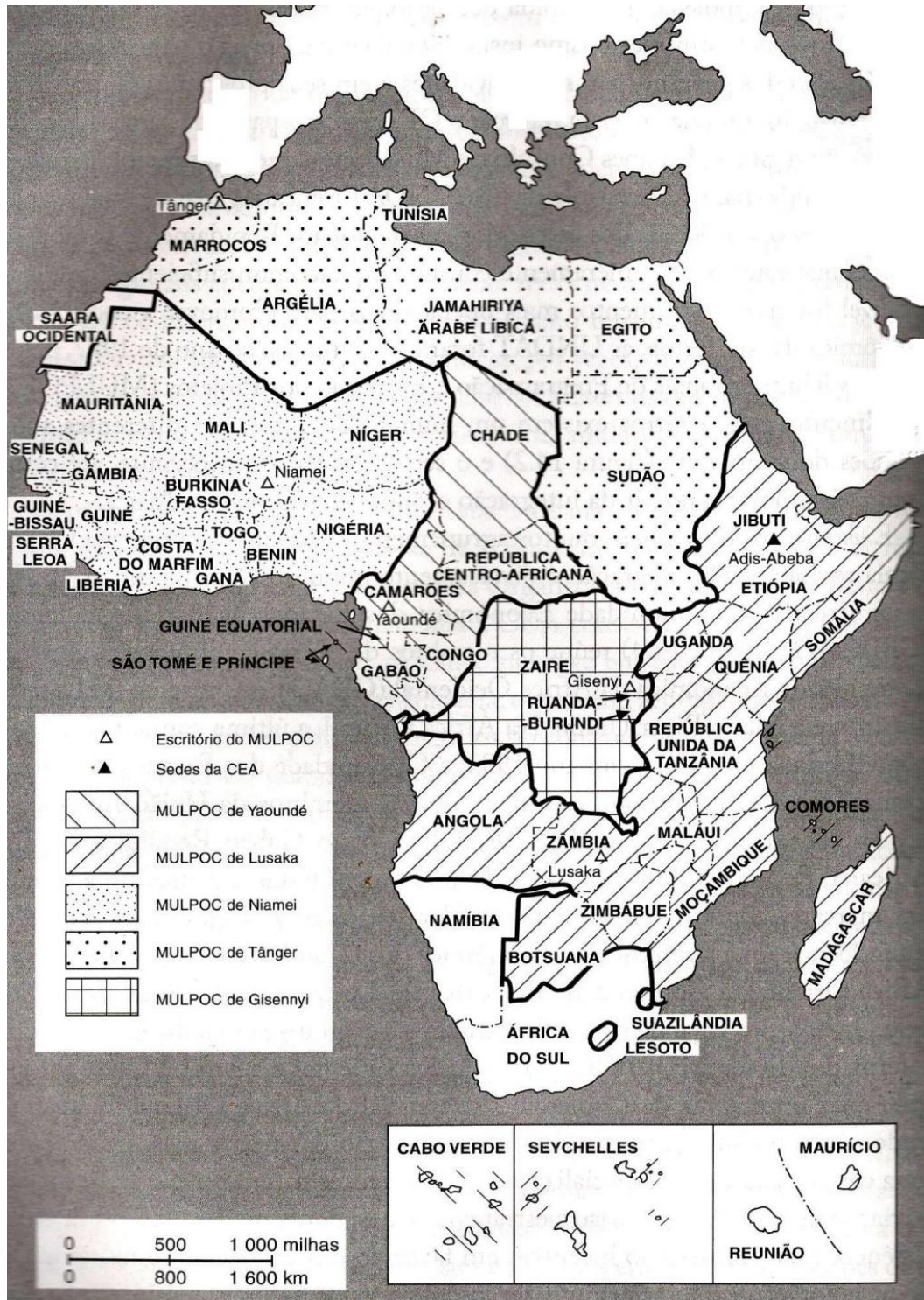
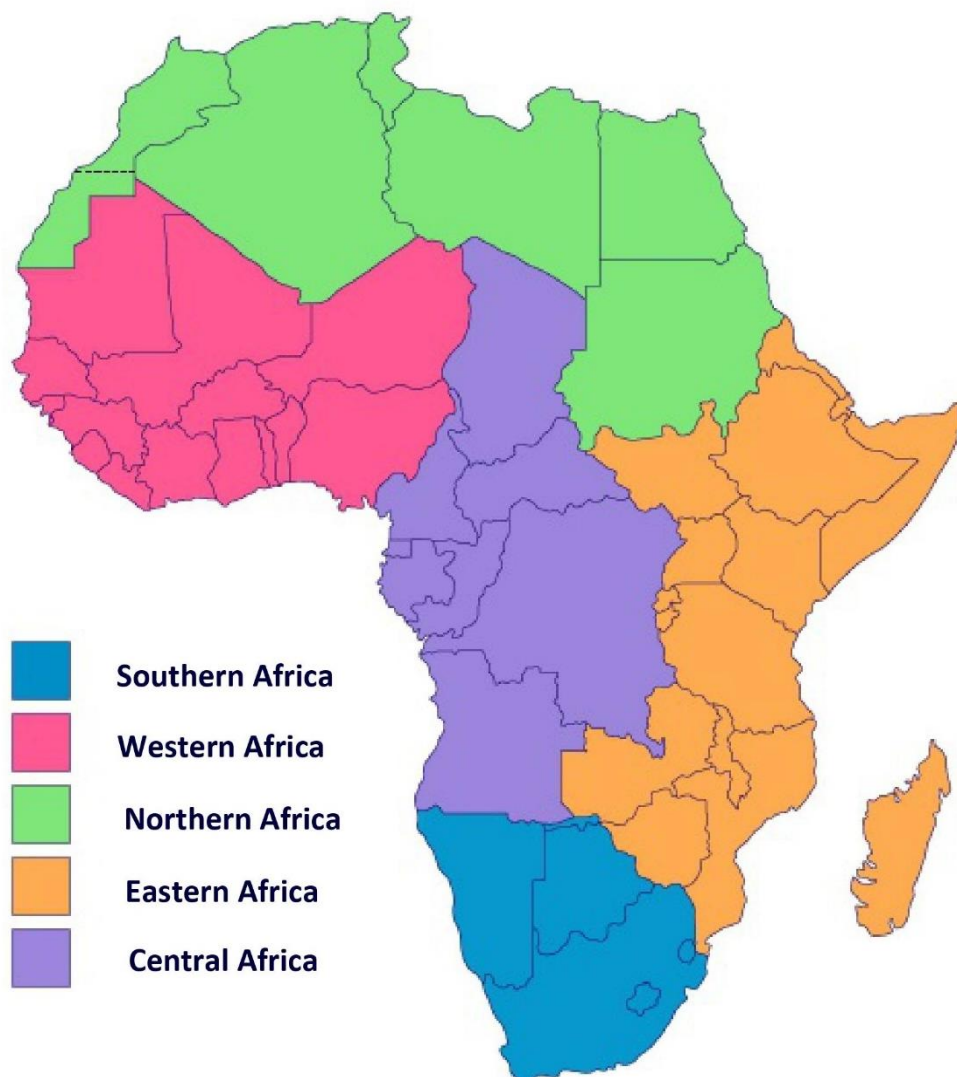


