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Identity changes in emerging regional integration blocs
of the Global South

-Markus Thiel

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Identity changes in emerging regional integration blocs
of the Global South

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Introduction

Over the past 50 years, the Union has managed to transform the individual and collective identities of Europeans to a quite dramatic extent. On the base of a limited common cultural identity, EU integration served as a transmitter for increased transnational cooperation by moving from economic to political integration, thereby creating a common transnational identification built upon cultural and civic components and reaffirming peaceful ties between member states. Since the EU is often described as 'sui generis' and it is argued that each regional integration experience is unique, the questions emerge how does this phenomenon compare to other regional integration efforts in the world with regards to common identification enabling peaceful co-existence, and what factors explain and constrain regional transnational identity developments?

This paper looks at these specific issues, with a focus on the regional integration associations located in the Global South: the Andean Community in South America, Ecowas in Africa and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations in Southeast Asia. Looking at the cultural and civic components of collective identity formation, this paper presents the chances for and constraints of peace-enabling identity changes in these regional spheres.

Collective identity as social science concept

The use of identity as a concept in the social sciences has increased tremendously in recent years with the rise of postmodernism and the pressures of globalization. Initially limited to the exploration of the individual psyche, the term now includes collective and group identities and the variable identity is researched as dependent as well as independent variable. The word itself stems from the Latin notion of 'sameness'. Some scholars have linked the concept of identity to an immanent political meaning: if identity means sameness, then there exists automatically a distinction from the other, the dissimilar and thus, an intrinsic categorization of inclusion and exclusion[1], with potentially dramatic consequences for peaceful co-existence of such groups.

The idea of a constructed nature of identity rather than an inherent unalterable state of mind possesses the strongest explanatory power for collective identity formation such as occurred in Europe. For post-modern sociologist Hall, identities are "the unstable points of identification or suture, which are made within the discourses of history and culture. Not an essence, but a positioning".[2] But whereas most regions in the developed North, with their relative political transparency and observation through mass media,

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[1] Spencer & Wollman. Nationalism. A critical introduction. SAGE: Thousand Oaks, 2002, p. 58.
[2] Hall, Stuart. "Cultural Identity and Diaspora", in J.Rutherford (ed). Identity: Community, Culture and Difference. Lawrence & Wishart: London, 1990, p. 226.

elitist and activist groups, offer a pluralist and possibly inclusive collective identity to their respective public spheres, collective identity is more narrowly circumscribed in most regions in the Global South.

The idea of a *political* collective identity as a way in which self-understandings are expressed within the general public sphere can be anchored in locale (the place where people live), network (the ways in which people interact) and memory (the understandings which are sustained and recreated over time).[3]   While identities have become a hot topic in recent years, there are also voices that criticize the 'unscientific' use of the term in contemporary social sciences. Brubaker and Cooper, for example, call for – and partly deliver – a more specific understanding of identity and identification as a category of practice (e.g. as in identity politics) and one of analysis (e.g. self-ascribed identity vs. prescribed identity vs. identification).[4]

In this paper I will concentrate on the treatment of collective identity formation rather than on individual ones. Both forms need to be conceptually distinguished even though they are related to one another. Group identities, no matter what size, are socially constructed, thus making social constructivism the theoretical foundation for my exploration. Most realists won't acknowledge the significance of identities, particularly not transnational ones, and liberals see institutionalized patterns of interactions between statist or market units as predominant. However, a distinction needs to be drawn between collective identities in which communicative social exchange is logistically possible and larger collective groupings such as nations or even trans-national regions in which identity is constructed via intermediate agents such as institutions or mass media.[5] A regional hemispheric identity is only one of the many variations of collective identity. This specific transnational identification can again be located on two levels: the regional 'external' identity assumed by the entire integration bloc in its interaction with its member states and the international sphere and the regional identity found in individuals of the participating states of the integrating area, collectively forming the base of legitimacy for this identity.

One of the main distinguishing elements of collective identity applied in this paper are the two components *cultural* and *civic* identity. Only recently Michael Bruter investigated attitudes towards the separate civic and cultural components of a European identity, finding that European identity does not automatically translate into support for EU integration.[6] The term 'regional collective identity' entails the existence of two distinctly different yet related political identifications, the cultural one referring to the cultural common aspects of social groups such as history, language, religion and/or race and the civic component built upon political values and a system of rights and rules.[7] This basic distinction lies at the heart of nationalism-research and is reflected in the dichotomy

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[3] Preston, P.W. Political / Cultural Identity. Citizens and Nations in a Global Era. SAGE: Thousand Oaks, 1997.

[4] Brubaker, Rogers & Cooper, Frederick. "Beyond 'identity' ", in: *Theory and Society*, Vol. 29, 2000, p. 1-47.

[5] Anderson, Benedict. Imagined communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism. Verso: New York, 1991, p. 5-8.

[6] Bruter, Michael. "Civic and Cultural Components of a European Identity: A Pilot Model of Measurement of Citizens' Levels of European Identity", in: Risse, Thomas, Herrmann, Richard & Brewer, Marilyn. Transnational identities, Rowman & Littlefield: New York, 2004, pp. 186-213.

