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Participation of Regional  
Economic Communities on  
the conceptualisation and  
contextualisation of security.

The case of ECOWAS and West Africa

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## **RESUMEN:**

África es el continente con el mayor número de golpes de Estado del mundo, con 220 intentos de golpe desde 1950. A pesar de que desde el año 2000 el número de golpes ha disminuido significativamente, en los últimos años hemos visto un repunte en el que la región occidental se ha convertido en el epicentro de la escalada. En consecuencia, el aumento de la inestabilidad y la falta de democracia, desarrollo y seguridad plantean un desafío cotidiano para muchos países africanos.

El ADN de la seguridad de África Occidental ha sido determinado por un pasado colonial y postcolonial, que dejó a la África independiente con leviatanes que perpetraron desigualdades estructurales, corrupción, violencia y subdesarrollo. Esto vinculado a otros factores como la proliferación de grupos terroristas, la explotación de los recursos naturales y las diferencias étnicas, entre otros, han contribuido a formar sistemas de gobernanza débiles en los países de África Occidental.

Teniendo en cuenta la forma en la cual el pasado ha forjado la realidad de muchos países de la región del África occidental, este trabajo tiene por objeto comprender cómo se construye y se entiende la seguridad desde una perspectiva regional con "soluciones africanas para los problemas africanos" mediante el análisis del papel de la CEDEAO, una Comunidad Económica Regional, en África Occidental.

El análisis se realizará a través del concepto del "El Nuevo Regionalismo" y la "Teoría del Complejo de Seguridad Regional" para entender el efecto dominó que caracteriza la falta de seguridad en la región. Además, se empleará el concepto de "Gobernanza de la seguridad regional", pensando en la seguridad en términos de gobernanza, y teniendo en cuenta cómo los actores estatales y no estatales ejercen poder y autoridad sobre la seguridad, tanto formal como informalmente a nivel nacional y local.

En consecuencia, para entender cómo ha participado la CEDEAO en la conceptualización de la seguridad en la región, analizaré iniciativas, mandatos y acciones, al mismo tiempo que su impacto en la seguridad humana, con el objetivo de ir más allá de un enfoque centrado en el Estado.

**Palabras clave:** África, Complejo de seguridad regional, seguridad humana, arquitectura de seguridad, regionalismo, Comunidad Económica de los Estados de África Occidental (CEDEAO), dinámicas de seguridad.

## **ABSTRACT:**

Africa is the continent with the highest number of coups d'état in the world, with 220 coup attempts since 1950. Even though since the year 2000 the number of coups has decreased significantly, in the last years, we have seen an upturn in which the West region has become the epicentre of the escalation. As a consequence, the raise of instability and the lack of democracy, development, and security, pose an everyday challenge for many African countries.

The DNA of West Africa's security has been determined by a colonial and post-colonial past, which left post-independence Africa with leviathans that perpetrated structural inequalities, corruption, violence, and underdevelopment. This linked to other factors such as the proliferation of terrorist groups, the exploitation of natural resources and ethnic differences among others, have contributed to form weak governance systems across West African countries.

Taking into consideration how the past has forged the reality of many countries within the West African Region, this study aims to understand how security is built and understood from a regional perspective with "African solutions for African problems" by analysing the role of ECOWAS, a Regional Economic Community, in West Africa.

The analysis will be carried out through the lenses of "New Regionalism" and the "Regional Security Complex Theory" to understand the domino effect which characterises the lack of security in the region. Additionally, the concept of "Regional security governance" will be deployed, with security thought in terms of governance by taking into account how state and nonstate actors exercise power and authority over security, both formally and informally at a national and local level.

Consequently, to understand how ECOWAS has participated in conceptualising security in the region, I will analyse initiatives, mandates, and actions, while looking at their impact on human security, aiming to go beyond a state centric approach.

**Keywords:** Africa, Regional Security Complex, human security, security architecture, regionalism, Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), security dynamics.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Purpose and motivation:

The purpose of this paper is to understand how security is conceptualised in West Africa by examining regional security dynamics with a particular focus on the contribution to security played by regional organizations. To do so, the research will be centred on the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), as a pivotal actor in the contextualisation of security in the West African region.

Consequently, by delving into the dynamics of ECOWAS involvement, the study will aim to point out the ways in which regional organizations contribute to framing West Africa's security architecture, especially at a regional level, but also, at a national, continental, and international level.

Furthermore, the motivation behind undertaking this research derives from my personal interest and curiosity on getting to know better the particularities of security dynamics in West Africa. This region, characterized by its complexity, has for a very long time, been marked by numerous violent conflicts, which derive from, or contribute to political instability, development challenges, poverty, human insecurity, and a myriad of other challenges. For me, this paper serves as an intriguing opportunity for understanding how a Regional Economic Community like ECOWAS influences the conceptualization of security, discussing the interplay between economic cooperation and regional security dynamics.

### 1.2 State of the issue

How security is understood and studied has been changing through time due to the different dynamics the world has been experiencing. Specifically, since the end of the Cold War the term of security has broadened to encompass new actors, new threats, and new sectors. It has moved away from dominant perspectives based on state supremacy that preceded the post-Cold War era, to give way to a transcendental transformation of the transatlantic security architecture. This transformation is characterised by the fragmentation of political authority towards a diversified landscape of actors and sectors. Such complex scenario requires a new level of analysis (Krahmann, 2003).

Under the changes experienced in the security architecture, one of the most relevant has been the transition from a dominant state centrism vision, where states were practically considered

to be the only relevant actors capable of creating and influencing security dynamics through security policies, to a new structure, where regional and subregional institutions have taken an elementary role on the new complex networks in which security is caught in (Krahmann, 2003).

Like this, numerous scholars have placed their interest on the analysis of security dynamics at a regional level by looking into specific regions in the globe, such as Southeast Asia, South America, and West Africa, among others. Speaking of West Africa, it can be argued that its security architecture is characterized by its complexity and uniqueness, as historically its conceptualisation of security has been constantly hindered. In the first place, it has been affected by its colonial past, where African identity was de-emphasized in favour of a “civilised” Eurocentric governance. Precisely, this legacy was carried over to West Africa’s modern security institutions (Bryden and Chappuis, 2015) (Ifejola, 2016). Subsequently, the decolonization epoch unfolded, and it is in this time, when Africa’s contemporary history of self-governance initiated. However, the rapid onset of the Cold War caught up the continent in the middle of the contestation between Washington and Moscow, spoiling Africa’s pursuit of self-determination and increasing its vulnerability (Adesanya, 2021) (Zwanbin, 2022).

In this context, various regional organizations began to emerge in Africa looking forward to the integration and the promotion of development on the continent. Among the distinct regional organizations, one of the most relevant, which was constituted in West Africa in 1975 under the signing of the Treaty of Lagos, was the Economic Community of West African States, commonly referred as ECOWAS (Aleman, 2018). Today ECOWAS is formed by 15 members, these being: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Cote d’Ivoire, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togo (Office of the United States Trade Representative, n.d).

As the second article of the Treaty of Lagos puts forward, the elementary aim of ECOWAS and the reason behind its constitution was:

To promote co-operation and development in all fields of economic activity particularly in the fields of industry, transport, telecommunications, energy, agriculture, natural resources, commerce, monetary and financial questions and in social and cultural matters for the purpose of raising the standard of living of its peoples, of increasing and maintaining economic stability, of fostering closer relations among its members and contributing to the progress and development of the African continent (ECOWAS, 1975)

However, this original purpose was faced with numerous challenges mostly related to politically unstable region's unable to guarantee basic levels of democracy, development, and security, the three being strongly interrelated (Bryden and Chappuis, 2015) (Aleman, 2018). As a consequence, ECOWAS, willingly or unwillingly, transitioned into much more than an economic regional organization, starting to implement and develop protocols of peace and security, and therefore becoming a player in West Africa's security architecture (Aleman, 2018).

Some relevant actions which manifest this transition are: the establishment of a regional military force, ECOMOG, the revision of the official treaty, and the intervention on intrastate conflicts. Since 1990, the lack of engagement from the international community on the different intrastate conflicts in West African countries, which were clashing the livings of thousands of Africans, compelled ECOWAS to act and try to put an end to such violence. Like this, since that year, ECOWAS has intervened in Liberia, Mali, Sierra Leone, Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea Bissau and Gambia. Consequently, the revision of the official treaty was a step that needed to be taken in order for ECOWAS to have the accountability and the mechanisms to establish peace and security in West Africa (Aleman, 2018). Moreover, the outbreak of the Liberian civil war endangered the peace and security of the entire region, and as so, the Community of ECOWAS decided to carry out a peacekeeping initiative known as ECOWAS Cease-Fire Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) (Gupta, 2016) (IDEP, 1993).

Through these initiatives, ECOWAS has turned out to be a relevant actor not only in the realms of economic integration and development, but also in terms of peace and security, contributing to frame how security can be understood from a regional and integrated perspective in West Africa.

### 1.3 Theoretical Framework:

#### 1.3.1 New Regionalism Approach (NRA):

Regionalism within IR has experienced different waves that have been encompassed by the historical moment the world was caught in, and as Lambrechets and Alden (2005) put forward:

Regionalism and regionalisation are the terms used to describe, respectively, the political project of building a community of states, and the regional expression of global processes of integration and changing structures of production and power in a given geographic area.



Consequently, after World War II ended, the process of de-colonization unfolded, ushering a new influx of states. Concurrently, the establishment of the European Community as an integration process sparked interest in regional subsystems and regional integration (Kelly, 2007). In this moment, between the 1950s and the 1970s, the theory of old regionalism took shape. Within Morton Kaplans “systemic” framework, the notion of regions as “subsystems” emerged (Kelly, 2007), laying the basic premises upon which old regionalism is based on. As put forward in Figure 1: “Old Regionalism’s Chandelier”, regions were placed between the individual state and the international level. These regional subsystems were imposed in accordance with the bipolar Cold War power structure, where dominant societies exercised an “hegemonic regionalism” that dictated the formation of “subordinate regions” (Hettne and Söderbaum, 1998) (Gupta, 2016) (Kelly, 2007).

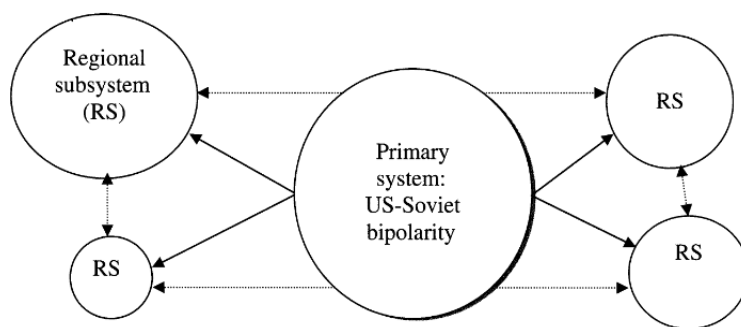


FIG. 1. Old Regionalism’s Chandelier

Later on, events taking place during the 1970s and the 1980s undercut subsystem security analysis (Kelly, 2007). But, as the Cold War ended, the rise of a multipolar system with Third World states, characterised by a greater autonomy, along with what Varynen referred as “the rebellion of the periphery”, swung back the pendulum, shifting the focal point of global conflicts, and elevating the importance of regional security theories (Kelly, 2007).

Hence, under this historical period and within the constructivist realm, New Regionalism Approach (NRA) materialised providing a distinctive analysis of regionalism, going beyond state-centric frameworks developed by realists, intergovernmentals, and liberal-functionalists, and aiming to analyse regionalisation in a multilevel and comparative perspective (Hettne and Söderbaum, 1998) (Grant, Issa, Söderbaum and Yusuf, 2022) (Gupta, 2016). Thus, new regionalist scholars aim to study regionalism from a different frame, challenging the pre-established systematic IR, which they describe as abstract, unconsciously Eurocentric and, as a consequence, unable to effectively capture regional dynamics in the “Third World” (Kelly, 2007).

This new regionalism is the product of major changes in the global sphere (Hettne and Söderbaum, 1998):

- 1- The end of the Cold War and the construction of a multipolar system.
- 2- The development of new patterns of interaction between governments and non-state actors due to the erosion of the Westphalian nation-state system.
- 3- The convergence towards a market democracy model after the 1990s with greater liberalisation and regional arrangements in developing countries (Gupta, 2016).