Figure 3. Map of MULPOC  
(UNECA, Addis-Abeba, in: UNESCO, 2010, Vol. VIII, p. 492)

Slowly but consistently, the map-making of the Regional Map of Africa was advancing. The 26th Ordinary Session of the OAU Council of Ministers (Addis-Ababa, 23 February-1 March 1976) approved a resolution defining the continent's regionalization according to a proposal that established four regional macro-sets: Northern, West, Central, and Eastern-Southern Africa. Afterward, from the *débâcle* of white supremacist minority regimes, the Eastern-Southern region was dismembered in two individual jurisdictions - Eastern and Southern -, complementing the regional shape of the map. Widely recognized as *the Map of the Five Regions*, these macro-sets were adopted by ECOSOC, the OAU, and last by the AU (Figure 4).



*Figure 4. The regional map of Africa or map of five regions*  
(Maurício Waldman's cartographic elaboration. Peters Projection. Scale 1: 53.125.000.  
Map-basis: < <https://mundoeducacao.uol.com.br/geografia/africa-2.htm> >, access: 04-20-2021).



We must keep in mind that this regional chart is representative of one contemporary ordering of continental space. Distinguishing itself by its African rooting, the proposal was initially conceived within the UNECA, subsequently becoming the reference map for all institutions working with the continent.

Mainly United Nations Statistical services have adopted this map as a basis for continental regionalization data in a Mundial prospect (See UNSC home page). Hereupon, a wide range of multilateral institutions, like interstate financial bodies, joint action plans, facilitators of inter-community trade, and other cooperation entities, make use of this model map. Fundamentally, for many Africans, this map is seen as a way to become rule-makers instead of rule-takers.

Thereby, Africa's Regional Economic Communities (REC) are conceived based on this map. As multilateral integration entities, the REC includes eight sub-regional bodies (frequently overlapping one another), which provides the overarching framework for continental economic integration (Figure 5). In addition, REC also key actors working in collaboration with the AU in ensuring peace and stability in their spaces. Hence, the *African Standby Force* is structured based on the circumscription of RECs (Waldman 2014; Khamis, 2013).

The Map of the Five Regions is possibly one of the rare cartographic productions accepted by consensus at the level of an entire continent. Approved by the OAU and subsequently revalidated by AU, this map was at the beginning of the 2nd Millennium, enriched with a Sixth Region: the one formed by the *African diaspora* 5 resulting from slave traffic of the past centuries and by nuclei of Afro-descendants sown by contemporary migrations.

Regardless of historical and techno-political attributes, the regional chart of Africa is a map, and therefore, includes not only consensus and proactive projects but also ambivalences and contradictions. So, we cannot afford not to realize that from the angle of the historical cartography, geopolitics, and international relations, the Regional Map of Africa analysis requests more provocative notions than expounded by generic/descriptive explanations.

Geographers willingly say that maps are a privileged research tool. However, as the renowned German geographer Friedrich Ratzel warned, *it is indispensable to problematize the charts* (Bord, 2003: 176). As such, this directive is precisely the backdrop that will magnetize the considerations that follow.