[7] Bruter, Ibid.

between essentialists, who emphasize common cultural characteristics of a nation (see above), and modernists who theorize the civic components of the current state-system such as institutions and political values and rights as preeminent.[8] Following this dual categorization, I intend to explore the peace-promoting identity-building or -constraining factors in the different integration blocs according to their relative strengths in either the cultural or civic component of the region.

Regional integration and collective identity development

As a response to globalization pressures and the existence of regional geopolitical hegemonial powers, regional integration associations have developed to mitigate the ensuing economic and political shocks, often in defense of the eroding sovereignty of the member states.[9] Particularly in the last two decades, the appeal of regional integration as exemplified by the EU has mushroomed globally. Various definitions of regional integration exist with particular emphasis on the level of integration. Because of its openness with regards to the various degrees of cohesiveness, I chose William Wallace's formulation of integration as "the amalgamation of, or the formation and maintenance of, close patterns of interaction between previously autonomous units. These patterns can be of a political, economic or social nature".[10] One can find a variety of regional blocs, some separated by the emphasis on regional economic integration or regional security, others more or less seamlessly moving from one state of integration to the other. Economic and political integration, in particular in the developing world where security problems are often caused by a lack of resources, are contingent upon each other. Some theorists even speak of a dominant neo-liberal ideology existing in the current international system, though questions of regional awareness and identity becoming more important.[11] There exist significant differences in the extent of integration and correspondingly, the chances for collective identity construction in these associations. However, the centrality of such regional identities as important variables in the study of regionalism is well recognized.[12]

The study of comparative integration provides us with various classifications, with an emphasis on the EU as an exemplary yet unique model of integration. But while it is imperative that the experience of the EU cannot be simply applied to other integration cases because of the unique conditions in post-war Europe, the search for (dis-)similarities is possible. More important than the mode of transnational governance is the distinction according to the nature of integration, be it purely economic, mainly political or a combination of both since this feature is the determining factor for the development of collective identity. The more integrated a region becomes when progressing from

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[8] Cederman, Lars-Erik. "Nationalism and Bounded Integration: What it would take to construct a European Demos", in: *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol.7, 2001, p.139-174.

[9] Acharya, Amitav. "Regionalism and world order", in: Breslin, S., Hughes, C., Phillips, N. & Rosamond, B. (eds). New Regionalisms in the Global Political Economy. Routledge: New York, 2002, pp. 20-32.

[10] William Wallace, 'Introduction", in: id (ed). The Dynamics of European integration, Pinter: London, 1992, p. 5.

[11] Higgott, Richard. "The international political economy of regionalism", in: Coleman, W. & Underhill, R.(eds). Regionalism and global economic integration: Europe, Asia and the Americas, Routledge: New York, 1998, pp. 42-67.

[12] Breslin et al, Ibid, p. 5.

economic to political bloc, the higher the chances for the development of a common transnational identification. In order to develop a transnational regional identity, I postulate that there needs to be at least a minimal amount of (permanent) institutionalization, (common) security objectives and economic interests.

It is becoming increasingly difficult to differentiate between economic and political regionalism because of the multi-dimensional interdependence between states.[13] Some, such as APEC (Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation) are built as a very loose network in which the member states periodically coordinate non-binding trade rules and policies. On the other end, the EU as the most advanced model of political integration possesses a multitude of supranational and intergovernmental institutions regulating harmonized trade, politics and law. A simple free trade area can rarely influence collective national identities in the participating member states, but a common market with free labor flows progressively increases the impact on identity formation through migratory transnational movements, while political integration as pursued by the establishment of supranational institutions and binding rules achieve not only economic cooperation but the formation of a political security community with an independent regional identity.[14] A regional identity might be forged in a (neo-)functionalist manner through institutionalization and agent socialization that is then transported by regulatory acts and the media onto the mass level. Others see 'communication theory' as a more appropriate construct to theorize the feedback processes in regional polities.[15] Along these lines, constructivists hypothesize that "the emergence and maintenance of Regional Integration Agreements reflect common regional values and a sense of regional awareness and cohesion, which is reinforced with time through increased enmeshment and institutionalized interaction".[16] I strongly align with this perception on the basis that the differences in the extent of integration in these integration blocs reflect the degree of common political cohesiveness rather than the statist power relationship between the integrated states.

Only those regional integration blocs will be analyzed here that possess a minimum standard of political integration that go beyond exclusively economic objectives and that have particular challenges with regard to politically stable and peaceful governance, such as the Andean Community, ASEAN and Ecowas. In contrast to regional blocs of the developed North, the issues in integration blocs of the South, such as ethnic conflict, poverty, political instability, (un)democratic governance have a strong connection to collective identities found in the member states and the overall regions and will therefore be more close looked upon below.

The EU is well researched and advanced in common identity development to be fully included in this comparative analysis though I will give a short orientation in the

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[13] Mutschler, Claudia. "Comparative International Experiences: Latin America", in: Clapham, Mills, Morner & Sidiropoulos. Regional Integration in Southern Africa: Comparative International Perspectives. SAIIA: Pretoria, South Africa, 2001, p. 141..