In contrast to old regionalism, where regions were imposed following the Cold War power structure, new regionalism conceives regional constructs emerging from different dimensions, often originating organically from within the region itself. It is therefore, characterized by a multifaceted process which takes into consideration traditional issues of trade and economic integration, but also culture, democracy, environment, identity, security, and social policy, being a more complex and exhaustive approach (Hettne and Söderbaum, 1998) (Gupta, 2016).

Consequently, through these lenses, a region is a social construct, which is created and recreated in the process of global transformation, which may be formalized in existing regional organizations (Gupta, 2016). But in order to achieve this, regions go through distinct stages which can be characterized by its formality or informality, where there is a symbiotic relationship between state and non-state actors (Grant, Issa, Söderbaum and Yusuf, 2022). Precisely, this multidimensional essence is what defines new regionalism (Gupta, 2016).

Like this, regions turn out to be the outcome of a complex interaction with the states that form them, encompassing their characteristics, desires, and strategies, along with the structures of the international system and the role and influence of social actors. Additionally, within regions shaped by developing countries, regionalism serves as a means to overcome their relative weakness in the international sphere (Lambrechts and Alden, 2005).

Finally, within NRA, the outcome of the regionalisation process is characterised by a level of “regionness”, where the region acts as a distinct identity, an institutionalised and legitimate actor, capable of creating a security community based on regional cooperation and regional integration (Gupta, 2016) (Lambrechts and Alden, 2005).

### 1.3.2 Security Governance and Regional Security Governance:

Since the beginning of the 1990s the way security is conceived and understood converted as the transatlantic security architecture changed, and an emerging security system was envisioned (Krahmann, 2003).

The notion of security broaden and widened going beyond the level of the state to societies and individuals, as the prospect of interstate war decreased, and instead “new security threats”, including environmental degradation, illegal migration, transnational crime, poverty, and human security started to be incorporated into the definition and understanding of security. This shift emphasized a focus on domestic and transnational threats (Krahmann, 2003) (Kacowics and Press-Barnathan, 2016). Specifically, human security, which was first utilised by the UN in 1994, gave space for a new understanding of security based on a “people-centric” approach. Emancipating from the traditional understanding of security centred on states and recognising security at the individual level (Zyla, 2019). These changing dynamics towards complex networks, modified the security discourse and made it interesting to think of security in terms of governance instead of government (Krahmann, 2003) (DCAF, n.d).

Regarding security in terms of governance allows to include not only the role and responsibilities of governments, but also how state and non-state actors participate positively or negatively on providing or managing security (DCAF, n.d). This view of security gives room to include both formal and informal processes, actors, and values, which turns out to be extremely useful after the Cold War ended, due to the fragmentation and complexity that security structures experienced then and persist nowadays (Krahmann, 2003). Precisely, governance refers to the orchestration of social interactions which develops due to the lack of a centralized authority at the national, subnational, or international level (Krahmann, 2003).

More specifically, Security Governance, where governance denotes “the structures and processes which enable a set of public and private actors to coordinate their interdependent needs and interests through the making and implementation of binding policy decisions in the absence of a central political authority” (Krahmann, 2003) can be understood at a local, regional, and international level. For the purpose of this paper and based on the new security environment which arose in the 1990s, it is interesting to understand more deeply the concept and implications of Regional Security Governance (Krahmann, 2003).

As the new structure of security started to mold, regional and subregional institutions started to acquire significant importance, together with other private and public actors such as non-governmental organizations or private security companies. It is crucial to note that, while this

approach extends its scope by contemplating the role played by other actors beyond states, acting as providers or direct influencers of security (Krahmann, 2003), states remain being a fundamental anchor of regional institutional security structures (Kacowics and Press-Barnathan, 2016).

Regional Security Governance has been provided among other actors by the formation of new regional organizations, as well as by the already existing but expanding regional institutions in the different regions. More precisely, even though the provision of regional security governance has been mastered mostly by security-focused regional organizations like NATO or the AU, multi-purpose regional organizations initially centred on economic or political facets have matured to also incorporate security mandates (Kacowics and Press-Barnathan, 2016).

A different array of drivers need to be understood in order to explain the emergence of Regional Security Governance and its relevance on understanding security nowadays. In the one hand, it is important to consider those factors which are exogenous and endogenous to the region, and in the other hand, the factors that generate demand of security and influence supply, based on particular security governance realities (Kacowics and Press-Barnathan, 2016).

Speaking of demand, RSG is shaped by the existing or perceived common threats of the actors involved in the region, being mostly states, but also, regional organizations, the private sector or civil society. Interestingly, in regions formed by developing countries, such as South East Asia or West Africa, RSG can be pushed or developed around the common exogenous threat of extra-regional great power intervention, or as realists would define, the imposition of “extra-regional hegemons” such as the US, China, or Russia, among many others (Kacowics and Press-Barnathan, 2016). In the same line, the dual characteristics of new threats, both of domestic and international nature, require greater cooperation and coordination, as well as a greater weight of new actors (Kacowics and Press-Barnathan, 2016).

Moreover, demand of RSG can be pushed due to endogenous factors to a given region. Whether the threats derive from inter-state or intra-state conflict, how to prevent, cope, or face these threats in many cases turns out to be a regional matter due to its spillover effect and potential repercussion on the security of the region as a whole and on the individual actors that inhabit them (Kacowics and Press-Barnathan, 2016). Precisely, in developing countries the urge to manage regional security at a regional level is greater due to their internal weakness and in extreme cases, their state failure, alongside with their willingness to safeguard their state

sovereignty through cooperation (Kacowics and Press-Barnathan, 2016). Although, this does not mean that RSG is created spontaneously, as active involvement and compromise from the different actors is needed in order to build, develop, and sustain the RSG (Kacowics and Press-Barnathan, 2016).

On the other hand, RSG supply can be provided individually or by a combination of the following actors influence and power:

- Regional Hegemons or Pivotal States
- Extra-regional Hegemons or Great Powers
- International and Regional Organizations

The nature and characteristics of each actor is different and can vary in time, form, and region. Like this, Regional Hegemons are those considered to be the most powerful actor in the region which have both the interest and capabilities of enduring regional dominance. Meanwhile, the concept of pivotal states is more flexible as it is possible for various pivotal states to coexist in the same region (Kacowics and Press-Barnathan, 2016). Additionally, Extra-regional Hegemons of Great Powers have had a fundamental role in the creation and formation of many RSG, and even though their role is similar to the one played by Regional Hegemons, their actions on the region are based on a global perspective (Kacowics and Press-Barnathan, 2016). Finally, international, and regional organizations have become decisive suppliers of RSG. At a global level and with regional repercussions, the UN became a guarantor of peace, development, and security on its own, but also by encouraging regional organizations to take an active and primary role on empowering regional security (Kacowics and Press-Barnathan, 2016).

In practice, Regional Security Governance is institutionalized in order for the different policies, plans and actions centred on the provision of security to be carried out by the array of actors involved. Such institutions are contoured by normative-ideational factors, such as, the impact of regional norms, the normative agenda played by states, as well as the direct or indirect aspirations of both governmental and non-governmental actors involved in the region. Likewise, as regions are opened entities in a constant process of evolution and influence from below, across and above, interaction with norms of other regions or other entities at a domestic or supranational level, can become a template for the institutionalisation of regional organizations (Kacowics and Press-Barnathan, 2016).

The existence and practice of Regional Security Governance by different actors but especially by regional organizations has direct impact on how security is understood in a region. Particularly, how stability, cooperation, conflict prevention, reforms, and peace, among others, can be understood due to the institutionalization of RSG and the mechanisms displayed in these terms (Kacowics and Press-Barnathan, 2016).

### 1.3.3 Regional Security Complex:

In the context of the post-Cold War international security order, the Theory of Regional Security Complexes (RSC) developed by Barry Buzan and Ole Waever, representatives of the Copenhagen School, gained relevance (Sadurski, 2022). The framework is designed to provide the basic language and concepts for specialists to study the increasing importance of regional security relations in the absence of strong existing literature on the regional level (Buzan, Waever and Wilde, 1998).

The development of the RSCT puts forward the idea that the regional level is the ideal foundation for conducting security analyses, aiming to fill the gap between what so far had been the prevalent perspectives of security studies, the global level, and the single state or national level (Sadurski, 2022). Consequently, this theory puts its focal point on regions, giving importance to the interplay of the systemic and states level, as Buzan and Waever argue them to be a better and clearer level for an empirical and theoretical understanding of the dynamics of international security (Senam Amable, 2022).

The definition of “what is a region” has been contested by numerous scholars, and in some cases, it has become ambiguous and hard to define (Senam Amable, 2022). For the purpose of this paper, we will define a region as Russett (1967) does, by referring to it as “one with geographic proximity, social and cultural homogeneity, shared political attitudes and political institutions, and economic interdependence” (Senam Amable, 2022). Although, it is important to mention, that due to the fluid nature of the concept and the unique nature of regions, which are created and recreated in the process of global transformation, the understanding of what is a region will rest relatively open (Senam Amable, 2022).

Likewise, a regional security complex is “a set of units in which the major processes of securitisation, desecuritisation, or both at once are so intertwined that their security problems cannot reasonably be analysed or resolved independently of each other” (Buzan & Wæver, 2003, p. 44; see also Thompson, 1981, pp. 216–218) (Sadurski, 2022). This new theory and its definition defers from the classic theory of RSC, as states are not the only units concerned on

making up a region and the focus of analysis goes beyond analysing the political and military sectors. Specifically, the RSCT developed by Buzan and Waever widens the group of actors that can be taken into account including non-state actors, and it includes other sectors as the economic, social, and environmental ones, as part of the regional security studies (Sadurski, 2022).

Moving on with RSCT, Buzan and Waever introduce the idea of heterogeneous complexes, where the regional logic integrates states, nations, private corporations, confederations, and much more, which interact across different sectors and as a consequence end up forming deep and reliant relations (Buzan, Waever and Wilde, 1998). Precisely, this reliance is what gives a certain level of security interdependence, which is key so that we can speak of a geographic area qualifying as an RSC (Burgess, 2021).

Moreover, to understand the complete logic of RSCT, three concepts or ideas are of paramount importance: geographic proximity, patterns of enmity or amity, and the processes of securitisation and desecuritisation (Burgess, 2021). Firstly, geographic proximity is key. Security threats travel more easily over short distances leading to potential spillover effects. This dynamic prompts geographically proximate actors to prioritize cooperative or conflictual relations, securitizing issues and actors situated within a close distance (Senam Amable, 2022). Consequently, even though, this interaction may not necessarily match or overlap a common geographically accepted region, proximity continues to be central (Senam Amable, 2022).

Likewise, regional security complexes are directly shaped by their state's spectrum of amity or enmity relations, or the ones comprised in between. Consequently, the interdependence that explains the regional security complex, can be driven by internal dynamics of a negative end, or enmity, which derives from fear or a mutual perspective of threat. It can lay in the middle, where even though competition is present, arrangements to guarantee security are put forward. And finally, it can lay on the positive end, or amity, where states do not see each other as a threat or as a potential recipient of force (Senam Amable, 2022).

Finally, even though, the definition of Regional Security Complexes has evolved, the process of securitisation and desecuritisation continue to be a fundamental pillar manifesting in regional clusters (Senam Amable, 2022). In fact, securitisation in numerous ways serves as the driving force behind RSCT, as securitising actors declare that the object of security is threatened (Burgess, 2021). In this process, and under the increasing relevance of security at a regional level, great powers which are adjacent to a region may be compelled to securitize a

situation taking place in their backyard. This strategic move would be driven by the imperative need to address and manage the security issue, as it ultimately poses a potential threat to their national security. Consequently, great powers with security aims in proximate regions will tend to provide public goods (Senam Amable, 2022).

Lastly, although RSCT is of extreme relevance on understanding the dynamics of security at a domestic, regional, and international level, it has also sustained some critiques. Denis Senam tries taking RSCT a step further by pointing out what she considers to be an important gap in the theory. She argues that Buzan and Waever studies are based on already existing regions, undermining the emergence and evolution of RSCs processes, for what she proposes the Nascent Regional Security Complex (n-RSC) Framework (Senam Amable, 2022). By the same token, Safa Ghimire questions the lack of explanation that encompasses the process of “ordering” the region from the pre-complex phase to finally being considered an RSC. On the other hand, Petr Zelinka, argues the insufficient capacity of RSCT to define the transcendental role of non-state actors, as even though they are mentioned, little attention is paid into them beyond constituting a significant force in a given region (Sadurski, 2022).