North Africa is the center of a capital debate. As we can observe, this region (except Western Sahara) already appears on the MULPOC map. The populations of this space had long-standing historical contact between them, with the Middle East and South European trade and the several Levant and European powerhouses and cultures (*passim* UNESCO, 2010).

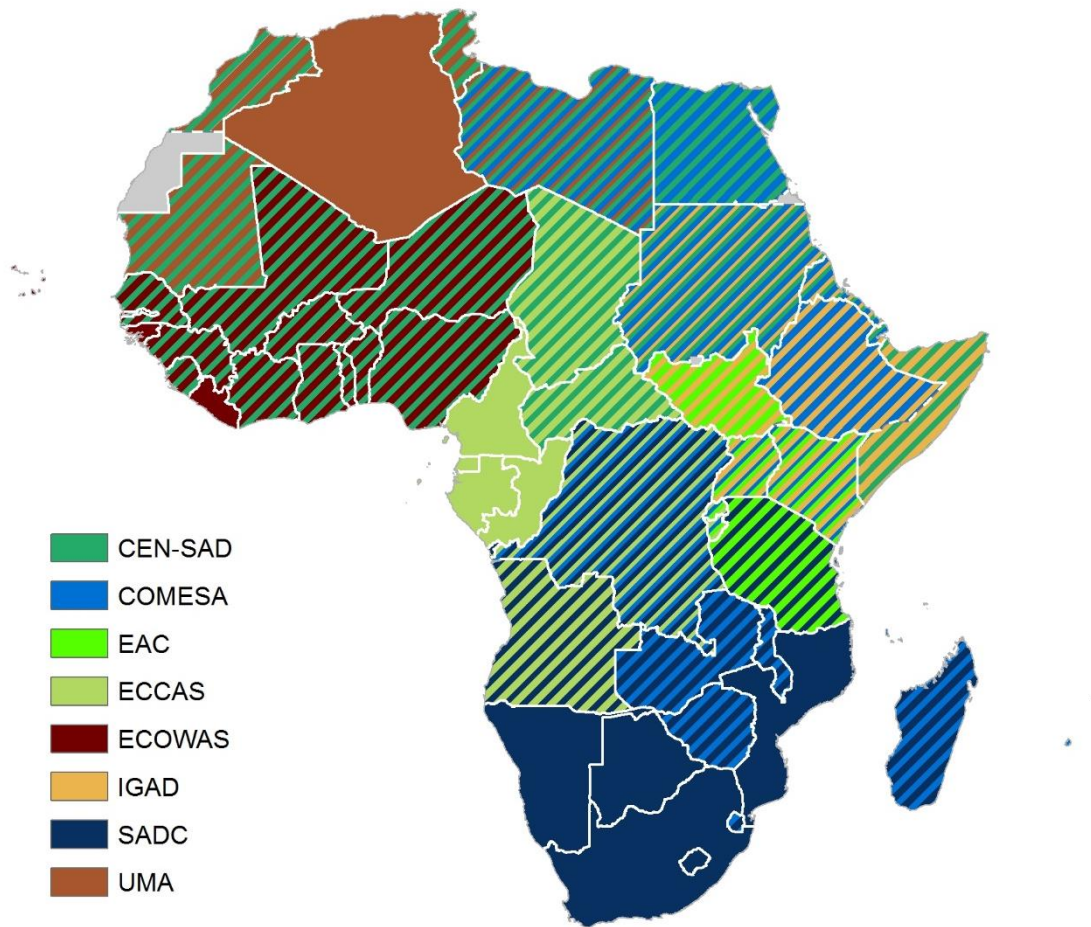


Figure 5. African REC

(Map-basis: < <https://theexchange.africa/countries/accelerating-african-regional-integration-key-to-propel-continents-economy/> >. Peters Projection. Scale 1: 47.544.000.)

The peculiar physiognomy of the region looks through controversial concepts like "Arab Africa" and "White Africa" and classic indications of the geographers of the 18th-19th century defining Northern Africa as part of the Middle East (Maull, 1959). Indeed, these terms justify explicit criticism<sup>6</sup>. Nevertheless, *Septentrionalis Africa* has a oneness that unquestionably suggests recognizing the historical, geographical, and cultural fact.

Frequently, the influence of the Sahara Desert is at the center of numerous evaluations. Nevertheless, we must note that the aridity of the Sahara acted more as a kind of filter than as an insurmountable barrier. The Sahara Desert imposed a selectivity in historical exchanges but never resulting in a cultural cloistering, and precisely for this reason, the reciprocity between the "two Africas" dates back to early antiquity (M'Bokolo, 2012 and Paulme-Schaeffner, 1977).



Nothing allows arguing that the two cardinal macro-areas diluted by Saharan landscape have been historically and geographically impermeable to each other or that their cultural dynamics have developed in an unattended manner to one another. Herewith is evident that another taxonomy explains the differentiated perception between two Saharan edges. Since XIX century final times, side by side with the rising of Arab nationalist ideas in Northern Africa, in the colonial possessions between the Sahel and the *meridionalisfinisterra*, the notion of Africanity gained indisputable notoriety.