[14] Chanona, Alejandro. "North American Security: A community or an identity?", Paper presented at the EU Center Conference of the University of Miami: The European Union and Regional Integration: A comparative perspective and lessons for the Americas, Miami, FL, April 8, 2005.

[15] Laursen, Finn (ed). Comparative Regional Integration. Theoretical Perspectives. Ashgate: Burlington, VT, 2003, p. 9-10.

[16] Gomez-Mera, Laura. "Explaining Mercosur's Survival", Journal of Latin American Studies, Vol. 37, 2005, pp. 109-140.

following section. The EU as the most advanced model of regional integration is an instructive case in order to see the identity forming capacity existing under 'ideal' circumstances. Research about the existence of a cultural European identity, based on historical, religious and other commonalities exist in abundance. Few scholars focus specifically on the formation of a European identity on a socio-political civic level. In general the literature on European post-national citizenship and identity proposes that the transformation of identities in the EU is occurring as a result of various factors: differentiation and ascription from outside, below and above (e.g. how Europeans see themselves as such and how they distinguish other 'non-EU' Europeans as well as non-Europeans), internal homogenization (e.g. the convergence of standard of living, of law or of culture) and inclusion (e.g. of the societal peripheries to the center).[17] A complementary 'identity' growth has been achieved that enables Europeans to maintain their identity as nationals as well as Europeans. However, this growth of intra-European regional identity is potentially exclusive with regards to non-European minorities in the Union as well as non-Europeans in general.

The regional integration blocs compared

Of the integration blocs in existence in the South, I will focus on the major ones ECOWAS, ASEAN and the Andean Community. Below I will detail the structural opportunities as well as constraints for common identity development in each of these organizations according to Bruter's and Cederman's main distinction of political identity components into cultural and civic elements.[18]

The table below gives a side-by-side overview of the regional blocs and summarizes quantitatively the potential for the development of a common regional identity in each area.

Cultural & Civic Identity factors	EU	Andean Community	Asean	Ecowas
Cultural factors				
Language	Wide variety, constraining	Common, facilitating	Wide variety, constraining	Wide variety, constraining
Ethnic group	Mixed	Mixed	Mixed	Mixed
Historical exchanges & contiguity	Mixed evidence	Mixed evidence	Mixed evidence	Mixed evidence
Religion	Common, facilitating	Common, facilitating	Diverse, constraining	Diverse, constraining
Cultural heritage	Common, facilitating	Common, facilitating	Mixed	Mixed

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[17] Muench, Reinhard. Nation and Citizenship in the Global Age. Palgrave: New York, 2001. , pp. 136-185. Dunkerley, David et al (eds). Changing Europe: Identities, Nations and Citizens. Routledge: New York, 2002.

[18] Bruter, 2004, Ibid. Cederman, Ibid.

Civic factors				
Equivalence (of econ. and military power)	Absent	Given	Absent	Absent
Democratic governance	Given	Given	Mixed	Mixed
Neo-liberal ideology	Given	Mixed	Mixed	Mixed
Respect for diversity (racial, cult.) & HR	Given	Given	Mixed	Mixed
Institutionalization	Strong	Strong	Medium	Weak

A short legend specifies the listed classification criteria more closely:

Cultural factors:
- **Language:** Possession of the same language and/or similar language group
Language is, together with ethnic group, the most important reference factor for a collective identity.
- **Ethnic relations**: Similarity of ethnic and racial commonalities
Common ethnic belonging determines common identity, so ethnic relations indicate regional tolerance.
- **Historical exchanges**: Presence & history of peaceful and/or agressive exchanges, contiguity
A history of common contacts in each bloc determines the view of the other and the degree of commonality.
- **Religion**: Possession of a common confession and/or religion
Religion affects the political outlook of collectives, thus is an indicator for homogeneity of region.
- **Cultural heritage:** Possession of common myths, customs, architecture and other socially constructed commonalities
The cultural heritage of a region, if existent, serves as common transnational reference point.

Civic Factors
- **Equivalence**: of economic/soft and military/hard power and comparative influence
This is an indicator of relative power and influence in and over the region.
- **Democracy:** Adherence to minimum standard of separation of powers and free elections
Often enhances the effects of regional integration or as precondition for membership.
- **Neo-liberal trade ideology**: Existing political-economic orientation towards capitalistic (regional) free trade
This indicator serves to assess the effects of the political economy of the region upon the common identity.
- **Respect for Diversity and HR**: Tolerance towards minorities, respect for human rights
As one of the civic elements postulated by many identity scholars, it is included here.
- **Institutionalization:** Degree of establishment and complexity of common (permanent) institutions
The degree of institutionalization reflects the existence or absence of common attitudes

and practices.

The Andean Community (AC)

The Andean Community, compared to its southern 'rival' Mercosur, is a more recent example of refashioning political integration in South America. Coming into existence as the 'Andean Pact' in 1969, it now comprises of the countries located along the Andean ridge Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia and just like Mercosur, has been carefully modeled alongside the EU's institutionalist approach and even imitates the institutional 3-pillar structure of the Union.[19] Regional integration schemes and free trade agreements in South America have been initiated as a response to the development challenge through import-substituted industrialization from 1950 onwards, but were hampered by unstable domestic political conditions and border conflicts, which is why the Andean community represents an important case for the development of a peace-enabling regional identity. Only in the 1990s, after the end of the Cold War in the wake of accelerated globalization, regional groupings recognized the need for closer economic cooperation to gain leverage in the international economy. So far, the Andean Community established a highly institutionalized free–trade area with almost free intra-regional trade and perspectives on free movement of labor and capital as well.[20] However, it faces competition from the Mercosur states and the U.S.-pushed Free Trade of the Americas (FTAA), which in turn would throw back the regional integration process achieved so far.

