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THE MAP IS NOT THE TERRITORY: GOVERNANCE, HYBRIDITY AND THE APSA IN MALI

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Dissertation

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Wilfrid Laurier University

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the politics and assumptions underlying regional security governance in Africa through the prism of the challenges posed by the intricacies of domestic governance in the Sahel. Based on a study of the actions of Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the African Union (AU) during the conflict in Mali (2012-), this dissertation argues that at the core of the challenges faced by the APSA in Mali, is the fundamental mismatch between the processes of regional governance initiated by African regional actors, which are rooted in the Westphalian conception of statehood, and the realities of everyday governance in which subnational actors play an important role in delivering governance. Subnational actors can behave either in support or in opposition to the state. Furthermore, they often initiate through their actions, regionalism processes from below, which challenge the formal processes established at the inter-national level and around which the APSA is built.

Based on fieldwork in Bamako, Addis and Abuja, this dissertation demonstrates that the Malian experience spurred a new will at the AU to address the limitations of APSA, a continental will that led to innovative and trans-regional approaches to addressing respond to regional challenges. At the same time, this new will clashed with the subsequent stronger involvement by extra-continental actors in addressing the region's multifaceted challenges through bilateral and multilateral engagement with Sahelian countries. In this process through which ad hoc mechanisms emerge to fill the security gaps of the existing architecture, the legitimacy of the APSA in relation to extra-continental actors is increasingly contested and renegotiated.

In the end, the APSA reflects an ideational aspiration, mandated with addressing conflicts often rooted in the state-society complex while lacking the autonomy to act on governance. The implications of these findings are that it is imperative for African regional actors to reconsider the nature of statehood where they intervene and recognize their dependence on member-states, in engaging with all actors involved in governance at the domestic level, formal and hybrid.

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Acronyms

ACIRC	African Capacity for Immediate Reaction to Crises
ACSRT	African Centre for the Study and Research on Terrorism
ADC	<i>Alliance démocratique du 23 Mai pour le changement</i>
ADEMA-PASJ	<i>Alliance pour la démocratie au Mali-Parti africain pour la solidarité et la justice</i>
AFD	<i>Agence française de développement</i>
AFISMA	African-led International Support Mission to Mali
AGIR	Global Alliance for Resilience Initiative
AMIB	African Union Mission in Burundi
AMISOM	African Union Mission in Somali
APSA	African Peace and Security Architecture
AQIM	Al Qai'da in the Islamic Maghreb
ARLA	<i>Armée révolutionnaire de Libération de l'Azawad</i>
ASEAN	Association of South East Asian Nations
ASF	African Standby Force
AU	African Union
AUPSC	African Union's Peace and Security Council
CASF	Central Africa Standby Force
CCO	<i>Comité de Coordination Opérationnelle</i>
CEMOC	<i>Comité d'état-major opérationnel conjoint</i>
CEWS	Continental Early Warning System
CFA	<i>Communauté Financière Africaine</i>
CILSS	<i>Comité Permanent Inter-Etats de Lutte contre la Sécheresse dans le Sahel</i>
CISSA	Committee of Intelligence and Security Services in Africa
CM-FPR	<i>Coordination des Mouvements- Front Patriotique de résistance</i>
CMA	<i>Coordination des Mouvements de l'Azawad</i>
CMLN	<i>Comité militaire pour la libération nationale</i>
CNRDRE	<i>Comité national pour le redressement de la démocratie et la restauration de l'État</i>
CONOPS	Concept of Operations
COPAM	<i>Coordination des Organisations Patriotiques du Mali</i>
CPA	<i>Coalition du peuple pour l'Azawad</i>
CSMAK	<i>Commission de Sécurité Mixte de l'Azawad à Kidal</i>
CSA	<i>Comité de suivi de l'accord de paix et de réconciliation de Bamako (2015)</i>

CSOs	Civil society organizations
CTMS	<i>Commission technique mixte de Sécurité</i>
DCCI	<i>Document- cadre de Coordination inter-alliés</i>
DDR	Demobilization Disarmament and Reinsertion
DGSE	<i>Direction générale de la sécurité extérieure</i>
DPKO	Department of Peacekeeping Operations
DSC	Defense and Security Council
EASF	Eastern Africa Standby Force
ECCAS	Economic Community of Central African States
ECOMIG	ECOWAS Mission in The Gambia
ECOMOG	ECOWAS Monitoring Group
ECOWARN	ECOWAS Early Warning and Response Network
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
ECPF	ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework
ECSC	European Coal and Steel Community
EFS	<i>Éléments Français au Sénégal</i>
ESF	ECOWAS Standby Force
EU	European Union
EUCAP	European Union Capacity-Building Mission
EURATOM	European Atomic Energy Community
EUTM	European Union Training Mission in Mali
FDR	<i>Front pour la défense de la république</i>
FIB	Force Intervention Brigade
FLN	<i>Front de Libération Nationale</i>
FMTS	<i>Force Mixte Tchado-soudanaise</i>
FNLA	<i>Front de Libération Nationale de l’Azawad</i>
FPLA	<i>Front Populaire de Libération de l’Azawad</i>
GATIA	<i>Groupe d'autodéfense Touareg Imghad e Alliés</i>
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
GSPC	<i>Groupement Salafiste pour la prédication et le combat</i>
GSIM	Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims
GWOT	Global War on Terror
HCIM	<i>Haut-Conseil Islamique du Mali</i>
HCUA	The High Council for the Unity of Azawad
ICU	Islamic Courts Union
IGAD	Eastern Africa’s Intergovernmental Authority on Development
IO	International Organization

IOM	International Organization for Migration
IRSEM	<i>Institut de Recherche Stratégique de l'École Militaire</i>
ISGS	The Islamic State in the Greater Sahara
JCM	Joint Coordination Mechanism
JNIM	Jamaat Nusr-al-Islam wal Muslimin
LCBC	Lake Chad Basin Commission
MAA	<i>Mouvement Arabe de l'Azawad</i>
MCP	Ministerial Coordination Platform
MERCOSUR	Southern Common Market
MICEMA	Mission de la CEDEAO au Mali
MINUSMA	The UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali
MISAHHEL	AU Mission in Mali and the Sahel
MITF	Mali Integrated Task Force
MNA	<i>Mouvement national de l'Azawad</i>
MNJTF	Multi- National Joint Task Force
MNLA	<i>Mouvement national pour la libération de l'Azawad</i>
MOC	<i>Mécanisme Opérationnel Conjoint/Joint Operational Mechanism</i>
MOJWA	Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MPA	<i>Mouvement Populaire de l'Azawad</i>
MSC	Mediation and Security Council
MUJAO	<i>Mouvement pour l'Unité et le Jihad en Afrique de l'Ouest</i>
NARC	North African Regional Capability
NARC	Northern Africa Standby Force
NASBRIG	North Africa Regional Standby Brigade
NATO	The North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
OAU	Organization for African Unity
OCRS	<i>Organisation Commune des régions sahariennes</i>
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OMCT	<i>Opérations militaires conjointes transfrontalières</i>
ORA	<i>Organisation de la résistance armée</i>
OSes	Office of the Special Envoy of the UN for the Sahel
PAPS	The Political Affairs, Peace and Security
PCAR	<i>Programme de cohérence et d'action régionale pour la stabilité et le développement des zones sahélo-sahariennes</i>
PIP	Priority Investment Plan

PSC	The Peace and Security Council
PSOs	Peace Support Operations
QIP	Quick Impact Projects
RDC	Rapid Deployment Capacity
RECAMP	<i>Programme de renforcement des capacités africaines de maintien de la paix</i>
RPM	<i>Rassemblement pour le Mali</i>
RSC	Regional Security Complex
RSCT	Regional Security Complex Theory
RSG	Regional Security Governance
SACU	South African Customs Union
SADC	South African Development Community
SADI	<i>Solidarité africaine pour la démocratie et l'indépendance</i>
SANDF	South African National Defense Force
SASF	Southern Africa Standby Force
SGTIA	<i>Sous-groupement tactique interarmes</i>
SVBIED	Suicide Vehicle Borne Improvised Explosive Device
TCCs	Troop Contributing Countries
UDPM	<i>Union démocratique du Peuple Malien</i>
UFL	<i>Unité de fusion et de liaison</i>
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNISS	UN Integrated Strategy for the Sahel
UNOCI	United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
UNOM	United Nations Office in Mali
UNOWA	United Nations Office for West Africa
UNOWAS	United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel
UNSC	UN Security Council
URD	<i>Union pour la république et la démocratie</i>
US-RDA	<i>Union Soudanaise- Rassemblement démocratique africain</i>
WAEMU	West African Economic and Monetary Union

Chapter I: Introduction

On 21 March 2012 General Sadio Gassama, the Malian Defense Minister was in Kati, a garrison town not far from Bamako, Mali's capital, to meet soldiers dissatisfied with the government's handling of the burgeoning rebellion in the northern regions (Gao, Kidal and Timbuktu). Mali had been grappling with another Tuareg rebellion since January 2012, led by the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA), a secular secessionist armed group and by Ansar Dine, an Islamist group, allied with Al Qaeda and the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM).

The security situation was grim when General Gassama went to visit the Malian soldiers. Winds from the northern front carried the news of the defeats of government soldiers and the abuses committed by the rebels, of defection in the ranks of security and defense forces towards the rebel movement, and of the poor conditions of the Malian soldiers in the frontline. A month before his visit, the wives of the soldiers deployed in the north protested in the capital against the government's handling of the rebellion and pleaded with President Amadou Toumani Touré, popularly known by his initials ATT, to provide better weaponry and overall better conditions for their spouses. Thus, when the general went to visit the soldiers in Kati to quieten them from their restlessness and to assure them of the government's commitment to decisively deal with the rebellion, the situation was already tense and the government has been the subject of criticism from several quarters for its reaction to the events unfolding in the north.

While General Gassama was visiting the soldiers in Kati, a high-level delegation composed of diplomats from the African Union (AU), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the United Nations Office for West Africa (UNOWA)¹, was in Bamako to meet with President ATT in Bamako, to impress upon him

¹ The United Nations Office for West Africa (UNOWA) became the UN Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) in 2016, following the merger of the UNOWA with the Office of the Special Envoy for the Sahel (OSES). See (United Nations Secretary-General 2016, 2–3) (What's in Blue? 2018)

the gravity of the situation and assure him of the support of the regional organizations. In Kati, the visit went badly. General Gassama's harsh reprimands did not impress the soldiers and were met with boos and jeers while his convoy was stoned out of the barracks and the city. He managed to return to Bamako with the support of the garrison commander who was helpless in dealing with the anger of the soldiers. The mutineers who had overreached on their behavior did not limit themselves to chasing the Minister of Defense away; they seized the arsenal of the camp and with their weapons, marched on Bamako, setting roadblocks in the main roads on their way, and took control of the national broadcasting company. They overthrew the regime, a few hours after President ATT was reassured regional diplomats of his control of the situation.

When the mutinous soldiers reached the Presidential Palace atop the Koulouba hill, they did not find President ATT nor any of the regional diplomats. The President had been forewarned of the advance of the mutinous soldiers and the government's control over Mali was crumbling as they got closer to Bamako. He was carried downhill by the commander of his presidential guard and found refuge in the embassy of Senegal. Elsewhere, the regional diplomats were stuck in their hotels and stranded in Bamako. That night, dozens of sweating soldiers appeared on the national TV while the evening news was being broadcast. An officer, in a voice, rendered hoarse by the day's events, announced the suspension of the constitution and the formation of a new military government, the *Comité national pour le redressement de la démocratie et pour la restauration de l'État* (National Committee for the upholding of democracy and the re-establishment of the state, CNRDRE). In 24 hours, Mali's government has collapsed while the rebellion was taking hold of the northern regions.

1. RESEARCH PUZZLE AND ARGUMENT

I was in Paris for an internship as these events unfolded. I remember asking myself how it was so easy for these soldiers to topple a government that has often been hailed for its successful democratic transition, which was suggested as a model for other African states (Bergamaschi 2014b). Many other questions troubled me as the MNLA and Ansar Dine swiftly conquered the northern regions a few days after the coup. Kidal, the northernmost regional

capital was taken on 30 March along with Ansongo and Bourem; Gao was taken a day after, by rebels carrying the flag of “Azawad”; on 1 April, Timbuktu and Douentza occupied by the rebels the regular soldiers deserted their bases. As state authority collapsed, a flurry of self-defense militias would emerge to fill the void in the north while MNLA, Ansar Dine and AQIM were extending their hold. On 6 April 2012, the MNLA proclaimed the independence of the republic of “Azawad”, carved out of the three northern regions (Timbuktu, Gao, and Kidal) and corresponding to two-thirds of Mali’s total territory. How could this happen? This was the first of many more questions to come, as regional actors became increasingly involved in managing the multidimensional crisis that Mali was dealing with and exposed the unfitness of their approach to security governance in the process.

The following months were characterized by fragility, as the military junta, the regional actors and the national elites wrestled to control the situation. Seven years since these events, the security situation has worsened in Mali despite the restoration of constitutional order, a peace and national reconciliation agreement between the government and the rebels (2015), and the presence of a UN peacekeeping mission and the deployment of a regional counter-terrorism force. Mali is still the epicenter of a terrorist insurgency in the Sahel, which has moved from the northern region (Gao, Kidal, and Timbuktu) to further south, affecting its central regions (Mopti and Ségou) and spilling over to neighbouring Burkina Faso and Niger. The peace agreement also led to the multiplication of armed factions, all interested in having a stake in post-conflict outcomes through their armed presence (Maïga 2016; Boutellis and Zahar 2018). The constant “soft spoiling” and competition along with the government’s reliance on militias to pursue its military agenda, has stalled the implementation of the peace agreement (Bencherif 2018a) while the conflict has metastasized into a communitarian one, especially in the central regions where there are fears of ethnic cleansing (Ibrahim and Zapata 2018). At the institutional level, the deployment of a French-led counterterrorist force in January 2013, of a UN peacekeeping mission in July 2013, and a regional offensive force against jihadist factions, have not effectively led to a reduction of violence. Because of this situation, which led to peacekeepers being

deliberately targeted, the UN peacekeeping mission in Mali (MINUSMA) has regularly been dubbed as “the deadliest UN peacekeeping mission in the world” (Goldberg 2019).

While this dissertation will focus on the interaction between these various actors, the main question I investigate is why the existing peace and security architecture governing conflict management in Africa has thus far decisively failed to resolve the conflict in Mali? What explains their failure to effectively contain the Malian crisis in 2012-3 despite the existence of an elaborate security governance framework in the form of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA)? How did their experience in Mali shape these actors’ perspectives on conflict prevention and management afterward?

My central argument is that failures of African regional actors to effectively manage the security situation in Mali stem from a fundamental mismatch between how regional actors understand ‘regions’ and ‘regional security governance’ in the West Africa context and the inherently transborder and transregional nature of the Malian conflict. Furthermore, the state-centric premises of regional security actors have prevented the development of more nuanced understandings of – and responses to – the sub-national and non-state dynamics that drive insecurity across the Sahel region. ECOWAS and the African Union’s state-centric perspective on regionalism processes failed to capture the sub-national dynamics initiated by non-state actors who compete or collaborate with Malian state institutions, but whose activities transcend the territory of Mali. These regionalism processes “from below” are steered by economic interests, tribal groups, but also armed groups such as the Islamists, who develop “trans-state networks” (Bach 2003) through their activities. ECOWAS’ challenges in 2012-3 during the transitional period and the controversy over “subsidiarity” between ECOWAS and AU stem from these issues (Hagberg and Korling 2012; Whitehouse 2013). Due to these challenges, the different strategies, based on normative perspectives over the nature of the state, were developed by national and international actors to manage security threats, reform governance, and foster development. This is most manifest in the formation of the G5 Sahel in February 2014 and of its military wing, the Joint Force, in March 2017. The presence of extra-continental actors constitutes a serious challenge to the

“African solutions to African problems” mantra and the future of the APSA. It also presents risks to the Sahelian state-society complex as the militarization of the region may lead to the development of security rents from regimes and less accountability towards the population. The different interventions meaning to restore stability are heavily dependent on the ability of the state to project its authority in the periphery, and its political will to do so to be effective. Through the different capacity-building programs targeting the different structures of the state, they generate security rents and contribute to the Sahel’s increasing dependence (political, military and financial) in the fight against security and development issues on international partners such as France and the European Union. They also entail the cooptation of these interventions by Sahelian actors to consolidate their positions, rather than for the public good (Sandor 2016b; 2016a; Frowd and Sandor 2018). The trajectories of the postcolonial African state has contributed to the securitization of some of the regions in which its authority is shared or contested by other subnational actors. This securitization has justified a host of statebuilding interventions by different actors, that have not succeeded in legitimizing the state but consolidated its dependence on international actors through diplomatic and military support. This dependence, in turn, has been used to consolidate regimes based on the fight against terror, or through their involvement in various militarized interventions in their region, sometimes at the expense of good governance and human rights.

Furthermore, I argue that the proliferation of armed groups in Mali since 2012 and the complexification of the crisis stem from the pre-existence and durability of orders of governance, alternative to the state’s and based on a shared understanding of values, systems, and behavior that contrast with the state’s rational-legal logic. This reality has hampered the activities of international actors, making Mali a “grey zone” of conflict since the 2015 agreement, characterized by “soft spoiling” by revisionist armed groups.

The postcolonial African state has long been the focus of scholarly and policy conversations; most of the debates focus on the relation between the state and its population, the parameters of successful democratic transitions, patronage politics, the resource curse and its relation to (ethnic) conflict, the fragility of the state and its impact on

the regionalization of intrastate conflicts (Bayart 2006; Englebert and Hummel 2005; Craven-Matthews and Englebert 2017). African regional organizations took a security turn in the 1990s to deal with ethnic conflicts and civil war; ECOWAS in a very ad hoc way became involved in the monitoring of a ceasefire agreement between the parties of the Liberian civil war in 1990; a conflict that threatened neighbouring Sierra Leone and Côte d'Ivoire (Adedeji 2004a; Adebajo and Rashid 2004; Aning 2004a; Bah 2013). These ad hoc beginnings became more institutionalized as multiple agreements and protocols were adopted by the organization in the late 1990s to prevent and manage conflict in West Africa. At the continental level, the transformation of the Organization for African Unity (OAU) into the African Union (AU) in 2002, consecrated a more assertive turn in security governance, manifest through the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA). Built around structures, objectives, and values and based on different institutional pillars, the APSA expresses the African Union's will to find "African solutions to African problems", after the lost decade of the 1990s. These efforts to "Africanize" responses to conflict on the continent, via the regional economic communities, were welcomed and supported by the international community, including the United Nations, the European Union, and France. Yet these initiatives have encountered considerable challenges over the last 16 years, related to their abilities to coordinate and implement effective solutions to complex security issues (Powell and Tieku 2005; Williams 2008; Franke 2008a; Hentz, Söderbaum, and Tavares 2009; Williams 2009; de Witt 2013; Chafer 2013; Tieku, Obi, and Scorgie-Porter 2014; Williams 2016; Wyss 2017a). The structural challenges of the African state; the gap between the Westphalian state model and the exercise of authority in many African states, along with the existence of alternative orders of governance in their territory constitute layers of complexity for African regional security actors (Boege, Brown, and Clements 2009; Bagayoko 2012; Luckham and Kirk 2013). The conceptualization of "ungoverned spaces" to refer to the areas within a legally defined territory in which the control and authority of the government are weak or inexistent, and where alternative orders of governance can coexist with state authority, constitutes an obstacle to understanding the nature of authority and the drivers of conflict. Besides, the securitization of these "ungoverned spaces" in the context

of the Global War on Terror leads to militarized solutions that address the symptoms but not the structural causes of instability. In the discourse of policymakers, borderless threats such as drug trafficking, illegal immigration, and violent extremism find fertile ground in these “ungoverned spaces” before spilling over into other regions (Abrahamsen 2005; Williams 2016, 41). Since the 2000s, Mali and more broadly the Sahel has been perceived as a sanctuary for AQIM but also for drug traffickers, and human and goods smugglers. More importantly, these non-state armed groups through their activities and interactions carve out their own trans-state spaces and participate in regionalizing dynamics from below, which is independent of the formal regional processes located at the level of the states. Mali’s 2012 conflict laid bare these structural issues, on the backbone of which a variety of armed groups thrived.

This dissertation will also contribute to a better understanding of the influence of these subnational actors in security issues, by linking the process of statebuilding in Mali (and the influence of these actors and orders therein) with the formal processes of regional security governance. Through their policies, regional actors like ECOWAS and the AU have attempted to foster security interdependence among their member states, with very limited success (Buzan and Waever 2003; 219-224). These processes are mainly concentrated on the formal structures of authority when in many contexts, authority is exercised through formal (i.e. the governments), informal and hybrid authorities. There are multiple sites of authority and governance at the national level that play an important role in security affairs, while regional security governance by African actors remains formal, state-centric and rigid in its conception of regions. Building on the concept of limited statehood, which allows for the coexistence and collaboration between various sites of authority between formal, hybrid and informal orders of governance, I will contrast the formality of the APSA with the complexity of governance within Mali, by showing the gap between ECOWAS’ perspective on the crisis in April 2012 with the process of statebuilding in Mali since the country’s independence from France in 1960.

Areas of limited statehood are found “from developing and transition countries to failing and failed states in today’s conflict zones and—historically—in colonial societies” (Risse 2013a, 2). In these regions, the government cannot implement and enforce its decisions and to exercise its monopoly on the use of force, without the support of other sites of authority. The recognition of their authority over these areas is still recognized in the concert of nations, but their control over these areas is not absolute and is often delegated to other subnational actors (Risse 2014:2). When regionalism is built on the assumption of the state’s integral control over its territory, what happens when regional security governance is confronted with non-state actors in these areas of limited statehood where local governance is done without the state? Contrary to the ‘ungoverned spaces’ debate, which is heavy with normative prescriptions over what a state should be and assumes that at one point in the past, these “failed states” were successful in their control of their whole territory and their provision of public services and goods to their citizenry, the idea of limited statehood is rooted in history and does not assume that state authority was always prevalent over these contentious areas. It recognizes the presence of different orders of governance within these states, on whom the central government relies on its conduct of daily affairs.

In the words of Krasner, “domestic sovereignty refers to the formal organization of political authority within the state and the ability of the public authority to exercise effective control over the borders of their polity” (Krasner 1999, 4). Domestic sovereignty can be less effective when the state fails to effectively be present in all four corners of its national territory. While the Westphalian state is the recognized entity in international affairs, alternative orders of governance, often localized, coexist and collaborate with national governments in the discharge of state functions. In Mali, traditional institutions have long played a supporting role in the state even during the colonial period. The traditional chieftaincy of the Kel Afella Tuareg confederation has long been an important mediator and facilitator for the state and even at times, successfully transformed into more institutional forms of governance (Lebovich 2017; Hüsken and Klute 2015). Geographical distance from the capital and the absence of state institutions have fostered a smuggling economy in which the ‘border’ constitutes an opportunity rather than a barrier for populations

(Bach 2003). This is facilitated by kinship ties and the subversion of economic policies, often in collaboration with local state authorities. These traditional institutions progressively coexisted with other forms of governance in the North, following the 3rd Tuareg rebellion (1990-1995) and the development of a shadow economy fueled by drug trafficking, goods smuggling and kidnappings of Western nationals in the 2000s. During that decade the relocation of defeated Algerian Islamists² in the north, along with the state's increasing reliance on communitarian militias to fill governance gaps constituted two lasting features. Violence between competing for economic networks became more common as the political and economic stakes became higher (Thurston and Lebovich 2013). It is these subnational actors that “govern” the so-called “ungoverned spaces”, securitized areas escaping government control and where the border between licit and illicit is very porous (Raleigh and Dowd 2013). The influence of these subnational actors increases with the breakdown of domestic sovereignty at the onset of internal conflict (Felbab-Brown, Trinkunas, and Hamid 2017). While proponents of local orders of governance have focused on how they are reconstituted in post-conflict settings, I focus on how they define patterns of conflict at the national and regional level, and how they impact responses to regional conflict in Mali and the broader Sahel region. In the context of this dissertation, I argue that the reality of this limited statehood constituted a challenge for regional organizations, whose understanding of “region” is based on the state's integral control over its territory, an understanding which contrasts with the regionalizing actions “from below” by these subnational actors. Therefore, regional security governance in Africa is often confined to the formal processes of governance which are associated with the state apparatus, and seldom with structural issues that are located at the domestic level, and in the relations between the state and these subnational and hybrid orders. This had an impact on their interventions in Mali, leading to a transaction-based

² The *Groupeement Salafiste pour la Prédication et le Combat* relocated to the northern fringes of Mali, following their defeat during the Algerian Civil War (1991-2001). In 2006, they pledged allegiance to Usama bin Laden and became Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb.

negotiation model, driven by practical concerns focused on engaging with the formal sources of authority due to its inability to engage with the others.

The contributions of this dissertation are multifold. First, it will provide a better understanding of the responses to the regionalization of conflict in areas of limited statehood. Regional economic communities play an important political role in Africa and have shown a willingness to deal with security issues, yet they have often been hampered in their efforts by institutional problems inherent in their making and gaps in terms of their capabilities. This dissertation will demonstrate that the challenges faced by the APSA in Mali stemmed from the disconnect between the political will to intervene and subnational governance dynamics in Mali. How regional actors understand their roles and abilities in conflict contexts may be challenged by state and substate actors, and the different intervention strategies are often contested by these same actors. Individual member-states play an important role in the successes or failures of conflict management processes by African regional actors, as will be shown by a thorough study of ECOWAS' intervention in Mali.

The dissertation will also explore how local orders of governance within states impact the regional governance of security issues. Sovereignty, as an international principle, impedes the ability to stabilize areas of conflict. As put by Felbab-Brown et al. (2018:4), “the emergence of local orders led by successful armed actors creates a dilemma for the international community. It must decide when, how, or even whether to intervene”. How to engage subnational actors who have long played a governance role, after the onset of the conflict, and reconstitute local orders following the breakdown of sovereignty, is the challenge. In the Malian context, these subnational actors have played an important role in thwarting rebel progress in the north in tandem with the state, but also in counter-terrorist operations, in tandem with France and some states in the region such as Mali and Niger. Felbab-Brown, Hamid and Trinkunas focus on armed actors, which in itself limits the understanding of local power dynamics and how it affects the provision of security by international actors (Felbab-Brown, Trinkunas, and Hamid 2017). In this dissertation, I

focus on how local orders are also shaped by more customary institutions such as traditional chieftaincies, religious brotherhoods, and economic/business cartels.

Third, the dissertation will highlight how the Malian experience has led to shift in the designing of security mechanisms by the APSA. New initiatives based on new understandings of regions have emerged; the Nouakchott process (2013-) and the African Capacity for Immediate Reaction to Crises (ACIRC) are two examples of “trans-scalar” and “trans-regional” initiatives that emerged following the French-led military intervention in Mali in January 2013 (Döring 2018a). Both initiatives were developed by the AU and aim to bridge the gap of the APSA in terms of regional governance and resource mobilization (Warner 2015; Döring 2018a). In parallel to these processes, Mali and some of its neighbours have also initiated new regional security governance mechanisms, with the support of extra-continental actors like France, the United Nations and the European Union (ICG 2017). The proliferation of these parallel initiatives has been initially resisted by traditional RECs and led to competition for resource mobilization among these different actors. The long-term impact of these processes remains unclear, but they have already upended the existing regional framework, leaving a marginal role for the APSA. If organizations become involved in regional security governance because they are seen as more effective than individual states (Breslin and Croft 2012, 4), their failure may lead to their progressive obsolescence despite the avowed ideational objectives. In this process, regional organizations are not passive but may on their own, find new avenues for providing security functions to their member states. Their “legitimacy” as regional actors vouching for “African solutions to African problems” is contrasted with the “efficiency” of extra-continental actors; furthermore, their legitimacy has been challenged by the new forums put forward by Mali and several of its neighbours to contain the security threats in their region.

The challenges faced by the Malian state are not dissimilar to those found in neighbouring Niger and Mauritania. In all three countries, the regional linkages of these networks, which rely on kinship ties of transborder communities, are different from the existing regional security architecture. As the conflict in Mali endured, it

affected neighbouring Algeria and Mauritania more than other West African countries. Since these two countries did not belong to the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and yet were affected by the externalities of the violence, the mismatch became evident and the necessity of addressing it became even more pressing. Indeed, the challenges faced by African regional actors in Mali and the Sahel stem not only from their limited capacities but also from their failure to account for the delegation of authority to local actors by national governments, especially in their peripheries.

2. METHODOLOGY

This dissertation looks at the experience of African regional actors in Mali and how the ontological understanding of the state and the region, as built around the Westphalian model, defined the patterns of interventions of African regional actors, and limited their impact. As a corollary to this, I explore how the subnational dynamics in Mali affected the different approaches by regional actors and shaped their interventions. I argue also that the particular dynamics of the conflict in Mali has led to attempts to adapt the APSA's instruments on peace and security through new initiatives that were put forward post-2013, that differ from previous ones by their transregional characteristics, but that remain state-centric, due to institutional constraints, and heavily militarized.

Building from a historical perspective on state governance in Mali, I demonstrate how the APSA misconceived the relations between the different actors involved in domestic governance in Mali, privileging an engagement with the formal processes of governance, to the detriments of hybrid actors who have often operated in tandem with the state. Mali is an interesting case for the analysis of "regional processes from below" and how subnational dynamics define the effectiveness of regional security governance policies. While it was hailed as a successful model of democratic transition in the 1990s, the country has regularly been confronted with different secessionist rebellions since its independence, which has fostered an economy of rebellion and integration, especially over the last two decades. Predating state borders inherited from the colonial legacy, Tuareg rebellions in Mali have often echoed similar events in neighbouring Niger. Both countries' demographics include a sizable Tuareg minority in their

sparsely populated northern regions, while the main politico-economic centres are in the south (in Bamako and Niamey). For this reason, the rebellions are often described as opposing Black Africans from the south and marginalized Berber/Tuareg from the North (Chauzal and van Damme, 2013), although the fault lines are more complex than they appear (Sangaré 2013; Diarrah et al. 2018). Tuareg rebellions are part of a ritualized expression of grievances towards the postcolonial states, through a cycle of rebellion, desertion from the national army, peace agreements, and reintegration into the state apparatus (Bourgeot, 2013:23-45 quoted in Sangaré, 2013). Between 1992 and 2012, the democratic transition, which excluded the military from political affairs, was sustained despite several security crises, including the installation of AQIM in the north. The political history of Mali is similar enough with the path of other West African countries that its analysis could result in contextualized generalizations but different enough to lead to its specific conclusions. It constitutes a good case for the study of regionalism in Africa due to the debates surrounding it, and due to what it can teach us about state expectations of regional organizations in security governance. The African Union, ECOWAS and the United Nations were all involved in managing the war in Mali; but other actors such as Algeria and France were key in the peace process, and in the peace enforcement, respectively. The flurry of actors is explained by the transboundary dynamics of a conflict that goes beyond the 'regions' as defined through the APSA, but also due to reservations from the Malian government over the ability of ECOWAS and AU to resolve the conflict. APSA's limitations were evident and criticized by the government, who with other neighbouring countries sought to circumvent these gaps by forming a new organization, the G5 Sahel, and entering into a regional counter-terrorism partnership with France. With the United Nations' resources in one hand, and the narrow focus and legitimate basis of the G5 Sahel on the other, the African Peace and Security Architecture was under intense scrutiny in Mali. Because I am interested more in understanding the failure of African regional actors, rather than establishing generalizable causal mechanisms for their success, a thorough study of their intervention and engagement with security actors, national and international, will yield meaningful knowledge about the gaps in their perceptions of the conflict, and how it shaped their interventions. Mali's political history and

subnational dynamics are similar enough to other West African countries to generate insights for other countries affected by similar subnational dynamics.

Case studies have gained new respectability following the domination of large-N quantitative methodologies in the social sciences (George and Bennett 2005; Bennett and Elman 2006; 2007). Dismissed for lacking “scientific consciousness”, due to the limited generalization potential of its finding (Rosenau 1968), and also for not being genuinely comparative in its comparisons, due to its descriptive characteristic and for not being grounded in theory (Macridis and Brown 1955; Kaufman 1958; Lowi 1964), the study of cases has also been mired in debates whether it’s a method or a methodology. If per Mills’ definition, methods are procedures and techniques employed in social inquiry, methodology is the perspective from which the researcher views and designs his study (Harrison et al. 2017). The fact that case studies have been used by researchers involved in qualitative, quantitative and even mixed methods has added to this ambiguity. In this dissertation, I adopt a qualitative research method built on one single case study to study the pitfalls of regional security governance in Africa.