#### 1.4 Objectives and questions:

The main objective of this paper is to study how Regional Economic Communities, particularly ECOWAS, can contribute to conceptualising security in a given region, in this case in the West African region.

Moreover, some specific objectives are:

- 1- Understand the security dynamics that characterise the West African region nowadays by diving into its past and exploring the ongoing trends.
- 2- Achieve a conceptualisation of security beyond a state-centrism vision, giving importance to the recognition of other actors, sectors and threats which affect state security but also human security.
- 3- Asses the impact of ECOWAS security-related policies and initiatives, as well as the challenges and consequences of such influence and intervention.

In addition, the main question this paper will try to answer is: How has ECOWAS contributed to shaping security in West Africa?

Some secondary questions the research will look to answer are:



- 1- What are the prevailing trends in regional security within West Africa?
- 2- How has the conceptualisation of security changed in West Africa? What have been the main drivers?
- 3- Have ECOWAS security actions had a considerable and measurable impact on the security dynamics in West Africa? Have its actions ameliorated human security, or on the contrary, has there been negative repercussions due to its intervention?

### 1.5 Methodology:

To examine the role played by regional organizations on the conceptualisation and/or contextualisation of security, I will carry out a qualitative research, in order to achieve relevant insights and to do so critically.

In order to do so, I will firstly examine how different IR theories and frameworks can be applied to critically analyse the regional conceptualisation of security in West Africa. To do so, I will use the insights of the New Regionalism Approach, Security Sector Governance and Regional Security Complexes.

To add on those insights and to make them West African specific, I will consult the existing academic literature, policy documents and specialized publications regarding regional security in West Africa. I will do so to figure out the complexities of how security is understood and exercised regionally, but also to comprehend its repercussions at a sub-national, continental, and international level.

Finally, I will carry out an inductive approach by analysing the particular case of Mali as an example of a country in the region which has undergone numerous security challenges, and where the role of a regional entity like ECOWAS has had an impact in security terms.

## 2. SECURITY DYNAMICS IN WEST AFRICA:

### 2.1 Security in West Africa

Security, its roots, causes and implications have been part of the human reality since time immemorial. In behalf of security wars have been fought, people have been “saved” or “killed”, societies and countries have “evolved” or “retreated” and the world has been shaped. Thus, the dimensions of security are vast and contested and its implications for people all around the world are real, relevant, and profound. However, security and all that moves around it, is characterised by its dynamism and its uniqueness as, even though there are important

interconnections between security matters and its dynamics, security can be studied and understood in numerous ways depending on what is studied and observed, who carries out the observation, what effects are being measured and, on whom, among other things. As such, and in regard to the analysis in question, it is fundamental to study and dive on how security has shaped West Africa and vice versa, how West Africa has shaped security. For doing so, a critical historical analysis on West Africa's diverse realities, characteristics, influences, and so on, needs to be performed.

Historical and context-specific knowledge of West Africa in relation to security, peace or conflict have often been interpreted and represented simplistically, without really considering the reality of local dynamics and consequently falling in the trap of given stereotypes which mostly come from an external and western vision (Charbonneau, 2017). So, even though, this has been the prevailing approach for many years, and in some cases, much of the stereotypes regarding security in West Africa persist, researchers have made an effort to grasp how security in West-Africa is lived by attending the complexity and particular aspects that determine it. Hence, although terrorism, state failure, diseases, autocratic regimes, among other things, are clear symptoms of insecurity that resonate in West Africa, it is fundamental to study this problematics by comprehending the structural conditions that generated them (Charbonneau, 2017).

The question, "Whose West Africa?", as Bruno (2016) suggests, "points to the interactions and struggles between a number of forces and actors to construct, perform, and/or enact West Africa". Accordingly, the distinct practices of security take part in the production and formation of states, regions, and their dynamics, constituting the entities that seek protection and regulation (Charbonneau, 2017). Hence numerous facets intervene in the interplay of security, and in the case of West Africa these facets are amplified due to the region's colonial past, the direct consequences embodied in its security architecture, and the subnational, national, and international perception of it. In fact, to further understand the security architecture detached in West Africa, it will also be important and interesting to take into consideration the discrepancy between "how security is understood in the lived experiences of ordinary people, and how it is practiced by professional security personnel" (Aning, 2021). Therefore, even though security has been clearly institutionalized through different organisations, laws and mechanisms, the subjectivity of it all, will always be present, and grasping this will grant us with the opportunity to realistically understand the meaning of the concept of security from a

more complete and sincere perspective, by asking us questions like, whose peace is being pursued, and for what purpose? (Charbonneau, 2017).

It is fundamental to picture that Africa is not an isolated entity, it is ingrained on a wider and more complex reality, that is, the whole world with its billions of distinct people, cultures, businesses, countries, and interests. Consequently, as part of a greater world, it is subjected to constant interactions and influences that regardless of their nature, can end up inflicting both positive and negative consequences. As such, it is not a surprise that some of the already existing internal dynamics and problems in West Africa, have been amplified and have worsen in certain moments of time due in part to the global dynamics the world was caught in. And if to this we add that West Africa comprises 16 states which have directly been influenced by a mixture of colonial experiences, the complexity of it all is intensified (Ebo, 2007).

As a way of illustration of how severe and transcendental external forces or dynamics can be on shaping the future of a country, a region, or in this case even a continent, it is striking to see how the formation of the state was moulded in West Africa. When colonial powers arrived in West Africa their main objective was to exploit the regions resources for their interest regardless of its implications for the West African inhabitants, their culture, or their economic development. These dynamics of governance were passed on from the colonial powers to the political elites that succeeded them, and as such the continuity of exploiting those same institutions and their own citizens was pursued for their private gain (Aning, 2021).

This being said, researchers have arrived to consensually determine that the root causes of most of the obstacles Africa has faced and continues to face nowadays in terms of security, and as such in terms of development and democracy, have to do with a bad economic and political governance that goes back to pre-colonial and colonial times (Gibert, 2007). The governance habits that originated then, have never been overcome, and they have turned out to be the main reason behind the conflicts and insecurity Africa, and West Africa in particular, are embedded on nowadays. In fact, following the outcome of historical events, as countries in West Africa started to detach from the colonial powers in the 1960s, a new world of opportunities regarding self-governance emerged. New questions such as, who we are?, or how do we project ourselves?, started to enter the discourse and opened the space for years of contestations between the ideals of more tolerant societies and on the contrary the establishment of authoritarian means of governance (Aning, 2021).

The aforementioned led West African countries to many years of violent conflict and crises that were originated from the incapacity of the newly independent states to accurately determine their identity and therefore what was their role and what actions should be pursued based on it. This situation of struggling to understand “who we are” continued during approximately 40 years, until in the early 1990s, when a new period of optimism in terms of transparency, democratic processes and greater development unfolded (Aning, 2021). Unfortunately, after the bipolar world came to an end the early optimists soon vanished as violent conflicts sprawled through the region. The promises for democracy and prosperity that seem to surface, turned to disgrace as its leaders turned out to be unable to lead, failing to run the newly created institutions, and therefore, failing to deliver (Aning, 2021).

The historical trajectory of Africa, the decisions made by the different actors involved in the African reality, and their respective role, have profoundly influenced the contemporary conception of West Africa. These influences extend across its political, cultural, and social structures, shaping its dynamics and resulting in significant consequences at a subnational, national, regional, and international level. Consequently, taking in mind how history has formed the current reality, it is of paramount importance to see what actors were involved, how they were involved, how they evolved through time, and what implications they had on shaping the current security architecture of West Africa.

## 2.2 Main actors:

To fully comprehend how the concept of security has built in West Africa, how it is understood and materialised, it is crucial to analyse the impact the different actors that have intervened on West Africa have had. Since West Africa has experienced important changes throughout history, different actors have played distinct roles depending on the era being taken into consideration. As such, some actors have maintained a consistent presence, others, initially crucial, have seen their influence disappear, and some have recently emerged as pivotal. In the case in hand, when speaking of West Africa, what is most intriguing but at the same time most complex, is the imperative need to include an analysis on a myriad of actors which defer in nature and origin, as we need to analyse state, but also “non-state” actors, as well as external and internal actors.

Importantly, one of the main objectives of this paper is to explore the concept of security by moving away from a state-centric approach to encompass the impact other actors have had on transforming and defining West Africa’s security landscape. Mostly as, since the 1980s, the

meaning of security has been widely contested and a process of “securitization” of political, social, or environmental issues has been taking place, and issues such as terrorism, infectious diseases, or transnational crime have entered the security narrative and have started to be considered direct security threats (Krahmann, 2003). However, despite these awareness of other security problems and actors which have made security become a multifaceted reality, the anchor of many of the security dynamics and of its architecture continues to be the state (Kacowics and Press-Barnathan, 2016).

*The state in West Africa:*

All West African states have encountered considerable political, economic, and social challenges through history. Interestingly, even though, some of these challenges have rose and have perdured due to causes outside the states reach, others can be directly linked to the nature of states in West Africa. More specifically, Aning (2021) argues that West Africa’s states have find it difficult to mature from their condition during the colonialism epoch. Consequently, they have been caught between modernity and tradition, leading them to complicated contestations as the newly independent states seeking for modernity arose. As Ekeh (1975) explains, the experience of colonialism led to what he refers as the “two publics”. The first one being the civic public or citizens, which alludes to a political collective which holds certain rights, privileges, duties, and obligations. And the second public referring to the traditional or “primordial public”, which are centred on safeguarding customary rights, thus positioning individuals as actors which regard their duties as moral obligations to nurture and sustain an alleged primordial or traditional sphere (Aning, 2021). The coexistence of these two publics and their differences, led many West African states to disputes over how the governance of the state should be enhanced, leading to an identity crises that culminated in the increase of violence throughout the region (Aning, 2021).

Despite this fight for governance between traditionality and modernity, a period of optimism where many West African states evolved and welcomed democratic processes took place, allowing for democratic elections to materialise. However, these recent advances in democratization were soon shadowed by the take-off of the Liberian civil war, which signalled the beginning of new violence and conflict (Marc, Verjee, and Mogaka, 2015). In consequence, the advances in electoral democracy were not translated to real democratic consolidation, leaving states with incipient and promising processes of “institutionalization of political power”, weak and exposed to the control of authoritarian and undemocratic regimes (Iwilade

and Uchechukwu, 2012). Indeed, the occurrence of democratic recession can be detected by looking to the increase the region has experienced in human rights violations and the rise in military coups.

The consequences for security and for the people living in the region are palpable, and as it has been mentioned the roots can be in part directly linked to the ingrained nature of the state in West Africa. It's incapacity to manage its colonial past and enact modernity relegated "state power" as a tool for authoritarian regimes to expand their personal gains, completely excluding civil societies and therefore eluding any type of genuine collective approach centred on working for what it is good for the people (Seiyefa, 2022). This means that the state in West Africa has failed to provide and guarantee public security, as the focus has been centred on guaranteeing the survival of a reduced group of elites by defining security institutions and practices that at times have directly threaten human security. Importantly, and due to the reality that has just been presented, in West Africa the state has at no point in time had the monopoly of legitimate force, and this is the starting point to comprehend how security is understood and lived in West Africa compared to other places (Ebo, 2007).

#### *Non-state actors:*

Since the end of the Cold War the impact of non-state actors and non-state means of coercion has increased significantly. The security vacuum left due to the growing trend of governments stepping back from their duty of guaranteeing peace and security has been filled by other actors (Ebo, 2007). Like this, within the frame of security governance, which refers to the system and processes that allows a group of different parties to coordinate their needs through binding policy decisions to realise individual and collective freedom from fear, non-state actors—both profit and non-profit, armed, an unarmed, internally, and externally located— have directly influenced security governance (Krahmann, 2003) (Ebo, 2007). Besides, it is important to mention that governance can be achieved by both, the provision and the jeopardization of security. Consequently, non-state actors which are originators of security and insecurity should also be considered, as they are part of the "push and pull" which results is the de facto governance of security (Ebo, 2007).