Language
The AC is very homogeneous in this respect, most its citizens using Spanish. This gives the region a certain degree of cohesiveness, in particular in conjunction with the common colonial experience. The indigenous dialects and languages such as Quechua are spoken by the minorities delimited to the mountainous Andean region. The official language is spoken by almost every citizen, in theory facilitating transnational communicative exchange. In addition, the AC has a standing group working on the rights of indigenous people, including the preservation of dialects and languages located throughout the AC.

Ethnic group
Despite the diversity of ethnic groups, the member states of the AC enjoy a relative peaceful coexistence absent of ethnic conflict within the region. Of all full members, Peru, Ecuador and Bolivia display most heterogeneity, with indigenous populations in these countries reaching almost half of the overall populace.[21] While colored people are well assimilated in the AC – and mostly prevalent in the Caribbean Northern coast of Venezuela- a sublime racist component resulting from colonial roots exists in the preferred treatment of Caucasian European descendants. However, the social standing of colored people is far better than the marginalized treatment of the indigenous minorities in the Andean countries Peru, Ecuador or Bolivia, latter having just elected its first

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[19] Andean Community Website: http://www.comunidadandina.org/endex.htm, March 17, 2006.
[20] Andean Community, Ibid.
[21] Ecuador, Peru Data from: http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook, March 17, 2006.

indigenous president.

Historical exchanges
The history of all AC member states is strongly intertwined. Aside from the colonial experience (more about it below in the section dealing with cultural heritage), ancient meso-American civilizations established already border-crossing trading routes throughout the Andean region, the Incas featuring prominent amongst these. The relationship today is peaceful with no military conflict present, though there have been political tensions between the AC member states Venezuela and Colombia, and border conflicts between Peru and Ecuador in the recent decades.

Religion
In terms of religious beliefs, Latin America is the most homogenous regional bloc of all: about 90 per cent of the population is at least nominally Roman Catholic, which can be considered a major 'success' of the colonial rulers. Indigenous beliefs have persisted throughout in spite of its attempted eradication during the last centuries. More recently, protestant sects have gained a wider audience in the deprived segments of South American societies. Aside from these and small minorities of Jews and Muslims, the wide presence of Christianity is a major component of common identification in Andean countries.

Cultural heritage
In pre-colonial times, the meso-American and pre-Columbian civilizations of the Andean mountain range established relationships among each other that influenced the cultural fabric of the South American nations. The cultural heritage has been heavily influenced by the colonial rule of the Spanish and Portuguese with the objectives of Christianization, discovery and exploitation of the continent's people and resources. The remnants of this past are scattered throughout the region and consist in similar art forms, architecture, religion, myths and customs which give the AC a basic level of cultural cohesiveness only found in the EU. The AC recognized this common heritage and took actions, e.g. by incorporating Andean identity contents into the Member Countries' basic educational study plans.[22] In the case of the AC, cultural identity factors are very conducive for the development of a transnational regional/continental identity.

Equivalence
The states assembled in the AC do not vary as much as in other regions. There is no regional economic or political hegemon apparent. Aside from this, the countries range in terms of GNP per capita only slightly from $ 800 in Bolivia on the low end to Peru with $ 2, 300 on the high end (Mercosur has a much wider variance). While the whole region is in need of improved economic development, the economic differences between them are relatively small, but the mountainous Andean region is poorer than other subregions, which is why AC leaders implemented special aid programs for rural development to balance out some of these disparities.

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[22] Andean Community 'Culture' Website: http://www.comunidadandina.org/ingles/culture.htm, March 17, 2006.

Democratic governance

With regards to adhering to democratic principles, the AC member states are not well compatible. Most of the member states retain relatively fragile democracies upon overcoming military dictatorships and oligarchic rule. At least on paper, membership in the AC has been made contingent upon democratic governance in the founding 'Cartagena Agreement' in order to bind the countries together in a democratic framework. However, most analysts view the democratic progress made in the member states as diverging with regards to rule-of-law criteria (e.g. in Venezuela or Colombia), the inclusion of minorities in the states' societies (e.g. Ecuador, Bolivia etc) or problems of accountability, which concerns all of the AC member governments.

Neo-liberal ideology

While 3 of the current 5 full members are at least officially capitalist and free-trade oriented, they display varied degrees of ideological convergence with regards to neo-liberal international economic policies. Venezuela and Bolivia pursue a strong left-leaning socialist model modeled after Bolivarian ideals in protest to the contentious hegemonic position of the U.S. on Venezuela. Overall, the main motivation behind most regional integration efforts in South and Latin America is to fend off the detrimental developments caused by the (semi-)peripheral status of these economies. On the other hand, countries such as Peru or Colombia pursue, with the support of the U.S., a more neo-liberal economic development.