Due to the varied background and ontologies of its investigators, case study as a method and a methodology has been subject to various definitions (Harrison et al. 2017). While some authors focus on the scope, process and methodological characteristics to define it (Yin 2018), others focus on the object of study, the “case” (Stake 1995; Merriam and Tisdell 2016) and how its study leads to a descriptive and heuristic analysis. George and Bennett define a case study as “an instance of a class of events”, with the class of events referring to a phenomenon of scientific interests such as revolution, or an economic system, that is investigated not for the event itself, but to develop a theory or “generic knowledge” (George and Bennett 2005, 78). In their words, “a case study is thus a well-defined aspect of a historical episode that the investigator selects for analysis, rather than a historical event itself” (George and Bennett 2005, 78). To avoid any confusion between case studies and other forms of experimental inquiry, this dissertation builds on Yin’s definition and conceives case studies as an “empirical method that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the “case”) in depth and within its real-world context, especially when the boundaries

between phenomenon and context may not be evident” (Yin 2018, 45). But all these authors agree that the goal of the case study is to provide an in-depth analysis, bound within its context, leading to the production of meaning from the perspective of the participants (Harrison et al. 2017; Merriam and Tisdell 2016; Yin 2018; Fujii 2018). For this reason, it is essential to get as close as possible to the site of research to interact with the participants.

George and Bennett have shown the theory-building potential of case studies, and the possibility of generating limited generalizations through this approach (George and Bennett 2005). George and Bennett’s contributions were built on a structured and focused approach to comparison and process-tracing as a method. Based on the investigation of historical events, the method of structured-focused comparison allowed for the cumulation of knowledge and the possibility of drawing inferences through the study of case studies, in a rigorous and standardized approach (George and Bennett 2005, 215). It is structured because a set of research questions that reflect the investigator’s research objective are asked to each case study and data collection is standardized. It is focused because it deals with specific aspects of the cases studied. Because it is structured and focused, it allows for systematic comparison and the cumulation of findings, even post-facto. By adopting the congruence method, through which the research builds on existing theory and tests it through a case study, this dissertation will generate meaningful knowledge on the assumptions and design behind the APSA, and why the security turn of regional actors does not necessarily translate into effectiveness in certain contexts.

An in-depth investigation of the regional security response to the Malian conflict (2012-) could offer us a better understanding of the basis of the collaboration between the UN and instruments of the APSA, but also give us an understanding of the expectations of each security actor towards the others. The Malian conflict is at the confluence of different contested regions; and efforts to resolve it have been characterized by overlapping and contested levels of intervention, ranging from regional organizations (ECOWAS, AU) to the national (government) and the local (civil society organizations) An analysis of the interactions of these organizations among themselves and with the Malian state, will generate findings on how African actors have adapted to the role of sub-national actors in fostering

regional dynamics that transcend the state and regions as they understand it. ECOWAS, Algeria, the AU, the United Nations, and France all participated in the management of the conflict in 2012, and all these actors had different procedures and relations with conflict parties and the other sub-national actors. Far from being a smooth collaboration, there were notable misunderstandings and contentions over who should do what during this process. ECOWAS' involvement in the conflict was not smooth but was subject to challenges from neighbouring Algeria and the transitional authorities in Mali.

To meet my research objectives; I planned my fieldwork in two phases. During the first one, I undertook three research trips in Bamako (Mali), and one research trip in Dakar (Senegal) to conduct semi-structured interviews with 62 respondents over six months (September 2017-February 2018). Interlocutors were both Malian (government, civil society, armed groups) and international actors involved in the management of the conflict (ECOWAS, the United Nations, the African Union, and France). Bamako, as the capital of Mali, was a crucial site for engaging both with Malian government officials and with the regional actors who all have missions there. Dakar, as a regional hub on capacity-building on security issues through engagement with the states and with ECOWAS, was also an important site. The second phase of the data collection (May-August 2019) led me to Addis Ababa (Ethiopia) and Abuja (Nigeria), where I interviewed 35 AU and ECOWAS diplomats currently working on Malian and Sahelian issues and involved in the strategic development of these two organizations' security governance mechanisms.

During these research trips, I interviewed Malian government officials, active and retired, officials of the ECOWAS Mission in Mali, former and current diplomats of the AU's Mission in Mali and the Sahel (MINUSMA), of the *Éléments Français au Sénégal* (EFS), of the United Nations' Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) and the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA). I also interviewed leading figures from Malian civil society involved in the different conflict processes, and with academics interested in the management of the Malian conflict. I also interviewed Malian political and religious figures that were active during the transitional period, along with some members of the rebellious armed groups and peace mediators. These

interviews were done with policymakers and actors deeply involved in the regional response, including Malian national elites. Elites are defined as those possessing knowledge and prestige due to their proximity, or being one of the nodes, of power (Lilleker 2003). At the national level, they may include elected representatives, executive officers of organizations and senior bureaucrats and ministers, but this may be broadened out. In the framework of this dissertation, interviewing senior officials has various merits, including interpreting the decision-making process and the personalities involved, but also understanding the atmosphere of the discussions about a precise historical moment (Richards 1996). Access to these respondents was made possible by the relationships I built with these institutions, but also by the interest of the respondents in this dissertation, and their willingness to put me in touch with other relevant figures. A limitation of this technique is also the unresponsiveness/unwillingness of potential respondents to being interviewed, which may result from their perception that they have more to lose than gain from agreeing to be interviewed due to their role in the investigated issues. This was not a problem for me during my research as I relied on recognized institutions to obtain access, and in cases, where a respondent (a political actor) refused or deferred my interview request, I was always able to complement it with other respondents with a similar background and triangulate the responses among the interviewees. Triangulation was also used to weed out “unreliable” data that was collected during interviews.

I was also involved in a multi-year multi-country project on the political economy of Islamist insurrections with other faculty members from the University of Toronto and the Norwegian University of Life Sciences. Mali was one of the case studies and I participated in the research design, implementation, and analysis of a political economy analysis of violence in the regions of Gao, Kidal, and Timbuktu that involved qualitative interviews and quantitative surveys. These networks had a positive impact on my field research trips, as it allowed me access to different government, international, and civil society stakeholders. It allowed me to map the key actors, domestic and international, that were involved in the management of the conflict. From there, I identified key respondents in

these institutions that needed to be interviewed, and building on these networks, I was able to identify and interview more informants until I met my objectives.

During my first round of data collection, I was hired as a consultant by the Institute of Security Studies to research innovations in conflict prevention in Mali. This facilitated even greater access to Malian and international stakeholders, who were keen to engage with a recognized African think-tank and share their perspectives on the challenges they faced in managing the conflict but also on the prospects of long-term peace. While in the field, new sites for research also opened up to me through discussions with the interviewees. Ouagadougou and Abidjan emerged as tempting sites to secure more interviews with government figures from Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire, that were involved in ECOWAS' efforts. Burkina Faso in the person of its then-head of state Blaise Compaoré (1987-2014) was the mediator and its Ministry of Foreign Affairs was heavily involved in the regional efforts. Research became impossible there due to the removal of Blaise Compaoré by a popular uprising following his bid to revise the constitution and extend presidential terms limits. Blaise Compaoré has been in exile in Yamoussoukro (Côte d'Ivoire) since November 2014 and his Minister of Foreign Affairs, General Djibril Bassolé, has been in detention and accused of complicity in a pro-Compaoré coup attempt in September 2015 during Burkina's transitional period (November 2014-November 2015). Despite the potential benefits, I decided not to go to Ouagadougou for these practical reasons but also due to financial constraints. Financial constraints prevented me from going to Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire) to meet with high-level officials of the government who were involved in ECOWAS' efforts to mediate the conflict.

Finally, in Abuja, I interviewed ECOWAS diplomats on the challenges faced by the organization in Mali, and how, if at all, the conflict shaped their approach to regional security governance. The objective is to make sense of ECOWAS' view on the role it should play in conflict settings like Mali, where its capabilities are under stress and its actions have been challenged by national actors and international actors. In this endeavor, I engaged with officials of the Political Affairs, Peace and Security (PAPS) Division and the Secretariat of the ECOWAS

Commission which oversees conflict resolution and management. Tensions within the organization (between PAPS Commission and the ECOWAS Commission) on security governance will be considered as well as tensions between ECOWAS and the United Nations and the AU, through a thorough analysis of the roles each regional organization is playing during the conflict in Mali. Based on the 2013 Mali After Action Review, I also explore the role that ECOWAS sees itself playing in the short to medium-term future in security governance in the Sahel and how it aims to contribute to inclusive and resilient societies by engaging with economic actors, youth and women's organizations and traditional authorities. I have also engaged with researchers and scholars based in Abuja, to have another view of ECOWAS' roles in Mali, and the prospects of this regional organization on security governance in the region.

In Addis Ababa, I engaged with the AU Commission's Peace and Security Department, and with the Peace and Security Council. In these interviews, I focused on efforts to adapt the idealized APSA to the political economy of violence in Mali and the Sahel; and document the process through which several initiatives have been developed by the AU to meet these challenges.

3. OUTLINE OF THE DISSERTATION

This dissertation questions why the instruments, protocols and mechanisms of the APSA failed to decisively contain and resolve the 2012 conflict in Mali, and how this experience has impacted on the continental framework for peace and security. In addressing these questions, I put forward the hypothesis that the instruments of the APSA failed because they were mismatched with the conflict drivers in 2012, that was located at the subnational level and involved the existence of multiple sites of authority within Mali, and rooted in the country's statebuilding process. There is a gap between how regional actors conceive regions and regional security governance, which mainly focuses on the formal state and on a Weberian ideal, when the experience has shown that sovereignty is often mediated in the postcolonial African state between the government and subnational actors, whose influence and networks can

supersede the territory of the state, and the rigid conception of a “region” as understood within the framework of APSA. The Malian conflict was inherently local and yet regional (transregional if we follow the APSA’s cartography), for which the ECOWAS and the AU did not dispose of the right instruments. This experience has led to attempts to adapt the APSA’s instruments through new initiatives, but which are affected by political deadlock and parallel ad hoc initiatives driven by member-states and extra-continental actors.

The first section of the dissertation, composed of the introduction and the second chapter, will provide a background to the Malian crisis, to the security governance framework that is in operation in West Africa and lay the basis of our theoretical approach to understanding the experiences of African regional actors in Mali.

The second chapter will locate this dissertation theoretically within the literature on security governance in Africa. I argue that the challenges faced by regional actors in Mali and across the Sahel result from the contradiction between the Weberian nature of the postcolonial African state by regional organizations and their security architectures, and with the presence of subnational and hybrid orders of governance in the areas of limited statehood. Due to this paradox, the activities of regional organizations in conflict management are confined to the formal features of authority, which are associated with the state, and marginalize important segments of authority, that are hybrid or informal and follow their logic. The objective is to critically review the history of the involvement of regional organizations into security governance in West Africa since the end of the Cold War, the genesis and development of the APSA, its understanding of regions and relationship with ECOWAS, but also with the United Nations and other extra-continental actors. The chapter will highlight how APSA emerged out of the decades of the 1990s where ethnic rebellions in Liberia (1989-1996;1999-2003) and Sierra Leone (1991-2002) led to the security turn of regional organizations and the progressive institutionalization of their regional security framework. It will focus on the regional actors’ perception of their role as conflict actors but also on the regionalization of conflicts on the continent. Perspectives from regional security governance, new regionalism will be analyzed, especially on the

diverging views of what constitutes a “region” and how they relate to the actions of subnational actors in areas where they exert control.

The second section of the dissertation will discuss the relative ineffectiveness of regional security governance in the context of the conflict in Mali (2012-) and the impact of non-state actors in regional intervention strategies. After presenting the actors and their motivations in the war in Mali, Chapter III demonstrates how a poor reading of the political climate and the trans-regional dynamic of the Malian crisis impacted the effectiveness of the regional response by African actors. It will also review the role of ECOWAS and other regional actors in Mali, between 2012 and 2013, and explain how the cross-regional dynamics of the conflict in Mali were at odds with the traditional conception of regions by ECOWAS.

Chapter IV will focus on the impact of the international intervention in Mali, on the peace process. More concretely, it will explain the transformation in the mediation process in Mali, from one led by ECOWAS to one led by a host of international actors under the leadership of Algeria. This chapter will also review what the plurality of international actors in Mali entailed for Mali, ECOWAS and the AU through the doctrinal differences between African actors and the UN, over peacekeeping and “peace enforcement” with regards to the presence of various spoiler groups in Mali. I will focus on how the different actors hedged their bets among the different international actors, African and extra-continental, and how this multiplicity of interventions led to often competing for approaches to solving the Malian conflict.

Chapter V will analyze the new security arrangements that emerged out of the challenges faced by African actors in the context of the Mali crisis. I will discuss readjustments to the APSA by the AU through the development of an *African Capacity for Immediate Reaction to Crisis* (ACIRC) and another trans-regional security framework, the *Nouakchott Process*. These initiatives will be contrasted with the G5 Sahel, an ad hoc arrangement that was formed in 2014 by Mali, Mauritania, Burkina-Faso, Niger and Chad to deal with the security and development challenges affecting their peripheral regions, in partnership with France’s *Opération Barkhane* (2014-). This chapter

will consider what these new initiatives portend for the future of APSA and regional security governance in West Africa, given the fragility of its member states and the multiplicity of regional organizations.

The concluding section will discuss the implications of the challenges faced by regional organizations in security governance, where state authority coexists with hybrid orders who also act as regionalizing actors through their activities, as is the case in Mali and the Sahel. Regional organizations in Africa have often been called upon to address fundamentally national issues, while not empowered by their member-states to discuss patterns of governance within their territory, based on their national sovereignty. This has created frustrations among member-states, due to the expectations raised by the APSA's normative commitments, and where it has failed, states have developed ad hoc coalitions, with the support of their international partners, to circumvent the framework of the APSA. The conflict in Mali has led to readjustments of the security framework, but the AU and the RECs need to go beyond mere adjustments to actualize their ambition. In a context where there are multiple and often competing interventions, they need to reflect on the assumptions of their policies regarding the postcolonial African state and engage, or not, with hybrid orders, or find a new understanding with their member-states on their responsibility to prevent conflict, by addressing local politics in their territory.

Chapter II: Theorizing the state, society and regional security governance in Africa

The objective of this chapter is to review and locate the dissertation at the intersection of the literature on regionalism, regional security governance, and of the state-society dynamics within the postcolonial African state, with an emphasis on the security turn of African regional organizations which culminated with the establishment of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA).

The regional security governance literature provides insights about how regional actors become security actors and on the gaps in capabilities of these African regional actors. On the other hand, it remains very state-centric and based on a Weberian conception of the state that contrasts with the experience of many postcolonial states such as Mali. It has not considered unbundling the African state and its domestic governance apparatus, in order to understand how they impact the abilities of regional actors to govern and manage conflict. The emphasis on the state in this literature has obscured the influence that non-state and hybrid actors have on a wide array of topics in their domestic realm. This has been a regular feature of the literature on the postcolonial African state, whose “crisis” (Clapham 1996; Olukoshi et al. 1996; Bayart 2006; Lewis and Harbeson 2016) has been a pressing concern since independence. Essential insights in this literature consider state-society relationships, the influence of hybrid actors on governance, and the fallacy of the Weberian perspective when looking at the African state. This fallacy, while important, remains a defining feature due to the legal recognition of the state, even though its domestic sovereignty may, in practice, be shared.

The new regionalism literature has stressed the necessity of looking at informal processes of authority that involve non-state actors, and at the influence of the political economy on formal and informal regional processes. In a sense, it has gone beyond the national to look at how local factors play an important role in governance beyond national borders and offered new perspectives on non-state actors without really being able to establish a systematic theory.

In this chapter, I bring insights from these different perspectives together to explain the travails of regional security governance in Africa. The overarching focus of my dissertation is on the tensions between the statist assumptions of regional security governance in Africa and the actual experiences of governance by the state, which involves, in Mali and many other cases, the participation and collaboration of subnational orders of governance. The main point is that there is a need to unpack the state, and to go within and beyond this level of analysis to consider how subnational dynamics impact conflict and the success of interventions by regional organizations involved in security affairs. Regional organizations may have elaborate intervention frameworks, but these frameworks are built on a Weberian assumption of state control over its territory

Besides, their weak institutionalization and lack of resources, along with the member-states' staunch defence of their sovereignty (even when it is only legal) constrains their activities and compromises their chances of success when intervening in conflict settings.

These inherent tensions between the expectations raised by the development of these peace and security architectures, and the limitations of their model and capabilities, offer a space for intervention by extra-continental actors.

This chapter is structured around eight sections. In the first two sections, I will dissect the regionalism literature and proceed to a genealogy of its key concepts. I will demonstrate how discussions around regionalism have been rooted in the process of European integration, but nevertheless came to inform regionalism in Africa, especially the Organization for African Unity project. The European model of integration was perceived as a universal model for peace, irrespective of the different historical trajectories of these regions.

The third section of this chapter will review the literature on regional security governance that emerged mostly at the end of the Cold War. Also informed by the renewed dynamism of European integration in the early 1990s, this literature offered new insights on the origins and potentials for security governance by regional actors. This also coincided with the security turn of economic groupings such as ECOWAS, which progressively became regional

security actors, when they intervened in the civil wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone in the 1990s. Despite its insightful perspectives, the regional security governance literature framework does not consider informal processes of governance and their influence on security actors and mechanisms. For this reason, adopting this framework to the African continent risks omitting important actors in our analysis.

The fourth section of this chapter will delve into the insights of Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT), especially on the African state-society complex. Despite its emphasis on the state as the primary actor, and Buzan and Waever's argument about the difficulty of analyzing regional presences when the state is not present and does not control effectively all of its territory, the RSCT's insights on securitization/desecuritization are fundamental in analyzing the dynamics between African and extra-continental actors at the regional level, while its perspective on state-society dynamics points to one of the main challenges faced by regional actors in Africa. Building on this theoretical background, I will then describe in the fifth section, the security turn of the AU and ECOWAS, two regionalism projects in Africa, beginning in the late 1980s and how they came to be epitomized in the African Peace and Security Architecture. I argue that regionalization in Africa has been historically a state-driven and state centered project, influenced by developments outside of the continent, that seldom engaged with the specificities of domestic governance characteristic of many African countries. Looking at the institutionalization of the regional security governance framework of ECOWAS and the AU, I explain how developments at the global level affected the role of regional organizations on conflict management and describe the main pillars and limitations of the African Peace and Security Architecture.

The sixth section of this chapter will explore the literature on the postcolonial African state and proceed to a critique of the concept of "ungoverned space" as used to frame security threats and legitimize international interventions on the continent. I argue for more serious consideration of non-state actors who may be present in these so-called "ungoverned spaces" and active in governance. It is necessary to analyze the African state per se in order to understand how these non-state and hybrid orders came to be. For this reason, the concept of limited

statehood, as put forward by (Risse 2013b), is more useful to understand state-society relations and its impact on the modalities of governance in these areas. Furthermore, questioning limited statehood is also directly tied with the actions of regional actors in Africa, given that they are exclusively the emanation of inter-state relations, and state sovereignty is an essential principle of their action.

The seventh section of this chapter will review the literature on new regionalism. These disparate and heterogeneous approaches to regionalism go beyond the state by looking at the impact of globalization on regionalism, and by looking at the role of subnational actors in these processes. Regions are considered as the product of social constructs, that are perpetually made and unmade, and their borders are always shifting depending on the capacities of the actors involved in these processes. One important contribution of these approaches is its attempt to transcend inter-state regional arrangements and examine the embeddedness of state and non-state actors in regionalism.

The last section of this chapter will bring about these different literatures in order to formulate a conceptual framework to help make sense of the tensions of regional security governance in Africa. I argue that the tensions are partly rooted in the nature of the domestic sovereignty of the African state, which involves non-state and hybrid actors that the formal regional security arrangements, which are exclusively between states, omit and exclude in the process of regional security governance. Non-state and hybrid actors have long played an important role within African states, but their importance has increased with globalization. The APSA, which is the guiding framework for regional security governance in Africa, is built on the assumptions of state-centric regionalism. However, the limitations of this postulate have been laid bare by the conflict in Mali (2012-), and its subsequent management. Conflicts on the continent often emerge at the subnational level. They are usually rooted in the frictions of the state-society complex, issues with which member-states do not want regional actors to be involved because of sovereignty considerations. Regional security governance is thus constrained by these political dynamics within member-states, leading to deadlocks, that are often broken through outside intervention, either solicited by member-states or by

subnational actors. This structural factor strengthens its dependence on outside intervention and contradicts the professed motto of “African solutions to African problems”.

1. REGIONS, REGIONALISM AND REGIONALIZATION: A CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

Regions and their definitions have long been the topic of contentious debates in the literature. Most of the differences center around the ontological conception of regions, which opposes positivist and constructivist perspectives, and also between the “growing differentiation between physical (geographical and strategic) regions and functional (economic, environmental, and cultural) regions” (Hettne and Söderbaum 2000; Hettne 2005; Grant and Söderbaum 2003). The literature on regionalism has also been strongly influenced by the process of European integration. Indeed, its developments were the starting point of most regional scholars of the analysis of other regionalism processes.

If International Relations scholars consider the state to be their principal unit of analysis and define regions as supranational subsystems of a larger international society, they do not agree on what constitutes a subsystem of the international system, or under which contexts regional formations emerge, and what constitutes their dynamics. Joseph Nye, using geography and economic relations, conceptualizes the “world-region” as limited to several states bound by geography and mutual interdependence (Nye 1968; 1971). On the other hand, Cantori and Spiegel, include historical and cultural ties and define the region as several “states which have some common ethnic, linguistic, cultural, social, and historical bonds’ (Cantori and Spiegel 1970, 6). However, while these definitions differ, they share a rigid conception of regions as positive representations defined by geographical proximity.

Most contemporary scholars accept that regions are socially constructed and are not given, or “natural” (Grant and Söderbaum 2003; Söderbaum 2010). Regionalization is a process in which region-ness, i.e. the process whereby a geographical area is transformed from a passive object to an active subject, capable of articulating the transnational interests of the emerging region, increases or decreases (Hettne and Söderbaum 2000, 12). What they define depends on the topic that is under study and how political actors “perceive and interpret the idea of a region and notions of

“region-ness” (Hettne 2005, 544). In this constructivist perspective, regions are intersubjective identities, that can be weak or strong, but “as long as they display internally some degree of region-ness, cohesion and actor-ness, they are to be seen as distinct regional formations” (Hettne 2005, 557).

Regionalism, as the political commitment to organize the world in terms of regions, refers to a specific regional project that may be led by states (Gamble and Payne 1996) or by an “identifiable group of actors” not limited to the state (Hveem 2003, 83). Regionalization, on the other hand, refers to the more complex formation of regions, although whether consciously planned or caused by the spontaneous process is not agreed upon. For some scholars, regionalization refers to the “ideas, dynamics and means that contribute to changing a geographical area into a politically-constructed community” (Boisseau du Rocher and Fort 2005, xi). Others like Ivar B. Neumann, borrowing from Benedict Anderson’s perspective on nations (Anderson 2016) define regions in terms of “imagined communities” (Neumann 2003). For Neumann, the actualization of regions is contingent on the action of region-builders, that is, political actors who, as part of a political project, define a distinct spatial and chronological identity for a region, before disseminating this perspective to a maximum number of other people, through a series of speech acts (Neumann 2003, 161). These region-builders can be from the region in question, or from outside the region.

I argue that the regionalization of the Malian conflict and what it meant, was a topic of contestation between different prospective region builders, hailing from West Africa, Africa more generally, but also outside the continent. The regional nature of the Malian conflict oscillated for a time between a “West African” and a “Sahelian” space, in contradiction with a rigid conception of regions, and their ensuing security governance, as envisaged in the African Peace and Security Architecture. The presence of AQIM in northern Mali since the early 2000s and the securitization of the Sahel has contributed to these different perspectives of the conflict, and to important changes in security cooperation in the region. The war in Mali and the failures of the existing structures to manage it and prevent spillover into neighbouring countries constitutes the peak of this regionalism discourse. The development of new initiatives by the AU following the international intervention in Mali, in the form of the African Capacity for

Immediate Reaction to Crises (ACIRC) and the Nouakchott process, and by countries (G5 Sahel) constitutes attempts to actualize this security-driven regionalism project.

In the context of this dissertation, the conception of the region follows this dynamic process in which their regionness fluctuates. Whereas security actors can be contested by other actors, national or regional, in the field of security governance, regions are determined by more than geographical considerations and other material factors, including intersubjective identities. Following this, it is not uncommon to see emerging, collapsing and overlapping regions, depending on political factors and the ability of regional organizations to meet the expectations of their member-states.

One positive effect of this ontological standpoint on regions is to pave the way for the existence of other intersubjective identities within and between states. Indeed, many scholars have argued over the existence and relevance of micro-regions as entities located between the national and the local levels, rather than whole countries, and that may straddle the geographical territories of different countries. For Hettne (2005), they are constituted by a network of transactions and collaboration across national boundaries, which may emerge in opposition to the challenged state, and even in competition with state-driven regionalism. Since colonial times, northern Mali, especially the region of Kidal, has been governed differently from the rest of the country due to its extensive geographical size, the prevalence of the nomadic lifestyle, and its relatively small population (B. Lecocq 2002; Baz Lecocq 2010; Grémont 2012; Boilley 2012; Chauzal and van Damme 2015). For these reasons and due to the governance dynamics engendered by the recurrence of rebellions against the postcolonial state, the northern regions bear the characteristics of a micro-region within the territorial borders of Mali. From the military administration of the northern regions under Mali's first two republics (1963-1991) to the "governance by proxy" favoured after democratization (1991-) through the use of hybrid orders in the forms of security forces mobilized around a specific tribal identity, funded by businessmen associated with the political elites, governance in Mali has long entailed the delegation of authority to non-state actors usually with the purpose of "securing" a region for the state.

The crisis in Mali led to the Sahel being recognized by policymakers as a strategic region, where the nexus of crime, terror and challenge to state authority necessitated intervention to restore or strengthen state authority. This emerging reality posed an operational challenge to African regional actors, since it fostered competition and a lack of coordination in managing conflict in a region that was not foreseen in the context of the APSA. Moreover, this mismatch explains the failures of the existing security structures and the new dynamism that emerged following the 2013 military intervention in Mali. Extra-continental actors played a large part in the securitization of the Sahel and its emergence as a region, which went from bearing a geographic and environmental reference, to a more strategic one, over the last two decades.

2. THE REGIONALISM LITERATURE: “OLD” REGIONALISM BETWEEN NEOFUNCTIONALISM AND INTERGOVERNMENTALISM

Old regionalism emerged in Europe following the end of the Second World War to analyze the then ongoing integration processes. These theories, although outdated, were mostly concerned with how to establish peace among states and viewed the “nation-state” and “nationalism” as an obstacle. These theories had an underlying normative prescription, being to prevent the reoccurrence of the devastation that plagued Europe from the “age of nationalism” to the end of the Second World War. This political grounding is most apparent in federalism theory, which aimed to prevent war in Europe by providing a blueprint to unity for the previously war-torn countries. Later, Mitrany’s functionalism theory would address questions about which political level could best meet various human needs (often defined in a technical, functional way), and aimed to go beyond the nation-state, although not necessarily at the regional level (Mitrany 1948; 1965).

Functionalism views territory and the state as relics of the Westphalian system, which were conducive to the perpetuation of conflict and war. To overcome this danger, functionalist scholars argued that cooperation through sectoral and technical domains could reduce tensions among member-states and lead progressively to lasting peace, i.e. the absence of conflict. In this regard, the common management of the coal from the Ruhr region (European

Coal and Steel Community) constituted an illustrative example. France and Germany had tense relations since the formation of the latter in 1870, leading to arms races in the subsequent decades. By jointly managing the coal of the Ruhr and Saar region, the six countries managed to diffuse tensions and opened avenues for other sectoral collaborations, including on atomic energy (EURATOM in 1958), and progressively at a broader economic level, with the formation of the European Economic Community in 1957.

Building on this, neofunctionalist scholars such as Ernst B. Haas posited that there is no separation between politics and bureaucracy, as argued by Mitrany. Through the concept of spillover, neofunctionalists highlight the role played by bureaucrats in the political developments taken by regional organizations, sometimes at the expense of the will of heads of state. The spillover effect is defined as “the way in which the creation and deepening of integration in one economic sector would create pressures for further economic integration within and beyond that sector, and greater authoritative capacity at the European level” (Rosamond 2010, 60). In other words, the implementation of policies over a sectoral issue can lead to more pressures to extend the authority of the implementing agent (in this case, the regional organization), to govern a corollary one. The example of Jean Monnet of the ECSC and his role in European integration is recurrent in this literature.

The functional and neofunctional literature considers the development of regions and regionalism as a technical process in which successful collaboration in one sector can deepen integration among member states. These two traditions also have a very optimistic perspective on regionalization, seeing it as an efficient way of resolving potential areas of conflict among member-states. In this sense, it is strongly influenced by European integration, and how the disputes between France and Germany over the exploitation of the natural resources of the Saar and Ruhr region led to the formation of a regional body that managed these resources for these two states’ populations. The regionalization process is seen as a technical one, focusing on specific sectors, and mainly driven by technocrats. This emphasis on the technical aspect of integration, and the downplaying of the ‘national interests’ of member-states, was one of the main reasons for the criticism of neofunctionalism within the intergovernmentalism literature.

Also heavily influenced by European integration, the intergovernmental literature argues against the assumptions of neofunctionalism by highlighting the primacy of national interests and high politics (security) in the process of integration. Low politics, such as economic and cultural relations, play a comparatively minor role in the process. Hoffmann (1966), in his study of European integration, also dismissed the importance given to technocrats by neofunctionalists in the “uniting of Europe” through the concept of the logic of diversity (Hoffmann 1966). For Hoffmann, this logic “set limits to the degree which the ‘spillover’ process can limit the freedom of action of the governments...the logic of diversity implies that on vital issues, losses are not compensated by gains on other issues” (Hoffman, 1966:82). The example of the “empty chair policy” by France’s leader De Gaulle in 1965 and its impact on integration efforts, is illustrative of the degree of control still held by member-states, which have been ignored by neofunctionalists.

Building on Hoffmann’s criticism, Moravcsik also argues that it is governments who control the intensity of regional integration and can exercise a veto over issues that are central to them, despite the desires of regional technocrats (Moravcsik 1993). For intergovernmental scholars, the state and its national interests remain central in the EU integration process, despite the ideational aspirations of its early founders such as Robert Schumann and Jean Monnet. They are also critical of the neofunctionalists’ generalization of the dynamics of regionalization outside the European experience (Axline and Axline 1994). Regarding this criticism, neofunctionalist scholars have failed to challenge the accusation that they did not consider enough the context of the early beginnings of European integration, and the historical pathways that led to the formation of the European Union (EU) in 1993 in the development of their theory.

Concerning Africa, this Eurocentric perspective has created tensions (Söderbaum and Taylor 2010) in the institutional/liberal perspective, which emphasizes formal interstate frameworks and/or official trade and investment flows in the process, and which establishes the developments in Europe as a reference model (Fourutan 1993; Holden 2001; Jenkins and Thomas 2001).

Institutional and Liberal scholars on regionalism view the European experience potentially universalizable, including in Africa. In a continent plagued by conflict and civil strife, the same ideational aspirations of the first theories of regionalism are reproduced. Regionalism is assigned an operative goal, which is to be an instrument of peace. In this regard, the “Pan-African” scholarship has embraced African unity through integration as the way to overcome the “balkanization” of the continent and its underdevelopment following decolonization (Nkrumah 1985). Despite their criticism of the negative European influence on the continent, through colonization, the European model of integration is still central in this literature, as it ties successful regionalism in Africa to the existence and perpetuation of durable and functional regional organizations and institutions (Asante 1997; Muchie 2003). This is not to mean that Africa is only receptive to global norms on security governance and doesn’t have an influence on defining new norms. Indeed, African actors have played a massive role in the development of global norms related to humanitarian interventions, conflict diamonds and anti-constitutional ways of acceding to power through their experiences in responding to conflict (Coleman and Tieku 2018).

Naturally, the problem with the institutional/liberal perspective and of the pan-African perspective on regionalism is the “weakness” of the postcolonial African state, especially when compared to contemporary European ones. The possibility of state failure on the continent impedes their abilities to transfer sovereignty (which they often effectively share *de facto*), to engage in collective action and to build the capacities and institutions of regional organizations. More importantly, it ignores the security threats from “within” African states, and the tense relations between regimes and their societies. In the end, what applies in Europe, i.e. unitary states, the influence of regional organizations and a national-bureaucratic state does not necessarily apply to Africa, despite the normative prescriptions. There is a need to move beyond normative orders on regionalism and to consider how intrastate dynamics have defined both regionalization processes on the continent and the activities of regional actors such as ECOWAS and the AU.