In West Africa there are an array of non-state actors whose role has been reinforced due to the historically alienated character of the state (see Figure 2: Typology of Non-state Actors in Security Governance in West Africa). Therefore, in order to adequately grasp the security thinking, provision, and oversight, it is fundamental to study an expanded typology that will

recognise the multiplicity of actors beyond the state and other commercial security contractors. Even though, the amount of non-state actors is wide, in West Africa, the most influential have been (Ebo, 2007):

- International non-governmental organizations (INGOs): they have been key in post-conflict policy environments. They have played a vital role in exposing human rights violations as well as on reporting about the security environments of West African countries heavily affected by conflicts.
- Private military security companies (PMCs): although the history of foreign mercenaries goes a long time back, the 1960s and the 1970s turned to be the “golden age of mercenaries in Africa”, as it was when, in order to prevent the proliferation of democratic aspirations, these mechanisms of security were heavily used. Since the 1990s until today, PMCs continue to be relevant in the security arena for multinational corporations, humanitarian agencies, peacekeeping organisations, among others.
- Local mercenaries: they are indigenous and locally based mercenaries, which have previously been child soldiers, and which have been involved in many of the conflicts of the region since the end of the Cold War. Their existence is mostly due to the fact that West Africa is highly populated by young people which have found it difficult to be employed due to poor socio-economic conditions.
- Civil society: despite their crucial role for achieving local ownership of security governance, the exclusionary attitude adopted by West African governments and military institutions, have made civil society in West Africa face numerous challenges as its role has been continuously limited by the prevailing security structure.
- Criminal networks: they are in fact small groups of people trying to make a living by exploiting historically established trading routes. Interestingly, in many cases, even though from an external view, these networks are regarded as destabilizing forces that generate insecurity, many African communities which benefit from these activities, look up to these individuals or groups honouring them to the point that they consider them the kind of “modern-day Robin Hoods” (Aning, 2021).

- Armed groups (NSAs): this typology includes, rebel opposition groups, local militias, warlords, civil defence forces and paramilitary groups. Interestingly, West African states have found themselves in some cases confronting armed opposition factions, and in others, benefiting from their support.

Level	Types	Examples	Activities
Global	International NGOs	International Crisis Group; Amnesty International; Human Rights Watch; Democratic Control of Armed Forces	Reports & policy analysis on security governance, human rights, SSR support; DDR support
	Private military/security companies	Military Professional Resource Inc.; Executive Outcomes; Sandline International; DymCorp	Consultancy, training, logistics, combat
Regional & sub-regional	NGOs & civil society networks	African Security Sector Network; West African Civil Society Forum; African Strategic & Peace Research Group; West Africa Network for Peacebuilding; West African Network for Security & Democratic Governance; West African Action Network on Small Arms	Research & analysis, advocacy, conflict resolution, policy dialogue, training
	Criminal networks		Small arms & light weapons production, trans-border crime, human & drug trafficking, illicit trade in natural resources, fraud
National	Think-tanks, NGOs & individuals	Centre for Democracy & Development; African Security Dialogue & Research; Centre for Law Enforcement Education in Nigeria;	Research & analysis, advocacy, policy dialogue, training
	PSCs		VIP security, security for homes & businesses, consultancy, training, logistics
	Media		Reporting, public information, agenda setting
	Criminal networks		Robbery, area control, arms & narcotics trade, human trafficking
Sub-state	Armed groups	Revolutionary United Front; Liberians United for Reconciliation & Democracy; Odua People Congress; Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra; Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta.	Combat for or against governments; hostage taking; policing & law enforcement, debt collection, vigilantes
	Sub-state		Informal community policing, administration, traditional judicial & oversight mechanisms

Figure 2: Typology of Non-state Actors in Security Governance in West Africa (Ebo, 2007).

*External states:*

Security policies and dynamics in West Africa have been heavily influenced by a range of external actors, including other states. Without a doubt, and as it has already been mentioned, the colonial era marked the history of West Africa not only in the reduced period of time where colonial powers governed the region, but also once they left, as many of the security dynamics, practices, and structures they inflicted endure till today (Ismail and Shöns, 2014). This being said, the motives behind external states interest in the African continent have varied through time.



Prior to the colonial epoch, external actors shaped security in Africa through different methods. These included the signing of security-related agreements, such as political alliances, as well as the exploitation of Africa's natural resources and trade networks (Ismail and Shöns, 2014). These practices ultimately led to the colonization of numerous territories in Africa, as European countries sought to impose their colonial rule. Despite the independence achieved by West African countries, the majority of the African states kept closely tied to their former colonial rulers through different defence and security agreements (Ismail and Shöns, 2014). This power of influence of the colonial actors, even after the new African states emerged, portrayed what has become a troubling reality for Africanism, the constant overlay of external actors in their affairs and thus the perpetual suffocation of local dynamics.

Likewise, even though during the Cold war, most African countries joined the Non-Aligned Movement with the hope of eluding being aligned with either the US-led Western bloc or the Soviet-led Eastern bloc, their strong and enduring ties with their former colonial powers made such alignment inevitable. Anyhow, once the Cold War reached an end, the "magnified Africa's geostrategic value" that was perpetrated by external actors disappeared (Ismail and Shöns, 2014), and it will not be until the 1990s where a revived external interest on Africa kicks in. Interestingly, this revival comes with a new influx of external actors such as Brazil, China, India, South Korea, or the Arab states of the Gulf, which start to lay their eyes on the African countries due to their interest in Africa's economic resources and its potential growth but also, due to the rising security issues and their exponential ramifications and implications for the wider international community (Ismail and Shöns, 2014).

#### *International, regional, and sub-regional organizations:*

The role played by international, regional, and subregional organisations in West Africa became strongly relevant since the end of WWII, experiencing an uptick in the years that proceeded the decolonisation process. The consequences created by the proliferation of conflicts and the spread of insecurity through West Africa called international organisations to try and restore peace and security through international co-operation and programs directed to solving the economic, social, cultural, and humanitarian crises West African countries were caught in (Ceesay, n.d). Similarly, regional, and sub-regional organisations emerged with the purpose and aspiration of fostering a more united, developed, competitive, peaceful, and secure region. Importantly, although both international and regional organisations aimed to enhance conditions in West Africa, regional and sub-regional organisations approach was firmly

grounded on trying to solve African problems through the African way. Consequently, this approach aimed to free the region from the external influences that have long shaped its development.

That being said, the links between West Africa and arguably the most important international organisation, the UN, began when Liberia became a full member of the organisation in 1945. Since then, the role of the UN in West Africa has been key in influencing the setup of African regional organisations such as the Organization of African Unity (OAU), or what then became its successor, the African Union (AU), as well as on leading important security and peacebuilding operations. Similarly, African organisations priorities after independence have been mainly centred on upholding peace and security, making subregional organisation such as ECOWAS, initially focused primarily on economic matters, transition to adopt broader security perspectives. As the philosophical principle asserts, “without peace and security, there is no sustainable social and economic development” (Siradag, 2012).

All in all, it is interesting to notice the array of actors that play a relevant role in conditioning both positively and negatively the security dynamics in West Africa. Thus, in order to effectively take into account the multitude of actors and grasp their interconnectedness with many of the region’s security issues, as well as to understand their power dynamics, it is fundamental to select the appropriate theory. The Regional Security Complex Theory emerges as essential for capturing the complexities that derive from the multifaceted dynamics outlined in the West African region.

### 2.3 Regional Security Complex Theory:

As it has already been discussed, security can be understood in multiple ways. Thus, the approach adopted to analyse it, it’s decisive. Since the end of WWII and the emergence of new states due to the subsequent decolonization period, the idea of studying important phenomena such as security at the regional level and as such from a regional perspective, gained relevance among the community of researchers. Consequently, if we consider a region to be the “outcome of a complex interaction with the states that form it, encompassing their characteristics, desires, and strategies, along with the structures of the international system and the role and influence of social actors”, it is thought-provoking to comprehend how security in West Africa has been moulded as a product of the regions dynamics (Lambrechts and Alden, 2005).

Precisely, employing the Regional Security Complex theory offers us the opportunity to focalise the analysis on the region. Buzan and Waever defend that this approach provides a

clearer framework for both, an empirical and theoretical understanding of security dynamics (Senam Amable, 2022). Therefore, understanding a regional security complex as a ““a set of units in which the major processes of securitisation, desecuritisation, or both at once are so intertwined that their security problems cannot reasonably be analysed or resolved independently of each other” (Buzan & Wæver, 2003, p. 44; see also Thompson, 1981, pp. 216–218) (Sadurski, 2022), is crucial for evaluating whether West Africa can actually be considered a Regional Security Complex (RSC), based on its intrinsic regional characteristics that will either corroborate or challenge this classification.

Respectively, the particularities and complexities of West Africa’s history, the alienated nature of its states, the myriad of non-state actors directly influencing the everyday provision of security and the consequences in social, economic, political and security terms that have derived from it, convert West Africa into an intriguing case to study from the prism of the Regional Security Complex theory. Indeed, even though, in some cases, it has been discussed how West Africa lacks the basic characteristics to be considered a RSC, in reality, according to Buzan and Wæver’s definition, West Africa does meet the attributes that determine a RSC, although, it does so partially, depending on the moments of time being analysed. Consequently, it will be argued that West Africa RSC has struggled to become a fully-fledged complex and it will probably continue to do so due to the persistence of destabilizing changes coming from the state itself, external actors, or non-state actors (Burgess, 2021).

One of the main determinants so that we can speak about a geographic area that qualifies for a RSC, is the existence of certain levels of security interdependence between the different actors involved in the region. In the case of West Africa, the existence of what has been defined as premodern states— “weak states at the beginning of the long road to build a functioning state and also failed states where strong sub-state actors affect security” (Varga,2020) — has had significant implications. As a result, most of the newly created African states lacked the capabilities to hold and exercise their sovereign power, giving space for personalised, authoritarian, and corrupt regimes that made states become internally unfit and perpetuating their incapacity to hold legitimacy, sovereignty, and influence not only at the national level but also regionally, continentally, and internationally (Varga,2020). This prevalence of mostly premodern states in West Africa, does not preclude the possibility for the existence of a RSC, but it definitely marks the security dynamics experienced within the region.

Despite these states' weakness, there has been many clear moments in West Africa's history, where the actors that form the region, conscious of the increase in internal and violent conflicts and their limitations to halt them, have reached their neighbours in different forms. In many instances, neighbouring countries have decided to securitise certain threats that were contemplated in essence as exogenous to their interests. However, due to the spill-over effect, characterized by high probabilities of neighbouring nations insecurities spreading into the region and potentially affecting their own country, has led them to view these security threats as shared concerns. The most evident illustration of it is how West African states have turned to ECOWAS, originally established as a subregional organisation focused on the promotion of co-operation and development in all fields of economic activity (ECOWAS, 1975), for security enhancement.

There are many examples of how ECOWAS has strengthen West Africa's possibility of being considered a RSC. One could be how the 1980s invasion of northern Chad by Qaddafi, followed by his sponsorship of other insurgent movements in West Africa, led the states in the region to agree on the establishment of an ECOWAS Protocol on Mutual Defence Assistance, adopting an amity approach to combat what they viewed and formalised as a common security threat (Burgess, 2021). Conversely, the same has happened, but from an enmity stand point, where for example, the opposition in the 1980s of Burkina's Faso and Cote d'Ivoire's leaders to the ECOMOG interventions led to subsequent negotiations rooted in regional enmity. These negotiations ultimately resulted in temporary peace in West Africa (Burgess, 2021).

Nonetheless, the lack of regional hegemons or simply strong states, capable to strengthen security cooperation through the building of amity or enmity, has meant that West Africa's RSC is weak and limited. An example of it, was the incapacity of Nigeria to suppress the Boko Haram and ISWAP insurgencies that started in 2009 (Burgess, 2021). In fact, and due to this lacking power, West African RSC has often relied on external actors such as the UN or France to stabilize insurgencies, thus constraining West African RSC's foreign policy autonomy. Consequently, as it can be inferred, we can speak of the existence of a West African RSC, as the region encompasses the basic characteristics that determine a Regional Security Complex, but due to its particular complexities, influences and dynamics, West Africa's RSC is subjected to thinness and weakness (Burgess, 2021).