Africanity concerns cultural, geographic, and historical interrelation between hundreds of ethnic groups in the continent, encompassing the populations settled to the south of the Sahara Desert. Africanity is a cultural whole, or civilization, based on standard structural, cultural features unfolding in inter-ethnic unity, *so-called Black Africa or Black African Civilization*, deep-seated in Sub-Saharan Africa, Afro-descendants' groups abroad and black nations of Diaspora (Waldman et al. 2006; Mazrui, 2002; Breton, 1990).

It is an exciting note that the construction of Africanity notion thrives first in the black diaspora, influencing the Pan-Africanist ideal. In this interface, diaspora *intelligentsia* had always been a generous creditor of the Pan-African imaginary. The movement's *première* conference, bringing together activists from the United States, England, and the West Indies, took place in London in 1900, convened by Afro-Caribbean activist Henry Sylvester Williams, a Trinidadian lawyer.

Afro-descendent militants such as Web Du Bois (USA) and Marcus Garvey (Jamaica), both defending the union of Africa and the strengthening of the diaspora's ties with the continent, were notable interpreters of Pan-Africanism, an expression not only of the African identity but about on the *whole black world*, now recreated externally to its original historical-geographical boundaries. In summary,

Africanity is a concept that does not encircle the entire African continental mass and concretely excludes North Africa. Africanity is an umbrella concept connected with a model of civilization, geopolitically polarizing with force-ideas like Arabism and Islamism, notably in the extremist versions.

South Sudan is a notorious example. The new country, which arises from a bitter divorce from the former central Khartoum regime, advocates at once withdrawal from Northern Africa by defending participation into the Eastern Region. Naturally, this formulation reflects ties of fidelity traditionally cultivated with groups that inhabit Ethiopia and Uganda (i.e., *Black Africa*), a position reinforced by the tough resistance struggles during five bloody decades against the Khartoum Arabization/Islamization politics 7.

As such, the definition of macro-groups and the states that comprise them is not fortuitous, even more so when multilateral bodies interact with delegations whose agenda express political programs or even a *weltanschauung* not necessarily associated in the realm of agreement or by consent (Waldman, 2014).

Cultural and historic syntaxes merged with economic interests are very clear, for example, in the Union of the Maghreb Arab (UMA). Comprising five countries: Mauritania, Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, and Libya (Figure 6), in this REC, the proximity with the powerful European Union encourages the strengthening of the regional partnership, that despite this, has not been able to achieve advances on its goals due to several disagreements, including Western Sahara, whose independence is since the 1970s supported by Algeria.



Figure 6. Union of the Maghreb Arab countries  
(Maurício Waldman's cartographic elaboration. Peters Projection. Scale 1: 53.125.000)

However, what we should stand out is the REC executive official designation: the Arab Maghreb Union, a unilateral assertion that omits the presence of large concentrations of Berber populations and black ethnic groups, indigenous communities which have guided aspirations to assert their cultural-linguistic identity facing the Arabization, a silencing institutionalized that invades the framework of multilateral relations.



*Figure 7. ECOWAS countries*  
(Maurício Waldman's cartographic elaboration. Peters Projection. Scale 1: 53.125.000)

Concomitantly, it would also be possible to exemplify regional blocks associated with one *inertia* identified by theoreticians like the Brazilian Milton Santos; a *geographical resilience* of the spatial arrangements linked to the dynamism inherited from the ancient territorial forms. Space is a historical construction, constantly aggregating new meanings and functions. After that, all that is new in temporal



sequences would be to adjust itself with the precedent's spatial form (*apud* Santos, 1978).

In this sense, the delimitation of two macro-regions, Western Africa and Central Africa, denounce one clear spatial homology with two colonial territorial predecessors: *L'Afrique-Occidentalefrançaise* (AOF), a general government embracing in the same federation eight *ex-colonies françaises* (now Mauritania, Ivory Coast, Burkina Faso, Guinea-Conakry, Mali, Benin, Senegal, and Niger), amid 1895-1958, and the *Afrique-Équatorialefrançaise* (AEF), another league of four French colonial countries in Equatorial Africa (Gabon, French Congo, Ubangi-Shari and Chad), extending northwards from the Congo River into the Sahel within 1910-1958 8.

A territorial reorganization in Africa Post-independence took into account a new reality, justifying, for instance, the incorporation of Nigeria, Ghana, Liberia, and Guinea-Bissau in Western Africa and, too, the embody the former Belgian francophone colonies (Congo, Rwanda, and Burundi), Angola and Cameroon in Central Africa. However, on the other side of the coin, we may see a corresponding replication of this regional framework in two African RECs: Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and Economic Community of Central African State (ECCAS), a fundamental similarity with the two macro-sets in Regional Map of Africa (compare Figures 7 and 8 with Figure 4).

Back to the economic evaluation, it would be the case to comment about France's economic projection in the continent, or better, about its schemes of economic domination in the new African nations. Much more than other Western possessions, the former French colonies have maintained substantial ties with the former metropolis, backing opinions that detect all sorts of neocolonialist ties.

This synergy, invisible to the naked eye, dates from the singular independence process of French Africa colonies. Since the late 1950s, most colonies have detached from France through "nonviolent ways," which means the new republics retained deep-running links with Paris.

More precisely, in the 1960s, just before conceding to the African demands for independence, France, preoccupied to fulfill its long-term geopolitical requirements, promoted arrangements in the newly independent countries to pave it in a prominent position in the post-war scenario.