3. THE REGIONAL SECURITY GOVERNANCE LITERATURE

The end of the Cold War coincided with the increased involvement of regional actors and organizations on a plethora of issues, not always linked to economic integration. This new wave of regionalism piqued the interest of scholars and favoured the emergence of new research projects aiming to explain this emerging dynamic and to explain what differentiated it from prior occurrences. Regional security governance literature emerged in this period as regional organizations became involved in security governance. This literature aims to provide a framework for the analysis of policy formulation and implementation by regional actors in the field of security. Security governance involves a system of rules developed by distinct levels of authority and actors (public and private) through formal and informal arrangements and centered around common objectives to resolve conflicts (Kacowicz and Press-Bernathan 2016).

The global security framework that was developed following the end of the WWII experienced new life with the fall of the Berlin Wall; in a more integrated global system, the concept of security was “expanded to include new security threats, a growing involvement of non-state actors, and a greater emphasis on the role of norms and practices of cooperative and common security” (Kacowicz and Press-Bernathan 2016, 297). Multiple levels of intervention, from the global to the local, emerged in a context of the retreat of the state (Strange 1996; Scholte 2005), while still orbiting around it (Kacowicz and Press-Bernathan 2016).

The 1990s decade was characterized by the reinvigoration of regionalism projects in the world, given the systemic changes that led to greater regional autonomy (Kirchner and Dominguez; Tavares, 2010; Acharya and Johnston 2007). Regional organizations, which were mostly economic actors, took an increasingly important role in security affairs by developing common policy positions to manage, contain and resolve conflict. In Africa, this coincided with the security turn of ECOWAS in 1990 through the deployment of a ceasefire monitoring group composed of 10,000 soldiers to keep the peace in Liberia (1989-1999) and then in Sierra Leone (1996-2003). Whether these organizations can effectively achieve their security objectives remains an open question (Kirchner

and Dominguez 2011). Still, the understanding of security has expanded to include new threats and to involve a growing number of non-state actors, and a greater emphasis on the role of norms and practices of cooperative and collective security (Kacowicz and Press-Bernathan 2016). As the development and dynamics of security arrangements in a specific geographic region, institutionalized through regional and sub-regional organizations whose member-states share rules, understandings and practices in the security realm (Hanggi 2005, 9; Oelsner 2009, 193–94; E. Kirchner and Sperling 2007, 18), regional security governance emerges when threats and actors/networks overwhelm an individual state’s capacity to respond and pose a challenge to a region. In this regard, several forms of regional security governance, differing according to the types of security threats/risks they address and their degree of institutionalization, have been identified, ranging from a balance of power and ad hoc informal alliances, to a regional concert, a regional collective security and pluralistic security communities.

Regional frameworks for security governance do not emerge from nowhere but follow a logic of supply and/or demand. The demand for regional security governance might be conditioned by “actual and perceived common threats to security (...) first and foremost by the states in a given region”. These threats may be external, as in the case of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) (Tavares 2010, 71), which shifted from a defensive alliance to a security community due to the duration of the threat (Webber 2011; Dominguez 2011, 47). Other demands include the transnational common interest of a region’s political elites to promote or preserve a specific type of political regime, whether liberal-market democracy or authoritarianism. The case of MERCOSUR, initiated by Argentina and Brazil, is an example of this type of RSG (Oelsner, Kirchner, and Dominguez 2011, 190; E. J. Kirchner and Dominguez 2011, 11). A combination of domestic and international (“intermestic”) threats can also trigger the development of regional security governance arrangement. In the context of the broadening of the concept of “security,” these can range from managing food scarcity to containing pandemics like HIV/AIDS (Babarinde 2011, 273). In several contexts, regional security governance can be triggered by governments facing intermestic threats but keen on defending their rule (Söderbaum 2004; 2010; Buzan and Wæver 2009) and, to a lesser extent,

external threat. This type of “sovereignty-boosting regionalism” is exemplified by the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) which emerged to challenge the “communist menace” (Khong 2004), the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) in the Arabian Peninsula, and to some extent ECOWAS and the AU (Söderbaum 2004; 2010; Stoddard 2017).

Security outcomes became embedded in a set of overlapping institutions, that are sometimes competitive. In Sub-Saharan Africa, regional security governance frameworks are nested “within the context of a larger, aspiring continental security complex” (Keller, Lake, and Morgan 1997, 298) or “multilayered security communities” (Franke 2008b). This plurality of regional security frameworks, which would only be institutionalized in the early 2000s, was anchored around the principle of subsidiarity which, applied in the African context, stipulates that the OAU/AU should only become involved in regional affairs when the regional level fails to resolve a specific conflict and security issue effectively.

Subsidiarity, complementarity and comparative advantage are three principles that govern the interactions of the different security actors in Africa, national and regional. The primary responsibility of security resides at the level of member-states, and it is only when they are unwilling or unable to provide peace and security that they can invite external actors to intervene based on universally recognized principles. Beyond the national, the next level of action is regional, then continental, then global. Security issues are expected to be resolved at the lowest level and when it fails, at the next higher. This means that on peace and security in West Africa, ECOWAS, as the regional level is supposed to act first to complement the action of member-states, before the AU could be seized of the matter. In this context, subsidiarity means that any external actor supporting the member state on peace and security must recognize the primary responsibility of the member-state, and act in a manner to complement its actions, and as a subsidiary actor under the leadership of the member-state. ECOWAS and all actors must act in a subsidiary role to the member-states. The member-states, based on the twin principles of complementarity and subsidiarity, can draw support based on the comparative advantages of different international actors. Subsidiarity, although a structuring

principle in the AU's relationship with sub-regional organizations, is not legally binding but solely based on comparative advantage and solidarity principles. This legal murkiness contributes to the sometimes fractious relationship between the AU and the RECs over the leadership of regional security governance, especially when some states, who consider the AU as more a political forum than an operational one, prefer to resolve issues at the lowest regional level (Warner 2016; Warner and Shaw 2017).

Despite the insights, it offers in understanding security policy formulation and implementation at the local level, the potential of this literature is hindered by its narrow understanding of governance as a formal, government-led process. Given the plurality of actors involved in governance in Africa, along with the relative importance of informal processes in the provision of public goods, a narrow conception of security governance will limit our insights on the role played by non-state actors. Furthermore, the security governance literature is influenced by neofunctionalist European integration theory and assumptions that security governance can only occur in highly formalized processes, which is not the case in the African context, where informal considerations spurred the security turn of ECOWAS.

4. THE REGIONAL SECURITY COMPLEX THEORY (RSCT)

Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) was first developed by Barry Buzan as an alternative to the structural analytical perspective on international relations and applied to the regional dynamics in South Asia and the Middle East in *People, States and Fear* (Buzan 1983, 115). These first iterations were then applied to study regional dynamics in Southeast Asia (Wriggins 1992; Buzan 1998) and the transformations in Europe following the Cold War (Buzan and Waever 1992; Waever, Buzan, and Carlton 1993). At the center of this approach is the concept of the security complex, which stipulates that regional sub-systems, nestled between the global and the national, constitute legitimate units of analysis in international politics. The logic of the theory relies on the argument that all states in international politics are part of a global web of security interdependence, that is, that conflict in a country can contribute to insecurity across the whole system. But since distance matters in military projection and the

propagation of instability, security interdependence is stronger among neighbouring states than it is between non-neighbouring ones (Buzan and Wæver 2003, 140). It thus proceeds that regional security interdependence is stronger than global security interdependence.

Regional security complex theory cannot be understood outside of the framework of security studies developed by the Copenhagen school. In this literature, the scope of security studies has been ‘widened’ beyond the military sector, to include the society, the environment, the economy, the political and the human (Buzan, Wæver, and Wilde 1998). For Buzan and Weaver, the regional level is the one where states are bound by enough political, military and social links that the security of one state cannot be considered outside of the security of the other states forming that region (Buzan and Waever, 2003: 43).

One feature of this earlier iteration of the RSCT was its proximity International Relations theory through its emphasis on military and political dimensions of security. Later iterations broadened the understanding of security to include other sectors such as the environment, the economy and the society (Buzan et al. 1998). Security threats are no longer limited to those against the state but are the result of a securitization process, through which an issue described and accepted as being an existential threat to a referent object becomes a security issue (Buzan, Wæver, and Wilde 1998, 25). The concept of securitization was developed by Waever (Waever 1995) and then further by Buzan et al. (1998) as a way of bridging the debate in international relations between those that claim security to be objective (positivist theories) and those that claim threats to be subjective (critical theories). In this perspective, security should be viewed as a social process, a speech act that transforms specific issues into an existential threat for a referent object (Buzan, Wæver, and Wilde 1998). In this regard, the discourse of politicians plays a vital role in defining what constitutes security or insecurity. For an issue to be securitized, Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde argue that it must meet three criteria; an actor

- Must claim that a referent object is existentially threatened;
- Demands the right to take countermeasures to mitigate this threat;

- Convinces an audience that “rule-breaking behaviour” to counter the threat is justified.

A sector is securitized when through discourse, an issue is displaced from the realm of current affairs and framed as a threat to a referent object (Buzan, Wæver, and Wilde 1998, 23).

With this in mind, a security complex will include “a set of units whose major processes of securitization, de-securitization, or both are so interlinked that their security problems cannot reasonably be analyzed or resolved apart from one another” (Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde 1998: 201). A regional security complex (RSC) is therefore composed of the fears and aspirations of the states that form it, and the ‘region’ becomes relevant in the analysis of security governance when the interests of global actors and their interactions meet the ambitions of separate states. Animated by ‘mini-anarchies,’ they answer to their specific dynamic. In the context of RSCT, the referent object of securitization and de-securitization processes occur at the regional level. But how RSCT theorists define regions is opaque: for Buzan and Wæver, they are defined based on security dynamics and their intersubjective understanding by members (Buzan and Wæver 2003; Kelly 2007). While this definition includes an intersubjective dimension, states still play a significant role in the formation of regional security complexes, with the security dependence fostered by patterns of amity and enmity between them, and by geographical proximity

With regard to the applications of regional security complex theory to Africa, one of the difficulties highlighted by its theorists is the prevalence of ‘weak’ and ‘failed’ states on the continent. Securitization in the economic, societal and environmental sectors is made marginal by the failure of the postcolonial African state to fully bear its Weberian attributes, which renders the military/political as the predominant sector (Buzan and Wæver, 2003: 220). Thus, there can be no security interdependence when threats to the “regime” are conflated with “threats to the state,” even if they come from within the national society. For Buzan and Wæver, this is often the case in Africa, and it is, therefore, difficult to apply the RSCT framework to analyze regional processes in Africa when the state may not be “present” and in effective control of all of its territory. This empirical reality impedes the securitization process in

sectors other than the military (Buzan and Wæver 2003:220). For this reason, the applicability of RSCT to the study of regional security governance in Africa is limited.

Yet, some of the theories' concepts offer us ways to better understand the dynamics of insecurity in Africa. The emphasis on the specific nature of the African state-society complex is an essential reminder that the interests of the regimes in power differ from national interests. Further, the theory gives much leeway to subnational dynamics and how they can be securitized not only by state governments, but also by international actors: populations, especially in the periphery, have a problematic relationship with the central government, and this may facilitate issues related to state and/or nation-building. For this reason, some authors have argued that the interdependence between African countries is mostly inward, i.e. the fear of state collapse and further regional destabilization due to internal rebellion, and the dense regional arrangements in Africa have been set up to prevent this scenario (Breslin and Croft 2012). The formation of ECOWAS and the AU, as well as the development of the APSA, makes sense only if member states believe that through these organizations, security can be better managed at the regional level than at the global and national levels (Breslin and Croft 2012, 4).

5. REGIONALISM PROJECTS IN AFRICA

While the previous sections of this chapter have focused on the different theoretical perspectives on regionalism and security governance, this section will provide a historical review of the security turn of African regional organizations and link these institutional developments with the insights from the literature. The objective of this section is to demonstrate that regionalism and regional security governance has been mostly a state-driven and state-centred project in Africa, often rooted in idealized perspectives on the future of the continent that contrasts with the tensions between regime and society in many countries. In a sense, regionalism on the continent has been outward-looking, reactive to conflict situations and often informed by the developments occurring elsewhere in the world. This epistemological model contrasts with the political discourses on political integration that has been very ambitious from the beginning in its objectives and focused on the place of Africa in the world. The global politics

have shaped regional projects following independence, and the relations of the continent with the rest of the world, whether during the bipolar balance of power during the Cold War (1945-1989) or the regional integration developments that were happening in Europe.

The formation of the Organization for African Unity (OAU) in 1963 following debates about the operationalization of Pan-African ideology was also an attempt to wedge “Africa” into the global discussions of the day. Before its founding conference of May 1963 in Addis Ababa, newly independent African countries debated how to operationalize their vision, and to liberate themselves from Western interests, by pooling their capabilities. Two blocs with contrasting views emerged in the lead-up to the formation of the AU. The Casablanca bloc led by the foremost Pan-African ideologue Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana (but also including Algeria, Egypt, Guinea and Mali) wanted a federation of all newly independent African states, that would centralize their defence and economic policies. On the other side of the spectrum, was the Monrovia bloc, led by Senegal’s president Senghor (but also including Nigeria, Liberia and Ethiopia) which argued against a political federation, but for a gradual integration through economic and political cooperation (Mazrui 1967; Wolfers 1976; Ayittey 2010).

The OAU was formed as a tool to accelerate the decolonization of all the European colonies on the continent and to defend the sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of the newly independent African states, among other objectives. In this regard, it represented the institutional representation of Pan-Africanism, and as the indicated medium to defend the rights and interests of African people. Other forms of regionalism would emerge in the following decade on the continent, still driven by member-states. This new generation of regional projects was less ambitious than the OAU and focused on regional economic integration through the promotion of free trade, the creation of a customs union and a common market. ECOWAS exemplified this new generation of regionalism projects when it emerged in 1975 (Adedeji 2004b). Similar to the OAU, ECOWAS’ formation and objectives were subject to contestation among heads of state, who had different ideas of how to foster regional integration and what constituted “West Africa.” Reminiscing on the emergence of the regional organization (2004), Adebayo Adedeji,

the former Nigerian Commissioner for Economic Reconstruction and Development (1971-2018), stresses the differences between Nigeria's military leader General Yakubu Gowon and Senegal's Leopold Sedar Senghor. Adedeji and Nigeria spearheaded the West African regional project, but their enthusiasm was met by concerns about Nigerian hegemony over the new regional bloc (Adedeji 2004b; Adebajo and Rashid 2004; Franke 2008b, 64). To assuage this fear, Senghor suggested that Congo, Zaire and Angola should be included as part of "West Africa" and part of the regional project since they were located in the Atlantic façade of the continent. While this can be viewed as an attempt to dilute Nigeria's economic standing within the emerging project, it also reflected the divides between richer and poorer states, but also Anglophone West African countries and Francophone ones, which, in their majority, maintained close economic and political ties with the former colonial power (Gandois 2009; Adedeji 2004b; Charbonneau 2008b). These differences were bridged only through the backing of Togo's military leader, Gnassingbé Eyadema, whose partnership with Nigeria was central to the formation of ECOWAS on 28 May 1975, through the Treaty of Lagos. In ECOWAS and most cases, regionalism in Africa happened through "hysteresis" (Bach 2016); that is, most regional economic communities and mechanisms followed the borders of former colonial empires, with ECOWAS being an amalgamation of French and British West Africa.

As a form of compromise over their formation, member-states' internal affairs were seldom looked at in the first decades of these regional projects. Defence agreements, to the extent that they existed, focused on external threats rather than on sources of internal troubles; in the context of ECOWAS, a protocol of non-aggression (1978) and a protocol on mutual assistance and defence (1981) existed but were never put to the test. Despite the persistence of rebellions and military takeovers on the continent, the OAU never interfered forcefully in its member-states' internal affairs, a "non-interference" policy for which it would earn the reproach of being a "dictator's club" in the 1980s (Nolan 2010).

A. The security turn of ECOWAS in West Africa

The security turn of African regional organizations started in the late 1980s, through an ad hoc process, driven by the national interests of individual states and facilitated by the global changes induced by the end of the Cold War. The end of bipolarity loosened the strategic considerations informing the support to authoritarian regimes by either of the two superpowers and opened to global scrutiny the internal dynamics of African states. These interventions became much more formal over the 1990s as ECOWAS gained experience in the theatres of Liberia and Sierra Leone and looked increasingly at preventing conflict in the region. In this regard, initial forms of regional security governance in West Africa stemmed not from a demand by member-states but were supplied by a state keen on increasing its influence, and willing to bear the initial costs of new security arrangements and entice reluctant states to participate. In this context, RSG is a way to maintain regional dominance at a lower cost while maintaining stability. Nigeria's leadership in the security turn of ECOWAS through the deployment of the ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) in Liberia and Sierra Leone, while bearing the financial cost of the operation for ten years, is an example of this type of supply (Adebajo and Rashid 2004; Kabia 2009; Kacowicz and Press-Bernathan 2016, 148–49). Extra-regional hegemons such as great powers can also be suppliers; this is the case with France's close cooperation with ECOWAS military committee on training (Charbonneau 2008b; Chafer 2013; Wyss 2013; 2017b) along with the UN's push for the “Africanization” of peacekeeping operations through the support of existing multilateral organizations under Chapter VIII of its Charter. Operationally, this entails the provision of capabilities, training, political and normative backing to play a more active role in managing and resolving conflicts (Hentz, Söderbaum, and Tavares 2009; Cravinho 2009b; Prodi, Romano 2008; Boulden 2013; Tardy and Wyss 2014)

If ECOWAS' formation in West Africa was a contested process, fueled by fear over Nigerian hegemony (Adedeji 2004; Franke 2008: 64), the ECOMOG experience of the 1990s paved the way for an elaborate security architecture by the end of the decade. ECOWAS's approach to security governance was incremental. It started with the ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) that was deployed in 1989 to monitor the ceasefire between

belligerent parties in Liberia (Kabia 2009; Adebajo and Rashid 2004). The military interventions of ECOWAS in Liberia and Sierra Leone led to a more “prevention-oriented” approach to security governance by ECOWAS, which was translated into a series of protocols on peace and security between 1999 and 2008. Following the revision of its treaty in 1993, the West African organization adopted a Protocol on the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security (1999) to institutionalize its security architecture and move past the ad hoc processes that characterized ECOMOG’s interventions in Liberia and Sierra Leone. The “Mechanism” strengthened the organization’s institutional framework by establishing the Authority of Heads of State, the Mediation and Security Council, the Council of the Wise and the ECOWAS Early Warning System (ECOWARN) (Souaré 2007; Bøås 2015). The 2001 Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance tied governance to peace and stability; through the ‘constitutional convergence principle,’ the Supplementary Protocol rejects any transmission of power through unconstitutional means, and through its first article, puts national armed forces as “apolitical” institutions under a legally-constituted political authority (Akinrinade 2001, 8). These protocols, along with the 2006 Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons, their Munitions and Other Related Materials (initially a Moratorium), would be consolidated into the 2008 ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework (ECPF). The objectives of the ECPF are to comprehensively govern the operational conflict prevention and peacebuilding strategy for ECOWAS and its member-states. But also to serve as a guide for enhancing cohesion and synergy within ECOWAS (and its different departments) on conflict prevention initiatives to ensure a more active and operational posture on conflict prevention and sustained post-conflict reconstruction by ECOWAS system and its member-states (ECOWAS 2008 article 7). Within this framework, conflict prevention is understood to be operational, i.e., measures that are implemented in the face of imminent crisis, and also structural, i.e., measures that are implemented to prevent crises or their reoccurrence (ECOWAS 2008, 12). Peacebuilding activities, therefore, fall within the ECOWAS’ structural prevention doctrine. The ECPF is supposed to strengthen the regional human security architecture, by mainstreaming conflict prevention into the organization’s activities (Ekiyor 2008, 6). Given

the wide spectrum of its activities³, the success of the ECPF depended on close coordination between ECOWAS' different departments and on ECOWAS' collaboration with civil society groups, member states and external actors working on conflict prevention.

ECOWAS has shown itself as the most proactive regional economic community in Africa in the fields of peace and security (Bah 2005). Yet, it has also been criticized for its overly “militaristic” and “state-centric” approach to conflict management, with the ECOWAS Standby Force as its main instrument (Tavares 2010). Despite this quest for a cohesive security governance framework, ECOWAS' approach remains transactional and ad hoc in many regards. This is mainly due to the lack of implementation of the ECPF's normative commitments by its member-states, as well as the lack of synergy between the organization's institutions on complex conflict issues (Maiangwa 2017). The organization's limited financial, military and human resources often mean also that the implementation by the Commission of the decisions made by the ECOWAS Assembly of Heads of States is never a given. Despite its very detailed commitments on good governance, for example, Article 53 (m) of the ECPF provides for “after-office roles for out-going incumbents and former Heads of State” (Maiangwa 2017: 112). Given the abysmal governance record of some of the past and current heads of state, this practice can damage the credibility of the ECPF towards armed groups and external actors. In a continent where the state is often perceived as a “threat” to its population (Jackson 2012), the ECPF's approach remains still very dependent on their goodwill; and even though the ECPF recognizes some structural causes of conflict within states, the regional organization has seldom been able to unbundle the internal dynamics of its member-states in its regional activities. Emerging from the lessons of the 1990s, the ECPF's understanding of security threats remains centered on the state. In essence, it is mostly focused on those that are aiming at capturing state power, through rebellions, *coups d'état* and genocide.

³ The ECPF includes 14 component activities over this spectrum. Those are: early warning; preventive diplomacy; democracy and political governance; human rights and the rule of law; media; natural resource governance; cross-border initiatives; security governance; youth empowerment; ECOWAS Standby Force; humanitarian assistance and peace education (the culture of peace). (ECPF 2008: 21)

ECOWAS' emergence as a security actor coincided with developments at the global level that broadened the concept of security to include the safety of individuals from internal and external threats, and the acknowledgment of democracy and good governance as conflict prevention processes. ECOWAS' institutionalization and degree of legitimacy is more potent than other RECs/RMs (Olonisakin and Levitt 1999; Bah 2005; Bah 2013; Haacke and Williams 2008; Wagner 2013). Nevertheless, the degree of control of heads of state over the security preferences of the organization remains strong. The ECOWAS Charter gives little power to the regional institution as a form of compromise over the fear of Nigerian dominance (Gandois 2009, 113). This, in turn, defined the ability of the organization to take a leading and independent role when conflict arises. Indeed, personal relationships between heads of the state remain important and sometimes define the regional response.⁴ More often than not, the regional organization is used to boost different regimes' interests, through summitry and the development of extraversion practices (Gandois 2009; Taylor and Williams 2008; Wyss 2013; 2017b). Elaborate security preferences may exist, but their implementation remains faulty and dependent on the whims of member-states. (Babarinde 2011; Weiss and Welz 2014).

B. Building a continental framework for security governance: the development of the African Peace and Security Architecture.

Beyond West Africa, changes to the role of intergovernmental organizations were also occurring at the continental level. Human security became an essential principle in the management of conflicts in Africa following the civil wars of the 1990s. The broadening of the concept of security at the global level, and the promotion of the doctrine of human security and responsibility to protect, induced developments at the OAU, an institution often criticized as a dictator's club in the 1980s (Nolan 2010). The transformation of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) into the African Union (AU) in 2002 signalled a shift towards less 'indifference' by the new organization

⁴ Interview with former senior MINUSMA diplomat (Dakar: 27 December 2017).

towards human security issues affecting its member-states (Babarinde 2011, 284; Dersso 2012; Williams 2014). The UN encouraged this path through its “Africanization” doctrine which gave a leading role to African regional actors, by supporting regional organizations to intervene in areas of conflict, following the scaling down of UN interventions after the beginning of the civil war in Somalia (1991) and the Rwandan genocide (1994). Echoing this call for “African solutions to African problems,” other bilateral partners supported African regional institutions’ security turn through capacity-building programs: the United States, developing an African Crisis Response Initiative and France, through the Program for African Capacity-Building in Peacekeeping (RECAMP, *Programme de renforcement des capacités africaines de maintien de la paix*) (Charbonneau 2008b; Chafer 2013; Franke and Gänzle 2012, 91). In this regard, the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) was developed beginning in 2004 as a continental security framework, in partnership with the United Nations, the European Union and other international actors.⁵

Operationally, the APSA is built around five pillars: the African Standby Force (ASF), the Continental Early Warning System (prevention), the Peace Fund (financial), the Panel of the Wise (mediation) and the Peace and Security Council (PSC), an organ of the AU Commission which effectively drives the whole architecture in partnership with the regional bodies. ECOWAS and other RECs are included in this continental security regime through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that establishes their relations with the Peace and Security Council. Through the principles of subsidiarity, complementarity and comparative advantages, they are supposed to work in tandem with the AU to prevent, manage and resolve conflict in the five regions around which the APSA is built. The existence of the Memorandum has not always led to harmony or to a clear division of tasks between these regional organizations, especially in a context where many of the instruments of the APSA are not fully operational.

⁵ Although not defined per se, the APSA represents the peace and security architecture of the AU with its instruments, protocols, mechanisms and interactions with the REC, as outlined in the Article 4 of the PSC Protocol of 2004 and in the 2008 Memorandum of Agreement between the African Union and RECs/RMs. Interview with member of the PSC (Addis Ababa: 7 December 2019).

Indeed, a decade and a half after the establishment of the PSC, most assessments have pointed out the limited capacities of the APSA despite its ambitious objectives (Franke and Gänzle 2012; Aall and Crocker 2016), its reliance on the UN and EU for funding (Vines, 2013; Weiss and Welz, 2014) (Vines 2013; Weiss and Welz 2014; Ambrosetti and Esmenjaud 2014), and its uneven integration with the RECs (Williams 2016).

i. The Peace and Security Council (PSC)

The Peace and Security Council is the most critical department of the AU's Commission, and the keystone of its Peace and Security Architecture. Due to the prevalence of security crises on the continent, it is the one that receives the most attention from external partners. The PSC is a “collective security and early-warning arrangement to facilitate timely and efficient response to conflict and crisis situations in Africa” (African Union 2004, 4). The objectives of the PSC are, among others, to promote peace, security and stability in Africa, to anticipate and prevent conflict, to promote and implement peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction activities; to coordinate and harmonize continental efforts in the prevention and combating of international terrorism in all of its aspects. Its activities range “from assisting in the provision of humanitarian assistance to military intervention” (Williams 2016, 199).

The PSC was not foreseen in the AU's Constitutive Act but emerged out of an ad hoc reform process of the OAU Mechanism for Conflict Prevention. Composed of 10 member-states elected for 2-year terms and an additional five elected for a 3-year term, the PSC functions on the basis of “equitable regional representation and rotation” through which northern, western, eastern, central and southern regions present candidates for election⁶. It works closely with the Commissioner for Peace and Security, who is elected for a four-year term by the AU Executive Council and is appointed by the Assembly, along with the Chairperson of the AU Commission and the seven other

⁶ Regional representation is usually divided into Central Africa (3 seats), Eastern Africa (3 seats), Northern Africa (3 seats), Southern Africa (3 seats) and Western Africa (4 seats). See more: <https://au.int/en/organs/psc>

sectoral Commissions (African Union 2004). The Commission for Peace and Security is the most important and most significant of the seven Commissions. Through its working methods and the standardization of its operating procedures, the PSC has become the linchpin of the AU's activities, and a vital forum for peace and security on the continent.

The establishment of the PSC marked a radical departure for conflict resolution on the African continent, in its expansion of the concept of security and its willingness to coordinate responses to insecurity, in partnership with the RECs. Yet, for all these achievements, the PSC has been criticized for its overwhelming attention to “extinguishing crises” after they erupted at the expense of its work on conflict prevention, i.e. addressing the governance issues that are detrimental to human security (Vines 2013; Williams 2016). Although an organ of the Commission, the PSC has remained dependent for a long time on the AU Heads of States Conference for the definition of its agenda. For example, the Boko Haram crisis became a pressing continental issue more than five years after its beginning, after the global media frenzy over the abduction of the Chibok schoolgirls (Dersso 2017). Non-military dimensions to security, such as environmental degradation (a threat multiplier), pandemics or organized crime, are very marginal in the PSC's activities (Williams 2016).

Several of these criticisms stem from the influence of member-states at the level of the PSC, and the deliberate weakening of the authority of the Commission Chairperson after 2007. The first five years of the AU were characterized by a flurry of activity, and by the political autonomy of the Chairperson of the Commission with regards to the representatives of the member-states to the PSC⁷. Decision-making depends a lot on the individual personality of the country representatives at the PSC and the relations between the different African rulers. Regime

⁷ This was during the Chairpersonship of former Malian President, Alpha Oumar Konaré (2002-2007) who was noted for his authority with regards to the state's ambassadors at the PSC, and his ability to push forward debates on peace and security issues. Since 2007, the Chairperson of the AU Commission has never been a former head of state, but generally a former minister with different personalities and authority and much more susceptible to the pressures of member-states (Jean Ping, 2007-2012; Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma 2012-2017; Moussa Faki Mahamat, 2017-). Interview with former member of the Peace and Security Secretariat (Addis Ababa: 10 June 2019).

solidarity and the defence of national sovereignty matter a great deal in the PSC's agenda, even though media attention and civil society mobilization, as in the case of the Chibok girls, can exert pressure on the body (Dersso 2017, 10).

The PSC also has minimal abilities to exercise pressure over conflict parties and a poor record of implementing its decisions. The latter is mainly due to the budgetary constraints of the AU as a body, which remains dependent on external funding for its operations (Vines 2013; Weiss and Welz 2014; Williams 2014; 2016). The effectiveness of subsidiarity also remains a challenge due to the lack of clarity on the relationship between the PSC and RECs, more than 14 years after the APSA was established. The same coordination problems also affect the PSC's relations with those African states who are elected as non-permanent members of the United Nations Security Council.

ii. The Continental Early Warning System (CEWS)

Although long in development, the continental early warning system became operational in 2004. Discussions about an early warning system were already occurring in 1992 during the OAU summit in Dakar (June 1992), but the organization's traditional "non-interference" in state affairs constituted a roadblock. Indeed, the policy acknowledgement of "human security" that happened with the transformation of the OAU into the AU and the formation of the PSC in 2004 were decisive in the actualization of the CEWS. The CEWS is supposed to "to facilitate the anticipation and prevention of conflicts" and to provide "timely advice on potential conflicts and threats to peace and security in Africa to AU decision-makers" such as the Chairperson of the Commission, the PSC and the Panel of the Wise (African Union 2018a, 3; 2009, 62). More concretely, it works on data collection and analysis that would then be translated into rapid responses through conflict prevention strategies. At the continental level, a central observation and monitoring body were established in Addis Ababa (The Situation Room) to analyze and collect data. At the regional level, observations and monitoring units were developed to collect and process data that would then be transmitted to the Situation Room. In terms of sources, the CEWS draw from a variety of partners both inside and outside the continent, including IOs, NGOs, media, academia and think-tanks to collect and process

information. The CEWS also produces its own data through AU field missions and liaison offices, as well as those generated by the continent's sub-regional organizations.

The Situation Room is supposed to be operational seven days a week, 24 hours per day⁸ (Williams 2016), but the CEWS has failed to connect with the decision-making bodies of the AU. Indeed, while data has been collected and processed by the Situation Room, it has seldom been effectively translated into conflict prevention strategies by the PSCs, nation-states, and the AU Chairpersons (Institute for Security Studies 2015). For example, despite early warnings, the CEWS failed to generate initial discussions within the PSC on the 2007 Kenyan post-electoral crises or the 2008 political troubles in Guinea-Bissau (Williams 2016). This is partly due to national reticence to effectively discuss internal matters at the continental level (Institute for Security Studies 2017). The CEWS has had challenges making a decisive impact on conflict prevention and remains stuck, providing analysis from mostly open-source reportage as the AU and RECs have few of their own resources for information and intelligence gathering. Indeed, one of the challenges of the CEWS since its formation has been to engage with regional early warning mechanisms, such as ECOWARN effectively. Due to the scarcity of resources, staff from the CEWS seldom conduct field-level data collection, unlike ECOWAS and Eastern Africa's Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), which have field-based analysts in every country of their regions (Institute for Security Studies 2017). The difference in regional approaches to early warning by the RECs is another challenge to effective early warning; indeed, the degree of collaboration between the CEWS and regional mechanisms varies, as some of them (such as SADC's) are closed and do not engage with open systems such as the CEWS (Institute for Security Studies 2017).