#### 2.4 Security challenges:

Inferred from all the above analysis, we have already been able to comment on some of the most important security challenges West Africa as a region faces. Challenges that have emerged mostly due to a complex historical path and that are therefore in many cases deeply intertwined between them (Seiyefa, 2022). These challenges have marked the region with certain dynamics, which, in turn, have fostered the exploitation of corruption, underdevelopment, and insecurity, directly impacting the everyday life of West African citizens. More precisely, some of the main security challenges its citizens, governments, and the region as a whole face are:

- 1- The region has been facing constant democratic recessions due to the retention of power and control from authoritarian or undemocratic regimes that still perdure in many countries. This possess one of the major challenges for the security of the region and for the people, as these regimes tend to foster state power completely excluding the role of civil societies. As a consequence, security provision is completely personalised with institutions being ruled by unprofessional people centred on increasing their personal gains and thus undermining the effective management of the security institutions (Seiyefa, 2022).
- 2- The questioning of power legitimacy as well as the direct exclusion from politics and the benefits from economic growth despite the abundance of certain resources, has fuelled longstanding grievances among a marginalized youth population. This dissatisfaction has often ended in the radicalization and the manifestation of violence as a means of protest (Aning, 2021). Different criminal networks and organised crime have proliferated due to their capacity to attract these young and frustrated individuals, who have rebelled against the status quo and looked out for alternative ways of livelihood and expression. The spread of these criminal groups and activities constitute a direct threat for everyday security, and pose an added challenge to the national, regional, and international forces or organisations trying to reduce the levels of crime and vulnerability.
- 3- Despite the increase of regional organisations fight on countering conflict and violence, their lack of full support and their insufficient capacity to enact effective and stable mechanisms for conflict containment, reduces their opportunity of setting perdurable peace and security. As a result, the region is incapable of achieving certain stability that

guarantees development, and instead, other problems such as poverty, income disparities or diseases, are being amplified causing greater security challenges (Seiyefa, 2022).

### 3. ECOWAS ROLE IN WEST AFRICAN SECURITY

#### 3.1 Creation and Evolution of ECOWAS:

West Africa's regional security architecture has evolved significantly over the years, but it is with the end of the Cold War and when regionalism gains force, shifting the focal point from the global sphere to the regions, when the analysis of security through a regional prism becomes decisive. Parallely, the increased interests on integration processes following the creation of the European Community, led to the nascency of regional subsystems and regional integration processes around the globe (Kelly, 2007). Within this context, regional organisations in Africa such as the African Union, the G5 Sahel, or ECOWAS emerged (Seiyefa, 2022). Like this, as the new security structure in West Africa starts to mold with the newly independent states, these regional and subregional organisations begin to gain relevance.

Focusing our attention on ECOWAS, the largest regional community in West Africa, constituted in 1975, the main purpose of its foundation was the promotion of West Africa's economies integration (Seiyefa, 2022). Like this, the founding treaty signed in Lagos by the 16 members of what then became the organization, was exclusively concentrated on economic and social integration matters, leaving aside any peace or security concerns (Iwilade, and Uchechukwu, 2012). But how could ECOWAS ignore security matters, if we have argued that West Africa has been designated as one of the worlds key trouble spots? (Seiyefa, 2022). For that, we need to go back to what it has already been described as one of the primary causes of instability and insecurity in West Africa —its historical past. It should be pointed out that the statist view of security that was lived during the Cold War and was imposed by external forces in Africa, ultimately also ended up affecting ECOWAS. It did so, by creating a perception of security completely disconnected from reality, a view that implicated a stasis conception that ignored the numerous challenges to its security that social contradictions represented. Thus, ECOWAS perception of security challenges was structured in this manner.

However, the impossibility to carry out economic integration and foster development through it, due to the extensive security challenges previously pointed out, demanded ECOWAS to

reshape itself. The assumption of regional peace and security was unfeasible, so, following the logic of the demand for Regional Security Governance, the existence of these common threats in the region, made ECOWAS mold and adopt a major role as a primary regulator of regional security in West Africa through the promotion of peace and the management and resolution of conflicts (Iwilade, and Uchechukwu, 2012). As a consequence, ECOWAS has transformed to not only lead its economic integration mandate, but also to actively counter terrorism, promote democracy and combat organised criminal activities (Seiyefa, 2022). In fact, ECOWAS acquired role in the security architecture and dynamics of West Africa, is a clear example of the growing importance of governance over government, particularly in the realm of security governance. As new security threats and new actors appeared, the most traditional understandings of security were challenged, widening the scope of security analysis (Gupta, 2016). Consequently, Security Governance gives us the possibility to study the complexities of security by also incorporating the role and responsibilities played by state actors but also non- state actors like ECOWAS (DCAF, n.d). What is more, as Krahmman argues (2003), Regional Security Governance, allows us to do so by shedding the light on the region, serving as the stage where the complex relations of the different actors and the resulting implications manifest and unfold in political, social, cultural and security dimensions.

Like this, the explosion of ECOWAS's institutional structures regarding security has been motivated mainly because of three reasons that refer to exogenous factors, as well as endogenous factors that characterise the region. Firstly, the emergence of intrastate conflicts in the region after the Cold War signalled the necessity for ECOWAS to develop its mechanisms and adapt them to the complex reality that was defining the region. More specifically, the eruption of a significant wave of conflicts during the 1990s in countries such as Liberia, Guinea, or Sierra Leone, urged the organisation to take the necessary steps to respond effectively and appropriately. Secondly, ECOWAS acknowledgment that it was time to address African problems through African plans and initiatives was realised, especially as global attention waned. Consequently, this made countries such as Nigeria look on intensifying their efforts on actively engaging on resolving challenges emanating from their neighbouring countries, adopting the role of a Regional Hegemon (Iwilade, and Uchechukwu, 2012). Finally, the increased prevalence of security problems with transnational implications, made some state actors realise their inability and limitations to effectively safeguard their own territories. This reinforces the idea that, in certain instances, addressing security challenges requires a

framework beyond the nation-state level, where regionalism serves as a way for weaker countries to overcome their limitations (Iwilade, and Uchechukwu, 2012).

### 3.2 Mechanisms and initiatives of security developed by ECOWAS:

ECOWAS realisation of the imperative need to dedicate some of its efforts on dealing with the security complexities of the region and as such with the root causes that originate them, was inevitable. The extended instability and insecurity portrayed across the region rendered it impossible for ECOWAS to perpetrate greater levels of economic development and integration without tackling such deeply rooted obstacles. Hence, what started as a multi-purpose regional organization originally centred on economic facets matured to also incorporate security mandates (Kacowics and Press-Barnathan, 2016). Specifically, in the case of West Africa, due to the particularities of the region, the existence of regional institutions or multilateral alliances partially or fully devoted to the promotion of peace and security turned out to be central on the hope of effectively implementing security instruments and policies (Seiyefa, 2022). Like this, ECOWAS has remained as the premier institution of regional governance, serving as the primary forum for the establishment of normative consensus on a wide range of issues (Iwilade, and Uchechukwu, 2012).

Consequently, since ECOWAS initiated its transition towards incorporating security matters, it has pushed to strengthen and institutionalize Regional Security Governance in West Africa through the promotion of numerous security mechanisms. These policies have consolidated themselves as key pillars of the organisation's architecture and as binding tools enabling for the coordination and implementation of security practices in the region. The first indicators that illustrated the initial approach of ECOWAS towards security were, the adoption of the "Protocol of Non-Aggression" in 1978 and the "Protocol Relating to Mutual Assistance in Defence" in 1981, as well as the establishment of a Defence Council and a Defence Commission (Iwilade, and Uchechukwu, 2012). However, these materialized more as symbolic gestures towards security rather than decisive and practical mechanisms. In fact, in this period of time, when a conflict erupted and security issues were brought into play, ECOWAS preferred to regard the conflict as an internal affair (Iwilade, and Uchechukwu, 2012). However, the breakout of the Liberian crisis and the increased pressure on neighbouring countries due to hundreds of thousands of refugees crossing the borders, led ECOWAS to reconsider its stand on security.



Like this, it is in 1990s when ECOWAS for the first time actively engages in a conflict, in this case, in the Liberian crisis, by deploying thousands of troops via the ECOWAS Ceasefire Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) (Iwilade, and Uchechukwu, 2012). Despite the hope and efforts from ECOWAS to obtain a peace settlement leading to elections, the situation in Liberia worsened. Seeing no other alternative, the creation of ECOMOG was pushed forward mostly due to the insistence and leadership of Nigeria on its creation. Hence, ECOMOG was aimed to “conduct military operations for the purpose of monitoring the ceasefire, restoring law and order to create the necessary conditions for free and fair elections to be held in Liberia” (Howe, 1996). This marked a historic step on ECOWAS role as a guarantor of regional security. As, besides the materialisation of security action in Liberia, ECOMOGS creation and implementation meant ECOWAS was creating a precedent of regional cooperation, and parallelly, as Chike Akabogu wrote, “it signalled to the rest of the world that African nations were also ready and capable to responding to critical economic, political and security challenges of the new world order, without prompting from erstwhile colonial powers” (Howe, 1996).

Following, the creation and deployment of ECOMOGS force in Liberia, ECOWAS continued to adapt its structures in order to effectively face the security complexities of the region. Like this, in 1993, ECOWAS revised its Treaty, signalling a shift that aimed to prioritize democracy and the rule of law as the new frameworks for pursuing economic integration and development (Iwilade, and Uchechukwu, 2012). By the same token, in 1999 and 2001 a major step forward was taken in terms of security with the adoption of what have become the two most essential normative bodies of ECOWAS security architecture. Both normative bodies are a clear example of ECOWAS commitment to promoting and adopting measures looking to reinforce regional security governance (Kacowics and Press-Barnathan, 2016). The first one being the “ECOWAS Mechanisms for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security” of 1999, and the second one, the “Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance” of 2001 (Williams and Haacke, 2008).

The Mechanisms for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security of 1999 was adopted with the purpose of strengthening ECOWAS conflict prevention capacity with the integration and further development of different initiatives and mechanisms of security (Seiyefa, 2022). The Mechanism introduces 58 articles and 14 objectives, which’s aim is to tackle transnational challenges, cross-border crimes and in general, conflicts contributing to the expansion of insecurity and instability in the region. The main institutions

constituted to rule the Mechanisms in question are: The Authority of Heads of State and Government, the Mediation and Security Council (MSC) and the Executive Secretariat (Williams and Haacke, 2008). The first institution is in charge of guiding the MSC on the proper decisions that should be carried out regarding the Mechanisms provisions. Meanwhile, the MSC shall take the decisions regarding the issues of peace and security on behalf of the Authority (ECOWAS, 1999). It is composed by nine member states, seven elected by the Authority for a two-year term, while the remaining two are the current and immediate past chairman of the Authority. The MSC achieves a quorum when 2/3 of its members are present, and decisions are made through a 2/3 majority vote of the present members (Williams and Haacke, 2008). Finally, the Executive Secretary, has the power to initiate the actions for conflict prevention, management, resolution, peacekeeping, and security adopted (ECOWAS, 1999).

Furthermore, the above-mentioned institutions that conform the Mechanism, can count with the direct assistance of the Defence and Security Commission, the Council of Elders (eminent personalities), and ECOWAS Cease-Fire Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) for technical assistance and expertise, but also for the observation and monitoring of the interventions (Williams and Haacke, 2008). Consequently, through this body of institutions and their decisions, the main objective the Mechanisms pursue, which is to strengthen co-operation in order to prevent early conflicts and maintain and consolidate peace, security, and stability within the Community, aims to be achieved (ECOWAS, 1999). To accomplish this, and as it is stated in Article 25, the Mechanisms may be enforced in cases of (Williams and Haacke, 2008):

- Aggression or conflict in any member state or threat thereof
- Conflict between two or several members
- Internal conflict that threatens to trigger a humanitarian disaster or which poses serious threats to the peace and security in the region
- Serious and massive violations of human rights and the rule of law
- The overthrow or attempted overthrow of a democratically elected government
- Any other situation decided by the Mediation and Security Council (MSC)

Moving on, the Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance adopted in 2001, complemented the 1999 Mechanisms by putting the focus on the importance of understanding the root causes of insecurity and thus addressing them to achieve stability (Iwilade, and Uchechukwu, 2012).

By doing so, this Protocol adopts a human security approach where numerous factors directly concerning individuals' security are brought up, such as education, individual human rights or poverty (Zyla, 2019). The Protocol contains 12 constitutional principles, such as the separation of powers, legitimate means for accessing power or proper civil-military relations, to which all members state subscribe (Williams and Haacke, 2008). Likewise, the Protocol puts forward the rules for conduction democratic elections and the role of ECOWAS in guaranteeing them. As well, it establishes norms which refer to the different existing security forces and it authorizes through Article 45 (Seiyefa, 2022) for ECOWAS to: "in the event that democracy is abruptly brought to an end by any means or where there is massive violation of Human Rights in a Member State, ECOWAS may impose sanctions on the State concerned" (Williams and Haacke, 2008).