Figure 8. ECCAS countries

(Maurício Waldman's cartographic elaboration. Peters Projection. Scale 1: 53.125.000)

One of them is the franc de la *Communauté Financière Africaine* (CFA franc), a monetary system guaranteed by the Gaulish treasury, a central French cornerstone of economic politics to Africa. The franc CFA has divided into two currencies: the *West African CFA franc* (abbreviation *XOF*), accepted in eight West African nations and Guinea-Bissau, a former Portuguese colony; and the *Central African CFA franc* (*XAF*), utilized in six Central African countries and Equatorial Guinea, an early Spanish dependency. Although separate, both currencies have always been at parity, remaining interchangeable in a large area (Figure 9).

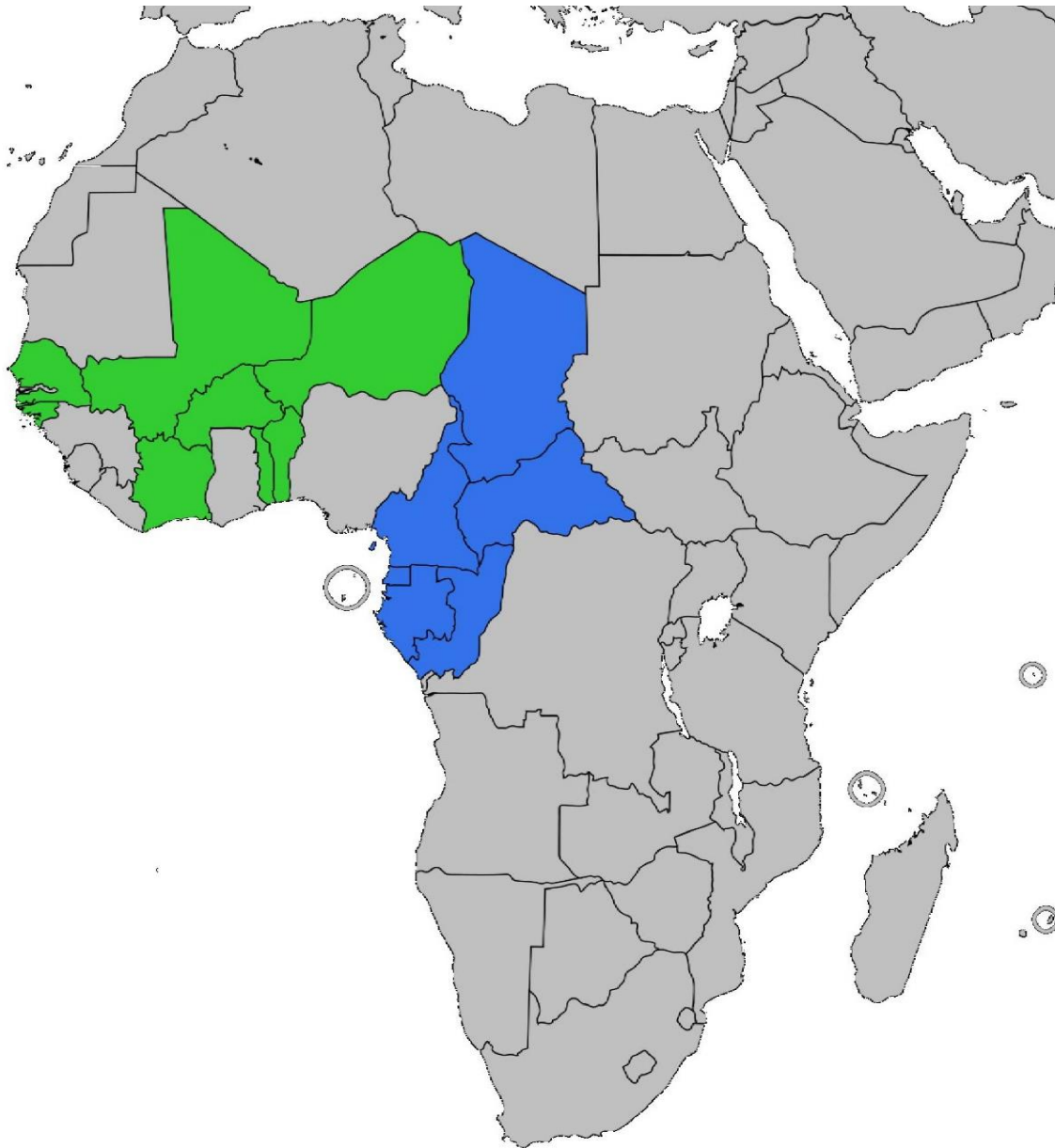


Figure 9. Franc CFA map

(Green: XOF area/ Blue: XAF area. Map-basis: < <https://www.mapsof.net/africa/cfa-franc-zone> >. Peters Projection. Scale 1: 53.000.000.)

The XAF as many the XOF are a liaison to two monetary unions: the *Union Economique et MonétaireOuestAfricaine* (UEMOA, also known by its English acronym, WAEMU) or the BCEAO's area (Banque Centrale des Etats de l'Afrique de l'Ouest); and the *Communautééconomique et monétaire de l'Afriquecentrale* (CEMAC, or ECCAS in English), over the control of BEAC (Banque Centrale des Etats de l'Afrique Centrale). Admittedly, these blocks are a legacy of ancient colonial circumscriptions. But not only in the geographical scope.