⁸ When I walked by the Situation Room at the Peace and Security Department in June 2019, I noticed that all the monitoring screens were shut off. This did not seem to surprise my interlocutors when I inquired.

iii. *The African Standby Force*

The military component of the APSA was developed to manage the consequence of conflicts that African actors have failed to prevent. The African Standby Force operates under the framework of the UN Charter and in pursuance of the AU Constitutive Act (art 4(h) and (i)) and covers a spectrum of peace operations including preventive deployment, peacekeeping, peacebuilding, post-conflict disarmament, DDR and humanitarian assistance (Cilliers 2008:2). It was during a meeting reuniting military experts and observers from 45 states, held in Harare (Zimbabwe) in 1997 that the African Standby Force originates, but it only became operational in 2004 (Williams 2016).

Key resources in an ASF regional brigade

Unit	Personnel	Light vehicles	Armoured vehicle	Light recce	Helicopters
<i>Brigade HQ</i>	85	15	As required		
<i>4x Infantry battalions</i>	3000	289	As required		
<i>Helicopter Unit</i>	80	10			4
<i>Recce company</i>	150		15	13	
<i>HQ Support Company</i>	65	16			
<i>Military police unit</i>	48	17			
<i>Light signals unit</i>	135	47			
<i>Field engineer unit</i>	505	65			
<i>Logistic Specialization Unit</i>	190	40			
<i>Level 2 Hospital</i>	35	10			
Total	4293	500	15	13	4

In its structure, the ASF includes military, civilian and police components. At the strategic level, the PSC defines the mandate of the ASF, which when deployed, it operates under the command and control of a Special Representative of the Chairperson of the AU Commission. In a similar model to the UN's peace operations missions, regular implementation progress reports are submitted by the PSC Chairperson. The ASF is divided into five general brigades for force generation and preparation. These regional brigades, which mirror the regional representation at the PSC level, are composed of "approximately 4300 troops and some 500 light vehicles" (Williams 2016: 205). They are tasked to support pre-deployment activities and the provision of planning and logistics necessary for a peace support operation (Cilliers 2008).

African Standby Force Regional Membership

Centre (CASF)	Southern (SASF)	Eastern (EASF)	Northern (NARC)⁹	Western (ESF)
Angola		Burundi	Algeria	Benin
DR Congo		Comoros	Egypt	Burkina Faso
Cameroon	Botswana	Djibouti	Libya	Cape Verde
The Central African Republic	Lesotho	Ethiopia	Mauritania	Côte d'Ivoire
Chad	Madagascar	Kenya	Tunisia	The Gambia
Congo	Malawi	Rwanda	Western Sahara	Ghana
Equatorial Guinea	Mauritius	Seychelles		Guinea

⁹ To these countries, we must add Morocco, which re-joined the African Union in 2017.

Gabon	Mozambique	Somalia		Guinea-Bissau
Sao Tome et Principe	Namibia	Sudan		Liberia
	Seychelles	Uganda		Mali
	South Africa			Niger
	Swaziland			Nigeria
	Tanzania	Eritrea		Senegal
	Zambia	South Sudan		Sierra Leone
	Zimbabwe			Togo

Because the five proposed regional brigades did not fit neatly onto Africa's existing RECs in the eastern and northern regions, the ASF required the creation of two new mechanisms to cover these areas: The Eastern African Standby Force (EASF) and the North African Regional Capability (NARC). Six operational scenarios have been outlined in the ASF's mandate ranging from the regional/military advice to a political mission (Scenario 1) that could be deployed in 30 days from the mandate definition to a military intervention to prevent genocide (Scenario 6), operational 14 days after the mandate. The ASF also fits into the global peace and security architecture. It falls under Chapter VIII of the United Nations Charter on regional security arrangements. A UN Security Council resolution for its deployment is therefore necessary when its actions fall within the framework of enforcement.

African Standby Force Design Scenarios

Scenario	Description	Deployment requirement (from mandate resolution)
1	AU/Regional military advice to a political mission	30 days
2	AU/regional observer mission co-deployed with a UN mission	30 days
3	Stand-alone AU/Observer Mission	30 days
4	AU/Regional Peacekeeping force for Chapter VI preventive deployment missions (and peacebuilding)	30 days
5	AU Peacekeeping force for complex multidimensional peacekeeping missions, including those involving low-level spoilers	90 days with the military component being able to deploy in 30 days
6	AU intervention, e.g. genocide situations where the international community does not act promptly	14 days with robust military forces
Here “robust” means about 2,500 troops (1,000 within fourteen days, and a further 1,500 within the following fortnight) on the ground within 30 days (Cilliers, 2008, p.10).		

The ASF also includes a Rapid Deployment Capacity (RDC) component that allows for its deployment within 14 days after a mandate has been issued for scenario VI. Theoretically, each regional brigade is expected to have a RDC, composed of 2 500 personnel per regional economic community/regional mechanism (REC/RM).

But the AU has struggled to make the ASF operational, and several roadmaps have been developed. The AU's initial plan (2005 roadmap) was to enable the ASF to manage the entire spectrum of scenarios anywhere in Africa by 30 June 2010, but this was not met. Instead, by 2010 four of the five regional forces had attained what was called Initial Operating Capacity (tested through their participation in a training exercise called Amani Exercise I) (Williams 2016: *ibid.*). The last evaluation of the ASF's readiness in October-November 2015 (Exercise Amani II) saw the participation of 6000 military, police and civilian actors, deployed by states and international organizations, in Lohatla, South Africa (Rees 2015b), with coordination from Addis Ababa. Assessments highlighted the dominance of the military during the exercise in the context of multidimensional peace operations and the lack of a political process paralleling the planning, analysis and implementation of the exercise (Rees 2015a). Logistical considerations were another challenge: indeed, several TCCs could not transport themselves, their troops or their armoured vehicles¹⁰. And despite being declared operational in 2015, the Maputo Plan (2016-2020) recognizes the lingering logistical challenges and stresses the necessity of strengthening the planning capacities of the ASF, of easing the decision-making process for the activation of the ASF in collaboration with the RECs and RMs, and of securing stable funding for future deployments (UA Maputo Plan 2016).

Another challenge to the ASF is doctrinal. Scenario VI schedules an intervention by the ASF when the risk of genocide is imminent, but it is far from clear whether the AU is ready to do what must be done to prevent a genocide¹¹. The events in Burundi (2014-5) have shown clearly enough the difficulties for the AU to take a clear political stance on issues where Scenario VI might be invoked, and as an intergovernmental organization, it is far from certain that the Commission will wade into these issues. In other words, Scenario VI might exist, but the AU

¹⁰ Angola provided airlift to Uganda's and Rwanda's troops and armored vehicles for the exercise, using its Ilyushin aircraft while Algeria and Nigeria transported troops from ECOWAS participating countries.

¹¹ Interview CEPWD/PSD staff member, (Addis Ababa, 3 June 2019).

has not figured out how to ascertain risks of genocide and whether it is willing to topple a government that might be involved in such practices.

Funding remains another challenge as arrangements are yet to be finalized (Rees, 2015a), and even in the best-case scenario, the ASF will remain massively dependent on external funding (from the UN and the EU) with the AU contributing only 25% of its budget. This external dependency is a critical obstacle to the effectiveness of the ASF; given the delays and the mandate readjustments, it might entail.

iv. The Panel of the Wise

The Panel of the Wise is the mediation component of the APSA and was set up to “to support the efforts of the PSC and those of the Chairperson of the Commission, particularly in the area of conflict prevention” (African Union 2016a). Composed of 5 recognized personalities from the five regions of the continent and various diverse backgrounds who have “made outstanding contributions to the cause of peace, security and development on the continent” (African Union 2016a), the Panel can act on the basis of its own initiatives or following a request of the PSC. The panelists are elected to three-year terms by the AU Assembly, after being nominated by the AU Commission Chairperson. Peacemaking and preventive diplomacy are the two main tasks of the Panel, which, operationally, must facilitate communications channels between conflict parties on the one hand and the PSC and the AU Commission on the other. The Panel also carries out fact-finding missions where there is danger of armed conflict breaking out or escalating, develops confidence-building measures, and initiates reconciliation processes, among other actions (Williams 2016). It has also submitted thematic reports on issues relevant to peace and security such as non-impunity, women and children in armed conflicts and electoral disputes. Since the nomination of the first five members in 2007¹², the Panel has been involved in a host of political crises, from Guinea, Guinea-Bissau,

¹² The first five wise were Ahmed Ben Bella of Algeria, who served as chair, Salim Ahmed Salim of Tanzania, Elisabeth K. Pognon of Benin, Miguel Trovoada of Sao Tome and Principe, and Brigalia Bam of South Africa. At the July 2010 Summit in Kampala, Ben Bella and Ahmed Salim were reappointed for another term ending in December 2013 and three

Kenya, Madagascar and Zimbabwe. But as with other AU institutions, it is poorly staffed, and there is consensus that without serious resources, it will not be able to perform as the dynamic and proactive advisory body imagined in the PSC protocol.

v. *The Peace Fund*

The Peace Fund was established in 1993 to support the OAU but was restructured into the AU to support its peace operations. Per the PSC Protocol, the Peace Fund is tasked with providing “the necessary financial resources (...) to peace and security (African Union 2004, 26–27). The Peace Fund is supposed to be financed through financial appropriations from the regular AU budget, voluntary contributions from the Member States, international partners and other actors such as the private sector, civil society organizations and private individuals. Other ways to raise money for the Peace Fund include fundraising activities by the Commission, and the ability of the Chairperson of the Commission to raise and accept voluntary contributions from sources outside of the continent.

The PSC Protocol also schedules the establishment of a revolving Trust Fund within the Peace Fund, to be managed by the relevant organs of the AU upon recommendation by the PSC.

Despite its importance, the Peace Fund has remained dormant for a long time, with several member-states defaulting on their assessed contributions. Indeed, a study by the AU shows that, on average, only 67% of assessed contributions are collected annually from member-states, with 30 among them, defaulting either wholly or partially on average every year (African Union 2016c, 6). Over much of its history, the AU has depended on external partners to finance in peace operations, and the different programs it is spearheading in the continent. Over 70% of its budget was funded by external partners by 2016 (Louw-Vaudran 2016a)

new members were appointed: Mary Chinery Hesse of Ghana; Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia; and Marie Madeleine Kalala-Ngoy of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The current members of the panel are Albina Faria de Assis Pereira Africano (Angola), Speciso Wandira Kazibwe (Uganda), Lakhdar Brahimi (Algeria), Luisa Diogo (Mozambique) and Edem Kodjo (Togo).

During a Special Summit in Tripoli in August 2009, the member-states decided to increase their contributions to the Peace Fund from 6% to 12% of the AU regular budget. Months later, during the 16th Ordinary Session of the AU in Addis Ababa, it was decided that the increase would be implemented over a three-year period, beginning in 2011. But by 2016, the increase was far from effective. The Peace Fund stood only at 7% of the AU budget, mainly due to the “high level of arrears and late payments of member-states’ assessed contributions”(African Union 2016b, 4). This situation has made the Peace Fund very dependent on external partners, despite the additional voluntary contributions of some member-states.

As part of the debates on making the AU “fit for purpose”(Kagamé 2017), the member-states committed to funding by themselves 25 percent of the AU’s peace and security activities by 2020 (later expanded to 2023). While their contributions to the Peace Fund was voluntary before, member-states now have to contribute to the Fund based on the scale of assessment used to calculate their contributions to the AU’s operational budget (International Crisis Group 2020, 12). In January 2016, Donald Kaberuka, the former President of the African Development Bank (AfDB), was nominated as the AU Commission High Representative on the Peace Fund in January 2016 with the mission of finding ways to revitalize the Fund. By January 2020, the Fund stood at 141 mln USD (Xinhua 2020), the highest it has been since its creation, although still short of the required 400 mln USD. There have been discussions since 2015 between the AU and the UN on how to share the burden of financing peace operations in Africa through the Peace Fund, to have more predictable funding for their peace and security activities, there. An initial scheme where the AU would pay 25% and the UN, 75%, was considered but has been fraught with misconceptions and misinterpretations (International Crisis Group 2020). An Ethiopian attempt in December 2018 to secure a resolution of the UN Security Council, to make it a principle, for the UN to use assessed contributions to finance missions UN-authorized AU-led peace support operations, was rejected by the United States(International Crisis Group 2020, 6). The United States faulted the AU for not having met some of the UNSC’s council’s conditions on funding, human rights compliance and financial governance. Attempts by South Africa in July 2019 to lobby the

US for its support of the UN's contribution to the Peace Fund were not successful and led to further divisions among the PSC. Indeed, some of the AU member-states wanted their contributions in troops to be considered as part of the 25% self-sufficiency commitment. Other states suggested that the 25% contribution should not be exclusive to peace operations but also include mediation and preventive diplomacy activities, two other core activities funded by the Peace Fund (International Crisis Group 2020). These debates generated frustration between the two organizations, leading the PSC to pause the negotiations, to allow a consensus among AU member-states (AU PSC 2019a). The objective is to develop a clear African position on what is scheduled to be covered by the 25 percent contribution.

vi. Assessing regional security governance in Africa

African regional actors have become key actors in regional security governance over the last decades. These regional initiatives have, at times, been spurred by the texts governing regional protocols, and at others, been heavily influenced by the policy preferences of influential leaders. Despite the normative frameworks, a country's decision to intervene as part of a regional action is motivated by different interests, avowed and hidden, and various pressures that go beyond the official discourses (Söderbaum and Tavares 2009). Ideological and political interests are often central to a country's decision to support a regional military intervention. More individualized dimensions, such as personal relationships among leaders, kinship affiliations or family ties, can also be relevant to understanding the decision by a regional organization to field a military operation in a security hotspot.

Most of the African Union's operations in conflict zones were developed as interim measures, in advance of broader UN engagement. Such was the case with AMIB in Burundi, which was viewed as a bridging mechanism, and AMISOM in Somalia, which remains heavily dependent on external funds for its operations. The idea of "integrated missions" became central in the continent's security framework, as it developed and engaged more with extra-continental partners. The AU and RECs such as ECOWAS have borne the brunt of the burden of conflict management operations since the 2000s. But their successes have been mixed since they remain in most of the cases

ill-equipped for their missions, and have doctrinal differences with the UN, on peacekeeping and peace enforcement (Thérout-Benoni 2013). In their assessment of African REC's actions in security governance, Hentz et al. (2009) stress that two main weaknesses must be overcome for African actors to be more effective. The first one is administrative and logistical: African organizations have shown their institutional gaps and limitations in the whole spectrum of conflict management, from mediation efforts to peacekeeping. Logistical shortcomings, poor coordination and weak harmonization among TCCs occur all too often. This echoes the "capabilities gap" argument put forward as the main impediment to effective security governance by African regional actors (Babarinde 2011; Badmus 2016).

The second weakness is the lack of adequate human and financial resources. Despite their engagement, AU and ECOWAS still lack sufficient funds, troops, material and strategic capabilities, and qualified staff "to sustain even relatively small-scale peace operations" (Babarinde 2011; Badmus 2016). Appraising the African Standby Force, Engel and Gomes Porto conclude that "ECCAS Brigade in Central Africa exists only in a rudimentary way, and NASBRIG in North Africa is embryonic at best" (Engel and Porto 2009; Hentz et al. 2009).

Following the *Agenda for Peace* (1993), the United Nations supported action by regional organizations whenever the situation was too complex or risky for the UN to engage with on its own (African Union s. d.). The report stresses that the primary responsibility for maintaining international peace and security remains with the UN Security Council, but that regional actors could play a more prominent role, under the Security Council, as a matter of decentralization, delegation and cooperation. The purpose is to lighten the burden of the UN Security Council and to foster more consensus, participation and legitimacy in international peace and security (United Nations 1992). Cravinho notes that this approach is very detrimental to the success of the actions of regional organizations since it casts a blind eye on the UN's limitations, and only involves African regional organizations in conflict resolution/management operations in the most complex of conflict situations, where the chances of success are limited (Cravinho 2009a). This is notwithstanding their already limited financial, material and political capabilities

and their dependence on external partners such as the EU and the UN to fund their operations. The UN acknowledged this discrepancy in its Report of the African Union-United Nations Panel on Modalities for the Support to African Union Peacekeeping Operations, which noted the “growing anomalous and undesirable trend in which organizations lacking the necessary capabilities have borne the brunt in terms of providing the international community's initial response, while others more capable have not engaged” (Prodi 2008:7). The UN’s engagement with African actors, especially the AU, is unparalleled, compared to other regional organizations with joint consultative annual meetings between the two organizations since 2007. But this partnership is characterized by the discrepancy in capacities between the UN and African actors, which has often led to friction and policy preferences that marginalize the interests of African actors when confronted with those of the UN Security Council. Murithi describes the dynamic between the two organizations as one of “hybrid paternalism” in which while responding to conflict, “the basic and dangerous work on the ground guided by the all-wise and ‘fatherly’ coterie of UN advisors”(Murithi 2009, 341). Building on this, Tieku and Hankak define “hybrid paternalism” as composed of five core elements:

- legal paternalism, that is, how international law defines the relationship between the AU and UN
- resource-based paternalism, which focused on the material incentives inherent in the partnership due to the AU’s dependence on the UNSC for resources.
- political paternalism, which centers around the outward appearance of an equal partnership based on the principle of open and honest communication, despite the apparent power balance between the two actors.
- normative paternalism, which revolves around the notions of right and wrong, and how the two institutions mutualize each other’s legitimacy in security affairs in the continent.
- And lastly, ideational paternalism which focuses on their shared worldview, policy ideas, and the similarities in their organizational architectures, institutional mandates, and inter-organizational arrangements (Tieku and Hakak 2014, 140).

The security turn of African regional organizations changed how the continent responded to conflict. ECOWAS and the AU became more involved in security governance, became key interlocutors to the UN and other international actors, and developed increasingly complex protocols to manage and resolve conflict within their own regional spaces. Their actions were characterized by uneven political will and their impact on the conflict on the continent has been hampered by the weak institutionalization of their policy mechanisms and their capability gaps (Babarinde 2011; Franke and Ganzle 2008; Williams 2009; Weiss and Welz 2015). The existence of regional security protocols does not mean that they are consistently applied; instead, the process of managing conflict remains ad hoc and reactive. Initiatives and mechanisms do not anticipate security challenges but are developed in reaction to grave security crises (Gandois 2009; Esmenjaud 2014). Reflecting on a decade of African-led peace operations, Okeke argues that AU-led PSOs illustrates an ad hoc process in which they remain heavily dependent on external support for the implementation of their policies (Okeke 2014). There is a consensus in the literature that the capabilities gap of African regional organizations and its corollary, the security dependence on extra-continental partners, is likely to persist due to the unwillingness of many African states to take on more political, material and financial responsibility (Okeke 2014; Ambrosetti and Esmenjaud 2014). Some African states have exploited their dependence on extra-continental actors in order to consolidate their regimes; they deploy troops as part of UN missions in conflict areas, for example, in exchange for being supported politically, financially and militarily by international actors, despite their problematic human rights and governance records. This geopolitical rent generated by this security dependence is manifest in the case of Uganda with AMISOM in Somalia and Burkina Faso in the Sahel prior to 2014. Both countries, although part of regional ensembles, acted as critical partners in counterterrorism and negotiation for Western countries dealing with violent extremist groups in Somalia and in the Sahel.

The generalized state-centric perspective on regions also hampers regional security governance in Africa along with the formation of the ensemble through hysteresis. Hysteresis being defined as the perpetuation of ensembles developed during the colonial period without the existence of the logic initially driving them (Bach 2005; 2017).

Concepts such as “West” and “Central” Africa are contested, as can be seen in the debates between President Senghor of Senegal, and Gowon of Nigeria, on what constituted “West Africa” before the formation of ECOWAS in 1975. Besides, the impact of external interventions on the production of “regions” cannot be discounted (Charbonneau 2017: 409): regions are identities created through “historical discourses and practices” (Anderson 1991; Lewis and Wigen 1997; Mbembe 2013; Mudimbe 1988) and become manifest through the formation of regional organizations. This legacy still impacts their security governance activities with the prevalence of transnational threats at the edge of national and regional borders. Overlaps and competition between regional organizations are a common feature in this context, despite the acceptance of the subsidiarity principle. This is heightened by the persistence of ad hoc processes over established policies and the importance of personal relationships in the field of security. Regional organizations are still under the control of member-states, and the building of consensus remains an integral part of their work. In this context, collective security is viewed as “negative,” in the sense that it might preclude the consideration of the legitimate grievances of subnational actors and be seen from the perspective of regime solidarity, especially with the amalgamation of regime security with national/human security. Containing and limiting the propagation of conflict becomes thus a vital feature of the actions of regional actors:

Rather than thinking about collective security as balancing against a threat external to the community, instead African collective security as embedded within IOs tends to focus on the threats posed by the IOs’ own weakest members. In short, African IOs’ visions of collective security focus on protecting members from other members’ tendencies of weakness instead of focusing on the threats posed by non-members’ capabilities of power (J. Warner 2016, 52).

African leaders’ perceptions of security than are not exclusively externally oriented, but more often comes from within their national borders (Ayoob 1995; Clapham 1996; Lemke 2002, 162). Reflecting on the relations between state and society, Mohamed Ayoob argues that security dynamics between “Third World” and Western countries are fundamentally different. While security threats tend to be viewed as coming from the outside in Western countries, and regional security arrangements established to counter an outside threat in the West, security threats in

the Third World are viewed as coming from inside. For this author, this Third World security predicament is rooted in the state's inability to control effectively most parts of its territory, which can favour internal strife from the peripheries (Ayoob 1995). This must be considered in order to explain the challenges faced by African regional actors in security governance, and the tensions between regime security which is still central to the ethos of the African state, and the human security norm around which most security frameworks have been built since the 1990s.

A critical takeaway of this discussion is the necessity of considering the state-society complex when looking at regional security governance in Africa. Despite the security turn and the increasing emphasis on human rights and human governance, regional security governance on the continent is still an affair between states, where their sovereignty is paramount and where non-state and hybrid actors are not viewed as legitimate interlocutors of regional organizations. It is crucial to consider the nature of the state, to not consider the discourses of state actors at face value. The APSA is built around a state-centric perspective on regionalism and securitization, which sidelines the problems associated with statebuilding on the continent, and the critical role played by hybrid orders in domestic affairs. Restoring state order and authority is a recurrent feature in the discourse of African and extra-continental actors on security governance. Still, this discourse ignores the realities of statehood on the continent and the implications of security governance when important non-state actors are excluded from the process. This, in turn, warrants careful consideration of the dynamics within the postcolonial African state and how some of its regions have been securitized to understand how subnational dynamics limits and constrain regional security governance on the continent.

6. THE “CRISIS” OF GOVERNANCE IN THE POSTCOLONIAL AFRICAN STATE

The process of formation of regional organizations in Africa has been built for the most part around states and the legal recognition of their sovereignty. Despite the debates about their weakness, fragility and failure, there is an implicit endorsement of the Westphalian model of what a state should be in the various regionalization processes on the continent. In the Sahelian context, this has informed the securitization of the absence of state control over parts

of its territory in the post-9/11 period (Piombo 2007; Hazen 2010). Within the framework of the Global War on Terror (GWOT), states which “allow(ed) their territories to appear chaotic, cut off, ungoverned or ungovernable” (Mitchell 2010, 29:295) were viewed as risks for their neighbours and to the international community. The existence of these ungoverned spaces was correlated with the proliferation of violent nonstate actors providing governance and using these territories as staging grounds for attacks elsewhere, which was seen as a prelude to state failure, regional destabilization and global insecurity (Schmidle 2009; Mitchell 2010). In the Sahel, the border region between Mali and Algeria became the sanctuary of AQIM, where they prospered due to the existence and development of an illicit economy based on cross-border smuggling. The securitization of these spaces was further developed with the kidnapping-for-ransom of Western nationals in the region. These ransoms allowed them to solidify their position and to challenge the armies of Mali and its neighbours increasingly. AQIM’s actions have been regularly used as an example of the destabilizing effect of “ungoverned spaces” within the region (Mehler 2004; Raleigh and Dowd 2013).

Despite the prevalence of the discourse on ungoverned spaces over the last decade in the Sahel, it contrasts with the historical patterns of local governance in the region and with the place of legal sovereignty as a historical reality. Before 9/11, numerous authors have studied the challenges of state-making on the continent and the relations between state and society within a legally defined territory. Grounded in the dynamics of the Cold War and the patterns of alliances that were occurring on the continent between the two superpowers, this literature was interested in state formation in Africa, compared to Europe, and how developments at the global level, such as the debt and financial crisis of the 1970s, contributed to more outside intervention through structural adjustment programs, and to more fragility and instability. The emphasis was put on the different political regimes, and this literature often equated their interests with those of the state. In his analysis of “third world regimes,” Clapham elaborates a sophisticated theory of state-making and governance based on the ruling regime’s interests, which is determined by their “legitimizing” political support base. In his view, third world states are the legacies of 19th-century European

imperialism; their borders do not follow an organic socio-cultural reality but were drawn based on the imperatives of colonial powers (C. Clapham 1998). Also, the same logic that drove imperialism, i.e. economic exploitation, still pervades third world politics according to Clapham, which includes the whole of Africa but also, America south of the United States, Asia except the Soviet Union, Japan and China, and the Oceanic Islands except Australia and New Zealand. The “third world state” is, at the same time, powerful due to its centralization and strong hierarchy, but also fragile due to the lack of organic unity between the state and the national society. This lack of organic unity gives rise to influential nonstate interest groups, which can hijack the state apparatus for their private purposes, giving rise to authoritarian rulers and widening the gap between ruling regimes and societies (Migdal 1988; Rothchild and Chazan 1988). In the governance process, different interests are at play but do not carry the same weight. In essence, economic interests are central, followed by the political relationships between the regime and territory, and lastly, the physical abilities to deploy its authority by the state. Although Clapham does not give detailed attention to societal dynamics in “third world politics” and sees the state as the only “entrepreneur,” the merit of his analysis resides in the disconnect he highlights between the state and society.

The postcolonial state in Africa is often characterized as “weak” or “fragile” in the literature (Hydén 2006), but different reasons have been put forward to explain this reality. The “neo-patrimonial”/elite capture hypothesis tends to put forward how the control of the state by specific interest groups, and the hazy boundary between private and state wealth, contribute to widening the gap between state and society, and to the fragility of the state. In this regard, Bates argues that fragility is rooted in market distortions and state interventions, in which political elites transfer resources from rural areas to urban ones (Bates 2014). Rothchild and Chazan (1988) argue that hegemonic exchanges are at the core of state-society dynamics. In this system, the state is unable to have complete hegemony over societies that are often multiethnic, and to overcome this lack of cohesion, has to facilitate coexistence and its survival by making sure that each groups’ interests are accommodated within its structure of governance (Rothchild and Chazan 1988). By providing and maintaining access to patronage and networks, the state ensures its survival through societal

stability. Single-party regimes and lack of political rights and freedom often characterize these regimes (Hyden 2006, 104). Elaborating on this, Migdal argues that the fragility of the African state is determined by the relative strength of the societies within its territory. Where societies are weak, the state tends to be stronger (Migdal 1988).

Bayart, on the other hand, offers a much more refined theory of political rule in postcolonial Africa. Bayart stresses that African regimes post-independence have appropriated the inherited colonial state and its structures, for their own purposes, and to coopt hybrid orders at multiple levels to assert state authority. In his view, the state is perceived as a source of revenue, ripe for predation (Bayart 2006). Using a sociological perspective, Bayart goes against bureaucratic and Marxist models of state formation and argues that the state in Africa is perceived by its representatives but also by the societies as the principal means of acquiring wealth, privilege, power and prestige. More than the normalization of graft, these “politics of the belly” are the way for a clientelist state to ensure its survival, which is never given, and rooted in longstanding historical practices. The postcolonial African state can only be understood if one conceives it as a way of access to “predatory positions” or giving rise to “neo-patrimonial relations,” while also fostering its dependence on the outside world through extraversion practices (Bayart 2000). In this regard, the crisis of the African state serves to foster dependence, which serves the purpose of increasing access to resources for those that occupy “predatory powers” and ensuring the survival of regimes. For Bayart, the marginal role of Africa in world politics as a form of extraversion, i.e. where this unequal relationship is used as a means of gaining benefits through international cooperation. African regimes are thus not only exploited but use their dependency on the international community to achieve their own military, political and security benefits.

Despite its rich empirical detail on the practices of governance in Cameroon and DRC, this explanatory model remains rigid in its perspective and essentialist in its generalization. Elite predation, although a constant feature of African politics, varies considerably among different countries, a reality for which the model fails to account. Nor does the model consider the diverse historical experiences of colonization and decolonization on the continent. Indeed, the historical trajectories of South Africa, which underwent colonization and then apartheid, is different

from Morocco, which was governed under a protectorate system by France for 50 years. Another limitation of the neo-patrimonial perspective on the African state is the limited consideration given to globalization and how it affected elite behaviour and state presence through its impact on state-society relations.

Other authors, following the 1980s financial and debt crisis, found in the legacy of colonialism the cause for the crisis of the African state. The argument being that European imperialism left the continent with a unique and “singularly difficult legacy” (Young 1994). The “scramble for Africa” was marked by two logics: the effective occupation of the continent’s hinterland but also “ruthless extractive action” to self-finance the colonies, through the exportation of raw goods. Using the same logic, Mamdani argues that an inability to deliver democratic governance is central to the crisis of the African state (Mamdani 1996). This inability is rooted in the colonial past and its extractive logic, rather than in a failure to govern. The transposition of the “European state model” in Africa through imperialism led to specific state-society patterns, among which was the disconnect between the rural and urban areas, which follow the different modes of colonial rule. For Mamdani, notions such as “ethnicity” became social markers during the colonial period and came to dominate post-independence politics in Africa. While these authors show the links between the colonial and postcolonial state, they fail to consider Africa’s diverse colonial experiences. Even between the two case studies used by Mamdani (1996), Uganda and South Africa, the colonial experience was very different, as were also state-society relations following their independence. Furthermore, while the Belgian authorities essentialized ethnicity (cf. categories “Hutu” and “Tutsi”) in their colonies (Mamdani 2002), ethnic identity was still relevant in other African societies and was the principle around which they were organized.

Political geography was also put forward to explain the patterns of state presence within its recognized territory. For these authors, state formation in Africa was animated by the lack of sufficient state capacity to project and be present in all parts of the national territory. Already in 2000, Herbst highlighted how geography determined the state’s ability to project its presence and to be the effective source of legitimate violence (Herbst 2014). This problem is particularly acute in areas with low population densities, which get more challenging to govern the further they

are removed from the center. This is echoed in the words of a Malian interlocutor for whom “the state’s hold ends at the toll gate in the outskirts of Bamako,” and the further we are from Bamako, the less effective state presence is. For Herbst, the exclusion of peripheries in several African states from networks of patronage and politics engenders violence. While internal conflicts tend to occur at the fringes of the state, it is arguable whether these local elites are, in fact, excluded from networks of patronage and politics. Based on this geographical model, patterns of governance of West African regimes create different modes of state presence in the countryside, based on the regime’s economic interests and relations with local societies (Boone 2003). State presence in its territory is uneven due to the differences in the political economy of these regions with regard to property rights, economy and local governance. These considerations determine the political influence of actors in the “countryside” and the economic needs of local elites. State presence and the distribution of power is informed by bargaining between the center and the periphery, rather than coming from unilateral government choices. Analyzing state presence in the countryside in several regions of Senegal and Côte d’Ivoire, Boone identifies different institutional arrangements in the peripheries of these states, depending on two criteria: the first one “spatial” focuses on the physical projection of state institutions within the national space and the second, “processural,” analyzes the de facto distribution of authority between central and local (village-level) actors (Boone 2003: 30). Thus, she identifies four modes of state presence:

1. A *power-sharing model* of state presence in which a deconcentrated institutional structure and developed authority, and where a dense network of state institutions in the countryside provides the political infrastructure for de facto or de jure devolution of authority to local elites.
2. A *usurpation model* of state presence in which a deconcentrated institutional structure coexists with a centralized authority. State institutions at the local level provide infrastructure for state agents to disrupt local circuits of power and micromanage the political process.