Besides these two main protocols that provide the institutional and normative context for ECOWAS response to security challenges on the region, it is important to also mention other minor agreements that complement the security architecture ECOWAS has built (Williams and Haacke, 2008). As we will see, many of the protocols that have been furtherly adopted respond to more specific problems that have been detected in the region through the pass of the years, and which contribute somewhat to destabilizing the region. Some of these are:

- 1991: The Declaration of Political Principles in the pursuit of freedom, people's rights and democratisation within the community (Seiyefa, 2022).
- 2006: Protocol for the establishment of the Criminal intelligence and Investigative Bureau (Seiyefa, 2022).
- 2006: Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons (Seiyefa, 2022).
- January 2008: ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework (ECPF) (Iwilade, and Uchechukwu, 2012).
- 2008: Political Declaration on the Prevention of Drug, Abuse, Illicit Drug trafficking and Organised crime in West Africa (Seiyefa, 2022).

As it can be inferred from the preceding paragraphs, it is crystal clear that ECOWAS, apart from its economic integration mandate, evolved in order to become a major security actor in the region. This evolution has been marked by the adoption of numerous mechanisms, conventions and initiatives aimed at proactively addressing transnational challenges in the region. These efforts contemplate not only the more obvious and common type of conflicts and their resultant insecurities, but also, delve into recognising the root causes of such insecurities,

aiming to tackle them through preventive mechanisms and effective responses (Seiyefa, 2022). Nevertheless, the development of ECOWAS security architecture and its application across various countries and scenarios have not come without difficulties, limitations, or criticisms.

### 3.3 Challenges and limitations:

Many scholars have argued how ECOWAS has become the leading light on the promotion of peace and security for the region and even for the whole continent (Seiyefa, 2022). However, as we will aim to discuss, it is important to address the numerous challenges that come on scene, largely attributed to the intricate dynamics of the region, its historical context, and the specific characteristics of ECOWAS. These factors, among others, collectively constrain ECOWAS ability to effectively ensure security in West Africa. For instance, as it has been presented previously in the analysis, the security challenges West Africa endures are plentiful and diverse, making it practically unachievable for ECOWAS but also for national governments, or other security providers to effectively deal with them.

To start with, one of the primary limitations for ECOWAS effective participation in West Africa's regional security provision is its lack of capacity and capability. The deficiency of capacity can be detected based on the insufficient troop numbers and their poor readiness and professionalism. This shortfall often results in ECOWAS inability on fighting against illegitimate occupations carried out by violent extremist groups. Additionally, this capacity deficit can also be explained in terms of economic resources, mainly due to the member states constraints on meeting their finance commitments in pro of the regional organization (Seiyefa, 2022), which, moreover, can serve as an example based on Buzan and Waever (2003) RSCT of why West Africa's Regional Security Complex is weak and limited. On the other hand, the lack of capability is manifested in ECOWAS inefficiency on implementing its mandates. Consequently, even though ECOWAS has strived to establish a comprehensive and exhaustive security architecture through the richness of the different protocols, conventions and mechanism created, simply formulating these security policies and mandates does not ensure violence, conflict or insecurity will be reduced (Seiyefa, 2022). In essence, for this to happen, the established measures need to be effectively implemented, but not before greater cooperation is pursued, either because of stronger amity or enmity relations (Senam Amable, 20022).

Another challenge stemming from ECOWAS lack of capacity and capabilities is its significant reliance on external forces for managing the conflicts and the violence of the region. Like this, despite the idea of ECOWAS being the vehicle for African solutions to Africa's problems, the

reality indicates the existence of a regions inclination to address security problems with an approach based on external solutions (Seiyefa, 2022). Consequently, various bilateral treaties between African nations and their former colonial powers regarding military intervention abound. This poses a considerable obstacle for ECOWAS, given the intricate nature of these relationships and the diverse views among West African countries regarding external influences over defence matters. Such complexities, make it extremely difficult for ECOWAS to achieve a cohesive community willing to take a collective approach on tackling regional security threats. This can be noticed in the example of France's intervention in Mali or Burkina Faso. However, even though this undermines the possibility for achieving sustainable regional security, we should ask ourselves, what would actually happen if France decided to suddenly remove its 5000 troops and assets arranged in the region? (Seiyefa, 2022).

Nonetheless, the dependency is not only external, but also internal centred on the figure of Nigeria as a regional hegemon. Although Nigeria's efforts to bolster ECOWAS has provided the organization with the opportunity to become stronger and realise its role as a mediator in West Africa's security governance, the community has attained an overwhelming dependence on the nation. To the point that some have argued that ECOWAS eagerness to continue providing peace in the region depends on Nigeria's willingness and capacity to continue keeping up with the military, political and financial costs directed towards the organization. However, the issue extends further, as this overreliance places Nigeria in a privileged position concerning power, control, and legitimacy within the organization, leaving ECOWAS vulnerable to the inclinations and caprices of a single country (Iwilade, and Uchechukwu, 2012). To illustrate the role of Nigeria as a hegemon in the region and as a significant contributor to the functioning of ECOWAS, we can point to Nigeria's pivotal role in the nascency of ECOMOG. It was Nigeria's President, Ibrahim Babangida, who advocated for the creation of the Standing Mediation Committee (SMC), a group of five ECOWAS members, which ultimately gave life to ECOMOG (Howe, 1996).

Furthermore, a deficit of long-term strategic thinking and the prevailing power imposition of strong personalities, has contributed to not only weaken national security agencies, but also ECOWAS security architecture. The widespread of regime protection endangers human security, as political elites look on politicising the existing security services and mechanisms to maintain their grip on power. Hence, there is a prevailing sense of politization in the region, with ECOWAS occasionally being influenced by it. This has directly limited its capacity to be taken seriously by every actor intervening in the region, as ECOWAS tacit support of certain

semi-authoritarian leaders signalled how in reality, democratic values can be infringed and ignored without regional repercussions. This has resulted on ECOWAS contributing to increase elites' protection over the broader security of the region and its inhabitants, thereby eroding ECOWAS credibility and effectiveness (Seiyefa, 2022).

Likewise, certain scholars have argued that the absence of a holistic security strategy where ECOWAS is capable of combining both military and non-military commitments, or the inability to implement such strategy when it does exist, limits ECOWAS capacity to truly focus its attention on providing security to the citizens as the central objective of its policies. This turns out to be a major challenge as it restricts ECOWAS engagement with social movements and civil society, jeopardizing potential collaborative relationships with other key stakeholders in order to carry out a more coherent and human-centred security response (Seiyefa, 2022).

Finally, despite the challenges and limitations that ECOWAS faces in its role as a security provider in West Africa, throughout the years the organization has consistently demonstrated its resilience by readapting its mandate. Thus, over the years, ECOWAS has proactively adjusted its strategies to tackle insecurity and boost stability, development, and democracy. The organization has reshaped and remodelled its institutional structures in order to better adapt to the realities of the 21<sup>st</sup> century conflict management organization (Iwilade, and Uchechukwu, 2012). Continuing this trajectory, ECOWAS must persist in refining its security architecture and mechanisms in order to overcome its limitations and truly aim to step-up on guarantying a more secure and prosperous West Africa.

#### 4. ECOWAS AND THE SECURITY CONCEPTUALIZATION IN MALI

##### 4.1 Historical Background:

Mali, located in West Africa, is characterised by a territory which encompasses three distinct areas: the Sudanese, Sahelian and Saharan zones, each marked by varying climatic conditions and vegetation. It is a landlocked nation where about two-thirds of its land is constituted by the three northern regions (Timbuktu, Gao, and Kidal) as it can be regarded in *Figure 3: Map of Mali* (Oficina de Información Diplomática, s.f) (Buyoya, 2015). Its borders limit with Algeria to the north, Mauritania and Senegal to the west, Guinea, and Côte d'Ivoire to the south, and Burkina Faso and Niger to the east. Mali ranks among the world's poorest countries, occupying the 186<sup>th</sup> out of 191 countries of the Human Development Index (HDI). Its economy relies heavily on agriculture and mining, these sectors representing 34% of Malis GDP, with the country being renowned as a significant gold exporter (Oficina de Información Diplomática,

s.f). The country is home to very different tribes and ethnic groups, with Mande (Bambara, Malinke, and Soninke) accounting for 50%, Fulani for 12,9%, Voltaiques for 12%, Songhai for 6%, Tuareg for 5%, Moors for 5% and others around 5% (Okon Ndem, 2021). Interestingly, while Tuaregs make up only 5% of Mali’s population, Mali hosts about 33% of all Tuaregs in the Sahel region, the largest concentration among all countries in the area. 90% of the population are Sunni Muslims, although after Mali gained independent in the 1960s the country has witnessed an increase of Wahabbist and Salafist Islam (Okon Ndem, 2021).



Figure 3: Map of Mali (Marie Cold-Ravnkilde, 2013)

It is mostly well-known that Mali has become increasingly unstable, with its inhabitants bearing the impact of rising conflict, violence, and terrorism, alongside a series of coups d’état in recent years. To gain a thorough and appropriate understanding of Mali’s evolving security landscape and to explain its conceptualization and contextualisation within the country, it is crucial to look back into its historical context. Mali’s security evolution is deeply related to the internal characteristics that define the country and that have been presented briefly in the preceding paragraph, but also, to other more complex and mixed realities and factors, which together have played a significant role in shaping the future of Mali and its population.

However, the turbulent situation that Mali faces nowadays was not always like this. Despite experiencing various rebellions and conflicts since gaining independence from France on September 22, 1960, during nearly 20 years Mali was considered a promising example of democracy in Africa, being praised by foreigners for its parliamentary institutions, the

existence of free press, and the possibility for conducting relatively fair elections (Marie Cold-Ravnkilde, 2013) (Buyoya, 2015). Then, how can it be explained that Mali has become a nation plagued by recurrent security crises directly inflicting a long-standing troubled and impoverished reality? To unravel the complexities of Mali's security dynamics, it is imperative to carry out a context specific analyses that enables us to determine the most influential factors.

The "supposedly" bright years of Mali's democracy were soon overthrown by the military coup of March 2012 and what resulted to be one of the most challenging security crises Mali has ever experienced. While numerous factors contributed to this setback, the primary triggers were: the gradual fragmentation of political and social institutions which accounted to the fragility of the Malian state ruled by a growing corrupt political elite which neglected their role as the main providers of security and basic services; the increasing marginalization of the north of the country revealed in the Tuareg unrest and their fight for greater state acknowledgement and recognition; the propagation of criminal networks; and the emergence of terrorist groups capable of attaining increased power and control (Marie Cold-Ravnkilde, 2013). All these complex realities subjected Mali and its people to being exposed to years of violence, fear, insecurity, and despair. The gravity of some of the conflicts and their potential spillover effect on Malis neighbouring countries and the wider region, as well as on other foreign nations, converted Mali into a focal point for regional and international intervention and cooperation (Marie Cold-Ravnkilde, 2013).

To fully comprehend how these triggers started to boil themselves up, it is crucial to take a step back and provide a brief view of the successive cycles of armed rebellions that took place in the north of post-independent Mali, along with their subsequent spread into the central regions. Since Mali achieved independence four cycles of rebellions, which can be referred to as the "Tuareg rebellions" can be depicted (Buyoya, 2015):

1. 1963-1964 cycle: this rebellion known as "Alfellaga" was a manifestation of the Tuareg tribes' dissatisfaction against the hostile attitude of the newly independent Malian state, which had adopted a serious of modernization policies which directly affected the lives of the nomadic groups (Marie Cold-Ravnkilde, 2013). The uprising was ruthlessly suppressed without the need for any peace agreement, leaving the Tuaregs even more marginalized than before in political, social, and economical terms (Buyoya, 2015). This situation in addition to the devastating consequences of the major droughts the northern regions suffered between the 1970s and the 1980s forced many Tuaregs to flee



to Libya, Algeria, and other West African countries in the lookout for a place that would enable them to sustain their living (Marie Cold-Ravnkilde, 2013).