Although the franc CFA is a robust and stable coin to 14 African countries, these nations have not had a national coin, depending on France to finance their savings. The

great franc CFA area nations are legally obliged to put 50% of their foreign currency reserves into the French Treasury, plus another 20% for financial liabilities. It is a continuing disadvantageous model to these countries because it deprived them of growth and wealth. Notwithstanding, it is continuing to be profitable for France.

Nonetheless, besides the amplification of a "spatial skeleton" related to old-fashioned colonial federations (AEF/AOF) toward an expanded REC (ECOWAS and ECCAS), the space resilience may be more incisive yet. In this case, South Africa is a fine example of the power and resourcefulness of old spatial frameworks.



*Figure 10. SACU countries  
(Maurício Waldman's cartographic elaboration. Peters Projection. Scale 1: 53.125.000)*

The South African economy had an economic development differentiation. The Dutch and the English administrations invested in a functional model based in European settlements. The subsequent economic advancement happens but to the total detriment of the local Bantu population.

A regional economic pattern was established in 1910 when the Southern African Customs Union (SACU) was founded. It was a customs union including South Africa and the old British BLS block, with four countries: Botswana, Namibia, Lesotho, and Swaziland (Eswatini). Patronized by London, it is the oldest Regional Trade Agreement (RTA) still in force globally.

The Republic of South Africa (RSA) hegemony in the meridional Finisterre economic context was always self-evident. Step by step, the country has become the most diversified and industrialized economy in Africa, and geographically, RSA is an undisputed pivot area. Not accidentally, the delimitation of the Southern Region in the Africa Regional Map and the SACU is strictly the same, a complete spatial homology (compare Figure 10 and Figure 4).

The *Apartheid* Era (1992) end confirms the South African favoritism and paves a robust expansion of the RSA prominence in the whole continent. In the 2010s, the share of South Africans in the GNP of SACU reached 99.9% of the total, and the country rules 17.5% of Africa's total GNP. Further, demonstrating the dynamism of the locational forces from the past, through the Southern African Development Community (SADC), RSA has magnetized Central and East Africa, a visible gain compared with the *Apartheid* times 10.

SADC covers 9.9 million km<sup>2</sup>, the third part of Africa (Figure 11), and is the continent's most potent regional block. In 2013, the entity represented 28% of the African GDP and 31% of the total population. Nevertheless, in isolation, RSA's GNP was three times greater than the national wealth of other SADC countries (Waldman, 2014).

Indeed, as in any other spatial arrangement, this geographic polarization depends directly on the smooth functioning of the system's driving center and one permanent feedback connecting fixed and flows (Santos, 1978). If there is any dysfunctionality in this equation, the progress achieved may disappear, freeze or even retract.

Viewed in this way, RSA has been a country that has wasted great opportunities to advance more. In the last decade, political turmoil has hindered its ability to meet its full potential. After experiencing consecutive quarters of negative GDP growth rates, the country faces a vicious recession cycle. The development has slowed, and GDP expanded by only 0.2% in 2019. These years of low growth are attributable to such determinants as low prices for commodity exports, weak investor confidence, policy uncertainty, and rigid local labor market laws (Cook, 2020).



*Figure 11. SADC countries  
(Maurício Waldman's cartographic elaboration. Peters Projection. Scale 1: 53.125.000)*

Other key socioeconomic challenges include high poverty rates, unemployment, organized crime, labor unrest, environmental crisis (chiefly an explosive water shortage), protests over public service access disparities in service delivery, and governmental corruption. Last but not least, RSA has one of the highest rates of social inequality in the world 11. Under those circumstances, the country's economy in the African scenario has shrunk. The RSA's GDP (nominal) in 2020, US\$ 317 billion, was significantly lower than that of Nigeria (in order of nearby 37%), whose national wealth totaled around US\$ 500 billion in this same year.

On this account, Nigeria, the "Giant of Africa," arises as a potential regional superpower. World Bank reports show Nigeria's economy expanded 7% year-on-year

between 2000-2014, definitely at a fast pace. Although the growth has slowed to 2% in recent years due to political and social instability and shocks on petroleum production, the country has tried to move away from its significant reliance on oil refineries and processing plants. Now, Nigeria is the wealthiest country in Africa, apparently predestined to spearhead the ECOWAS and the Guinean megalopolis surrounding the city of Lagos 12.

*Per contra*, this West African country, with a population of over 207 million citizens (16% of African population), often appears as an illustration of faulty governance: environmental pollution, overpopulated urban clusters, business scams, inter-ethnic conflicts, and in the last decade, endemic terrorist activities (for example, the Boko Haram in Northeast Nigeria).

As a deduction, it is challenging to identify well-structured scenarios that would be feasible for the Nigerian next future. The country needs to maintain an economically sustainable model, control the intemperately of demographic growth, mitigate the ethnic-religious tensions, and break up the regional gaps, an assortment of hurdles whose resolution, nevertheless, only the time may answer.