3. An *administrative occupation model* in which there is a concentrated institutional structure at the local level and centralized authority. State representatives govern at the local level from a select number of districts and are autonomous from the influence and pressures of the local elites
4. And lastly, a *non-incorporated territory* with concentrated institutional presence and devolved state authority. The presence of state institutions does not translate into an effective authority in the local scene, where “the center does not engage or impose” (2003:33). Local elites play the central role in this scenario, where the state seems to “abdicate” its authority. This mode of governance is found in regions that have little economic value for the state because otherwise, the “state will have an interest in taxing producers and in monitoring the accumulation of wealth in private hands” (Boone *ibid.*)

What flows from Boone’s argument about state projection is the presence of different actors, acting as governance providers in different ways, depending on the territory. This model is inherent in the contestation of the “monopoly of legitimate violence” by the African state by nonstate actors in Mehler’s idea of an “oligopoly of violence.” The state in Africa bears the hallmarks of the European model, with its claim over the monopoly of violence and of levying taxes over its populations, along with the legal recognition of these claims. But in actual practice, these claims are “only superficially internalized by state officials while it is alive in thinking and discourse as a pretense” (Mehler 2004, 1). This nuanced perspective of state presence and distribution of authority over its territory is more representative of the modes of governance in several African countries, including Sahelian ones than the politicized perspective of some parts of Africa as “ungoverned.” The African state is characterized by the presence of, and collaboration among, multiple powerholders and sources of authority, including the state, each connected through alliances, hierarchies and relations to determine the extent of power across territories. Governance in this context is done through a mixture of real repression by the state but also a permanent readiness to negotiate with local powerholders, sometimes against the rules idealized by the Westphalian model. Each source of authority, i.e. each “oligopoly of violence” has to prove its ability to rule by performing in the provision of public goods

(security and protection), through charisma, or ideology, or through the congruence of convictions between protectors and protected (Mehler 2004, 545). The effective performance in these provisions, in turn, is the source of their legitimacy. The same idea regarding the overlapping orders of governance within a territory is also reproduced in Hüsken and Klute's argument regarding the heterarchy of governance orders in numerous African countries (Hüsken and Klute 2015). Mali, Niger and several Sahelian states, despite the existence of recognized state authority, are effectively governed by a variety of agents more or less connected to the state. These competing and overlapping governance orders constitute the main challenges in the Sahel, rather than the limited presence of the state in these territories (Raleigh and Dowd 2013).

In a general sense, proponents of the concept of “ungoverned space” use it as evidence of the crisis of the African state and the necessity of outside intervention (statebuilding by NGOs and partner countries) whose ultimate aim is to fix governance challenges, strengthen institutions and overcome corruption by substituting themselves for the state, in order to limit the expansion of these “borderless threats” from these “ungoverned spaces” and contain the threat to regional stability. The securitization process has changed the perception of the continent and its peoples from a development/humanitarian perspective into a security threat that should be contained (M. R. Duffield 2001; Abrahamsen 2005). This securitization serves to legitimize outside interventions, often welcomed by individual states and organizations, but without much effect on core development and humanitarian challenges. This instrumental use of the concept has been a recurrent staple of its critics who highlight the poverty of the concept, and view it as a shortcut for quick-fix solutions (Utas 2013). Seeing the presence of nonstate actors and their embeddedness within government as evidence that these areas are ungoverned obscures the relationships between these states and the societies within. Indeed, the concept is problematic due to its “statism” and its minimal concern with subnational dynamics, with state-society relations, and the different modes of state presence. Critics of the concept define it as a “normative judgement of the type of governance” (Clunan and Trinkunas 2010, 5) within these territories on the basis of the ideal Westphalian model. While the term implies an absence of governance, a granular

analysis of these territories may show modes of governance, sometimes hybrid or completely distinct from the state, carrying different legitimacies within these societies. Building on the same criticism, Risse argues that these so-called “ungoverned spaces,”

are not “ungoverned” or even “ungovernable.” In fact, governance is sometimes provided even under rather adverse conditions of fragile or failing statehood. Under particular circumstances, nonstate actors become governance actors in that they are systematically engaged in rulemaking or the provision of collective goods (Risse 2015: 24)

The qualificative “ungoverned” obscures the subnational modes of governance that are happening, and that may be seen as legitimate by the societies within these territories. The influence of subnational actors, be they tribes, militias, or business interests associated with the state, contradicts the model of statehood based on the Westphalian model. In the Sahel, the notion of “ungoverned spaces” has been abused to describe political and security dynamics linked to the presence of AQIM and to legitimate international interventions with the purpose of “reinstating” a state that has never held much control over these territories. In this regard, the concept is thin in its meaning, as it perpetuates the securitized discourse centred on the transposition of the Westphalian model of statehood without considering the relations between the state and these societies. It is mainly informed by normative prescriptions over what a state should be, rather than based on the everyday practices of governance and state-making within these territories. Thus, it perpetuates a state-centric and securitized perspective of governance, with the absence of state control in Sahelian states making them a frontier in the GWOT in the discourse of politicians (Abrahamsen 2005).

Governance, defined as the “the various institutionalized modes of social coordination to produce and implement binding rules collectively, or to provide collective good” (Risse 2015:9), can happen without government. In Mali, Niger and Chad, national governments have often delegated this authority to private subnational actors, especially in sparsely populated territories in the peripheries (Sandor 2016a; Molenaar and van Damme 2017; Lebovich 2017). In this regard, limited state presence does not equate with a disconnect between local and state networks of patronage and politics. Sources of power and authority may vary within a state; in the Sahel, they tend

to be part of the everyday governance practices and are not always in an antagonistic relationship with the formal state apparatus.

Limited statehood captures better the subnational dynamics at play in these territories, the presence and interests of nonstate actors acting as governance providers while avoiding normative prescription. Risse defines statehood “as an institutionalized rule structure with the ability to rule authoritatively and to legitimately control the means of violence. While no state governs all the time hierarchically, states at least possess the ability to authoritatively make, implement, and enforce central decisions for a collectivity” (Risse 2011:4). This definition of statehood builds on Max Weber’s formal and hierarchical conception of the state, as a political organization that “successfully upholds the claim to the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force in the enforcement of its order” over a given territory (Weber and Roth 1968, 54) and on Krasner’s nuanced perspectives on sovereignty (Krasner 1999).

For Krasner (1999), sovereignty as a legal principle is sustained by mutual recognition and shared expectations in their relation by states in the international community, despite its incomplete nature in many contexts. Given the legal principle and the actual principles of interference in domestic affairs, there is a mismatch between state authority and state control over its recognized territory. Authority involves a “mutually recognized right for an actor to engage in specific kinds of activities” (Krasner 1999, 10). If sometimes authority and control are synonymous, it is not always the case when through brute force without mutual recognition, other actors enforce rules independently of the state (Krasner 1999: 10). Besides, if the recognition of state authority has increased over time, in parts of the world, the state’s ability to control parts of its territory has shrunk. States like Somalia may have a recognized authority within their territory. While in other contexts such as Somaliland and Puntland, effective control is held by non-recognized states or even nonstate actors such as al-Shabaab. In the Sahel, the border region between Mali and Algeria has long eluded state control, especially with the presence of AQIM, which used it as a staging ground for their operations. Thus, depending on the relative balance between state authority and state control, Krasner identifies four types of sovereignty:

- *International legal sovereignty* refers to the practices linked with the mutual sovereignty of territory by territories that have formal legal independence.
- *Westphalian sovereignty*, which is based on the exclusion of external actors from intervening in a given state's internal affairs or being part of its formal authority structures.

If both international legal and Westphalian sovereignties rely on a state's authority and legitimacy from external actors, domestic sovereignty is based on issues related to a state's authority and control within its recognized territory.

- *Domestic sovereignty* refers to "the formal organization of political authority within the state and the ability of public authorities to exercise effective control within the borders of their polity" (Krasner 1999:4).
- A last iteration of sovereignty identified by Krasner is *interdependence sovereignty*, which refers to a state's ability to control the flow of people, goods over its border, and thus based on control.

It is in their domestic sovereignty where the state's relations with the populations occur, for Risse (2015). Building on this, a state's interdependence sovereignty can be compromised over time, as a consequence of internal patterns of authority and control.

This reflection on sovereignty, authority and control, highlights the challenges faced by several states in controlling part of their territory, and in analyzing the role played by nonstate actors in governance within a state's territory. The legal recognition of sovereignty does not necessarily translate into effective control. Statehood is therefore determined by the monopoly over legitimate violence or the ability to rule, i.e. to make and enforce political decisions from the center to the periphery. And based on this definition, limited statehood occurs in areas that are internationally recognized as belonging to a state but where the domestic sovereignty of the state structures is strongly challenged or shared with other subnational actors. In these regions, the governments lack the ability to implement and enforce rules, or to exercise a monopoly of legitimate violence, whether on a temporary or permanent basis. A state's ability to govern or to monopolize legitimate violence may be restricted in different cases:

temporarily, on a territorial level, when its hold over part of its territory is limited; on a sectoral level, when its ability to enforce rules or to provide public goods over specific issues is limited and lastly on a social level when its ability to coerce parts of its population is limited or self-restrained.

This particular framework for understanding state presence offers interesting perspectives on the role of subnational actors in regional security governance. Limited statehood recognizes the presence of different orders of governance within a territory, on whom the central government (i.e. the state) may rely on exercising legitimate violence or enforcing rules. This conceptualization of the state-society dynamics is more appealing than the idea of “failed state,” as the latter assumes that at one point in the past, these “failed states” were successful in their control of their whole territory and their provision of public services and goods to their citizenry. Limited statehood makes room for the possibility of nonstate actors’ involvement in governance and their embeddedness within the state structure. Governance thus involves hybridity, in the sense that “multiple sites of political authority and governance where security is enacted and negotiated” (Luckham and Kirk 2013, 7) and the process of governance involves formal and informal dynamics, including “traditional, personal, kin-based and clientelistic [sic]” along with “modern, imported, or rational actor logics in the shifting historical conditions of particular national and local contexts” (Bagayoko, Hutchful, and Luckham 2016, 6).

The security governance of northern Mali before the 2012 conflict reflected more this hybridity than the formal processes expected in an area of consolidated statehood. The proliferation of armed groups in Mali since 2012 has been enabled by the limited sway of the Malian state over this part of its territory since the country’s independence in 1960. Domestic sovereignty has been shared by the state in the north, especially following the 3rd Tuareg rebellion (1990-1995) which led to the proliferation of communitarian militias who act as “governance actors” thriving off illicit economic circuits in the border regions between northern Mali, southern Algeria, and northern Niger. The pretense of consolidated statehood over the totality of Mali’s territory has confused the interventions of African regional actors in Mali and severely hindered the successes of their actions. This is because they remained oblivious

or unable to engage with subnational hybrid orders. In these areas, the state coexists and collaborates with other local orders of governance, constituted of sub-national actors in the form of militias, traditional chieftaincies and business interests. The influence of these subnational actors increases with the breakdown of domestic sovereignty at the onset of internal conflict (Felbab-Brown, Trinkunas, and Hamid 2017). While a proponent of local orders of governance have focused on how they are reconstituted in post-conflict settings, I focus on how they shape the regionalization of conflicts from the peripheries of the states, and how they impact responses to regional conflict in Mali and the broader Sahel region.

Local actors in these areas of limited statehood are involved in a variety of formal and informal political and economic processes that may transcend national borders. Building on Bach's criticism of regionalism processes in Africa (2017), I argue there is a gap between regionalism as an institutional project in the form of ECOWAS in Africa and regionalization as an everyday reality through the activities of these subnational actors (Bach 2017). This mismatch explains the inability of APSA, as a state-centric institutional project, to address the patterns of conflict, driven by subnational actors embedded in many ways in the state apparatus. Subnational actors in these areas of limited statehood are involved in a variety of formal and informal political and economic processes that is not constrained by formal state borders, or by formal governance mechanisms. This mismatch has led to competing for regionalism discourses on the conflict in Mali, with a growing realization that the security dynamics in the Sahel. This region emerged after the conflict through the discourses of the different security actors, needed to be addressed. The implicit criticism in this discourse was that the APSA and ECOWAS were unfit to lead the regional response. In this context, new cartography of security in the Sahel emerged through new regional groupings, through the readjustments of the APSA but also the emergence of new initiatives such as the G5 Sahel. Rather than meaningfully engaging with these hybrid orders, these new initiatives reproduce the same patterns of collaboration by coopting these subnational actors for security governance, albeit inscribed in a more regional and global discourse on security, one that ranges from irregular migration to counter security. If hybrid orders have become more visible in these new

regional frameworks, subnational actors remain marginal actors, entangled in a series of rivalries with competing orders.

7. THE NEW REGIONALISM LITERATURE ON AFRICA

The explanatory power of state-centric regionalism approaches has been questioned due to its failure to explain the impact of globalization on state and local politics, along with its fixation on the European model of integration (Grant and Söderbaum 2003b). Old regionalism theories cannot explain either the role played by local actors in governance outside of state structures nor the regionalizing dynamics of transborder exchanges that were occurring in numerous African states. This is despite their importance in the development of regional projects on the continent. In this new context, marked by the end of the bipolar order and strategic support for African regimes, several approaches emerged, focusing on the effects of globalization on patterns of regionalization (Grant and Söderbaum 2003). For these authors, the different effects of globalization in the world's different regions also led to varying patterns of regionalism (Hettne 2003, 22). There is a close link between these two phenomena since "regionalization processes constitute an important dimension of global restructuring, but they have an explicit spatial articulation" (Bøås, Marchand, and Shaw 2003, 201).

These approaches, not homogenous among themselves, share a common feature in their ontological understanding of regions as dynamic and the result of a social process, but also their focus on issues related to local trade, economics and security. Regions are understood to be always evolving and changing, a process continually being made and unmade, and should be viewed as social constructs (Neumann 2003:161). Borrowing from Benedict Anderson's perspective of nations, the new regionalism literature defines regions as "imagined communities" whose existence is preceded by the existence of "region-builders". These "region-builders" could be political actors "who, as part of some political project, see it in their interest to imagine a certain spatial and chronological identity for a region, and to disseminate this imagination to a maximum number of other people" (Neumann *ibid*). If political leaders play an important role in "imagining" the region, other regionalizing actors also play a primary role in

shaping it from below. New regionalism approaches and take a keen interest on “informal and mid-level ‘triangular’ relations among not only states but also nonstate actors, notably civil societies and private companies – is a central aspect of the ‘new’ inter- or transnational relations” (Söderbaum et Shaw 2003, 1).

If regions are between the global and the national, micro-regions are the subnational territories occupying the space between the national and the local, and often created “by networks of state and nonstate actors, and even inter-personal [sic] transnational networks (ethnic or family networks, religious ties and so on)” (Hettne 2005, 557). Due to the development of these activities, micro-regions tend to be less confined to the territory of one state, and more likely to spill over borders.

On security issues, new regionalism approaches focus on the attempts by the states and other actors in a “regional space” to transform a security complex with conflict-generating interstate and intrastate relations, into a security community with cooperative external relations (inter-regional/inter-organizational) and domestic peace (within the regional space).

In Africa, these approaches have emphasized the weakness of the African state due to the impact of globalization and the inapplicability of the “Westphalian model” of state sovereignty (Boas 2003). Globalization generates processes and opportunities for state and nonstate actors to subvert formal sources of authority, through its pressures on the abilities of states to direct and control their economies, (Grant and Söderbaum 2003a). With its interest in the process rather than the outcome of regionalization, new regionalism approaches do not consider that regional organizations in Africa will achieve the levels of institutional frameworks developed by the EU. A greater emphasis is put on the relations between informal and formal (state-originating) modes of governance and how these are shaped by the connections between African governments and their societies (Söderbaum and Taylor 2010). In this regard, most theories of new regionalism agree on the necessity of “unbundling” the state in order to understand how informal modes of governance interact with formalized regional projects, but also to avoid normative prescriptions on how a state or a regional organization ought to behave. Elaborating on these patterns of governance,

Bach shows that a focus on trans-state informal economic networks in which public officials and nonstate actors are involved has led to “shadow regionalism” processes, i.e. informal regionalization without formal regional integration driven by trans-state networks (Bach 1999; 2003)

In this reading, formal regionalization has been more instrumental for the different regimes than successful at sectoral policy integration across the different regions of the continent (Bach 2016). Looking at the history of regional projects on the continent, Bach argues that several of the post-independence projects continued on the basis of previous colonial formations: that is the case with the South African Customs Union (SACU) and the *Communauté Financière Africaine* (CFA, previously *Communauté française africaine*/French African Community) which has governed the monetary policy of several West African countries since independence. Globalization has also had an effect on the patterns of regionalization on the continent, favouring the consolidation of regimes, and the strengthening of sovereignties through donor support to capacity-building programs of regional organizations (Wyss 2017). The impact of these formal organizations is also considered to be limited, since they focus mainly on the cultivations of interpersonal relationships between heads of state and government, or the development of patronage networks. Bach’s portrayal of regional organizations in Africa is bleak, yet the limited impact of these projects on these regional spaces has been acknowledged even by their proponents (Adedeji 2004). Moving beyond formal processes, Bach borrows from John Igué and Bio-Soulé’s study of informal trade in the Republic of Benin and the instrumentalization of the different regimes on either side of the border with Nigeria, to analyze transborder trade (Igué and Soule 1992). The borders, rather than marking a limit between territories, open new avenues for trade for the state and the transborder communities who have become very effective at developing and cultivating links with external actors, on either side. Trade along the border leads to the development of sophisticated networks and, by extension to regionalization schemes that are not formalized but very present (Bach 2017). Thus, rather than constituting an obstacle, borders and the different regimes they create constitute a resource

and the objective of many African leaders is not to follow a formal border policy but to benefit from how the border creates different economic opportunities from which they can profit.

This “regionalism from below” is pursued by nonstate actors for economic purposes and built on cultural, ethnic and kinship ties between transborder communities. These processes contrast with formal organizations, which tend to serve as a means for “resource capture” and international patronage through state-building and “capacity-building” projects in partnerships with extra-continental actors (Bach 2003). The processes initiated by subnational actors are organic and heterarchical. State-driven regionalism is structured, and formal, and is often subverted to become a form of solidarity between regimes. And there may be informal regionalization patterns without any concordant formalized regional integration.

It follows that if regions are dynamic phenomena, continually being made, shaped and unmade, they might not fit the geographical composition of regional organizations and may even challenge these established actors depending on their degree of regionness. The definition of what was “West Africa” opposed different heads of state during the formation of ECOWAS in 1975 and the same contestation occur more recently when apprehending the conflict in Mali and its regional environment. The meaning of the “Sahel” came to be redefined, while new categories such as “Northwest Africa” have been proposed to link the dynamics in Mali, with the past developments in North Africa. In the end, new regional approaches, by unbundling the state, offer a research avenue that goes beyond the symbolic or “regime-boosting” discourses prevalent regarding ECOWAS and the AU. By moving beyond a statist perspective, we can see that regimes and leaders often engage in symbolic and discursive regional activities without always committing to it. The poor institutionalization of regional security actors along with the lack of follow-up regarding their policies, and the lack of independence of their bureaucracy all contribute to this reality.

This gap between the formal project and the commitment of member-states to actualize the security policies explains many of the travails of the APSA. As a formal process mainly built on states and national governments, APSA’s challenges are rooted in the dissonance between the lack of domestic sovereignty and the existence of

different informal actors participating in transborder trade and governance, and the normative prescription over what a state ought to be, on which the security framework is built. In other words, the formal regional projects and their formal security governance frameworks are confronted with the realities on the ground in which local actors participate in the regionalization of conflicts through their transborder trade activities and their relationships. Regionalism, as the “body of ideas, values and concrete objectives that aims to transform a geographical area into a regional space” (Bach 2003:7) may happen without any input from government or regional organizations. Analyzing the patterns of governance in the Sahel, several studies have shown how tribal identity is mobilized in the Saharan space, from Mauritania in the west to Southern Algeria/Northern Nigeria, by actors embedded within the different state apparatuses, in the pursuit and defense of specific interests. In the Sahel, tribal networks constitute relevant representations for the population, while serving as a conduit for mobility and pressure for businesspeople involved in trade oscillating between the licit and the illicit (Scheele 2009; 2011; 2012; McDougall and Scheele 2012). States have little capability to limit mobility in these spaces, where they have often delegated control to local actors. For Whitehouse and Strazzari, the northern regions of Mali are part of an emerging regional space, “Northwest Africa”, in which transboundary dynamics fueled by illicit activities and collusion with the region’s governments drive new patterns of trade and integration by subnational actors. For these authors,

‘concepts as fundamental as geographic space, territory, and border—as well as the legitimacy of economic activity and political authority—rather than being easily transferable from other geographic settings must all be deeply situated in the historical, cultural, and political context of this region if they are to aid analytical understanding of the problems and threats currently playing out’ (Whitehouse and Strazzari, 2015: 1).

This particular conception of regions mirrors Hettne’s attempt to move beyond the “old” vs “new” debate among the regionalism scholars. Using the concept “regionness” as a non-evolutionary spectrum to identify the formation and unmaking of regions over time, Hettne proposes a different way of understanding the various patterns of regionalism. Regionness as “the position of a particular region in terms of regional cohesion, which can be seen as a long-term historical process, changing over time from coercion, the building of empires and nations, to voluntary

cooperation” (Hettne 2005: 548), is determined by endogenous and exogenous factors. At the endogenous levels, the degree of social cohesion within a region can be identified according to five levels:

- a *regional space*, which designates a geographical area with more or less natural physical borders. If the territory defines originally what constitutes the region, how the inhabitants self-organize may change what constitutes the regional space and lead to increasing regionness.
- A *regional complex* in which there are more translocal relationships between the inhabitants creates an embryonic interdependence in which the states (which constitute the unit of the regional space) depend on each other for their mutual stability. The relationships between these states may be anarchic and dominated by a low-level of regionness. Regionalization, in this context can happen through coercion and imperialism.
- A *regional society* which can be organic or spontaneous, based on cultural, economic, political, or military issues. In this level of regionness, there is usually a regional project in the form of an institution and the region comes to be defined based on its membership. Alongside this “formal” region, there may be an “informal” driven by other “regionalizing actors” which creates the “real” region (Boas, Marchand and Shaw 2003: 201-2).
- a *regional community* that occurs when there is a convergence of values in the region, the existence of a regional civil society built on social trust, through the actions of an established organizational framework, which may be formalized or informal. The convergence of values and ideas can occur at different levels: on the nature of political regimes, economic policies and security arrangements. Hettne considers this form of regionness to be similar to Karl Deutsch’s idea of pluralistic security community (Hettne 2003:5)
- The last level of regionness is what Hettne calls a *regional institutionalized polity*, where a formal structure of decision-making coexists with a stronger actor-capability. This degree of regionness is what

could be expected in amalgamated security communities. There is integration at the regional level and intervention in conflict prevention/management and the mitigation of natural disasters, for example.

As a consequence of their regionness, these regional projects build a growing capacity to act as one. The concept of regionness is instrumental in understanding the emergence and unmaking of regional projects, but it is arguable how relevant are the different degrees outlined by Hettne. If projects such as ECOWAS and AU may be seen as regional community or regionalized institutional polity, there is abundant literature on the lack of convergence over values and ideas between members within these organizations. This reality is despite the *de jure* existence of common policies on issues as varied as security, justice and education. Nevertheless, this framework is useful to understand the emergence of a “Sahelian” regional space, and the contestations of the countries that constitute it, even before the Malian conflict (Helly et al. 2015). The existence of ECOWAS and the AU does not mean that they will not be challenged in their mandates, by other emerging regional projects with overlapping memberships. The narrow focus on inter-state regional arrangements is prevalent in the regionalism literature. Still, by building on the insights of the scholarship on the patterns of governance within the country, we can see better how state agents and local actors embedded within the state’s apparatus shape new patterns of regionalization through their political, economic and security activities (Bach 1999; Grant and Söderbaum 2003; Boas et al 2005).

This section has reviewed theoretical approaches focusing on the emergence of regions, the motivations behind regionalization projects as well as the role regional actors play in the management of conflict and security. This dissertation is at the nexus of the different scholarships on regionalism, of regional security governance and the nature of the postcolonial African state.

The earliest perspectives on regionalism (old regionalism) are pertinent to understand the ontological foundations of the earliest regional projects in Africa, i.e. the formation of the OAU in 1963 and of the ECOWAS in 1975. If the OAU was strongly anti-imperialist and was viewed as the embodiment of the pan-African ideal, it still represented the transposition of a regional model centred around the state as the only relevant unit, which

mimicked developments in Europe following the Second World War. These first regional projects remain central to the management of the regional security issues but did not question the modes of governance between formalized authority and informal actors within their member-state's territory.

A formal break in the interest of these organizations emerged in the 1990s, as the bipolar world order collapsed, and as civil wars and political violence beset many African countries. Global developments linked to global governance, human rights and human security became more apparent in the discourse of these actors as they took a security turn. These developments would be enshrined with the establishment of the APSA in 2004 and encouraged by the UN through its "Africanization" policies.

These developments never questioned the nature of statehood in Africa, as they were steered by organizations that were hardly autonomous from the strongest of their member-states. This is without considering the literature on the "crisis of the African state" and how the process of state formation in Africa differs sharply from what occurred in Europe. Unpacking the African state provides us with a glimpse into the varied patterns of state presence and governance within their internationally recognized territory. If, in the context of GWOT, the idea of "ungoverned spaces" has been used by Western policymakers to justify interventions in the Sahel, a perspective free from the normative prescriptions over what a state should be, shows the role played by nonstate actors in governance and security, often in collaboration with the formal state. Given the limited capacity of the Sahelian states to police their borders, nonstate actors, often engaged in trade, can establish regionalizing dynamics transcending regional categories ("West Africa"/"Central Africa"/"North Africa") as understood in the framework of the APSA. The insights of this literature on the state-society complex and the role of local actors in governance are essential to understand conflict dynamics in Africa and what regional actors may fail to capture due to their ontological foundations. Besides, these local actors involved in governance and security can also be regionalizing actors by building on tribal, ethnic identities and commercial interests, when located at the peripheries.

The new regionalism literature's conception of regions and emphasis on the role of subnational actors in trans-border provides clues to understanding the difficulties faced by ECOWAS and AU in Mali. Since those theories are not uniform, what is needed is a conceptual framework that will reconcile the insights from the African statehood literature and the regionalism from below to explain the role of regional actors in security governance in Mali, and the logic behind the changes in APSA following the international intervention in Mali (2013-).

8. LOCATING THE DISSERTATION: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK ON REGIONAL SECURITY GOVERNANCE IN AFRICA

The review of the different theories provides us with useful conceptual tools with which to apprehend regional security governance and the formation of regions in Africa. Flowing from this review, I bring together concepts originating from various scholarships to explain the particularities of regional security governance in Africa, the challenges faced by regional actors in managing conflict. The conceptual framework demonstrates how the conflict in Mali strained the capacities of the APSA and led to readjustments of the peace and security architecture in the region.

My conceptual framework builds on the new regionalism literature to explain the social construction of regions and binds it with the concepts of limited statehood and the state-society complex, originating from the postcolonial African state literature. At the nexus of these different traditions, I highlight how the mismatch between regional security governance frameworks and the realities of domestic governance with the presence of subnational actors in areas of limited statehood, limits the efficiency of regional conflict management on the continent. There is a fundamental difference between these two processes. Subnational actors often play a significant role in governance due to the control they have over areas of limited statehood. But they tend to be at the margins of regional approaches to security in Africa due to the essentialization of state sovereignty among regional actors.

On the other hand, conflict on the continent often originates in the realm of domestic governance where these subnational actors operate, thrive and sometimes challenge state authority. Given that regional security governance

is mainly an affair involving states through formal processes, African regional actors stumble when they operate in contexts where statehood has never worn Weberian attributes and where hybrid orders exist. Regional organizations do not address issues related to the state-society complex due to the importance of state sovereignty.

Due to this mismatch, the reality of regional security governance in Africa tends to be transactional, i.e. based on short-term negotiations enabling progress on specific issues when the action of hybrid orders stalls the process. Due to the mismatch, regional security governance also tends to be reactive, i.e. initiatives are developed to complement assessed gaps *post-facto* rather than proactive or strategic. Furthermore, this mismatch facilitates the involvement of extra-continental actors who generally have more resources (diplomatic, technical, financial, and military) than their African counterparts. It thus can push forward these processes and act as arbitrators in the multilayered security governance processes on the continent.

This dissertation presents an institutional explanation for the struggles of regional security governance in Africa, despite the security turn of regional organizations in the 1990s. Looking at Mali, I propose that the challenges faced by African regional actors in managing security are a consequence of the diverging trajectories of postcolonial African states and the assumptions governing the formation of regional organizations and the APSA. Furthermore, hybrid orders located at the domestic level are involved in regionalizing dynamics that transcend national and regional borders, and that contest the rigid cartography of the APSA. Due to these structural constraints, regional security governance in Africa constitutes a political project in which regionness matters as much as effectiveness. The primacy of regionness over effectiveness facilitates the development of overlapping and rival regional mechanisms, in which different actors exert their influence, in partnership or in opposition with extra-continental actors.

A. Regional security governance and the state-society complex

One of the assumptions of the regional security governance literature is the Weberian attributes of the African state and its consequent monopoly over legitimate violence. Regional security governance is supposed to emerge

when actual or perceived threats to security transcend these individual states and require a regional response to address them.

The underlying assumption in this thinking is that these threats are external to these states and the region. The reality is different in many African countries where most of the threats to the state are internal and are associated with issues related to domestic governance. In this context, regional security governance emerges to prevent state collapse and its potential destabilizing impact on the region. Thus, regional organizations participate in strengthening the sovereignty of their member-states first before aiming to address the core causes of conflict, which is often due to the peculiarities of domestic governance.

The state is a black box in the current approaches to security governance by African regional organizations. Put simply, there is an ontological mismatch between how African regional actors apprehend regional security governance, which is limited to state interaction, and the realities of conflict dynamics and regional instability, in which non-state and hybrid actors play an essential role (Bagayoko, Hutchful, and Luckham 2016). Thus, while engaged in regional security governance, African regional actors do not have a meaningful framework for engaging these substate actors, due to the emphasis on inter-state relations and the importance of the principle of state sovereignty in their affairs.

Regional security governance is an interstate affair in Africa, an ideational framework organized around summitry and the interactions between the highest levels of state authority. At the same time, the causes and premises of conflict are subnational and even local, with regional organizations needing the permission of states to engage at that level. One of the reasons for the failure of regional security governance is that it is a formal process unable and unwilling to engage with the governance challenges within many African states to deal with the structural causes of conflict, located in the state-society complex. Given that in many African countries, security and governance involve a plurality of hybrid actors in multiple sites of authority (Denney 2014), the dichotomy made between state and non-state actors by regional organizations falls apart when conflict arises. There is, therefore, a disconnect between the

formal processes of regional security governance through the APSA and the hybrid politics of domestic governance within many African countries, where African regional actors intervene. Hybrid actors are present in the domestic scene of politics. Their relationship with the state range from collaborative to confrontational, and from heterarchical to hierarchical. These hybrid orders are still relevant when conflict arises, and they play a major role in conflict dynamics and post-conflict politics.

Due to their lack of autonomy, regional organizations do not engage with informal processes of governance by regional organizations. This status constrains their action and manifests itself in the poor institutionalization of their security policies. Thus, regional organizations exhibit many “sovereignty-boosting” benefits for the regimes of its different member-states, sometimes to the detriment of their societies (Söderbaum 2010). The democratization period of the 1990s and the consequent inclusion of democracy, good governance and human rights into the peace and security policies of ECOWAS and the AU remain discursive practices, with little political will to actualize them. Sovereignty-boosting regionalism, based on weak state/strong regime dynamics (Boas et al. 2003), occurs when the principle of sovereignty is vigorously defended by states to defend any intrusion in their internal affairs. Indeed,

Many ruling (or crumbling) regimes and political leaders in Africa engage in symbolic and discursive activities, whereby they praise the goals of regionalism and regional organizations, sign cooperation treaties and agreements, and take part in ‘summitry regionalism’, but without having a commitment to or bearing the costs of policy implementation (Söderbaum 2010:6).

ECOWAS and the AU are tasked with promoting peace and security in their region but cannot engage with governance issues among their member-states, which often lead to conflict. For this reason, regional security governance involves mostly issues that aim to restore state authority and to confirm state sovereignty over its territory, without meaningfully engaging with issues, linked to state-making and nation-building. There is a consensus in the literature that this sovereignty-boosting regionalism is recurrent due to the nature of the postcolonial African state, which, despite having legal authority over its territory, does not necessarily control it. This lack of

control is compensated by the importance given to formal sovereignty in their international relations since it preserves the legitimacy of the regimes or the governing political elites, in their perpetuation in power (Söderbaum 2010, 7; Herbst 2007; Clapham 1996). In a context of internal contestation over the legitimacy of the state, regionalism can be a useful mechanism to protect regimes and can be deemed “successful” for those actors controlling the strategies and the resources of the regional organization. Thus, for Herbst, ‘regional institutions in Africa usually work when they help African leaders with their domestic problems’ (J. Herbst 2007, 129) and not when they aim to address the structural causes of conflict.