2. 1990-1996 cycle: known as Al-Jeba, the rebellions that took place in the 1990s were marked by a clear separatist agenda. In response, Moussa Traoré, which was the president at the time, declared a state of emergency at the north, mobilizing the army. In face of this mobilization, further violence was unleashed, culminating in the 1991 military coup. Violence continued against the national army, and it was through two peace agreements, the Tamanrasset Agreement, signed in January 1991, and the National Pact, signed in April 1992, when the violent clashes started to reach an end. It is imperative to mention that one of the main impellers working to end violence and find common ground between the confronted forces was Algeria (Marie Cold-Ravnkilde, 2013) (Buyoya, 2015). Importantly, the overthrow of president Traoré and its military rule came with significant changes, as Alpha Oumar Konaré gained control and initiated a decentralization reform. This reform constituted a major step forward as it made way for a multi-party democracy which allowed for greater popular participation and dialogue and for the realisation of a political pragmatic solution to the Tuareg conflict, recognizing their demands for greater autonomy and self-rule (Marie Cold-Ravnkilde, 2013).
3. 2006-2007 cycle: a new Tuareg rebellion emerged mainly due to internal power struggles and the violation of some of the premises covered under the National Pact of 1992. The rebellion was led by Ibrahim ag Bahanga, and compared to the previous ones, it lacked popular support, as the motives sustaining the urge to fight and the conflict itself started to become less clear. Peace was signed in 2006, leading to a gradual decline of state authority in the northern region, and consequently paving the way for what has become one of the major challenges Mali faces nowadays in security terms, the proliferation of criminal networks and terrorists' organisations (Marie Cold-Ravnkilde, 2013) (Buyoya, 2015).
4. 2011-2012 cycle: this rebellion has become without a doubt, the greatest source of insecurity Mali has experienced in its recent history. The characteristics of this uprising differed from the previous insurgencies as it had the additional challenge of being mixed with criminal and terrorist activities, as well as it was being led by ex-combatants

who had fought in Libya and returned to Mali following the civil war. Concretely, four were the main groups tucked in it, even though their drivers for doing so differed. This were: the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA), Ansar Dine, al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and the Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO). In 2012 the attacks intensified, and the MNLA occupied the three northern regions (Gao, Timbuktu, and Kidal) proclaiming an independent Azawad for the sake of the Tuaregs. The occupation took place at the same time that President Amadou Toumani Touré suffered a coup d'état, leaving an institutional crises behind which facilitated the rapid ascend to power of the armed movements. The clear collapse of the state and their incapacity to halt the armed groups filled these factions with confidence to extend their operations beyond the north of Mali. The rapid deterioration of the situation, the Islamic uprising which almost led Mali to an Islamization of the country and its break-out, called for the French to carry out a military intervention, known as, "Operation Serval" (Okon Ndem, 2021). In 2013, the northern regions were liberated and the Ouagadougou Agreement of June 18, 2013, was signed, allowing for presidential and legislative elections to be held and for a gradual recovery of state authority in certain territories (Buyoya, 2015).

Following the end of the fourth cycle in 2014 and the beginning of the Malian dialogue headed by Algeria, in June 2015 the signing of the Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation between the Malian Government and the Coordination of the Azawad Movements took place (Baudais, Bourhrous and O'Driscoll, 2021). The agreement was primarily concerned with the northern regions, considering the centre of Mali as secondary. Consequently, in spite of the situation been held more stable in the northern regions, insecurity and violence started to propagate to central Mali, specially to the centre region of Liptako Gourma, were the MLF, a group operating under the control of Amadou Kouffa, began to gain power increasing the likelihood of jihadist insurrections (Baudais, Bourhrous and O'Driscoll, 2021) (Tobie, 2017). The display of a jihadist front in central Mali became palpable and was aimed at widening their field of action beyond the norther regions, looking to expand their ideological discourse and amplify their destabilizing capabilities (Tobie, 2017). The propagation of violence enlarged the already complex security scenario, hindering even more the lives of the civilian population, and deterring the possibility of finding a lasting solution that will guarantee peace and security for the nation.

Therefore, even though major progress was made, including the ascension of Ibrahim Boubacar Keita to the presidency and the implementation of some of the key measures planned in the June 2015 Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation — such as, the creation of the Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission, the appointment of the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) and Integration Commissions, and the launch of the National Security Reform Council (RSS)— sooner than later instability struck again (Oficina de Información Diplomática, s.f). The stalled implementation of certain aspects of the Peace Agreement, together with the increased alienation between the political elite and the populace due to the endemic corruption of Keita's government, created fertile ground for a resurgence of conditions reminiscent of those witnessed in 2012 (Okon Ndem, 2021).

In August 2020, Colonel Assimi Goita led a group of soldiers on carrying out a coup d'état, forming the National Committee for the Salvation of the People (CNSP), which led to the establishment of an interim government presided by Bah Ndaw, the former Defence Minister, with Colonel Assimi Goita serving as Vice-President. Initially, with the mediation and constant supervision of ECOWAS, the transition process towards civil rule seemed to be moving in the proper direction. However, in May 2021, Colonel Assimi Goita instigated another coup d'état which resulted in the arrest of the President and the downfall of the Government, leading to the formation of another Transitional government. Under the persisting instability, ECOWAS, and other organizations such as the AU imposed sanctions and suspended Mali's membership, exerting pressure on the coup leaders (Oficina de Información Diplomática, s.f). Since then, the situation has only gotten worse, marked by a persistent escalation between the central government and non-state armed groups. This ongoing conflict only contributes to exacerbate the everyday insecurity experienced by the Malian people, perpetuating a cycle of unrest, instability, and poverty.

All in all, Mali has converted its grounds in the nucleus of violence and precariousness as a result of decades of unfavourable socio-economic conditions, elite's involvement in corruption, state fragility, the unrest, and conflicts with the Tuaregs, and the vacuum of power that facilitated the rise of the jihadist phenomenon. All these aspects have contributed to increase insecurity in the nation but also beyond it, to a regional and international level (Okon Ndem, 2021). In fact, the amplification of security threats beyond the Malian borders underscored the imperative for regional and international cooperation, as the complexities of the conflicts made it unbearable for the Malian state to face the whole gamut of these challenges (Buyoya, 2015). Specifically, and as it may have already been inferred, the role played by Algeria, France, the

UN, ECOWAS, and the AU, among others, has been decisive in determining the course of Mali's history.

#### 4.2 ECOWAS role in Mali:

The history of Mali stands out for its convulsiveness and complexity. Since its independence and as Ndem Okon (2021) puts forward, "Mali has experienced five military coups and Tuareg rebellions, four transition to civil rule programs and five unimplemented North-South peace agreements, as well as a democratic turnover". The consequences of these events on the everyday security of the nation and its people have been and continue to be dreadful and multiple. Consequently, considering the numerous security dilemmas that befall from the internal situation of Mali, as well as their impact on the rest of the region, it is imperative to ask ourselves, how has ECOWAS, the largest regional community in West Africa, and the primary regulator of regional security through the promotion of peace and stability in the region, contributed to trying to solve such complex security problems in Mali? Has ECOWAS implemented any of its security mechanisms in the country? In such case, what have been the impacts of such implementations? What contributions has ECOWAS managed to achieve when managing security?

In order to effectively gather the information concerning ECOWAS role in Mali and to critically interpret it, the analysis will be carried out following the methodology adopted on the previous section, with a focus on emphasizing the relevance of the insights provided by Buzan and Waever's RSCT. This entails a context-specific analysis centred on the historical evolution of the most important events concerning security in Mali. Like this, the analysis will focus on specifically pinpointing instances of ECOWAS intervention or the absence of thereof in the conflicts that have been outlined in the preceding section, and it will furtherly consider the implications of such instances on moulding the security dynamics of Mali. As it was previously mentioned, the unique and complex characteristics of the conflicts Mali has suffered, and the incapacity in many instances for the Malian state to effectively face them, urged for external intervention.

Consequently, during the different conflicts, Mali has experienced the intervention of multiple actors, both endogenous and exogenous. Concerning the exogenous actors, these entail the Malian neighbours, like Algeria or Niger, but also ECOWAS, the AU, and extra-continental ones such as France (Okon Ndem, 2021). Their presence and role during the distinct conflicts varies significantly. In the case of ECOWAS, and even though before the Tuareg rebellion of

2012, several conflicts had already agitated Mali, it was not until the 2012 cycle of insecurity when ECOWAS ushered an active role mostly centred on diplomatic manoeuvring and the mobilisation of troops for the sake of Peace Support Operations (PSOs) (Okon Ndem, 2021). At this point, it may be important to ask ourselves, why didn't ECOWAS commence to take an active role on the promotion of security in Mali until 2012 if Mali had already experienced three other significant conflicts? The response to this question could be related to three main reasons:

1. ECOWAS was formed in 1975, which leaves out the possibility of it intervening in the first cycle of violence (between 1963-1964).
2. ECOWAS was created at first majorly as an organization centred on economic and social integration matters. It was not until the wave of conflicts in the 1990s erupted in the region that ECOWAS started to question its role, acknowledging the need for the organisation to contemplate security matters as prior. Like this, ECOWAS role as the region's peace guarantor did not start until the 1990s, when it actively engaged in the Liberian crisis. Thus, in the 1990s its attention and efforts regarding security were mainly directed towards Liberia, practically ignoring the second cycle of conflicts in Mali.
3. The third cycle that took place between 2006 and 2007 was mainly regarded as internal and Algeria was already playing a mediating role in trying to reach a solution. Consequently, the presence of ECOWAS during this cycle was null.

The gravity of the 2012 crises was such for Mali but also for the region that the need for regional security governance resurfaced. Thus, ECOWAS took the necessary steps to intervene, driven by the change the organization encompassed internally in terms of its security architecture, but also, and more importantly, due to the alarming severity of Mali's security situation as a consequence of the crisis outlived. The clear inability of the Malian state as the central political authority to effectively combat the escalating insecurity, the presence of growing terrorist forces in the conflict, and the direct appeals for assistance from Mali itself but also from proxy countries such as Niger or Senegal, who feared the high probabilities of the crisis spilling over their territories, called for the direct participation of ECOWAS on working for peace and stability in Mali and in consequence for the region (Marie Cold-Ravnkilde, 2013).

ECOWAS actions to establish a democratic transition in Mali were centred in three levels: diplomatic, technical, and political. The first steps ECOWAS adopted were centred on

diplomatic and political efforts (Adewumi Bakare, 2023). Like this, and jointly with the AU, ECOWAS condemned the unconstitutional change of government and began to elaborate a plan that would concentrate its efforts towards achieving the restoration of constitutional order in the country (Buyoya, 2015). However, even though ECOWAS path towards the management of political transitions or conflicts is usually based on a traditional liberal peace approach, in some instances, and it was in the case of Mali's intervention after Amadou Sanogo 2012 coup, ECOWAS adopted a blended way, combining the liberal peace approach with military intervention (Adewumi Bakare, 2023). More specifically, the main instruments which give meaning to ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework (ECPF) and enabled ECOWAS to respond to the Malian conflict were amongst others, the Protocol on the Mechanisms for Conflict Prevention of 1999 and the Protocol of Democracy and Good Governance of 2001 (Okon Ndem, 2021).

But, before adopting any kind of military intervention, ECOWAS adopted different measures looking to mediate and restore stability through a diplomatic approach. For this, besides publicly condemning the coup, ECOWAS suspended Mali from the organisation, and it sent Alassane Ouattara, ECOWAS president at the moment, to Bamako where Ouattara was in charge of transmitting to the Military junta that they had a 72-hour window to transfer power to the embattled administration. The unwillingness to do so, pushed ECOWAS to adopt further measures which included, freezing the Malian state accounts in the West African Central Bank, freezing the junta's assets, and carrying out border closures (Okon Ndem, 2021). These pressures led Sanogo to be prone to engage in discussion with ECOWAS. Consequently, ECOWAS opted to appoint President Blaise Compaoré of Burkina Faso as the official mediator of the crisis (Buyoya, 2015). This appointment resulted key, as Compaoré was able to reach a Framework Agreement for the restoration of constitutional order. This Agreement was signed with the military junta the 6<sup>th</sup> of April of 2012, and it encompassed the transfer of power from the coup leader, Sanogo, to the Speaker of Parliament, Dioncounda Traoré (Buyoya, 2015).