Finally, regardless of the Nigerian and South African cases, the African continent, more than sixty years after the *annus mirabilis*, exhibits very complex territoriality, topped by old and new Pivotal States, able to polarize different regions or groups of nations.

In this instance, a not definitive list, incorporating a pretty differentiated taxonomy, would indicate countries like Morocco and Algeria in the Maghreb; Egypt at Machrek; Senegal, in the vertex of West Africa; Nigeria and Ghana, in the Gulf of Guinea; Tanzania and Rwanda, in central-eastern Africa; Ethiopia, in the African Horn; Angola in the central-southern plexus of the continent; and the RSA in Austral space (Waldman, 2014; Almeida, 2011, p. 22-24; Boniface et al., 2009, p. 117; Badi, 1992, p. 85).

The performance of these Pivotal States tends to embarrass the schemes endorsed by the Africa Regional Map in the geopolitical, economic, and cultural fields. Furthermore, the strengthening of what we can label as regional powers may zero the initial purposes of the map-makers seduced by the proposals stated by the United Nations Regional Cartographic Conference for Africa. This possibility must be clear to all who study the map-making of the continent.

Accordingly, as a spatial expression of a distinct moment or period in history, the maps, including the one focused in this paper, cannot claim the condition of axiomatic geographic pieces, nor do they draft plans of understanding *a priori*. Not least because space is above all the result of decantation of unequal time flows in the ecumene (Santos, 1978).



## Conclusions

Although understood as a product external to societies, maps teach much more about the contexts that placed them in the world than the other way around. The cartography involves several narratives, both those outlined in the map and those that, even though they do not show clearly, translate *a language of silence*.

We can observe in the Regional Map of Africa an articulation that permanently combines *resilient or inertial aspects* with *changeable features*, both connected and inscribed in the social imaginary, which in this configuration, materialize reinterpretations and too new territorial semantics, an essential matrix for apprehending the socio-spatial arrangements and regionalization processes documented in this cartographic piece.

It is essential to note that, whatever the degree of distancing or amplification of the original meanings of this map, Africa, a vastness formed by more than 30 million km<sup>2</sup>, *unique and at the same time diverse*, remains as a matrix reference. Notwithstanding the meanings associated with each map-making idiosyncrasy, the continent remains legitimized as a singular landmark, repeatedly considered in its scope.

*A fortiori*, rescuing what we emphasize in the text, Pan-Africanism as an ideal was initially established as a political and cultural movement, thinking Africa and the Black Diaspora as two trunks of the same tree, rooted in a community of origin proposing a *Gemeinschaft* modulating a desired common destination for Africans and Afro-descendants.

In this sense, in opposition to the many readings that accentuate the fragmentation of African societies, it is interesting to note that the political map of Africa remains fundamentally the same as that brought to light in the wake of decolonization. In other words, thinking about unity and integration is not strange to the grammar of the political dictionary of Africans.

Nevertheless, in contrast to the centrifugal forces, which induce unity, the centripetal forces are also manifested, which constantly seek to restore disunity, especially because persistent structures of economic domination are at stake. So, the intending is to postpone *ad eternum* the movement that put African peoples' independence into action.

Of course, as the French philosopher Raymond Aron reasoned, it is impossible in a world governed by an international system to carry on any action in one part of the globe without reverberations in another part. Therefore, Africa interacts in different ways, according to the types of actions directed to the continent. Global crises affect Africa, that is for sure. However, in contrast, Africa's crises also affect the world.



As noted, the perpetuity of spatial forms inherited from the colonialist past is at the root of the great migrations of impoverished Africans. Therefore, it would be urgent to address this problem at its origin, in Africa, guaranteeing the governance of states that are still fragile in the spaces of origin of these migrants, promoting an effective integration and facing the economic texture of the conflicts (a great theme, deserving evaluation in a specific text) taking into account the development and the social progress.

This *tour de force* is essential for the maxim of the English philosopher Thomas Hobbes to become effective, for *whom the primary function of the State is to guarantee a safe civil society*. From the perspective of regionalization, better connectivity between countries, economic integration, and good governance are synonymous. Hence, guaranteeing the State's functionality and empowering the management models is the cornerstone for Africa's progress.

As the Nigerian historian, Ade Ajayi recalls: "The vision of a new African society must necessarily be developed in Africa, proceed from the African historical experience and the proper sense of the continuity of African history. The African is not yet a master of his destiny. *However, neither does he persist only as an object subject to the vagaries of this same destiny*" (in Asante and Chanaiwa, 2010, p. 896).

In this respect, the Africa Regional Map cartographical identity associates itself with the maxim of African unity, a notion of which this map is simultaneously its materiality and continuity, a road that awaits many contributions and re-readings in favor of the progress of the Africans.

### **Conflict of interest**

The author hereby declares that no competing financial interest exists for this manuscript.

### **Notes on contributor**

Maurício Waldman is an Africanist anthropologist, professor, and author of 18 books, 21 ebooks, and more than 700 papers, articles, and consulting reports. Waldman was a professor at the African Studies Center of the University of São Paulo. Waldman is a Doctor in Geography (USP, 2006), Post Doctor in Geosciences (UNICAMP, 2011), Post Doctor in International Relations (USP, 2013), and Post Doctor in Environment (PNPD-CAPES, 2015). Since March 2021, he is a Senior Researcher at the Doctoral School for Safety and Security Sciences - Óbudai University - Budapest, Hungary.