Respect for Diversity and HR

While we find a relatively unproblematic high ethnic diversity in South America, in the AC this is limited mainly to the indigenous populations. Likewise, the respect for diversity is confined to more traditional-religious values and while the AC propagates respect for diversity and human rights in its declarations, the reality in the national spheres tend to disregard the rights of minorities of any kind, in particular of indigenous people. According to Freedom House, the political and civil rights in the member states range from being partially free (Venezuela & Colombia with a rating of 4) to free (Peru excels with a rating of 2).[23]

Institutionalization

While they may not be the most effective instruments in governing economic integration, the AC institutions are well developed and comprise of the Andean Presidential Council, the Council of Foreign Affairs, a permanent secretariat, a Court of Justice and even an Andean Parliament, soon to be elected through direct elections. These well-developed structures are modeled according to the EU model and draw heavily on the latter's expertise, which enables effective negotiation and institutional communication. For regional security objectives, the Council of Foreign Affairs emphasized in the Lima agreements 2002 a limit on military spending to invest in social development and a concerned effort to fight illicit arms smuggling in the region. [24]

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[23] Freedom House Country Reports 2005, www.freedomhouse.org, March 16, 2006.
[24] Andean Community, Political Cooperation Website, http://www.comunidadandina.org/ingles/Exterior/security.htm, March 16, 2006.

In sum, the South American integration bloc is well suited to develop a stronger communal identity as its population and its socio-cultural experiences are relatively homogenous. In addition, the AC has a well-structured transnational system of governance in place which aims at both, regional security and economic development. The future of the AC is to be watched since several distinctly different integration models for the continent and the Western hemispheres exist at the moment.

ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States)

Ecowas is the largest of the regional integration associations in Africa, comprising of currently 15 member states inhabiting 210 million people. Though now included into the African Economic Community, it remains the best-known case of regional integration in Africa. Established in 1975 as an instrument of closer economic cooperation on the Western half of the continent, resulting from the weakness of its member states and the fragile security environment, its main contributions were not necessarily on the economic but on the political front.[25] The implementation of the ECOWAS goals of a common market and single currency have been hampered by non-implementation of community instruments by member states so that security advancements such as the regional peacekeeping operation ECOMOG over time became more important. While there are ambitious plans for a single currency scheme, immigration harmonization and free trade in addition to important natural and mineral resources such as oil and diamonds, little has been achieved in reality in excess of partial customs union and trade liberalization so that intra-regional trade stands at less than 15 per cent.[26]

Language
The ECOWAS member states are bifurcated by the use of their colonial languages English and French. They also possess a tremendous variety of subregional indigenous languages such as Yoruba, Hausa or Igbo with corresponding local dialects. The major distinction still remains between the English-speaking member states Nigeria and Ghana and the Francophone majority with members such as Niger, Benin, Cote d'Ivoire etc. This internal split actually led some members to pursue increased cooperation among the francophone West African Economic and Monetary Union, which many ECOWAS member states belong to as well.

Ethnic relations
The ethnic composition of the ECOWAS member states is highly diverse, displaying a mosaic of hundreds of ethno-linguistic groups. Historically, there have been few major empires such as the Ghana one or the Yorubas, but the majority of people live in small-scall ethnic groupings which are hard to reconcile even with national inclusion, let alone

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[25] Clapham, Christopher. "The changing world of regional integration in Africa", in: Clapham, Mills, Morner & Sidiropoulos. Regional Integration in Southern Africa: Comparative International Perspectives. SAIIA: Pretoria, South Africa, 2001, p. 58-60.

[26] Center for Democracy and Development, Working Paper on Regional Integration in West Africa, www.cdd.org.uk, March 16, 2006.

regional cohesiveness and solidarity. Ethnic relations are very fragile and tensions easily arise over material (water, land) and non-material issues (religion). Another complication of the West African scenario is that in some states such as Nigeria, majorities claim to government control and/or to resources, thereby negating minority rights.

Historical exchanges
Related to the previous topic, the West African states assembled in ECOWAS possess a fragile peace and all of them basically accept the colonially determined frontiers drawn pre-independence. There had been long-standing trade exchanges amongst the different ethnic groups in densely populated West Africa and the colonial political and trade regimes of the French and British rulers reinforced some of these exchanges but cut off others where they transcended colonial borders. Small-scale conflicts existed, however, in relation to some border-conflicts, religious incompatibilities and internal civil conflicts played out over bordering states such was the case in the Liberia-Sierra Leone conflict in the 1990s. On paper, a protocol relating to non-aggression from 1978 as well as the 1981 instituted mutual assistance clause built the base for communitarian monitoring and possible intervention through the peacekeeping force ECOMOG. Within the framework of integration, ECOWAS also enabled citizen to move around freely without the need for visas, which increases mobility and a sense of shared space.

Religion
The major religions in the ECOWAS states are Christianity, Islam and a host of indigenous pantheistic religions. In at least half of the member states, including large ones like Nigeria or Senegal, a large majority of the population is Muslim, therefore sharing transnational religious commonalities. Overall, however, the religious (missionary) fervor of some denominations of the major religions and inter-religious tensions, in particular between Islam and Christianity, contributes to constant tensions in the region, at times with violent outbursts between rivaling groups where ECOWAS had no effect in reducing violence.