The challenges faced by APSA make sense when we consider it as a forum for mutual support among regimes despite its very formalized peace and security architecture. It cannot meaningfully address core conflict issues, because these are often located in the state-society complex, with which APSA cannot engage with due to states’ sensitivity over their internal affairs. This does not mean that the African regional actors are always oblivious to these issues. In essence, they have, from time to time, attempted to address them, but this has often resulted in accusations of external interference. Limited statehood has been a defining feature of the postcolonial African state. Still, due to the emphasis on the legal sovereignty of its members by regional actors, it is seldom addressed in the context of regional security governance.

One consequence of this “sovereignty-boosting regionalism” is the multiplication of regional organizations involving the same member-states within the same regional space. Adhering to a new organization is not necessarily a long-term commitment to a political project but a way to be involved in, and not excluded from, different regional fora (Chabal and Daloz 1999). Reminiscing on West African integration since the formation of ECOWAS in 1975, Adedeji highlighted the subversion of the political and economic integration projects progressively, through the creation of the West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU) in 1994 by West African francophone countries sharing the same currency (Adedeji 2004). In more recent years, the multiplication of regional

organizations sharing a keen interest on Sahelian issues and including more or less the same member-states have been a critical impediment to cooperation on security and development issues (Helly et al. 2015).

Regional organizations testify more to a political claim than to their commitment to manage and contain conflicts. While the existence of overlapping regional mechanisms can be perceived as an indicator of failure, the overlapping of the areas of interests, and the memberships of regional organizations results from the limited political commitment to these projects but also attests to the importance of informal governance processes (Söderbaum 2010). Thus, the creation of new regional frameworks in the Sahel demonstrates not only the will to go beyond the rigid cartography of regions and the political deadlock in the APSA but also the regionness of an emerging space.

B. Limited statehood and regionalism from below

Limited statehood and the existence of informal processes of governance also defines the parameters of regional security governance on the continent. Subnational actors in these areas of limited statehood are involved in a variety of formal and informal political and economic processes that may transcend national borders. Building on Bach's criticism of regionalism processes in Africa (2017), I argue there is a gap between regionalism as an institutional project in the form of ECOWAS in Africa and regionalization as an everyday reality through the activities of these subnational actors (Bach 2016). This mismatch, and the absence of hybrid orders in regional security governance processes, is another factor behind the difficulties faced by African regional actors in addressing patterns of conflict. This mismatch also serves as a background for competition between different regional organizations spearheaded by different national actors.

Subnational actors can act as "regionalizing actors" through their activities and interests if they hold substantial control over the peripheral regions. This is achieved through the pursuit of their own economic and political interests, which may be different from those of their national governments. The informal economic cross-border activities and regional interaction contribute to a "shadow regionalism" or "trans-state regionalization". In this situation, the state

plays a limited role in regionalism processes (Grant and Söderbaum 2003a; Söderbaum and Taylor 2010; Söderbaum 2010).

This in turn, contrast with the APSA, which is built around the flawed assumption of the Weberian nature of the postcolonial African state. The Weberian fiction falters when the APSA is confronted with the reality that its formal framework is of little use with the informal governance processes, and that it is deprived of tools to engage with subnational actors who are strongly embedded within state apparatuses. Thus, the challenges of the APSA are rooted in the contradiction between the fiction of the Weberian state, and its state-centric regionalism, and the various processes (formal and informal) which structure the dynamic between the state and other subnational actors. This is a reality in the Sahel, where the state faces challenges in policing its territories, especially in the border regions which host populations that share the same cultural and historical background.

In the specific case of Mali, the pretense of consolidated statehood over the totality of Mali's territory has obscured the actions of regional actors in security governance, which remain oblivious or unable to contain subnational patterns of governance in the north. In these areas, the state coexists and collaborates with other local orders of governance, including sub-national actors in the form of militias, traditional chieftaincies and business interests. The influence of these subnational actors increases with the breakdown of domestic sovereignty at the onset of internal conflict (Felbab-Brown 2017; Felbab-Brown, Trinkunas, and Hamid 2017). While proponents of local orders of governance have focused on how they are reconstituted in post-conflict settings, I focus on how they define patterns of conflict at the national and regional level, and how they impact responses to regional conflict in Mali and in the broader Sahel region.

The rigid cartography of the continent into regions, with different RECs at their helm, can therefore serve more as a hindrance to the effective management of conflict than a supporting mechanism. In Mali and in the Sahel, the regionalizing actions of subnational actors from areas of limited statehood escapes formal patterns of regional security governance, as developed through existing organizations like the AU or ECOWAS. The challenges faced

by African regional actors in managing the conflict in Mali stem not only from their institutional limitations, but also from the gap in their security and peace policies which is mainly reliant on formal processes, and the practices of governance and regionalization at the ground level. The legal existence of borders, and the lack of control of many states over them, create *de facto* a political economy based on trade and the exploitation of the different economic regimes on either side of the borders. In many Sahelian countries, borders have served as a bulwark against state power in times of crisis. Communities threatened by the state would move on the other side, to join their kin. Bach shows how communities in Niger under pressure from the colonial power (France) to contribute to the war effort in terms of goods and men (through enlistment), tended to move massively to Nigeria, then a British colony but still part of the same ethnocultural space (Bach 1999). More recently, several anthropological studies on trade in the Sahel have highlighted the existence of a regionalized informal trade, between Southern Algeria, Northern Mali and Mauritania, built on the existence and mobility of tribes in the Sahel (Scheele 2009; Julien 2011; McDougall and Scheele 2012). Subsidized goods in Algeria (flour, milk, pasta, etc.) are smuggled into Mali by businessperson from the northern regions, often under the benevolent eye of the state. At the same time, on the other end of the circuit, cattle are traded from northern Mali to Algeria. This informal trade has become a substantial part of the economy of northern Mali (Antil 2012; Reitano and Shaw 2014) and remains central to the infighting between the armed groups in the north.

Notions such as “West Africa” or “North Africa”, and the division of labour they presuppose, are not always relevant for regional security governance in areas where hybrid actors have built and developed formal and informal relationships that transcend national and regional borders. In this context, the rigid framework of APSA has had to adapt to the reality of the ground through ad hoc processes and political negotiations that involve other regional groupings or neighbouring countries.

C. Securitization and the construction of regions

The reality of limited statehood does not preclude the continued securitization of these areas, and the actors within it, by African and international actors. Rather than being the outcome of the intersubjective identities shared by region-builders, region-making on the continent often results from the securitization of these areas of limited statehood by African and extra-continental actors. This securitization is often a contested process, pitting proponents of specific forms of intervention against existing national and regional actors. Thus, the meaning of a region can shift substantially, from a regional space to a strategic conception, warranting intervention by national and international actors. The meaning of the “Sahel” shifted from an environmental area to a security hotspot due to the securitization of its areas where hybrid orders operate, and the belief that for stability to occur, state authority must be present throughout all of its territory. Extra-continental actors play an essential role in this process through their bilateral support to specific countries, and through their multilateral engagement with regional actors. The APSA has had to adapt to this new cartography of security through the development of new security initiatives that aim to address these securitized concerns in this emerging region. Despite the innovative features of these initiatives, they constitute more a show of “regionness”, and a claim of legitimacy from African regional actors, than a genuine will to unbundle the state-society complex in the Sahel. In the Sahel, the creation of the G5 Sahel in the aftermath the international intervention was an attempt to go beyond the “regions” as mapped out in the APSA, but also results from this phenomenon. The discursive practices on security and development promoted by its five member-states (Mali, Mauritania, Burkina Faso, Chad, Niger) and their partners fail to capture the governance dynamics within these countries. At the same time, its mere existence has led to competition and friction with ECOWAS and the AU over the management of Sahelian issues.

With the emphasis on interstate dynamics in regional security governance by African actors, subnational actors in areas of conflict court and try to engage with extra-continental actors to influence post-conflict dynamics. The security landscape in Africa is characterized by the dependence of security actors on extra-continental actors,

especially the UN and other state actors. Despite the existence of developed security frameworks, African leaders maintain informal ties of support and assistance with extra-continental actors/leaders. These ties are often at odds with formal regional security governance mechanisms.

The APSA is, first and foremost, a political project, an idealized ambition that is mainly driven and controlled by its member-states. But it is also characterized by the tensions between its idealized “Pax Africana” and its embeddedness within a global security architecture, with the United Nations at the helm. Extra-continental actors participated in the securitization of threats and in the actualization of new regions through their discourses and practices. The disparity in capacities and different approaches to peace support operations are two threats that define the relationship between African regional actors and extra-continental ones, such as the UN. This generally creates friction, mainly when extra-continental actors act as judges in the competition between security actors in Africa, from subnational to regional levels.

The mismatch between formal regional security governance frameworks through the APSA and its rigid mapping of the continent and task division between the RECs, and the regionalizing actions of subnational actors which transcend state and regional borders, are at the core of the difficulties of the regional response in Mali and in the Sahel. Due to this foundational mismatch, regional security governance in Africa is often confined to dealing with the formal features of governance, associated with the state apparatus. Regional actors adopt transactional methods, outside of their framework, to overcome obstacles posed by the presence of alternative orders of governance. Furthermore, the hybrid and orders of governance within these areas of limited statehood remain still the object of securitization by African and extra-continental actors. This securitization process, the aim of which is to (re)-establish state authority over its territory, participates in the actualization of new regions that contest existing ones, by misconstruing the presence and activity of alternative orders as a threat to regional stability.

9. CONCLUSION

This conceptual framework allows us to explain the patterns of security governance in the Sahel, and to incorporate the importance of subnational dynamics in this process. The ability of the new regionalism approaches to explain the failings of regional security governance in Africa is rooted in the theory's deep history of the informal and formal modes of governance in the African postcolonial state, and of the regionalism processes driven by subnational actors (Bach 1999).

Understanding regions as dynamic processes and the incongruity of the normative prescriptions of the Westphalian state in several African countries reorient our perspective on the security turn of African regional organizations. I can, therefore, highlight the gap between the discourse and the practices of regionalism, incorporate the reality of the African state-society complex in the analysis of ECOWAS and AU's intervention in Mali and recognize the role of informal regionalization processes in the propagation of conflict, and how it derails the ontological foundations of the security policies of African regional actors.

By associating the theoretical developments of the new regionalism theories with the literature on the varied modalities of state presence over their recognized territory in Africa, and by going beyond the misleading and normative idea of "ungoverned spaces", this dissertation will account for the limits of the current peace and security architecture and the logic of the new security cooperation mechanisms that have emerged in the Sahel, following the international intervention in Mali (2013-). I argue that these limitations stem from the ontological dissonance over the idea of "regions", and from the lack of autonomy and the limited institutionalization of the security governance mechanisms of African regional organizations.

This conceptual model will be applied to explain the difficulties faced by ECOWAS and the AU in Mali during three moments of the conflict. The first moment was during the initial phase of the conflict, which started with the coup d'état against the government in Mali and the occupation of the northern regions by armed groups (March 2012-January 2013). ECOWAS was the main actor in this model and its intervention was soon challenged by Malian

political actors whose opposition to the West African organization was built on their frustrations with the course of statebuilding in Mali; and by the regionalizing action of hybrid actors which completely escaped the hold of West African states and ECOWAS, leaving Algeria better positioned to coordinate the regional response. This, in turn, caused some friction between the AU and ECOWAS over the coordination of the African response.

The second moment followed the 2013 international military intervention and is constituted of the attempts to “Africanize” peace support operations in Mali, in a context where a multiplicity of international actors was active in Mali. The AU took the lead during this moment while building on its partnership with ECOWAS. The limitations of the APSA became even more glaring in 2013, as African states and international actors worked outside the scope of the APSA framework to stop the conquest of southern Mali by armed groups by building initially on informal and postcolonial relations between West African states and France. These links would be further institutionalized through UNSC Resolution 2100, through which the UN took control of AFISMA and rehatted it into MINUSMA, a multidimensional stabilization mission.

The last moment in which this conceptual model will inform the challenges faced by APSA in Mali is the period following the deployment of AFISMA, which was characterized by the emergence and consolidation of a Sahelian regional society, and by the operationalization of the APSA in the Sahel-Sahara. The AU initiated new security initiatives, based on the lessons learned from the Malian experience, in the form of the Nouakchott Process and the ACIRC. These attempts at the continental level developed in parallel with the G5 Sahel, a regional arrangement aiming to address security and development initiatives in the Sahel, spearheaded by Sahelian states in partnership with international actors. The novelty of this ad hoc initiative is the greater control of the states over the regional response, in comparison to the AU PSC and its emancipation from the rigid cartography of the continent within the APSA. While innovative in several ways, the G5 Sahel also bears the same limitations as older regional frameworks. These are rooted in its statist perspective and focus on militarized solutions to address subnational governance and security challenges.

All seemed paltry. The night fell on Mali'
 Doulaye Konaté¹³

Chapter III: Between the coup and the rebellion: ECOWAS's intervention amidst the peculiarities of governance in Mali

This chapter explores the impact of the January 2012 rebellion in Mali and beyond, and the response of African regional actors to this situation. The formation of two rebel groups, the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (*Mouvement National pour la libération de l'Azawad*, MNLA) and the AQIM-affiliated Ansar Dine in late 2011, resulted directly from the collapse of Muammar Gaddafi's regime in Libya. Gaddafi's downfall led to the return of several hundred hardened Malian Tuareg fighters, veterans of earlier rebellions in their homeland, with their weaponry and with the desire to actualize their dream of secession. The 'Tuareg question,' which is one of the main knots of the nation-building process in Mali, had already led to several uprisings and four rebellions since Mali's independence. It is also one of the consequences of Mali's decolonization and subsequent, mostly top-down, attempts at statebuilding following the country's independence from France in 1960 (Boilley 2012; Bourgeot 2017). If in many regions, the formal state structure is an alien institution for populations who have limited interaction with it, this perception is even more acute in northern regions of Mali (Timbuktu, Gao, Kidal). This is due to the geographical distance from the capital, the lower density of population compared to the southern regions where the capital, Bamako, is located, and also due to the comparatively higher importance of informal patterns of governance by hybrid orders in this region.

The victories of the rebels in January 2012, and the mass executions of Malian soldiers following the capture of the army positions in Ménaka, Tessalit and Aguel'hoc, had an immediate impact on Malian politics. Indeed, the tensions became higher as the spouses of the soldiers in the front led demonstrations in the capital and complained

¹³ (Institut d'études avancées de Nantes 2013, 16'00)

about the inadequate weaponry of the army and their abandonment by the government. The *coup d'état* of 22 March 2012 by disgruntled soldiers opened a new episode that saw a more forceful intervention by African regional organizations in the burgeoning conflict in Mali. ECOWAS was the lead actor in the early hours and remained influential throughout 2012, up to the international intervention in January 2013.

In this chapter, I will explain why the response of ECOWAS failed to contain the complex conflict in Mali and was confined to supporting formal structures of governance by arbitrating between the transitional authorities and the junta. I will focus on the politics within Mali and the legacy of democratization to explain the difficulties encountered by regional actors between the military coup of March 2012 and the international military intervention of January 2013. The challenges to the regional response led by ECOWAS are not only explained by the capabilities-expectations gap, but also by the mismatch between the emphasis on formal structures of governance in managing security at the regional level, and the regionalizing actions of hybrid actors in Mali. The scale of the Malian conflict goes beyond the borders of ECOWAS as a region and how it apprehends conflict resolution and management. It is rooted in the country's state consolidation and governance processes, from which the regional organization has been disconnected, unlike Algeria and other neighbouring actors. This, in turn, constituted an impediment to an adequate response, as actors within Mali and beyond its borders regularly challenged ECOWAS' leadership. I make two core arguments.

First, ECOWAS' intervention in Mali was fraught by a poor reading of the political situation and also by the incoherence of its mediation framework. This poor reading led to fractious relations with Malian actors and had a direct impact on the organization's credibility and on its ability to contain the crisis, despite some limited successes. Following the March 2012 coup, ECOWAS did not anticipate high levels of domestic support for the military takeover and the divide within the Malian political class. This led to entrenched conflict between the regional organization and the junta, and to the establishment of a weak transitional government, itself the product of a compromise. The junta articulated its positions around the failure of democratization politics (1991-2012), which

damaged Malian state institutions, including the military, and contributed to persistent security troubles in the north. In this regard, it resisted ECOWAS' attempt to legitimize and strengthen political actors in the transition, who the junta viewed as having caused the 2012 rebellion. Despite the establishment of a transitional government, ECOWAS was never able to effectively isolate the former members of the junta, who continued to play essential roles in domestic politics and to serve as a rallying point for actors dissatisfied with the handling of the transition. ECOWAS was thus confronted with several challenges related to the intense divisions within the Malian polity; these challenges, along with the ad hoc nature of ECOWAS mediation in Mali, which delegated substantive powers to the Mediator and his Plenipotentiary, led to tensions within the organization due to the transactional arrangements made with Malian parties in order to move the process forward.

Second, the presence of hybrid governance orders, active in trade networks that often preceded the formal Malian state, and based on tribal and religious affiliations, posed another challenge to ECOWAS and to the APSA's state-centric conception of regionalism. These non-state actors, which included actors involved in illicit trade, were also embedded within the state's governance networks. They also often moonlighted as security actors, especially concerning the liberation of Western nationals held by AQIM. For this purpose, they often relied on their tribal networks and economic connections to increase their political capital. In the Malian context, hybridity posed a challenge to ECOWAS because of the regionalizing dynamics of the subnational actors, which transcended the territory of the state and the region. ECOWAS' preeminence as a forum to determine the regional response was challenged by Algeria, which has long been involved in mediating among Malian parties and was more directly affected by the consequences of the conflict than most ECOWAS member-states. The APSA, and in this instance ECOWAS, was ill-fitted to engage, coerce and induce actors who navigated between formal and informal processes of governance. Their action in Mali was concentrated on the transitional government and other formal institutions, and thus had a limited impact on a critical dimension of the conflict.

The first section of this chapter will show how the 2012 rebellion constituted another episode of Mali's challenging statebuilding process since independence and highlight the relation between Mali's post-democratization politics and the March 2012 coup. ECOWAS' attempt to restore constitutional order as per its protocol was challenged by the supporters of the coup and beyond.

After setting the context, the second section will focus on ECOWAS' intervention in Mali and how the disconnect with the grievances of Malian political actors undermined its response. This section will also highlight the tensions within ECOWAS' mediation framework, and how its weak institutionalization led it to adopt ad hoc, transactional approaches when confronted with political hurdles. The third section will assess the governance of the security situation in the northern regions, where hybrid orders have long played an important role. ECOWAS' regional security governance framework was confronted with a political economy of governance and conflict that relied on a host of subnational actors, with which it was ill-fitted to engage.

The last section will look at how tensions related to subsidiarity and to the existence of overlapping regional mechanisms contributed to the failure to deploy a regional force by ECOWAS. The presence of informal and hybrid orders of governance whose activities transcended the territory of Mali and the West African region was a crucial factor in the failure of an African military intervention in Mali. ECOWAS, the AU and Algeria (an actor with substantial influence over hybrid actors due to the connectedness of its economy with northern Mali), held diverging views of the proper response, stalling any military response. Indeed, the mismatch between the division of labour between RECs through the APSA and the regional dynamics of the conflict constituted a severe impediment to African actors. This, in turn, led to the non-deployment of a military force in Mali, and subsequent attempts to bridge the gap through greater AU involvement. The ensuing negotiations with the UN over the endorsement of the African-led Intervention Support Mission in Mali (AFISMA) failed to generate a military force, leading to the French-led intervention in January 2013, following demands by Malian and West African states, all of which highlighted further the limitations of the APSA.

1. THE MALIAN CONFLICT FROM A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

A. *Statebuilding and the “Tuareg question” in Mali*

The January 2012 Tuareg uprising by the MNLA was the fourth rebellion since the country’s independence in 1960¹⁴. It brought once more to the fore, the Tuareg question, a longstanding issue in the country’s statebuilding project that was left unaddressed by the previous rebellions and peace agreements. The rebellion was led by the MNLA and Ansar Dine, two groups that emerged in late 2011, as the Gaddafi regime collapsed in Libya. Gaddafi’s downfall led to the mass return of hundreds of Tuareg Malian fighters to their homeland and with the desire to actualize their long-held idea of a Tuareg state, carved out of the three regions of the north (Nossiter 2012). In November 2011, the MNLA was formed at the Tin-Zaouatene meeting through the amalgamation of the student-led secessionist National Movement for Azawad (MNA, *Mouvement national de l’Azawad*) and the veteran Tuareg combatants of the Gaddafi regime¹⁵. The 2012 conflict is another episode of the long-sought desire by sections among the Tuareg community to form their own autonomous state in the Sahel¹⁶.

The Tuareg question and the emergence of the MNLA are one of the lingering legacies of Mali’s decolonization process. Indeed, Mali’s colonial power, France, considered for a time the possibility of forming a Tuareg state out of their colonies in Western and Northern Africa. This was devised in the context of the war in neighbouring Algeria (1954-1962), where the anti-imperialist National Liberation Front (*Front de libération Nationale*, FLN) used northern Mali as a base. The Common Organization of the Saharan Regions (*Organisation commune des régions sahariennes*, OCRS), created in 1957 to promote the development of Saharan regions in the colonies of Algeria, Mauritania, French Sudan [Mali], Niger and Chad (France (Assemblée Nationale) 1957) was seen as the prelude to the formation of a “Tuareg state” before its dissolution in 1963. But they never came to be; France abandoned that

¹⁴ The previous rebellions occurred in 1963-4, in 1990-1995 and 2006-2008.

¹⁵ Interview with security analyst based in northern Mali, (Bamako: 22 February 2018).

¹⁶ This “Tuareg question” is one of the open questions of the decolonization period and is also relevant in Niger and to a lesser extent in Algeria, two countries that host a sizable Tuareg population.

project as the war in Algeria continued, and French Sudan gained its independence in 1960, in tandem with the colony of Senegal, as the Federation of Mali¹⁷.

The troubles in northern Mali started following the death of the *Aménokal* Attaher ag Illi (r.1928-1962) and the progressive deployment of the post-independence authorities in the northern regions (Boilley 2012, 321). Although a defining moment in Mali's political history, the first rebellion (1963-4) was a very localized affair, confined to Kidal, and did not receive broad support from the Tuareg¹⁸. Yet, its brutal repression would be a defining factor in the relations between the state and the Tuareg, and a fertile ground for future rebellions. Between 1963 and 1990, the district of Kidal was under military administration, unlike other districts¹⁹; the Algerian-Mali border region was declared a forbidden area and any individual found there was considered a rebel (Boilley 2012; Thurston and Lebovich 2013). Added to the 1970s drought, this fostered a mass exodus of young unemployed Tuareg (the "Ishumar"²⁰) in neighbouring countries, especially in prosperous Libya, where a sizeable number of Tuareg exiles from Mali, were enlisted in Gaddafi's Islamic Legion.

The second rebellion (1990-1996) was conceived in Libya and was led by these veteran fighters²¹. It coincided with the downfall of the military regime in Mali (1968-1991) under General Moussa Traoré and the country's democratic transition (1991-1992) under the pro-democracy military ruler Lieutenant-Colonel Amadou Toumani

¹⁷ The Federation in Mali was short-lived and would be disestablished in August 1960 due to the ideological differences between Senegalese and French Sudanese leaders. The former colony of French Sudan changed its name and would henceforth be known as the republic of Mali.

¹⁸ The rebel leader Zaid ag Attaher was a son of the deceased *Aménokal* Attaher ag Illi and was an unsuccessful candidate to his succession in 1962. See (Boilley 2012)

¹⁹ Interview with security expert based in northern Mali (Bamako: 22 February 2018). See also Thurston and Lebovich, 2013.

²⁰ The Tuareg term for this generation of migrants "Ishumar" is a corruption of the French "chômeurs" for unemployed people.

²¹ Iyad ag Ghali, Mohamed ag Najem and El Hadj ag Gamou were officers in Gaddafi's Islamic Legion. Ag Ghali's and ag Najem's fathers were also killed during the 1963-4 rebellion (Thurston and Lebovich 2013: 3).

Touré.²² The second Tuareg rebellion, which aimed to carve out a Tuareg state between Mali and Niger, was better planned than the first and reflected a new dynamic among the Tuareg around their place in Mali, and the role and influence of traditional hierarchies and institutions (Boilley 2012, 445; Thurston and Lebovich 2013, 23). It began with the attack on Malian army positions in Ménaka on 28 June 1990. It was precipitated by a wave of arrests that dismantled the pro-rebellion networks of support and disrupted the original plans for a rebellion in 1992-1993 (Boilley 2012, 445–46). The precipitated nature of the rebellion by the *Mouvement Populaire de l’Azawad* (MPA) had limited means despite the broad nature of its membership. The Kel Adagh Tuareg from Kidal were the dominant members of the first uprising occurred, but the second rebellion saw the involvement of communities from Ménaka and Tessalit, along with Arab communities from Timbuktu. By the end of 1990, the rebellion was still active but locked in a mutually hurting stalemate with the Malian military regime, which was contending with a series of pro-democracy demonstrations and sit-ins in the capital. The January 1991 Tamanrasset preliminary agreement negotiated by Algeria and supported by the most influential Tuareg chieftain in Mali, the Aménokal Kel Adagh Intallah ag Attaher²³ fostered dissensions among the MPA, especially among some of the non-Kel Adagh Tuareg commanders, who were more prone to question and challenge the authority of the Aménokal (Thurston and Lebovich 2013). A collective Tuareg identity united the Tuareg “Ishumar” in their exile, but this unity broke apart in Mali, where tribal considerations remained important.²⁴ The *Front Populaire de Libération de l’Azawad* (FPLA) dominated by Kel Intessar and Chamanamas tribesmen from Ménaka, and the *Armée révolutionnaire de libération de l’Azawad* (ARLA), mainly composed of Idnane and Imghad tribesmen, under El Hadj ag Gamou²⁵, emerged in

²² After leading the transition and retiring from the military as a General, Amadou Toumani Touré was elected President of Mali under an independent platform in 2002.

²³ The Aménokal of the Kel Adagh Intallah ag Attaher (1928-2014) ruled from 1962 to 2014.

²⁴ Interview with leading Tuareg Imghad former MP and politician (Bamako: 15 February 2018) and with former civil administrator, Kidal (Bamako: 12 February 2018).

²⁵ El Hadj ag Gamou led the ARLA in the 1990s and continued the rebellion against the Malian government and was also involved in clashes against the MPA. He was integrated into the Malian army in the 1990s, and became in the 2000s, one

this context and articulated their grievances for a Tuareg independent state. The collapse of the military regime facilitated another round of negotiations mediated by Algeria in December 1991, which ended with an agreement between the transitional government and the rebel groups, the *Pacte National* of 11 April 1992. The *Pacte National* gave a special status to the northern regions (*Comité de Transition pour le Salut du Peuple*, 1992).

Among the other essential clauses of the document were the integrations of rebels, on an individual and voluntary basis, into Mali's administration (civil and military) and the redeployment of security services in the north, a preferential tax and incentive system during ten years for the northern regions, a regional assembly, and the return of refugees to their homeland. The *Pacte National* reduced the violence between the state and rebels. Still, violence and banditry persisted in its wake, as a substantial part of the Songhay, Bozo and Fulani, the black sedentary communities that form the overwhelming majority in the north, felt dissatisfied with the Pact (Boisvert 2015). Many of the provisions of the *Pacte National* were not implemented by the government of Mali, under its first democratic president, Alpha Oumar Konaré (1992-2002). Decentralization was enacted to create more room for communities to have a say in governance. But it was voided of all of its potential due to the limited financial autonomy of local institutions.²⁶ Many rebel grievances remained potent, and suspicions between former/integrated rebels and the government remained high²⁷. The 2006-7 Tuareg rebellion is the third since the country's independence. Led by Ibrahim ag Bahanga and Colonel Hassan ag Fagaga, two former members of the MPA that were subsequently integrated into the army and national guard respectively, resulted from this distrust and disaffection regarding the implementation of the *Pacte National*. It never took the scale of the second rebellion and remained a limited affair.

of the most solid supporters of the government's policy in the north, acting as a governance actor, enmeshed in political rivalries with his former comrades in arms such as Iyad ag Ghaly.

²⁶ Interview with former Minister of Decentralization (Mali), (Bamako: 24 October 2017), and with former rebel and member of the CMA, (Bamako: 17 February 2018).

²⁷ A current member of the CMA denounced the poor will of the Malian authorities to implement the agreement and went as far as to denounce "population transfer" schemes by the government, in order to reduce the size of the Tuareg demographics, comparatively to other ethnicities. Interview with former rebel and member of the CMA, (Bamako, 17 February 2018).

In this context, the Malian army managed the rebellion at the highest echelons of government. It most of the fighting to the “Force Delta,” a special battalion at the crossroads between regular government forces and a tribal militia, under then Colonel El Hadj ag Gamou, and brokering an opaque peace agreement with the help of Algeria.²⁸ The military defeat of Bahanga’s *Alliance démocratique du 23 Mai pour le changement* (ADC) did not end the violence, which took increasingly tribal dimensions, as the political and economic competition between communities became another issue.

The fourth rebellion started when the MNA, an independentist association formed in 2010 in Timbuktu by young college educated Tuareg, who was still intent on actualizing a Tuareg state in Mali’s northern regions²⁹, incorporated veteran Tuareg rebels returning from Libya. Ibrahim ag Bahanga and Mohamed ag Najim, who were the two most prominent members of this cohort, were significant figures from earlier Tuareg rebellions³⁰. The MNLA presents itself as representative of the diversity of the population of northern Mali by going beyond the Tuareg, unlike previous armed groups from earlier rebellions. In the conflict landscape, MNLA distinguishes itself from the other armed groups by its secularism and its regionalism. Its opposition to the Malian government is voiced mainly in political terms. The current conflict started in January 2012 when Malian military garrisons in Ménaka, Aguel’hoc and Tessalit were attacked by the MNLA, and its Islamist ally, Ansar Dine.

B. From a “Tuareg question” to an Islamist insurgency

The conflict in Mali is also related to the internal politics of its northern neighbours, in particular the spread of violent Islamist groups in the 1990s. Indeed, following their defeat in the Algerian civil war (1990-2001), the insurgent Salafist Group for Predication and Jihad (*Groupeement Salafiste pour la prédication et le combat*, GSPC) relocated in the desert areas of northern Mali, next to the Algerian border, in 2003. The initial objective was to

²⁸Interview with leader of pro-junta platform in 2012 (Bamako, 16 February 2018).

²⁹ Interview with security expert from based in northern Mali (Bamako:22 February 2018).

³⁰ Ibrahim ag Bahanga was the leader of the third rebellion in 2006-7 and self-exiled to Libya, when the July 2006 peace agreement was signed. He returned in Mali in August 2011 but died not long after in a car accident.

regroup and challenge the Algerian state, but global developments related to the War on Terror had a decisive impact on the priorities of the group. GSPC, the Algerian Islamist faction, mutated into the more regional AQIM, creating a new dynamic, linking a local civil war faction to the broader “global jihad” movement (Bencherif 2017, 4). Through hostage-taking and the payment of ransoms by Western governments, AQIM went from a defeated civil war party to a regional threat to Mali and other Sahelian countries. Its vast financial resources allowed the organization to progressively fill a void left by the government in the country’s northern fringes and to establish itself as one of the local governance and order providers by ‘distributing money, handing out medicine, treating the sick and buying SIM cards (Bøås and Torheim 2013; Chauzal and van Damme 2015, 34). Several national actors have lamented the progressive disengagement of the government’s security forces from the northern regions, especially Kidal and Timbuktu, during the 2000s. One provision of the July 2006 agreement that ended the third Tuareg rebellion scheduled the replacement of non-northern security service members by service members from the region³¹.

AQIM thrived in the context of this disengagement where the Malian government delegated the security governance of the north to tribal militias (Arab and Tuareg), often by accommodating local businesspeople involved in the smuggling economy (both licit and illicit). These measures had a damaging effect in the sense that they led to heightened communitarian tensions within communities in northern Mali, who tended to compete for the control of local politics and local economies. Among the Tuareg, the 2006 agreement paved the way for the emergence of leaders from the Imghad caste, allied with the government, who tended to contest the authority of traditional Tuareg

³¹ Several Malian figures and organizations criticized this clause, among which was the Malian Workers Trade Union Confederation, which sent an open letter to President Amadou Toumani Touré and faulted the government for its handling of the crisis. For an analysis of the 2006 agreement see “Accords d’Alger de 2006”: https://fr.wikisource.org/wiki/Accords_d%E2%80%99Alger. This has been one of the main themes of criticism by the pro-junta platform leader against the deposed regime of ATT, Bamako, Mali (17 February 2018). Other more neutral interviewers have also faulted the deposed regime for its leniency towards AQIM and other alternative governance providers linked to the illicit economy. See interview with Malian diplomat involved in the Algiers peace process (Bamako: 18 October 2017).

chiefs.³² The loose presence of the state and the proliferation of parochial interests provided fertile ground for the development of AQIM.