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### **Webography**

- African Unity Website < <https://au.int/> >
- Afriwonk Policy lessons for the Africa Continental Free Trade Area < <https://afriwonk.com/>
- 2020/02/10/policy-lessons-for-the-africa-continental-free-trade-area/ >
- Caspian Report – Politics, Economy, History. Edition 2019-06-28 Landlocked Ethiopia wants a Navy. < <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EBUyK0orjdc> >
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- UNECA - United Nations Economic Commission for Africa <<http://www.uneca.org>>
- Universidade de Santiago de Compostela <[https://www.usc.gal/en/institutos/ceso/RASD\\_Reconocimientos.html](https://www.usc.gal/en/institutos/ceso/RASD_Reconocimientos.html)>
- UN-OSAA - United Nations Office of the Special Adviser on Africa (OSAA) The Regional Economic Communities (RECs) of the African Union < <https://www.un.org/en/africa/osaa/peace/recs.shtml> >
- UNSC - United Nations Statistical Commission < <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/commission.htm> > < <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/methods/m49/m49regin.htm> > < <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/methods/m49/m49regin.htm#africa> >



## Notes

- 1) Contrary to the verdicts that announce the multiethnic states as unfeasible - a preach that falls heavily on the new state formations of Black Africa - the history shows us that the Kingdom of Congo had accumulated at least three centuries of political evolution at the time of the appearance of the Portuguese in 1482. The Empire of Ghana lasted for nine centuries. Mali, for more than three. Thus, before declaring ethnic diversity as a problem in itself, the rub may reside in the capacity building or not of the so-called "more advanced" political structures (implanted in Africa to give rise to neocolonialist inspired political projects) to assume the plurality, a debate mingled at the center of the antinomies of Modernity.
- 2) It is to be regretted that this lack remains strong inside the horizon of cartographic studies: "When maps of Africa do receive attention, the focus is almost exclusively on European maps of the continent. The dearth of indigenous African mapmaking studies may be explained by some factors that have collectively served to marginalize the indigenous cartographic record" (BASSET, 1998: 24. See also WALDMAN, 2018; AUSTEN, 2001; DÖPCKE, 1999)
- 3) This process is also indicative of the *finitude of the Planet*. The French philosopher and writer Paul Valéry pondered: "There are no more voids on the map. The era of the finite world begins."
- 4) Ethiopia is the only African landlocked country for which the guarantee of access to the sea has traditionally intervened on a geopolitical agenda. The Abyssinian control of the port of Djibouti and possession of the Eritrean window to the Indian Ocean remain open questions for a large sector of Ethiopian society (See CASPIAN REPORT: 2019-06-28).
- 5) The African Union defines the African Diaspora as "Consisting of people of African origin living outside the continent, irrespective of their citizenship and nationality and who are willing to contribute to the development of the continent and the building of the African Union." Its constitutive act declares that it shall "invite and encourage the full participation of the African Diaspora as an important part of our continent, in the building of the African Union." (< <https://au.int/en/diaspora-division#:~:text=The%20African%20Union%20defines%20the,constitutive%20act%20declares%20that%20it> >. Access: 27-04-2021).
- 6) Although in North African countries the Islamization was historically synchronized with Arabization, this process was not complete. Several populations are Muslim but not Arabs. There is a strong presence of mixed people with black ancestry too. White Africa proper does not exist, and overall, the conception serves exclusively to ideological purposes.
- 7) This phenomenon is not restricting to Sudan. Since the 2000 decade, Muslim fundamentalists groups are carrying on skirmishes or open wars on diverse levels, in the all Sudanese strip, African Horn, and surrounding, different avatars of the same ethos of civilization clashes.
- 8) We note that the internal territorial circumscription of the AOF and AEF obey ancient traditional African borders, the localization of commerce centers and long-distance paths (chiefly caravans ways), spatial references acting as a prerequisite to the French political geography (MAULL, 1959: 406-407).
- 9) Critics assert that countries of CFA franc channel more money to France than they receive in aid and also that this policy results in impoverishing Africa (by the way, one of the reasons for the migratory crisis). This critique explains why, in May 2020, France agreed to end the Gaulish engagement in the West African CFA franc. Then, French and African administrators announced that an independent currency, called eco, would replace the West African currency (apud Caspian Report, 2019-06-10 and DW, 2019).
- 10) Note that even when Apartheid was in effect, RSA maintained exchanges with several African nations, particularly with Botswana, Lesotho, and Swaziland, countries without access to the sea, and logistically made use of the South African rail network (Santos, 1999, p. 27; Fako, Miti and Mogalakwe, 1989).



- 11) The end of *Apartheid* did not result in significant alterations in the RSA's income structure. Low-income segments remain disproportionately concentrated in large crowds of Bantu ethnic groups, a fact that, due to the contemporary history of South Africa, can revive the irruption of new racial tensions.
- 12) Lagos has 14.8 million (2020 data). It is the most populous city in Nigeria and the third-largest city in Africa, after Kinshasa (Democratic Republic of Congo) and Cairo (Egypt).