Cultural heritage
The rich cultural heritage of the African continent is often underrated. In the same vein, West Africa's common cultural heritage deserves more attention. The center of ancient cultural activities there lay in today's Nigeria and stems from the fifth century. Later on, the wide trading relations along the Coast as well as along the rivers from North to South led to a certain degree of common cultural asthetics as expressed in society and religion. One needs to recognize, however, that despite these commonalities, art objects were more often than not used to distinguish different ethnic-cultural groups. Although today the cultural heritage of West Africa is endangered by civil conflicts and unawareness of its importance[27,] aside from lofty declarations and a regional ECOFEST festival, ECOWAS has not contributed significantly to the preservation of its cultural heritage.

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[27] UNESCO, Regional consultation on cultural industries in Africa Final Report, Coutonou, Benin, 2000, http://www.unesco.org/culture/industries/html_eng/benin4.shtml, March 14, 2006.

Equivalence
There is little to suggest that the ECOWAS states are symmetrical in terms of economic
or military power. While they are performing average compared to other African nations,
they differ dramatically in military strength and political influence. Nigeria is the now
'benign' regional hegemon dominating the political direction of ECOWAS in foreign and
trade relations as well as through institutional means/voting rights within ECOWAS.
Nigeria also initiated periodical meetings of sub-groupings within ECOWAS. The
economic situation of the countries is similar, though their GNP per capita varies from
extreme poor countries such as Liberia with $100 to comparatively well off states such as
Nigeria with $ 1220.[28]

Democratic governance
The consolidation of democracy in these West African states is of utmost importance
since most of them went through turbulent times immediately after their independence in
the second half of the twentieth century. The record of ECOWAS contribution to the
democratization in West Africa is mixed: In the first 15 years of its existence, little efforts
were made that would change the despotic governments in countries such as Togo or
Nigeria, the lack of democratic governance being reflected in the majority of states being
rated as partially or non-free (with the exception of Ghana and Benin).[29] In other
countries of the region such as Niger or Sierra Leone, nothing was done to prevent the
military coups occurring in the 1990s.

In 2001, the protocol on good governance and democracy was adopted by the
highest ECOWAS institution, the Authority, in the hope of stabilizing regional peace
based on democratic principles. While it was not able to successfully end the civil
conflict in Cote d'Ivoire, the intervention in Togo in 2005 by the ECOWAS leaders in
favor of a democratic elected government contributed to the rising political importance of
the this issue within the region.

Neo-liberal ideology
Because of a history of protectionism stemming first from colonial tradition and then
from the national efforts for development and access to the world markets, the neoliberal
approach has mainly been introduced through World Bank efforts and the globalized
North more general, calling for multilateral trade liberalization. Although economic
liberalization as pursued under developmental programs is not designed to promote
regional trade in particular, its intent is certainly to promote open trade more generally,
thereby increasing chances for the adoption and implementation of open regionalism
through ECOWAS.

Respect for Diversity and HR
Another issue is cultural and ethnic diversity, which is highly diverse in the West African

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[28] US-Africa Development Country Files 2003, http://us-africa.tripod.com/countries.html, March
16, 2006.

[29] Freedom House Country Report 2005,
http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=22&year=2005, March 16, 2006.

states. Unfortunately, in many ECOWAS countries cultural and religious differences sometimes lead to violence and political and economic instability in the sub-region or within member states. In theory, ECOWAS recognizes that education, culture and religion are essential factors of peace, stability and development in each member state but puts no effort into strategies to realize these broader goals.[30] Human Rights issues remain a constant trouble for the autocratic governments of states like Liberia or Nigeria.

Institutionalization

While the degree of institutionalization is relatively high, comprising of the Authority of Heads of State and Government, the Council of Ministers, the Community Tribunal, the Parliament, the Executive Secretariat and six specialized Commissions, they are non-permanent. These institutions meet mostly on either an annual basis, e.g. in the case of the High Authority meetings consisting of the heads of states or the Council of Ministers, or on a case-by-case basis such as in the case of the tribunal.[31]

A special example of security integration is the establishment of ECOMOG, the region's monitoring and peacekeeping instrument, which has been sent to several conflict locations within the community, notably in the case of Liberia's civil war (1991-1997) and in Sierra Leone (1998-1999).[32]

Overall, the prospects for a development of regional identity and increased regional security for the West African Countries in ECOWAS are relatively limited. The degree of commonality in cultural factors, in particular in ethno-linguistic and religious aspects is very low, as are the necessary civic elements. While ECOMOG has been a force in peacekeeping, its contribution to economic integration and the development of democratic governments throughout the region are limited, most likely because of the existing diversified cultural determinants of that region. ECOWAS needs to display a more active role in implementing its many economic and political goals so as to guarantee regional stability upon which over time further integration and regional peace can take place.

ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations)

In the first years after its establishment in 1967, ASEAN was considered an intergovernmental co-ooperation effort rather than a highly economically and politically

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[30] Sesay, Amadu. The role of ECOWAS in promoting peace and security. Development Policy Management Forum, DPMF Bulletin, Vol. 9, No.3, 2002.