AQIM commanders like Mokhtar Belmokhtar became prominent through their activities in the Sahara, which allowed them to contest the authority of AQIM's Algeria-based central leadership. Progressively, AQIM's ideology would find an echo among quarters of the Tuareg and Arab populations of Kidal and Timbuktu, disenchanted with the Malian government. The Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (*Mouvement pour l'Unité et le Jihad en Afrique de l'Ouest*, MUJAO) emerged in 2011 along with several squadrons (*seryas*) composed of Tuareg fighters³³. Through kinship ties and local alliances leveraged by local commanders, AQIM would expand its influence progressively in northern Mali.

The creation of Ansar Dine in December 2011 was the culmination of the convergence between Jihadist activity and the "Tuareg question" in Mali, with the formation of Ansar Dine, a jihadist group mainly composed of Tuareg. Iyad ag Ghaly a former rebel commander turned negotiator for the liberation of hostages after his leadership bid of the MNLA was defeated, was its leading figure³⁴. The MNLA, MUJAO, Ansar Dine and AQIM were the main armed groups at the beginning of the conflict in January 2012 and collaborated to dislodge Malian forces from the north. Ansar Dine and MNLA fought side by side against Malian troops in the north in early 2012 following the

³² Prior to 2012, the most senior state representatives in the region of Kidal, the main area of presence of the Kel Afella/Ifogha, belonged to the Imghad community. Alhamdou ag Iliyene acted as governor while El Hadj ag Gamou was the senior military officer. Although this communitarian dimension should not be overstated as an explanatory variable, it is illustrative of the reliance on class-based considerations by the Malian state to manage the Kidal region. See also Chauzal and van Damme 2015; Bencherif 2018, Franco-Paix Bulletin.

³³ By AQIM members from Mauritania and Mali, led by Sultan ould Badi and Hamada ould Kheirou, two figures well-connected to drug trafficking networks and thus autonomous financially from the Algerian leadership. See (Bencherif 2017:9).

The most infamous of these squadrons was the al-Ansar, led by Abdel Karim el-Targui (Hamada ag Hama), which operated in the Kidal region. El-Targui was a cousin of Iyad ag Ghaly, one of the rebel commanders of the 3rd Tuareg rebellion, and the current commander of the Jamaat al-Nasr al Islam wal-Muslimin (Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims). See (Abu al-Ma'ali 2012:4).

³⁴ Interview with security analyst based in northern Mali (Bamako: 22 February 2018).

defeat and withdrawal of the Malian government from the north when the coup disrupted the military command structure. The alliance between the armed groups broke down following the defeat of the Malian forces in April 2012, and the secular and regionalist MNLA was quickly defeated and sidelined by the jihadist groups affiliated with AQIM in a series of battles over the summer of 2012. The Islamist governance of northern Mali (June 2012-January 2013) had a long-lasting impact in the country, as combatants from other communities flocked to the Jihadist side, often in the expectation that they would be supported in their local conflicts³⁵.

Armed groups in Mali in April 2012 and their leaders

Armed groups	Leaders	Background	Political Orientation
<i>Mouvement national pour la libération de l’Azawad (MNLA)</i>	Bilal ag Achérif (Political)	Tuareg Ifoghas	Secessionist
	Mohamed ag Najem (Military)	Tuareg Idnane	
	Moussa ag Acharatoumane (Political/Spokesperson)	Tuareg Dawshahak	
<i>Ansar Dine</i>	Iyad ag Ghaly (Political/Military)	Tuareg Ifoghas	Jihadist
	Alghabass ag Intallah (Political)	Tuareg Ifoghas	
	Cheikh ag Aoussa (Political/Military)	Tuareg Ifoghas	
<i>Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)</i>	Yahya Abou el-Hammam	Algerian	Jihadist
	Moktar Belmokhtar	Algerian	
	Abdelhamid Abou Zeid	Algeria	
	Hamadou ould Kheirou	El-Guebla Arab (Mauritania)	Jihadist

³⁵ Hammadoun Kouffa, the main spoiler to the peace process in the Mopti region, was a close associate of Iyad ag Ghali during the occupation period. The Macina brigade of Ansar Dine was formed by Kouffa and other Fulani combatants in 2015.

<i>Mouvement pour l'Unité et le Jihad en Afrique de l'Ouest (MUJAO)</i>	Omar ould Hamaha	Bérabiche Arab (Ma)	
	Cherif ould Taher	Tilemsi Arab (Mali)	
<i>Mouvement patriotique Ganda Koy (MP-GK)</i>	Imam Mohamed N'Tissa Maiga	Songhai	Pro/Government/Self-defense
	Harouna Toureh		
<i>Ganda Izo</i>	Seydou Cissé	Fulani	Pro/Government/Self-defense
	Amadou Diallo (died in March 2012)	Fulani	
<i>Front de libération nationale de l'Azawad (FNLA)</i>	Mohamed Lamine ould Sidatti	Kounta Arab (Mali)	Self-defense
	Colonel Hussein Ould Moctar "Gho"	?	

C. Democratization, consensual politics and the coup d'état

The 22 March *coup d'état* occurred as Mali was grappling with the rebellion in the north. It marked a milestone in Mali's recent political history as it disrupted the electoral process, scheduled to conclude with the April 2012 elections that would see the second alternation in power since 1992. It laid bare the underlying tensions over the failed promises of democratization and the decay of its institutions that had appeared from time to time since Mali's democratization in 1991. The coup against the regime of President Amadou Toumani Touré was planned and executed by the junior officers and subaltern corps that were at the forefront of the fighting yet excluded from access to state and political patronage networks. No senior officer participated in the planning of the coup, even though several senior officers would figure among the leading members of the junta, the *Comité*

national pour le redressement de la démocratie et la restauration de l'État (CNRDRE), notably the Saint-Cyr³⁶ trained Moussa Sinko Coulibaly and Colonel Youssouf Traoré³⁷.

In a series of declarations over the next days, the CNRDRE justified the military takeover based on the poor management of the rebellion in the north and the poor state of the military, which had weak morale, weaponry and leadership. In the words of its leader, Captain Amadou Haya Sanogo, they “came first to require good living conditions and treatment, salary, all the things needed for the operation of a noble, professional and efficient army” (Office de Radiodiffusion Télévision du Mali 2012). In his first public speeches, and despite promises of convening a national unity platform, Captain Sanogo, the leader of the CNRDRE, emphasized the failure of the Malian state and the corruption of the political elites that had deepened since 1991 by highlighting

the climate of corruption, impunity, and lawlessness that had precipitated their military defeats in the north. They likened the state to a crumbling wall and said that their mission was to knock it down and erect a stronger one in its place” (Whitehouse 2013, 5).

In a series of preventive actions, the CNRDRE quickly suspended the constitution, dissolved all the country’s institutions, implemented a curfew in the capital and closed all the country’s international borders soon after taking over (RFI 2012). Several politicians whom they accused of being corrupt, or too closely associated with the deposed regime were also harassed or detained. Modibo Sidibé, a former prime minister and candidate in the April 2012 elections, was arrested for several days following the *coup d’état*. Sidibé was a former Prime Minister (2007-2011) of the deposed President and was seen as his prospective *dauphin*. Another prospective candidate

³⁶ The École spéciale militaire de Saint-Cyr is the foremost military academy where French military officers are educated. Several senior officers hailing from former French colonies are also trained there, building on Franco-African partnerships. For a discussion about Saint-Cyr and Franco-African military relationships, see (Koungou 2007; Augé 2008; Lejeal 2009)

³⁷ Interview with journalist close to the transition authorities (Bamako: 16 October 2017). According to this key person, the coup was mostly engineered by soldiers garrisoned in Kati led by Lt. Seyba Diarra. This has been corroborated by several other key political actors, who tended to highlight Lt Traoré’s connection with radical political figures, disenfranchised and from and disillusioned of Mali’s politics under democratization. Interview with leader of pro-junta platform, (Bamako: 16 February 2018) and with Malian former minister involved in negotiations during the transition (Bamako: 18 October 2017)

and former Finance Minister, Soumaila Cissé, sought refuge in the Senegalese embassy after he was warned of his impending detention. Several other security figures associated with the deposed regime were also detained (Télédiaspora 2012)³⁸. These arrests and the harassment of numerous political figures fostered fears not only among Malian national figures but also among the country's international partners. ECOWAS and the international community showed unity in condemning the military takeover and in calling for the release of the detained national figures. Given the security context of March 2012 and the lack of information regarding the whereabouts of the deposed President following the coup, concerns were also high over the possibility of extralegal violence by the junta and some of its partisans. But at the same time as they stifled any potential opposition to their takeover through a severe criticism of political figures associated with the democratization period, blaming them for all of the country's ills and by courting public figures who were seen as symbols of integrity or patriotism. Imam Mahmoud Dicko of the High Islamic Council (HCI) and the Archbishop of Bamako Mgr Jean Zerbo, contributed to assuaging the fear among national and international actors³⁹.

The *coup d'état* seriously upended the military command structure and disrupted the political process that would have led to presidential elections in April 2012. These developments put the newly formed junta at odds with ECOWAS, the AU and most of the international community.

D. Democracy and its discontents in Mali: the reception of the coup d'état in Bamako

In order to understand the challenges faced by ECOWAS in Mali in 2012, we must consider Mali's post-democratization politics, especially the impact of President ATT's administration (2002-2012) on state institutions and how this defined the reception to the coup. ECOWAS' procedures were out of synch with the national mood at

³⁸ Among the detained security figures were the Director-General of Police, Mamadou Diagouraga, the former Minister of Defense whose meeting with the mutinous officers led to the coup, General Sadio Gassama, the Personal Chief of Staff to the deposed president, General Hamidou Sissoko and General Kafougouna Koné, a former Minister and close associate to President Amadou Toumani Touré.

³⁹ Interview with President, High Council of Islamic Affairs (Bamako:18 February 2018) with journalist close to the transition authorities (Bamako: 16 October 2017).

the time, leading to difficult relations with the CNRDRE. While the takeover was condemned by the political class and several of its members refused to collaborate with the CNRDRE and called for the restoration of the political and electoral processes, a substantial section of Malian parties and groups that played a marginal post-democratization role, welcomed the change of power, and even felt empowered by it (B. Lecocq et al. 2013). For example, Oumar Mariko, a former student leader and a major actor in the fight against the military dictatorship in the early 1990s, vocally and actively supported the coup and accused the deposed president of “national treason” for his management of the security situation in the north. His party, the SADI (*Solidarité africaine pour la démocratie et l’indépendance*- African Solidarity for Democracy and Independence) in association with trade unions and left-leaning/anti-globalization groups, supported the takeover by the military officers. Another platform, the COPAM (*Coordination des organisations patriotiques du Mali*, Coordination of Mali’s Patriotic Organizations) an umbrella organization for several trade unions, organized massive demonstrations in support of the junta’s platform and denounced international interference as an attempt to “balkanize” Mali⁴⁰ (Bøås and Torheim 2013, 1289). These pro-putschist groups would regroup under the *Mouvement populaire du 22 mars* (MP-22) and subsequently play a significant role in internal politics during Mali’s transitional period (April 2012-August 2013). MP-22 viewed the military takeover as an opportunity to reset the country’s political path and to “cleanse” the state of all representatives of the deposed regime (Bøås and Torheim 2013); COPAM in particular and MP-22 saw the Tuareg rebellion as an international conspiracy to divide Mali and exploit its resources, towards which the deposed regime had been overly lenient (Xinhua 2012)⁴¹. For this political faction, the restoration of a constitutional rule “was the worst of the outcomes” (Lecocq et al. 2013, 6).

⁴⁰ Balkanization is a regular theme in anticolonial and pan-Africanist discourses in West Africa, and is rooted in the decolonization period, when the federal French West Africa, became fragmented in 1956 under the Loi Gaston Deferre, which paved the way for more autonomy of French colonies. For a thorough historical review of the concept of “Balkanization” in Africa, see Skurnik, W. A. E. "France and Fragmentation in West Africa: 1945-1960." *The Journal of African History* 8, no. 2 (1967): 317-33. <http://www.jstor.org.libproxy.wlu.ca/stable/179486>.

⁴¹ Interview with former leader of pro-junta platform in 2012 (Bamako: 16 February 2018)

On the other side of the MP-22, the *Front pour la défense de la république* (Front for the Defense of the Republic, FDR) opposed the military *coup de force* and called for the restoration of civilian rule. FDR was composed of several political parties and CSOs, including the main political parties of the democratization period, including the *Alliance, pour la Démocratie au Mali* (Alliance for Democracy in Mali, ADEMA), then Mali's leading political party. The FDR did not rule out dialogue with the rebels in the north (unlike the MP-22, which called for a military victory of the junta-led government) and was more open to interacting with ECOWAS and international actors. But similar to the MP-22, the FDR disputed arguments advanced by the MNLA and other rebel groups about the marginalization of Tuareg groups in Mali's politics, pointing out that they were "well integrated into the political system because the last National Assembly had 19 representatives from the north, 11 of whom were of Tuareg or Arab ethnic origin" (Bøås and Torheim 2013, 1288). Several of the leaders detained and harassed by the junta in the first weeks following the coup belonged to this faction. Another faction, closer to the FDR but clustered around former prime minister Ibrahim Boubacar Keita (1994-2000), who was also a candidate to the cancelled April 2012 elections, opposed the military coup but also a prospective dialogue with the rebel groups in the north. This faction was also less favourable to intervention by ECOWAS, although not opposed to it.⁴² These divisions among Mali's political class favoured the junta in the long term, as it relied on the MP-22 for popular support and criticized its opponents' close association with the deposed regime, which was held responsible for all of Mali's travails.

The decade preceding the *coup d'état* in Mali was characterized by a "consensual" type of government, rooted in the country's transition from a military dictatorship to democracy in 1991. The military dictatorship of General Moussa Traoré (1968-1991) was overthrown by a section of the army following a series of strikes and demonstrations, by student movements, clandestine political associations and trade unions, between 1990 and 1991.

⁴² Ibrahim Boubacar Keita, popularly known as "IBK" has since then been elected President of Mali in August 2013. He was reelected in August 2018 for a second term.

The actors demanded an opening of the political space and in general more liberties through a series of demonstrations. The brutal repression by the military regime over the year hardened the stance of the pro-democracy activists. The situation only changed in the aftermath of 26 March 1991, after several protesters were shot at by security forces. This led to a breakdown among the military corps, and to the coup d'état against Traoré by the Paratrooper Corps' Col. Amadou Toumani Touré, since then known as "ATT." Following this coup, ATT pledged to return power to civilians and led a transitional process in tandem with the pro-democracy activists that ended with the proclamation of the 1992 constitution and the election of a democratic president, Alpha Oumar Konaré (1992-2012). In 2002, ATT came to power as a civilian running on an independent platform and received massive public support.

Mali's politics under ATT (2002-2012) was characterized by the desire to govern by consensus and through close collaboration between the government and what was supposed to be the opposition (Baudais and Chauzal 2006; Bleck, Dembele, and Guindo 2016). Concertation among elites has been a regular feature of Mali's state structures, even during pre-colonial times (Baudais 2015) but took a dramatic turn in the 2000s (Sidibé 2013; Sidibe 2013). President ATT governed for ten years without the structure of a political party, but by co-opting political actors via his charisma and his status as President. This was mostly built on his reputation as the officer who secured Mali's democratization in 1991 by relinquishing power in favour of the civilian rule. The economic boom of 1990-1, and a bountiful harvest after years of drought, added to his aura at the national level (Fay 1995, 41). At the international level, ATT's direction of the democratic transition in Mali (1991-1992) was celebrated for its success; during the decade following the transition, he acted several times as a regional envoy to mediate conflicts across the continent. Added to the fact that he was an independent candidate to the 2002 presidential elections, he was widely perceived as a figure around whom all Malians could gather.

Consensual politics was therefore centred around the figure of ATT and the politics of the democratic transition (1991-2); his successor, President Konaré (1992-2012) tried to build on this foundation with limited success (Sidibe

2013; Institut d' études avancées de Nantes 2013, 38 "00). Consensual politics was a middle-ground, relatively functional, a minimum-consensus agreement between some elites at a specific historical moment, and represented the price paid by all political actors in Mali for temporary stability (Baudais and Chauzal 2006, 71). In this context, all actors, political and civil society, became involved in governance through state support and by the allocation of ministerial posts; political parties showed their support by limiting their criticism of the regime and by endorsing government policies in Parliament. During his ten years in power, ATT always relied on the cooperation of ADEMA-PASJ and of the URD (*Union pour la république et la démocratie*) to support his policies. In return, many of the leaders of these parties joined his government and gained access to state resources. All parties wanted to participate in governmental affairs and to clinch ministerial posts. Since none wanted to be part of the opposition, they mostly rallied around the President who did not have a political structure of his own.

Without their support, President Touré would have been marginalized from the political life, and his opportunities for reelection [in 2007] would have been severely reduced (...) All wished to benefit from power, including ADEMA, whose candidate was the adversary of ATT [during the 2007 presidential elections]" (Baudais and Chauzal 2006, 71).

The absence of political infighting was viewed at the international level as representative of social cohesion and evidence of a successful model of democratic transition (B. Lecocq et al. 2013; Bergamaschi 2014a).

On the other hand, the arrangement between the political elites, and the subsequent subversion of state institutions, was viewed as a deal against the ordinary citizenry. It was one of the reasons put forward to justify the March 2012 coup and to explain the poor standing of the political class at the dawn of ECOWAS' intervention. Slogans such as "Mangez-tous et taisez-vous" ("Everyone eat up but do shut up"), propagated by the playwright, Sirafily Diango, demonstrated the perverse nature of governance and widespread disillusionment with the political class (Tulet 2014). Political actors used less catchy slogans to describe the impact of this mode of governance on the state's institutions. In the words of Ousmane Sidibé, a former Minister of Jobs and Public Works, the "absence" of opposition politics had completely derailed political competition in Mali. It also fostered competition among Mali's different institutions for prebendal reasons (Sidibe 2013). For Oumar Mariko, one of the most prominent

supporters of the putsch, the *coup* freed Mali of the democratic illusion. For Aminata Dramane Traoré, a former Minister, “Sanogo [the coup leader] is not the problem but a symptom” of Mali’s unfronted challenges (Perret 2014, 24).

Beyond the criticism of consensual politics, the military takeover was also viewed as another manifestation of the statebuilding needs in Mali. In the worlds of a former Malian governmental figure, the 2012 crisis was first and foremost a crisis of the state, and its

[institutional] mismatch with the realities of the country, and of its shortcomings during several regimes, shortcomings that were worsened by corruption, poor governance and the incompetence of the political elites (...) Mali is a very vast country with a very diverse population, territories, cultures, ethnicities, religions but also of a very diverse climate system. When a country is so complex, it is to the state to adapt to the country and not to the country to adapt to the state. The state must restructure itself in order not to impede on the aspirations of the people but to answer them. This has never been the case [since Mali’s independence].⁴³

This sentiment was shared by many actors, from both political and civil society, especially with regard to the recurrent rebellions in the north and the implementation of the 2015 peace agreement. Attempts to institutionalize the Malian state were disrupted by the dominance of the different regimes, and their parties, over the state’s institutions. Defining institutionalization as the autonomy of the state’s institutions vis-à-vis both the governing regime and broader society, Baudais argues that the Malian state was captured by a “state bourgeoisie”, composed of former colonial administrators and clerks, soon after its independence (Baudais 2015). Following decolonization and after a brief period of multiparty politics, the ruling regime’s one-party system (1960-1968), the *Union Soudanaise-Rassemblement démocratique africain* (US-RDA), subverted the state’s institutions to defend and promote the regime’s socialist ideology and doctrine against both internal and external threats. This preeminence of the regime over the state was one of the motivations of the 1968 *coup d’état* that paved the way for a military rule (1968-1991). During this period, the state was bent to the will of the junta, the *Comité Militaire pour la Libération*

⁴³ Interview with former prime Minister and leading political figure (Bamako: 13 October 2017)

Nationale (1968-1976; CMLN), and then to the one-party promoted by the regime, the *Union démocratique du Peuple Malien* (UDPM). Praetorianism and neopatrimonialism became entrenched in the governance of public affairs during this period and re-directed the state's institutions from their original purpose (Craven-Matthews and Englebert 2017; O. Diarrah 1990; Baudais 2015). These patterns of capture and diversion continued following democratization and were favoured indirectly by the consensual type of politics that prevailed in Mali during ATT's rule. In this context, the neo-patrimonial nature of the state attests to the failures of institution-building on the part of different regimes but also of the political realities of Malian society (Baudais 2015, 164). Neopatrimonialism works because, in many ways, the social fabric and bonds of Malian society are not threatened by it. Since 1960, the Malian state has been described as "hybrid", combining the exploitative apparatus of the colonial state with the social bonds that define African societies (Baudais 2015, 187). Neopatrimonialism pervaded the state's institutions during military rule (1968-1991) and during the democratization period (1991-2012) and cannot be justified by the necessity of statebuilding and socio-economic development, as the abandonment of political pluralism was justified during the first republic (1960-1968) and the military dictatorship (1968-1991). This informalization of the exercise and reproduction of power through the use of kinship and clientelist relations weakened the formal state's institutions and emptied them of their meaning. Thus for Baudais, "the state exists, even though it remains at the center of all predations and remains weakly institutionalized" (Baudais 2015, 187)

This disintegration of the state's institutions also affected the army, where allegations of corruption and nepotism came to the fore during the 22 March 2012 coup (Sears 2013). Well, after 2012, reports fingered senior officers of the Malian armed forces, and even the President of the republic, for corruption and collusion with drug trafficking networks active in northern Mali⁴⁴ (Sears 2013; Niagalaly 2012). This reality was most apparent in

⁴⁴ These allegations against the deposed regime were widely supported by diplomatic and political actors. A Malian diplomat interviewed in Bamako argued that the Presidency and local political figures all benefited from proceeds of illicit trade. Interview with Malian diplomat active in the implementation of the peace agreement, Bamako, Mali, 18 October 2017. For a leader of a pro-junta organization, these interests explain the aloofness of the deposed regime towards the

northern Mali (Timbuktu, Gao and Kidal) where the state often relied on proxy actors, such as tribal militias and tribal chieftains to govern these micro-regions, whose informal structures and the economy was closer to those found in southern Algeria and northern Niger, than southern Mali. Indeed, following the third Tuareg rebellion of 2006-7, the northern regions saw the emergence of pro-government militias tasked with subduing the remnants of the rebellion. These militias were often mobilized around tribal identity and funded by businesspersons with alleged links to drug trafficking networks. The most famous of these militias were led by Colonel El Hadj ag Gamou, a former rebel turned officer of the Malian army, who, even though part of the regular security forces, led a militia composed mostly of members of his community, the Imghad⁴⁵. As posited by a Malian personality, “on the night of the 21 to 22 March 2012, only the façade was removed; the [Malian] state had collapsed way before.”⁴⁶

2. MANAGING THE CONSTITUTIONAL CRISIS: ECOWAS’ POLITICAL INTERVENTION IN MALI

As it consolidated its standing as a security actor over the 1990s, ECOWAS came to promote democratization among its member-states and the norm of submitting all military authority to civilian rule in the region. The 2001 Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance stipulates that “every accession to power must be made through free, fair and transparent elections” and that the regional body will not tolerate “power obtained or maintained by unconstitutional means” (ECOWAS 2001, 6). The same Protocol further enshrines the primacy of civilian rule over military institutions by stressing that “armed forces must be apolitical and must be under the command of a legally constituted political authority; no serving member of the armed forces may seek to run for elective political [sic]” (ECOWAS 2001:6). More than any other REC in the continent, ECOWAS came to espouse and promote the norms

armed rebel groups, which veered on “national treason”, with former leader of pro-junta platform in 2012 (Bamako: 16 February 2018)

⁴⁵ This militia formed the core of the Tuareg Imghad and Allies Self-Defense Group (Groupe d’autodéfense touareg Imghad et Alliés, GATIA), which emerged in 2014, as one of the main actors of the Malian conflict and later, as one of the signatories of the peace process.

⁴⁶ Interview with journalist close to the transition authorities (Bamako: 16 October 2017).

of democracy, good governance and the strengthening of state institutions through the separation of power, to promote peace and security in its regional space.

It was thus natural for ECOWAS to condemn the *coup d'état* by the CNRDRE, and to call for the safety of the deposed president and a return of power to Mali's civilian authorities (ECOWAS 2012a). These demands were echoed by most international actors in reaction to the events in Bamako (ICG 2012). ECOWAS' response to the coup put it at odds with the junta and its supporters in Mali, and these initial fractious relations would define the dynamic between these two actors over the upcoming months. As the junta resisted its intervention, ECOWAS suspended Mali from all regional activities following the *coup* and raised the threat of sanctions pending the restoration of civilian rule and constitutional order (ECOWAS 2012b). The EU and AU followed suit by publicly rebuking the new Malian authorities and stressing the necessity of restoring constitutional order. Soon after, the EU suspended all of its international development programs in Mali (RFI 2012).

The widespread support for the coup not only among sections of the political class but also among the citizens constituted a complication for ECOWAS (Whitehouse 2012; 2013). This was a surprise to many external observers and the discourse of the coupists on the failed promises of democratization and denouncing the corruption of the Malian elite struck a chord among the population (Perret 2014, 23). ECOWAS' attempts to restore civilian rule as a prerequisite and without addressing the causes that led to the coup, was akin to restoring this elite to many members of the political class in Mali. These actors saw in the rapid takeover of northern cities by armed, a more potent threat to the country than the collapse of a regime that was widely seen as "corrupt." For them, the emergency was in the north, and that is where they expected regional action and support.

In this context, ECOWAS' mediation in Mali started on the wrong foot when a regional delegation, on the way to Mali six days after the coup, was prevented from landing by supporters of the junta. Indeed, during the extraordinary summit of 28 March 2012, ECOWAS decided to send a high-level delegation to Bamako to assess the political and security situation and to ease the restoration of constitutional order. But on 29 March, the regional

delegation⁴⁷ had to reroute their flight to Abidjan, where they convened an emergency meeting on Mali after supporters of the junta occupied the landing strip of the Bamako airport. The regional body acted on its earlier threats by applying targeted economic and diplomatic sanctions against the members of the junta and their families (ECOWAS 2012b). The threat to the junta also involved a military dimension, as the West African brigade of the African Standby Force, was put on alert if a need arose to restore constitutional order in Bamako.

These first interactions would define the relations between ECOWAS and the CNRDRE during the transitional period. Although a regular feature of ECOWAS' responses to coups, the suspension of Mali from all regional decision-making was received as a further humiliation, following the coup and the capture of the northern cities by the rebels⁴⁸. The threat of closing borders and denying access to ports was also felt keenly in Mali, a landlocked country whose southern regions are heavily dependent on regional trade and access to the ports of Dakar, Conakry and Abidjan. For one pro-junta figure, ECOWAS' leaders such as Alassane Dramane Ouattara (of Côte d'Ivoire), Blaise Compaoré (of Burkina Faso) and Thomas Yayi Boni (of Benin), were disconnected from Malian affairs and were subservient to France⁴⁹. In March 2012, Ouattara was heading the Authority of Heads of States and Government, the executive body of the organization, while Blaise Compaoré remained a key security actor in West Africa and the Sahel and was to head the mediation process in Mali (Diallo et al. 2014). In the words of the pro-junta figure,

Ouattara, Blaise and Boni Yayi [sic] who took their legitimacy from France would come and say that they would enforce an embargo if one thing [the return to constitutional order] was not done. What type of embargo? What can an embargo of Boni Yayi [Benin's president] do to us? They have not learnt anything from history, or their culture. I don't see what impact an embargo by Boni Yayi can have on us.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ The delegation was composed of President Alassane Ouattara (of Côte d'Ivoire), Blaise Compaoré (of Burkina Faso), Thomas Yayi Boni (of Benin), Ellen Johnson Sirleaf (of Liberia) and Mahamadou Issoufou (of Niger).

⁴⁸ Interview with former leader of pro-junta platform in 2012 (Bamako: 16 February 2018) See also reaction of Doulaye Konaté in 2013, in Institut d'études avancées de Nantes

⁴⁹ Interview with former leader of pro-junta platform in 2012 (Bamako: 16 February 2018)

⁵⁰ Interview with former leader of pro-junta platform in 2012 (Bamako: 16 February 2018)

More neutral figures such as Ousmane Sidibé, a former minister of Public Administration, Works and Jobs, also denounced not only the high-handedness of the regional organization but also its disconnect with the aspirations of the Malian people. In his words, ECOWAS “bungled a lot” in its approach, by threatening to shut off Malian regional trade, and it was evident that the Malian people did not feel attached to the regional organization (Institut d’ études avancées de Nantes 2013, 32 “00).

ECOWAS, on the other hand, felt entitled to enforce an embargo if the military junta did not relinquish power. In their words, ECOWAS had no choice but to intervene in Mali, or else risk losing its credibility. Given the 2008 ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework, the regional body could interfere in one of its member-state affairs under six conditions, of which five were applicable to the situation in Mali in March 2012⁵¹. For one West African diplomat, “there was no question about ECOWAS’ right to intervene if it had to because there was really no choice”.⁵² Besides, the decisions taken on Mali during the emergency summit of 28 March 2012 were similar to the ones taken by the regional body following the 2010 post-electoral conflict in Côte d’Ivoire (ICG 2012).

A. ECOWAS’ role in brokering a transitional government (2012-2013)

The threat of sanctions riled up many in Mali but forced the junta to negotiate with ECOWAS⁵³. One of the decisions of the heads of state during that extraordinary summit was to name the president of Burkina Faso, Blaise Compaoré, as the ECOWAS mediator in Mali. Compaoré had brokered several political agreements in Guinea, Togo and Côte d’Ivoire, and was a crucial player in Sahelian politics (O. A. Diallo, Gnamké, and Maiga 2014). Mediation is one of the elements of ECOWAS’ Conflict Prevention Framework, and the role of Mediator is usually given to

⁵¹ These conditions are listed in Chapter 5/Article 5 of the ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework.

⁵² Interview with Senior ECOWAS diplomat in Mali (Bamako:17 October 2017).

⁵³ It is said that religious leaders filled the void left in the political scene by the coup in March 2012. For instance, Cheikh Mahmoud Dicko and Mgr Zerbo were decisive in convincing the junta to negotiate with the regional leaders, as the sanctions were looming. See Interview with 12. Senior ECOWAS diplomat in Mali (Bamako:17 October 2017).and HCIM leader (Bamako: 18 February 2018)

one eminent individual, generally a head of state⁵⁴. By entrusting to Compaoré the political dialogue process between the Malian political class and the junta, and between state authorities and northern rebel movements, ECOWAS naturally relied on his personal network in the region, and the Burkinabe state apparatus, to push the process forward. But at the same time, the Authority of Heads of State and Government relinquished some of its control to Compaoré, in a process where the role of the ECOWAS Commission is very vague. In Mali, the regional mediation was most visible through the regular trips and conferences of the Mediator's Plenipotentiary, Burkina Faso's Minister of Foreign Affairs, General Djibril Bassolé. Following several rounds of consultations and negotiations with the junta, a Framework Agreement that would inaugurate a political transition was agreed upon by ECOWAS and the CNRDRE on 6 April 2012. In this document, the military junta agreed to relinquish power to Mali's constitutional authorities based on article 36 of Mali's 1992 constitution. The article stipulates that in case of vacancy of the Presidency for any reason, absolute and definitive, as witnessed by the Constitutional Court when invoked by the President of the National Assembly, the duties of President should be discharged by the President of the National Assembly (République du Mali 1992). The same article also stipulates that a new president must be elected no sooner twenty-one days and no later than forty days after the handover, but this was disregarded in the Framework Agreement given the exceptional circumstances in Mali at the time. More importantly, in order for a vacancy to exist, ECOWAS engineered the submission of a resignation letter by the deposed president Touré, who was seeking refuge in the Senegalese embassy and following that, the formation of governing institutions during the transition (ECOWAS 2012c)

Through this agreement, the President of the National Assembly, Dioncounda Traoré, became the transitional president in Mali, as per the constitution. He was assisted by a Transitional Prime Minister, disposing of "full powers" in discharging his duties and heading a "national unity government". The CNRDRE was to be dissolved

⁵⁴ Interview with Senior ECOWAS diplomat in Mali (Bamako:17 October 2017).

once the agreement, which it was tasked to implement, was in place (ECOWAS 2012c), but they would continue to play an essential role during the transition, and both the transitional president and prime minister would defer to them. Yet despite this, the CNRDRE remained the sole Malian signatory of the framework agreement, and many political actors felt that they were not adequately consulted by ECOWAS.⁵⁵ The regional body saw the deal as a pact between them and the junta, to favour the return of power to civilian authorities, and felt that consultations with Malian national actors had been enough to integrate their concerns.⁵⁶ This perspective wasn't shared by Malian actors close to the transition for whom the framework agreement was not necessary because it implicitly legitimized the *coup d' état* while there were already provisions in the Malian constitution to engineer the return to constitutional rule. As stressed by a political actor of the transition

Many felt that [Bassolé, the Plenipotentiary of the ECOWAS mediator] was listening more to the theses of the junta and that would explain to us, that agreement that they engineered, and that we did not need, and that approved implicitly the *coup d' état*, which is not a constitutional way of acceding to power in Mali. But perhaps he did with what he found; he managed with the reality on the ground, then with the provisions of the constitution⁵⁷.