In order to monitor the progress being made in this transition to civil rule, ECOWAS along with the AU and the UN co-chaired the newly created Support and Follow-up Group on the Situation in Mali (SFG) (Buyoya, 2015). Likewise, ECOWAS engaged in a dialogue with the different armed groups and held different summits trying to make sure that every effort was being made on trying to resolve the conflict diplomatically. However, and despite continuing to bet for a peaceful path, the gravity of the situation took ECOWAS and other actors involved to consider the possibility of a military intervention and therefore be prepared for its

deployment. Consequently, with the support of France, an extra-regional great power, ECOWAS proposed a military intervention with 3.000 combatants of its Standby Force (ESF) for the ECOWAS Mission in Mali (MICEMA), then AFISMA (Okon Ndem, 2021). However, the scepticism of the UN and other Western governments in regards to ECOWAS ability to effectively deploy these forces and undertake such a complex mission, the blocking of Algeria and Mauritania, and the attempt by the armed groups to expand the crisis through further parts of Mali in January 2013, led the UN Security Council to transform AFISMA, that had been a mission carried out from a regional level with external support, into the United Nation Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA). This change essentially assimilated the military and police personnel of AFISMA, incorporated new recruits in order to face the “re-hatting” process, and displaced ECOWAS role on the military side to a secondary level (Buyoya, 2015) (Okon Ndem, 2021).

The crises of 2012 ended with the election of Boubacar Keita as Malis President in the 2013 elections and with the Algerian mediated peace agreement. However, the delay in implementing the agreed-upon aspects of the Agreement, alongside other internal problems causing socio-economic discontent, made ECOWAS rapidly become aware of the high stakes for a new political turmoil. Under this scenario, ECOWAS held several summits with the different heads of state in order to discuss and monitor the situation. Despite ECOWAS efforts on trying to critically comprehend the underlying causes of the discontent and its provision of specific recommendations aimed at improving the situation, violence erupted nonetheless (Okon Ndem, 2021). At those instances ECOWAS initiated a new approach based on a diplomatic stand by appointing Dr. Goodluck Jonathan, former Nigerian President, as the mediator of the conflict, and deploying a mission on Mali in accordance with its Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance (Okon Ndem, 2021).

Regardless of the steps adopted, in August 18<sup>th</sup>, 2020, Colonel Goita commanded a military takeover. ECOWAS repeated the steps taken when the 2012 coup took place, and it therefore condemned the coup, imposed sanctions, and prepared the ESF for a possible deployment (Okon Ndem, 2021). A transition process commenced, with ECOWAS consenting to extend it for 18 months until the 27<sup>th</sup> of February of 2022, when new presidential and legislative elections were scheduled to take place (Oficina de Información Diplomática, s.f). During this period ECOWAS leadership was key on monitoring the progress made by continuously assessing the changes that were being implemented. Importantly, during this process it is key to highlight that ECOWAS approach looked on allowing for the real participation of civil

society groups, thus treating the conflict with a more people-centred integration view (Khadiagala, 2018). But, in May 2021, a coup within a coup took place and the President and the government were detained (Adewumi Bakare, 2023). At first, ECOWAS reaction lacked the necessary entity, but as time passed and the materialization of elections seemed to vanish, ECOWAS imposed further economic and financial sanctions, as well as the closing of the different frontiers. Finally in 2022, after ECOWAS agreed on putting a limit to the transition in June 2024, the sanctions were removed (Oficina de Información Diplomática, s.f).

Unfortunately, the 27<sup>th</sup> of January 2024, Mali, along with Burkina Faso and Niger, countries which had also recently faced coups d'état, announced their decision and plan to withdraw from ECOWAS (Westcott, 2024). In a joint statement they based their decision on the argument that ECOWAS had “drifted from the ideals of its founding fathers and spirit of Pan-Africanism”. They further explained how ECOWAS had fallen under the influence of foreign powers and had been incapable of tackling some of the most concerning and devastating threats affecting their people, jihadist violence (Wong, 2024). These decisions come with severe consequences for ECOWAS unity and *raison d'être*, as it manifests how despite the efforts and actions adopted, the situation has only been getting worse, and not only in Mali, but in the whole region.

As it can be seen, ECOWAS activity on Mali gained importance since the 2012 crisis, and since then, ECOWAS has adopted various decisions and implemented diverse mechanisms aimed at restoring security in Mali. However, success has been limited as conflicts have succeeded themselves without granting the Malian people any lasting stability or security. It is no secret that the Malian crises constitute a complex mixture of national, regional, and transnational security challenges, surpassing the capacity of any single actor to deal with it effectively. However, what has been the true impact of ECOWAS? Could its role in the Malian conflicts been more effective? What factors have constrained ECOWAS' ability to effectively improve the situation?

#### 4.3 Outcomes of ECOWAS Mediation in Mali and lessons learned:

Numerous scholars have argued how ECOWAS realisation of the dramatic rise of violence in West Africa and its willingness to adapt and become an organization committed to enhancing cooperation in security, is already a major step forward towards working on achieving peace and development (Onyinye Jacinta, Ruth Caleb, and Muchammed Baban'Umma, 2023). However, willingness is not everything, as for peace and security to be guaranteed,



effectiveness on preventing, managing, and containing conflicts and their subsequent propagation of violence and insecurities are elementary. This is why, it is of paramount importance to critically examine if ECOWAS intervention in Mali was effective and helped the Malian state and its people restore security, or in the contrary, and as some critiques will argue, was in reality far from successful.

ECOWAS efforts on dealing with the Malian conflicts have earned her respect both at the regional and international level. However, even though ECOWAS mediation could be seen as very exhaustive as it was a prolonged approach that encountered not online political and diplomatic negotiation processes, but also technical, military and on the ground activities, it can be argued that ECOWAS intervention in Mali came with little or no success (Onyinye Jacinta, Ruth Caleb, and Muchammed Baban'Umma, 2023). This is due to very different factors, some which respond to the own internal characteristics of ECOWAS and its limitations, and others which are exogenous to the organization, and that therefore do not depend directly of ECOWAS mandate, but do have directly affected its ability to face the conflicts. These factors are:

- 1- The existing gap between ECOWAS aspirations and its capacity. Despite ECOWAS efforts on guaranteeing a secure community, the increased complexity that define the new threats arising in West Africa, the challenging terrain of Mali, together with ECOWAS deficient funding and lack of equipment and forces, prevent it from adequately dealing with the conflicts and achieving the desired outcomes (Okon Ndem, 2021). As a way of illustration, ECOWAS internal limitations became apparent in its dependency on Nigeria. This posed a challenge and affected ECOWAS effectiveness when intervening in Mali, as due to the organization's reliance on Nigeria and the fact that the country was experiencing its own internal crisis when the Malian conflict erupted, ECOWAS encountered shortages in manpower and resources, leading to a slower pace in achieving peace in Mali (Onyinye Jacinta, Ruth Caleb, and Muchammed Baban'Umma, 2023).
- 2- The interest of other countries such as Algeria or France hindered ECOWAS possibility of resolving the conflicts effectively, as there was a need for greater coordination, decision-making was slower, and the distinct interests of the actors intervening on the conflict overlapped (Onyinye Jacinta, Ruth Caleb, and Muchammed Baban'Umma,

2023). This being said, considering the complexity of the conflicts and ECOWAS capacity limitations, it could also be argued that without these other actors' involvement, ECOWAS prospects for solving the conflicts would be even lower. Therefore, the presence of other actors, despite it sometimes meant relegating ECOWAS to a secondary role on the peace negotiations, could be seen more as a complementary and enabling factor than a hindrance (Okon Ndem, 2021).

- 3- The possibility of developing a comprehensive process of democratization and demilitarization were incomplete as ECOWAS lacked the capacity to really understand the root factors that explained the conflicts. As depicted, Mali's conflicts stem from a complex and alienated reality where many factors such as, ethnicity and religious affiliations, played a significant role. Consequently, ECOWAS efforts on restoring democracy by trying to offer the Malian people basic democratic rights, such as the right to vote, made no sense, as it first needed to adequately tackle the root causes that were precisely preventing those people from exercising those rights (Onyinye Jacinta, Ruth Caleb, and Muchammed Baban'Umma, 2023). For example, ECOWAS showed zero tolerance for unconstitutional change in Mali, but did not condemn or mobilised itself to tackle the excess of those in power, the lack of freedom of the Press, or the lack of openness in government transactions, among other things (Okon Ndem, 2021).

As a result, despite ECOWAS mediating efforts in Mali and the admirable advances made in security terms in some instances where ECOWAS exercised without a doubt a catalyst role on restoring constitutional order, peace, stability and democracy in the country, the reality remains that Mali has lacked lasting stability since 2012. Our historical analysis highlights a recurring pattern: just as one conflict appears to be resolved, another one emerges in its wake (Onyinye Jacinta, Ruth Caleb, and Muchammed Baban'Umma, 2023). Regrettably till today, the situation in Mali remains deeply severe. Regardless of ECOWAS intervention and occasional glimpses of progress, the reality of the Malian people continues to be characterised by insecurity, underdevelopment, instability, violence, terrorism, and poverty.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The capacity of granting security has always been a primordial aspect of every society. Without it, the potential for development, growth, and prosperity of the nations and its people is consistently hindered. The absence of security means the perpetuity of violence, conflict, the

violation of human rights, instability, poverty, and much more. Consequently, even though every nation has historically strived to cultivate security, since the end of the Cold War, how security is understood and the aspects that influence it have evolved, making it necessary to consider new actors, threats, and sectors, as well as new levels of analysis.

In the case of West Africa, how security is understood and how it works forms part of a much complex reality. The analysis carried out reveals how the colonial legacy West African countries experienced, profoundly influenced its modern institutions, contributing to explain the root causes that till today cause the myriad of insecurities and challenges the region faces. One of the main inherited elements was the governance dynamics, based on the exploitation of the existing institutions above the citizens for the private gain of the colonial power initially, and, since independence, of the different political elites. The struggle to understand who West Africa is since independence, left many states in the region incapable to mature from their condition in the colonialism era. This incapacity to enhance modernity has led them to complex contestations that in many cases have culminated in state failure and the hazard of human security.

The security vacuum left due to this inability, prompted other actors to step up and assume the role of security providers. As highlighted in the paper, and following the logic behind the foundations of the theories of Regional Security Governance and Regional Security Complexes, ECOWAS transition into much more than an economic regional organization by incorporating security mandates and mechanisms in order to become a major player in West Africa's security architecture, is an example of it. Mostly since 1990, ECOWAS has immersed itself in a constant process of readaptation in the lookout for greater resilience, better strategies, and more adequate mechanisms and measures that enable the organization to effectively act as the most relevant and competent security provider of the region. ECOWAS efforts and its ambitious security framework have proven effective in some instances of democratic violations, terrorism, organised crime, and various conflicts, directly contributing on sustaining a better outcome for peace, stability, and human security in the region.

Nevertheless, despite ECOWAS efforts and contributions on conflict management, peacekeeping, and democracy promotion for the benefit of West African inhabitants, the unique and complex characteristics behind the security dynamics in West Africa present significant challenges. As a result, ECOWAS contribution has been constrained, and its

capacity on inflicting lasting peace, security, and development, remains limited. Thus, ECOWAS faces a considerable journey ahead in realizing these goals. An example of this, has been illustrated by analysing ECOWAS intervention in Mali. Since the organisation actively engaged in the crisis Mali was experiencing in 2012 through the display of numerous mechanisms and actions that contained political, diplomatic, and military elements, certain progress was indeed made. However, the results of such achievements were soon obscured by the escalation of more conflicts, violence, and terrorism, all of which persist to this day.

Consequently, despite ECOWAS emerging as a major provider of security in the region, despite the steps it adopted to evolve into becoming a more well-prepared multi-faceted organisation, despite the different actions adopted and its influence on positively ameliorating the security environment in which the region is immersed, the inherent complexity of the region, coupled with the internal and external limitations of ECOWAS, have suffocated its ability to attain real peace and stability. The recent withdrawal of Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger from ECOWAS, opens the doors to critically question and further analyse if ECOWAS existence as a regional organization striving to promote peace, security, stability, and development by fostering a common space for cooperation among West African countries, civil society, and other organizations, will one day be fully realized. For now, ECOWAS must remain committed to enhancing its security framework, and most importantly, to addressing its limitations to genuinely strive to achieve a more secure and prosperous West Africa despite the numerous barriers.

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