[31] NEPAD (New Partnership for African Development) website, ECOWAS Brief, http://www.nepad.org.ng/PDF/About%20Nepad/ecowas.pdf, March 13, 2006

[32] Ibid.

integrated bloc.[33] South-East Asia in the middle of the Cold-War separated by the ideologies of the superpowers, ASEAN was seen by its original five members (Indonesia, Malaysia, the Phillipines, Singapore and Thailand) mainly as a security provider. Since then, the scope of integration as well as membership has widened, now encompassing ten member states and more than half a billion people in South East Asia. Today, ASEAN pursues successfully open economic and political integration and its additional five members Brunei, Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar and Cambodia are attracted by the economic success of ASEAN within the framework of economic integration in the international system. Even though intra-regional trade expanded significantly over the last two decades, the outward-orientation of the ASEAN economies resulted in a stagnating intra-regional trade percentage of about 20-25 per cent over the last few years.[34]

Language
Each country has its own language, which in turn possesses many local variations. The language groups, while distantly related, are distinctly different depending on the geographical location. As such there exist various groupings, the Thai languages, the Vietnamese ones, the Austronesian, Indonesian and Phillippine languages, aside from others such as Chinese dialects.[35] In more recent times, the addition of the colonial languages British and French has paved the way for bilinguality in the more urban and developed areas of Southeast Asia, with many people speaking English or Chinese as second language. ASEAN chose English as the official working language of the organization.

Ethnic group
Aside from the major ethnic groups of Malay, Thai, Chinese, Indian and Javanese, there exist hundreds of local indigenous tribes on the South-East Asian continent as well as scattered throughout the islands of the region. In some smaller, advanced states such as Singapore or Malaysia, the cohabitation of these groups works relatively well with only minor tensions resulting from the perceived domination of one ethnic group over the others (e.g. the Chinese minority over the Malay majority). In other states such as Burma and Indonesia, the indigenous groups use violent tactics in order to achieve a certain degree of independence. The dissimilarity of the ASEAN population makes a common cultural reference difficult and identity politics are generally not well developed.

Historical exchanges
Intense trading exchanges existed in the region for centuries and have been continued throughout the colonial period. This, however, does not mean that the exchanges were

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[33] Than, Mya & Singh, Daljit. "Regional Integration: The case of ASEAN", in: Clapham, Mills, Morner & Sidiropoulos. Regional Integration in Southern Africa: Comparative International Perspectives. SAIIA: Pretoria, South Africa, 2001, p. 167.

[34] Than & Sing, Ibid, p. 174; ASEAN secretariat, www.aseansec.org, March 17, 2006.

[35] Entry 'Southeast Asia', from www.wikipedia.org, July 16, 2005.

purely peaceful. In particular, a continued dispute over the territorial reign of today's Eastern-Malaysian island of Sabah produced violent conflicts in the past between the Phillippines, Malaysia, Brunei and Indonesia. Later on, the ideological split between pro-western and pro-soviet countries isolated these blocs throughout the first years of ASEAN. It was only after the end of the Cold War that the (former) communist countries were allowed to join.

Religion
Historically the region was very much influenced by Buddhism and Hinduism. Currently, the main religions are Buddhism for most of the continental ASEAN members, Islam for Malaysia, Indonesia and Brunei, and Christianity for the Phillippines. Aside from these main streams there exist Hindu, Animist and Taoist minorities in most of these states. While the traditional cultural heritage has been influenced by Buddhism and Hinduism a lot, more recently the region has seen tensions arising between the Muslims and Buddhists/Christians. In particular with the backdrop of current jihadist movements spreading in many Muslim areas all over the world, this tension is likely to increase, thereby delimiting religion as a tool for common identity construction.

Cultural heritage
The spread of Buddhism and Hinduism has given the region a relatively homogenized historical heritage including works of art, dance and (sacral) architecture. Some scholars postulate the existence of specific 'Asian' values, in which individual rights are subordinated to the obligations of the community and therefore, the presence of strong governments.[36] However, the diversity of ethnic groups and religions in the last few centuries changed the local coloration of public life according to the local conditions and developed according to the emerging state's model. More recently, the colonial period has left deep socio-cultural imprints that again divided the member states into two groups. On the one hand, Singapore, Brunei and Malaysia were British colonies and continued on the neo-liberal model of development, while the French colonies of Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam turned to communist models of development. Thailand and the Phillippines were strongly US-oriented.

Equivalence
The ASEAN member states reveal a wide variety in terms of size, population, national wealth and military capabilities. This diversity is actually one of the most distinguishing features in relations to the other regional integration cases. No single hegemonic power exists in ASEAN, rather, there exists a bifurcation of more influential countries (such as Indonesia and Phillippines because of their sizes and Singapore and Malaysia because of their prosperity) and less powerful ones (e.g. the relatively small and very poor members Laos, Cambodia or Myanmar). Economically, the GNP per capita ranges from well-off Singapore with $ 30,060 to Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia with only about $ 300. While this dissimilarity presents an economic challenge, it did little to hamper the objective of regional security at the outset. In addition, current growth trends converge around 5- 7.5

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[36] Katzenstein, Peter. "Regionalism and Asia", in: Breslin et al, Ibid, p. 107.

per cent, although it has to be said that the poorer member still lag comparatively behind the more developed 4 founding countries. While this two-tier situation persists, the degree of complementarity was raised as the older, more developed member states were able to relocate labor-intensive industries to their poorer neighbors.[37]

Democratic governance

While some member states have a short history of democracy (such as the Phillippines, Indonesia) or are partially democratized (e.g. Singapore or Thailand), few newer members are actually not yet ruled by a democratic government. Myanmar/Burma has an oppressive military junta, and Vietnam and Laos are still ruled by communist regimes, giving most of the regions a rather negative Freedom house rating of between 4-7.[38] In particular the admittance of Burma under military dictatorship into ASEAN in 1999 on grounds of the non-intervention principle was seen as blow to serious democratization efforts through ASEAN. Once again, ASEAN members display high heterogeneity with regard to political governance, making attempts to closer political integration particularly challenging. This in turn decreases chances for common transnational identity developments since political attitudes of democratic countries and authoritarian one-party states differ substantially.

Neo-liberal ideology

Similarly to the previous aspect, the neo-liberal economic orientation of the ASEAN countries depends in large part on their political grouping. Vietnam and Laos as communist countries pursue a market model that combines limited aspects of a capitalist economy with the restrictions of a tightly controlled one-party system – with comparatively little success. On the other side one finds the westernized capitalist economies of Singapore, Malaysia, Phillippines and Thailand, though also with various amounts of government intervention. This ideological split makes a common identification very difficult.

Respect for Diversity and HR

Connected to the theme of democracy, multi-ethnic recognition and human rights more generally do not seem to be pressing issues on ASEAN's agenda. The case of Burma's accession 1999 without setting any preconditions reflects this agenda, although in part the respect for (often hardly gained) sovereignty and cultural diplomacy of the region plays partly a role in it as well. A similar effect is visible with ASEAN's reaction towards the independence and accession application of East Timor, in which the organization reacted hesitantly in order not to aggravate Indonesia.

Institutionalization

Political integration and institutionalization remained low during the Cold War since two

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[37] Than, Mya & Singh, Daljit, Ibid, p. 170.

[38] Freedom House Country Reports 2005, http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=22&year=2005, March 16, 2005.

the two different ideologies present did not allow for closer cooperation and the issue of the Malaysian territory impeded any progress. In 1976, ten years after its establishment, the Treaty of Amnity and Cooperation (TAC) spelled out political cooperation explicitly and created a dispute settlement mechanism. In 1992, the permanent ASEAN secretariat received an enhanced status in Jakarta, Indonesia, with the appointment of the Secretary General of ASEAN. The annual ASEAN summit of heads of states, the regular ministerial meetings as well as the diverse topical networks ranging from sectoral economics to student exchanges constitute a well developed yet flexible degree of institutionalization. This flexibility can turn out to be a more inefficient instrument of cooperation since it relies on personal relationships that need to build trust and a time-consuming approach of cultural diplomacy.[39] Amongst other things, ASEAN citizens are allowed to travel within the member-states without a visa for at least a week.

In conclusion, ASEAN has successfully instituted peace in the region, which was not the case before. Consequently, regional security has remained a more important goal and the economic outward orientation of the member states as well as the reluctance to interfere in other member states' domestic issues impedes deeper integration. In addition, the cultural, historical and political diversity of the ASEAN member states make the development of common identification highly unlikely, even though organization spelled out a 'Vision 2020' which calls for deeper economic and political integration and the reduction of socio-economic differences in this bloc.[40]

Conclusion: Where to go from here?

A prediction about the future collective regional identity development is difficult: while the process of regional institutionalization in itself almost guarantees the establishment of common objectives and regional security, the variance in cultural and civic aspects of the region as well as global political developments might as well lead to a stagnation in the development of regional identities. As the case-by-case analysis of cultural and civic factors contributing to a common identification has shown, the degree of commonality in each case is dependent on the strength of each of these individual indicators with both, cultural and civic factors being equally important. One of the main conclusions is that there needs to be a sufficiently strong presence of both sets of indicators. If there are strong common cultural reference points but no civic ones than the development of a regional identity results in little more than a 'superstate' regional nationalism. On the other hand, civic factors are preceded by cultural ones so that the former could not exist independently as factors influencing regional identity.

There exist additional factors that were not included into the above analysis, such as, for example, demographic developments in or continuous enlargement of these integration blocs. The most important factor affecting the future development of regional identity are the economic conditions and cycles of each individual country as well as the

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[39] Than & Singh, Ibid, p. 176.

[40] www.aseansec.org, March 17, 2006.

whole bloc. For example, an economic downturn has important consequences for the national protectionism of each country, thereby reducing its willingness to subordinate national priorities to communal goals as seen in the Asian financial crisis.

This paper has shed light on the under-rated topic of identity developments in these regions, which are essential in determining the attainment of regional security at a maximum and the prevention of further interstate tensions at a minimum. The outcome of these integration processes result in the dependent development of common identification throughout the region, thereby establishing a reinforcing cycle of progress in regional integration and institutionalization, which in turn will make the achievement of regional zones of peace more likely in the future.