And for all of the meditation efforts, the transitional government was shaky from the beginning; its legitimacy was questioned by numerous Malian actors. The interim president's authority was never firmly established, as the junta, although sidelined, still continued to play an essential role in national and international affairs, a reality that ECOWAS was powerless to prevent (ICG 2012). The political career of the transitional president was problematic for the members of the junta, and to those favourable to the coup. Dioncounda Traoré is a veteran politician, a baron of the ADEMA-PASJ political party which dominated the first decade of democratization, and a senior figure of Malian post-democratization politics. He was also a former Minister of Foreign Affairs (1994-1997) and the

⁵⁵ Interview with Malian former minister involved in negotiations during the transition (Bamako: 18 October 2017)). See also interview with former leader of pro-junta platform in 2012 (Bamako: 16 February 2018) and Civil Society Member. (Bamako: 23 October 2017)

⁵⁶ Interview with Senior ECOWAS diplomat in Mali, (Bamako: 17 October 2017).

⁵⁷ Interview with journalist close to the transition authorities (Bamako: 16 October 2017).

President of the National Assembly (2007-2012) just before the coup. Thus, he was perceived as a critical figure of consensual politics. If the transition was to pave the way for new leadership detached from the post-democratization politics as desired by most of the pro-junta groups, Traoré's background firmly established him as a conventional political actor with a solid political structure. In the months after the coup, the sentiment that the "junta did not make a *coup d' état* against ATT to return it to the civilians, especially those that governed the country previously"⁵⁸ was popular enough to be used to challenge Traoré's authority as interim president. A substantial section of the Malian population, urban and rural, responded favourably to the populist message of the junta and its supporters and resented the re-emergence of figures seen as close to ATT (Whitehouse 2012, 94). Beyond this internal opposition, Traoré also had difficult relations with the ECOWAS Mediator and his Plenipotentiary, who, while supporting his nomination as interim president, sought to check his power during the transition to accommodate these concerns⁵⁹.

Because he was focused on formal institutions and the restoration of constitutional order, without really being able to engage on the structural drivers behind the coup, the ECOWAS Mediator brokered a transitional government in partnership with the junta. The transitional government's main characteristic was its distance from the deposed regime, except for the interim President. The latter had little input on the formation of this initial government, whose Ministers often lacked administrative experience and were removed from the political class (ICG 2012). Cheick Modibo Diarra, a minor political figure and candidate for the aborted April 2012 elections, was nominated as Prime Minister with "executive powers". He was handpicked by the former junta leader, Captain Sanogo, and only validated by Dioncounda Traoré, the transitional president, who did not have the means his nomination.⁶⁰ Traoré's role and the division of his responsibilities with the interim prime minister were vaguely defined in the Framework agreement. Cheick Modibo Diarra, as "head of the government" bestowed with "full executive powers" was to "to

⁵⁸ Interview with former vice-president president of National Youth Council (Bamako:13 February 2018).

⁵⁹ Interview with journalist close to transition authorities (Bamako:16 October 2017).

⁶⁰ Interview with journalist close to transition authorities, (Bamako:16 October 2017).

lead the transition, manage the crisis in the north of Mali and organize free, transparent and democratic elections”. This put him in direct opposition to Traoré, who meant to play “a concrete role” (ICG 2012). Army officers were at the helm of the different security departments⁶¹, a fact that was decried by anti-junta political figures who stressed the need for the army “to return to the barracks” (Le Monde 2012). Another controversy that dogged the first transitional government was the nomination of Sadio Lamine Sow as Minister of Foreign Affairs. Sadio Lamine Sow, although Malian, had been for two decades a Special Advisor of Blaise Compaoré of Burkina Faso, the ECOWAS Mediator, for Sahelian Affairs. (ICG 2012, 24) His presence was seen as interference on the part of the ECOWAS Mediator and further contributed to the sentiment of helplessness and humiliation voiced by the Malian political and intellectual class (Konaté and Sidibé 2013).

ECOWAS’ mediation in Mali thus led to the return to civilian rule, but it failed to fully isolate the authors of the putsch from political affairs. Most of the energy of the regional organization was spent brokering and supporting a transitional arrangement that would be characterized by its fragility. The CNRDRE’s shadow still loomed over the political actors, while the lack of clarity regarding the division of tasks between the president and the prime minister led to turf wars in Bamako, while the rebel groups strengthened their hold over northern Mali.

B. A mediator, not a mediation: the tensions within ECOWAS’ mediation framework

Beyond the divide in the Malian political class, ECOWAS’ intervention in Mali was plagued by issues related to its institutionalization, especially the relation between the Mediator mandated by the Authority of Heads of States and Government, and the ECOWAS Commission tasked with implementing decisions taken by the Conference of Heads of State and Government.

⁶¹ Three senior officers of the army occupied the most critical security cabinet posts of that government. Colonel-Major Yamoussa Camara was Minister of Defense; General Tiefing Konaté, Minister of Public Security and Civil Protection; Colonel Moussa Sinko Coulibaly acted as Minister for Territorial Administration and Local Affairs

As part of the Regional Conflict Prevention Framework, ECOWAS established a Mediation and Security Council to operationalize its preventative diplomacy by facilitating political and military intervention in eight specific situations, including “in case of internal conflict”, “that poses a serious threat to peace and security in region”, and “in the event of an overthrow or attempted overthrow of a democratically-elected government” (ECOWAS 2018, 25). Composed of nine member-states, of which seven are elected by the Authority of the Heads of States and Government⁶² for a two-year renewable term (ECOWAS 1999 article 8), the MSC’s meeting and deliberations occur at the levels of heads of state and government, at the ministerial and at the ambassadorial levels. The Heads of State and Government meet at least twice annually for ordinary sessions while ministers of foreign affairs meet at least every three months to “review the general political and security situation in the sub-region” (ECOWAS 1999 article 13). Most of the work is done by the member-state’s permanent representatives at Abuja, who meet at least monthly (ECOWAS 1999). In the discharge of its mandate, the MSC is assisted by a Defense and Security Council⁶³ (DSC) on issues related to peacekeeping (Aning 2004b, 536), by a Council of Elders on issues related to mediation, and by the ECOMOG on matters related to peace enforcement (ECOWAS 1999).

At the institutional level, the MSC works in tandem with the Authority of Heads of States and Government, which is the highest decision-making body of the mechanism, and which delegates to it, powers to act (Article 7 of the Protocol; ECOWAS 2018: 18).

The functions of the MSC include, among others:

1. Deciding on all matters relating to peace and security
2. Deciding and implementing all policies for conflict prevention, management, resolution, peacekeeping and security
3. Authorizing all forms of intervention and deciding particularly on the deployment of political and military missions (ECPF).

⁶² The other two members of the MSC are the Current Chairman of the ECOWAS Commission and the Immediate Past Chairman. See, 1999 ECOWAS Protocol, article 8,

⁶³ The DSC is composed of the member-states’ chiefs of defense staffs, officers responsible for internal affairs and security, and experts from the foreign ministries

The MSC was formed after the civil wars in Liberia (1989-1996;1999-2003) and Sierra Leone (1991-2002). The ad hoc experiences that led to the deployment of ECOMOG were followed by robust institutionalization processes of conflict prevention and resolution mechanisms, with the encouragement of the UN (Adebajo and Rashid 2004). The strong influence of Nigeria in the deployment of ECOMOG in Liberia and Sierra Leone and the divide between Anglophone and Francophone countries were other areas of concern at the time (Adedeji 2004b; Aning 2004b). In this context, the institutionalization of mediation and security governance mechanisms was seen as a way of limiting the influence of individual states in the regional organizations' interventions. If the 1999 Protocol, and especially the MSC, was a way for ECOWAS to "curb the...instrumentalization of ECOWAS by Nigeria" (Wulf and Debiel 2009, 16), the analysis of mediation efforts in Mali shows clearly the influence still wielded by heads of states and individual member-states in directing the regional organization's security governance policies.

Compared to the Authority of Heads of State and the Mediation and Security Council, the ECOWAS Commission's role in mediation affairs is much vaguer, limited to "fact-finding missions, mediation, facilitation, negotiation and reconciliation of parties in conflict" (ECOWAS 2008, 19). The mediation in Mali was troubled by a lack of coordination between the Mediator mandated by the Authority of Heads of State on the one hand, and the Commission, which sent a Special Representative of its Chairman to Mali to monitor political developments. This dual channel of representation with imprecise coordination mechanisms impacted negatively on its relations with national actors. Three moments during the transition highlight this disparity: the first on the executive powers of the transitional prime minister; the second on the duration of the transitional period and, lastly, on the prerogatives bestowed on the former ruler of the military junta by ECOWAS.

During previous rebellions in Mali, ECOWAS had limited involvement in brokering peace agreements between the parties (ECOWAS 2014); Algeria generally acted as Mediator in the 1990s and the 2000s, given the security continuum between its southern border and northern Mali. In this context, the nomination of Blaise Compaoré as the ECOWAS Mediator may have seemed natural for the organization, given Compaoré's record on mediating

conflicts in the region⁶⁴. While not at the forefront of the fight against terror, Burkina Faso, under Compaoré, was a major actor in the Sahel, often brokering and facilitating deals for the liberation of Western nationals, abducted by AQIM, and detained in Mali's northernmost regions.⁶⁵ Through his Special Adviser, Moustapha Ould Limam Chafi, a Moor from Mauritania, allegedly in business with socioeconomic interests in Niger, Compaoré had ways of engaging and maintaining communication channels with the northern rebel groups (Sandor 2016a, 150). Indeed, Burkina played a leading role in brokering a peace agreement between the Republic of Niger and a Tuareg rebel group, the *Organization de la Résistance Armée* (ORA), by facilitating the dialogue and hosting formal negotiations in Ouagadougou in April 1995 (Gouvernement du Niger 1995; Beucher 2011).

This background was viewed as an asset for the Mediator, who already had channels of communication with the main armed groups in Northern Mali. Furthermore, Compaoré's history as a leader of a successful coup in Burkina Faso was also perceived as a bonus by the regional organization in engaging with the junta.⁶⁶ Notwithstanding these considerations, the ability of Compaoré to set aside his own strategic interests was questioned by Malian actors, who feared being short-changed in this process. While Compaoré's connections have been leveraged for the release of Western nationals, strong allegations suggest that his role in the Sahel was murkier. He has been accused of acting as a negotiator and as an instigator to the conflicts in the region, of protecting some of his allies among the Arab and Tuareg businessmen associated with the rebel groups, and sometimes providing them

⁶⁴ Blaise Compaoré's regional presence increased following the death of Côte d'Ivoire's Houphouët-Boigny in 1993 and Togo's Gnassingbé Eyadéma in 2005. He has been a privileged partner of France in the region, where it still maintains shadowy relationships with military and political circles. For a discussion of Compaoré's influence in the region in the context of Burkina's recent political history, see Benoit Beucher (nd). "Le Burkina Faso et son environnement géopolitique: Essai de mise en perspective historique"

⁶⁵ Compaoré's role is discussed extensively in Robert Fowler's account of his 130-day captivity by AQIM in 2008-2009. See R. Fowler (2001). *A Season in Hell: My 130 days in the Sahara with Al-Qaeda* (Toronto: HarperCollins)

⁶⁶ Many felt that his background, although unfortunate, gave him more insights about the mindset of the coupists and constituted a leverage for the regional organization See interview with Senior ECOWAS diplomat in Mali (Bamako:17 October 2017).

sanctuary in Ouagadougou (Sandor 2016a, 150), under the guise of facilitating dialogue between the transitional government and the armed groups.⁶⁷

All these parameters justified Compaoré's selection, but the poor articulation between his authority as a Mediator and the Commission loosened the coordination between the organization and its mediation team in Mali. This was compounded by the establishment of a Special Mission in Mali, headed by a Special Representative, who reported to the Chairperson of the Commission. ECOWAS mandated a Mediator in Mali and delegated to him substantive control over negotiations that engaged the regional organization, yet which they did not control. These two mechanisms, whose relations were never clearly spelled out, fostered confusion among the Malian parties. For many national actors, Compaoré's role and leverage dwarfed that of ECOWAS, and the regional body's weak institutionalization manifested itself in the regular controversies among the former junta, the transitional organs, and ECOWAS that dogged the Malian transition (2012-2013).⁶⁸

C. The impact of the limited institutionalization on ECOWAS' mediation of the constitutional crisis

ECOWAS' Mediation of the constitutional crisis in Mali was characterized by several controversies that set it against Mali's internal actors, but that also led to internal conflicts within the regional organization. More than anything else, these controversies highlight the challenges faced by the regional organization and the tensions between the necessity of formalizing its security governance apparatus and the tendency to adopt transactional attitudes to unlock political obstacles in emergencies such as the Malian crisis. Regional projects such as ECOWAS might be pushed forward by member-states to pursue their foreign policies (Warner 2016) or to boost individual

⁶⁷ This is the explanation given by an ECOWAS diplomat to the medical evacuation by helicopter to Ouagadougou, of, Bilal ag Chérif, leader of the MNLA, following clashed between the armed groups. This has been strongly criticized across boards in Mali. See interview, ECOWAS diplomat, Bamako, Mali (17 October 2017). Regarding Compaoré's shadowy role in the Sahel, Sandor argues that Limam Chafi's smuggling business (of cigarettes) through the ports of Cotonou and Lomé to the Sahel, has been initially funded by Compaoré's brother, François Compaoré. This would suggest that the President of Burkina Faso also had business interests in the Sahel. See (Sandor 2016a, 150 note 59)

⁶⁸ Interview with Malian political figure and former lead negotiator, Bamako, Mali (17 October 2017).

regimes (Wyss 2017b). Still conflict situations, like the one in Mali, highlight internal contradictions and their disconnect with specific dynamics of state-society relations. This is most manifest in the controversy over the executive powers of the transitional prime minister, the debate throughout the transition and the quid pro quo concerning the status of Captain Sanogo, former leader of the junta who remained influential during the whole transitional period.

i. The “executive powers” of the transitional prime minister

As mentioned above, the framework agreement of April 2012, which defined the parameters of the transition, was the result of exclusive negotiations between the Mediator and the junta. While it guaranteed the end of direct rule by the junta, some of its provisions regarding the attributes of the transitional organs sowed the seed of institutional discord. This was already apparent in the framework agreement, which gave vague roles to the interim president while specifying the Prime Minister as head of the government with executive powers.

The notion of executive powers of the Prime minister became a controversial issue, given the different interpretations, and the lack of clarity of the Framework agreement. For the supporters of the CNRDRE, it meant that the prime minister had the sole responsibility for the direction of public affairs while the transitional president was to play a more “ceremonial” role. This interpretation was contested by the opponents to the junta who, feeling slighted by the Mediator in the negotiations, defended the powers bestowed on the interim president by Mali’s 1992 constitution. Arguably, the vagueness of the agreements could lead to both interpretations, but the question remains whether it was necessary to include this notion without defining it in the framework agreement. Several actors have laid the blame squarely at the feet of the Mediator’s team, as the controversy dogged the activities of the transition between April and August 2012. The tricephalic nature of the transition (with the interim president, the prime minister, and the leader of the deposed junta in Kati) and the different perspectives of these actors on how to engage with regional actors, heightened tensions and often resulted in mixed signals being sent to national and international

audiences. While the prime minister, Cheick Modibo Diarra, remained close to the junta, critical of the deposed regime, and reticent towards regional intervention in Mali, the interim president showed himself more open to engaging with ECOWAS despite his weak hand. The controversy regarding the first transitional government and the role the Mediator had played in its formation contributed to propagating the view that the Mediator purposefully weakened the interim president for ulterior motives.

In the words of a political figure involved in the transition, the notion of “executive powers” included in the agreement resulted from the

condescension that Compaoré and his Mediator [sic] and a section of the Malian political class close to the junta, had against the actors of the democratic movement that were in power. It was Oumar Mariko⁶⁹ and the MP-22 that said they did not want Dioncounda. For the USA and France, it was unthinkable to sideline Dioncounda and, the compromise they found was to install a transitional president and to make him as weak as possible⁷⁰.

For ECOWAS, the notion of “executive powers” only meant that the transitional president couldn’t remove the prime minister or any other member of his government. The controversy over the notion was manipulated by Malian actors jockeying for power.

“Executive powers” is simply a notion, let us say, without any legal meaning. It means simply that, given that Mali was in a transition, the interim president must appoint a prime minister who will have the integral attributes of a prime minister. That’s what it means. The transitional prime minister must not be encumbered and must receive the full responsibilities of a prime minister [as defined by the constitution]. Since it was a transition, the president could not remove him⁷¹.

This perspective was also echoed by ECOWAS’ Contact Group on Mali, which argued that given the circumstances in which the transitional government was installed (with the resignation of President ATT and his Prime Minister, Mariam Kaidama Cissé), there was a need for the regional organization to ensure that the Transitional Prime Minister be guaranteed the same responsibilities and duties as the Prime Minister of a legally-

⁶⁹ Oumar Mariko is the leader of the party SADI, an anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist figure and a staunch supporter of the junta, and critic of the transitional president, and the deposed regime.

⁷⁰ Interview with journalist close to transition authorities (Bamako:16 October 2017).

⁷¹ Interview with Senior ECOWAS diplomat in Mali (Bamako:17 October 2017).

elected government (A. Diarra 2012). Most national and international actors didn't share this perspective. Even within the regional body, there were tensions related to the provisions of the framework agreement and the unbalanced nature of the transition, especially during the Extraordinary Summit of the Heads of State of 26 April 2012 (ICG 2012). The presence of the Ivorian Minister of Integration, Adama Bictogo, in the April negotiations followed by the nomination of the Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan as Associate Mediator, constituted attempts by ECOWAS to supervise its Mediator's actions in Mali⁷² (ICG 2012, 24). Yet up to the international military intervention, it was Blaise Compaoré and his Plenipotentiary, Djibril Bassolé, who were the face of ECOWAS in Mali

ii. The duration of the transitional period

Another episode that heightened the tensions between ECOWAS and the transitional government was the duration of the transitional period. To ensure the return of power to constituted authorities, the ECOWAS Mediator relied on the 1992 Malian constitution, which defined the parameters of a transition in case of "vacancy of power by the President." While the 1992 constitution establishes the duration of the transition as 40 days, the period was deliberately left vague in the framework agreement due to the rebellion in the north. The decision of the ECOWAS Heads of State in April 2012 to extend the transition to 12 months, after which presidential elections would be organized, added to the decision to deploy the ECOWAS Standby Force in Mali immediately, caused an uproar among the supporters of the junta.⁷³

⁷² The formation of a regional contact group to monitor the situation in Mali is also another attempt of the Authority of Heads of State, to limit the freehand of the Mediator, on the situation in Mali. See interview with former director of think tank for West Africa, in charge of Mali, Dakar (Sénégal) (09 January 2018) and former Deputy RSGUN for Mali, Dakar, Sénégal (27 December 2017) who argued that Burkina's "sympathy for Sanogo" created issues at the level of the heads of state.

⁷³ Interview with leader of pro-junta Platform in 2012, (Bamako: 16 February 2018)

Given the defiance towards the president and towards the Mediation by the pro-junta MP-22, several actors criticized the high-handedness of the decision and the interference in Malian affairs of the regional organizations⁷⁴. Criticizing the intrusion into national affairs by ECOWAS, several actors among which the COPAM and the RDR denounced violations to the agreement and the Malian constitution by the regional organization through this decision (Guindo 2012). The pro-junta COPAM argued for a national convention that would select a consensual transitional president after the end of the 40 days. The transitional president became more isolated than ever during this period, as the prime minister took control of political affairs, while Capt. Amadou Haya Sanogo, the deposed leader of the junta who still wielded actual power, canvassed for support among the political class. The controversy highlighted the lack of ownership, by a substantial section of the political class, of the framework agreement of 6 April 2012.

To compound the lack of coordination between the Mediator, the Authority of Heads of State and the Commission, and the emphasis on short-term transactional arrangements, Compaoré's Mediator announced on 21 May 2012 that a deal had been struck between ECOWAS and Captain Sanogo regarding the duration of the transition. In exchange for his elevation to the status of a former head of state, Captain Sanogo accepted the extension of the transition to a one-year period, which would start after the initial 40-days scheduled in the Malian Constitution (on 22 May 2012). Beyond the transactional nature of the projected arrangement, the negotiations⁷⁵ demonstrated the failure of ECOWAS to isolate the former leader of the junta.

The storming of the Presidential Palace Complex by pro-junta protesters a day after the announcement, with the complicity of the presidential guard, demonstrates the weak leverage ECOWAS had over developments in Mali.

⁷⁴ Interview with leader of pro-junta Platform in 2012, (Bamako: 16 February 2018).

⁷⁵ Several diplomats from neighbouring countries and international organizations participated in the negotiations of the 19-20 May 2012. Bassolé was accompanied by Nigeria's Nurudeen Mohammed and Côte d'Ivoire's Bictogo. On the 20th, they were joined by the Chairperson of the ECOWAS Commission and the SRSG, Désiré Kadré Ouedraogo, a representative of the AU and of the UN for West Africa, Said Djinnit. <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/176027/politique/crise-au-mali-accord-sign-pour-une-p-riode-de-transition-de-12-mois/>

Several hundred protesters, affiliated with the MP-22 and other pro-junta circles, stormed the presidential palace, demanding the resignation of the transitional president. The meeting ended on a tragic note with the beating of the transitional president by protestors and the looting of the presidential palace complex. Furthermore, the protests demonstrated the inability or the unwillingness of the deposed junta to contain the more radical elements among its supporters, but also the will to challenge the decisions of ECOWAS by these same actors. The opaque nature of the negotiations, along with the isolation of the Malian political class in favour of negotiating directly with the junta, enabled the putschists and their allies to challenge the regional organization. In an unintended way, the violent attack against the interim president negatively impacted on the credibility of the CNRDRE and the pro-putschist faction in national and international circles. Dioncounda Traoré was evacuated in France, for his health but also his safety, but his moral leadership towards the prime minister but also towards the Mediation, increased following the attack. ECOWAS had exclusively focused on the situation in Bamako while the armed groups consolidated their hold over northern Mali. Mediation is one area where ECOWAS has excelled the most but in Mali, the framework agreement created more tensions than consensus and was beset by the poor coordination between its Mediator and the Commission. The decision to bestow on Capt. Sanogo, the status and privileges of a Head of State without including Malian parties in the negotiations, was another episode of contention between the Mediator's team and the Authority of Heads of State.

iii. The controversy over the status of the former ruler of the military junta.

While the Mediation team had offered the status of a former head of state to the junta, as an incentive for the extension of the transition, the violent attack against the interim president nullified any agreement among the parties. Furthermore, the Authority of Heads of State rescinded that offer, while pressing for the exclusion of the junta from political affairs. This is despite the presence of several military officers and regional diplomats during the rounds of negotiations that resulted in the agreement in principle between Capt. Sanogo and the Mediator's Plenipotentiary,

Djibril Bassolé. The Mediation decided to grant these privileges, without consulting the Heads of State, nor the ECOWAS Commission through his Representative in Mali.

[The decision to give privileges of a former head of state to Captain Sanogo] came from ECOWAS. And when I say ECOWAS, I mean the Mediation team from Burkina, especially Bassolé's staff. Because there was an Office from the Commission with Cheaka [the Special Representative of the Chairperson of the Commission], who hardly knew what Bassolé was doing. Cheaka learnt like everybody that Bassolé came [to Bamako] and left. He had no idea what was being brokered (...). He wasn't much associated with Bassolé's action. And since the region's heads of state had trusted President Compaoré with the Mediation, his Plenipotentiary Bassolé did not take into account the Office of the Special Representative of the Chairperson of the Commission in Bamako.⁷⁶

It is debatable whether the Commission could sway the decision of the Mediator, but this quote illustrates well enough the lack of coordination within ECOWAS' institutions regarding their actions in Mali⁷⁷. The isolation of the Commission on the negotiations with political actors had been contested by the then-Special Representative, for whom there had been no institutional duplication nor toe-stepping. Yet, the acknowledgment of the "marginalization of the ECOWAS Commission in the Mediation process leading to inconsistencies" in the ECOWAS Mali-After-Action Review, is evidence enough of this reality.⁷⁸

After entrusting Compaoré with the Mediation, the Heads of State had hardly any control over his actions or those of his Plenipotentiary in Mali. The decision to withdraw the privileges bestowed over Sanogo by the Mediator, just after its announcement, constitutes another example of ad hoc arrangements that negatively impacted the credibility of the regional organization. One actor during this period argued that the Mediator favoured the junta more than the established political actors, and this was apparent in the controversy trailing the Mediator's Plenipotentiary all through 2012.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ Interview with former Malian minister involved in negotiations during the transition (Bamako: 18 October 2017)

⁷⁷ Some actors have expressed the view that mistakes could have been avoided if Bassolé and Bictogo associated the Malian political class, and ECOWAS' Commission, in their negotiations with the junta.

⁷⁸ See ECOWAS. 2014. "After-Action Review"

⁷⁹ Interview with journalist close to transition authorities (Bamako: 16 October 2017).

A Mess. A mess first between Bassolé [the Plenipotentiary] and the Malians. (...) and between Ouattara, who was the President of the Conference [Authority] of Heads of State and Compaoré, who was in charge of Mediation. It took President Dioncounda to slam the table during one ECOWAS summit [to press his concerns with the Mediator]. There were many meetings to round off the edges, so it was not easy. There has probably been much toe-stepping [between the different ECOWAS institutions].⁸⁰

Beyond these partisan concerns, the Mediator had to concentrate on the junta because they controlled the army and were the most influential actor in Bamako. Furthermore, there were different policy preferences among the West African leaders regarding the Mediation. President Alassane Dramane Ouattara of Côte d'Ivoire, who was President of the Authority of Heads of State and Government, the highest executive body of ECOWAS, was staunchly against military intervention in political affairs in the region.⁸¹ Indeed, soon after Bassolé's announcement, Côte d'Ivoire's Foreign Minister Daniel Kablan Duncan expressed the imperative of excluding the junta from political affairs in the future (Duhem 2012). This was formalized during the 41st Summit of Heads of State when ECOWAS denied any recognition to the CNRDRE and any privileges to its former leader (ECOWAS 2012d article 20).

The first four months of ECOWAS' Mediation highlighted the limitations of its institutional framework. They were characterized by recurrent wrestling with national political actors over critical provisions of the framework agreement. The transactional arrangements between the Mediator and the former junta were evidence of the lack of leverage of the regional organizations in Mali. While ECOWAS continued to condemn the activity of the MNLA and Ansar Dine in the north, and despite the activation of the ECOWAS Standby Force, most of his focus and action was on the constitutional crisis in the south. The controversy throughout the transition negatively impacted the Mediation, as many Malian political actors began to boycott consultations with the Mediator (ICG 2012). For all these setbacks, the former junta and its supporters were worse for wear following the aggression against the interim

⁸⁰ Interview with journalist close to transition authorities (Bamako: 16 October 2017).

⁸¹ Interview with former senior MINUSMA official (Dakar: 27 December 2017) and et avec Tiébilé Dramé. Ouattara's perspectives should be understood in the context of the civil war in Côte d'Ivoire and the post-electoral violence of 2011-2012 which shook the command of Côte d'Ivoire's security forces, and their intervention in national affairs.

president, which increased international pressure on them, while weakening their support base nationally. The sacking of Cheick Modibo Diarra and his government in December 2012, after many attempts by ECOWAS to sideline him, and the nomination of Django Cissokho, an experienced government figure open to engagement by regional actors, marked another phase in ECOWAS' actions. This occurred as developments in the north shifted the nature of the conflict substantially, from a secessionist one to a fully-fledged Islamist insurgency, intent on conquering the whole territory. ECOWAS' attempts to stem the tide in the north were hampered by that region's particular dynamics, which was closely related to Algeria's security concerns. Differences in the application of subsidiarity, difficulties in resource mobilization and the disconnect between the regionalizing dynamics of the conflict and the APSA stifled action by the African regional actors.

3. ECOWAS AND THE SECURITY CRISIS IN THE NORTH

The rebellion in the north constituted the main concern of ECOWAS before the *coup d'état* and the constitutional crisis it generated led to their mediation. Indeed, ECOWAS, along with the UN and the AU, were engaged in preventive diplomacy with the ATT regime regarding the rebellion in the north, until the coup diverted much of their attention to the capital. Finding a credible interlocutor in Bamako through a transitional arrangement became central to dealing with the security fallout in the north. All along this process, ECOWAS played an important, if not the leading role among Mali's international partners.

Between April 2012 and January 2013, ECOWAS, in tandem with the AU and the UN, attempted several times to conduct a military response to reverse the gains of the armed groups in the north. These attempts never materialized and did not move past the planning stages. This failure to respond constituted another impediment to ECOWAS' relations with Malian actors, who expected regional support yet contested the organization's definition of its parameters.

The West African organization's attempts to contain the security fallout in northern Mali failed for two reasons. The first, is linked to the presence of informal and hybrid governance orders in the north, which existed before the

conflict but whose relations with the Malian state became more heterarchical than hierarchical. Hüsken and Klute view heterarchy as “the mutable as well as unstable intertwining of state and nonstate orders and the plurality of competing power groups.” (Hüsken and Klute 2015, 321). The Malian state has limited sovereignty in the north and often relies on middlemen to maintain its control over this wide area.⁸² Political power is thus diffused through the proliferation of nonstate armed groups, a reality that makes the borders between the local, national and local more porous. The second reason, following from the first, relates to the diverging views on the regional dimension of the conflict and the challenging of ECOWAS’ leading role in the response given its inability to engage and contain informal and hybrid actors. Indeed, the activities and interests of these nonstate actors are not constrained by categories such as “West Africa” and “North Africa” on which the division of labour of the APSA is based. This, in turn, creates tensions over subsidiarity and complementarity between the AU, ECOWAS, Mali and its neighbours. ECOWAS’ leadership was not given, as it was often challenged by Mali’s neighbours, who were more affected by the insecurity and who were not part of the regional organization.

A. ECOWAS and the political economy of conflict in Northern Mali

As shown in the first section of this chapter, the governance of Mali’s northern regions differed substantially with the south’s, due to the greater influence of subnational actors and their embeddedness within a political economy that links them with the Malian formal institutions and actors, but also which also transcends them.

All these actors, from the secessionist to the jihadist, and from the formal to the customary, operate in an environment where political influence is strongly correlated with commercial flows, and the ability to control and

⁸² Northern Mali covers 827 000 km², which corresponds approximately to 66% of the total national territory. This relative size contrasts with its population, numbered at 1.3 million in 2010, which corresponds to 8.6% of the country’s total population. Due to the recurrent conflicts, the population of northern Mali has decreased since independence, from 17% in 1960 and 11.5% in 1990. The population is mostly rural and the most populated cities, Gao (50,000) and Timbuktu (30,000) are located on the southern fringes, in the Niger river valley. See “Northern Mali at a glance”, OECD Sahel and West Africa Club: <http://www.oecd.org/swac/northernmaliatag glance.htm>

levy taxes on people and goods (Grémont 2012, 131). The cities of Gao and Timbuktu, capitals of the regions of the same name, have been essential posts in the trans-Saharan trade routes that connected Sub-Saharan African to North Africa and even the Mediterranean world since their establishment in precolonial times. Rather than a geographical barrier, the Sahara and its various oases and trade routes constitute the “second face of the Mediterranean” (Braudel 2017, 171). Both cities flourished due to this trade, which remains a particular feature of their identity (Scheele 2009). Colonial rule and the subsequent emergence of the modern Malian state had little effect on these trans-state dynamics, animated by networks often organized around tribal identity (McDougall and Scheele 2012). Salt, dates, textiles and horses flowed from the north while slaves, ivory and gold flowed from the south (Horden 2012, 26). In this context, traditional power, projected as the control of the population, rather than territory, and organized around alliances between tribes, is reshaped by the emergence of the modern state and its emphasis on the control of area as the basis of power (Grémont 2012). The ability to levy taxes on trade and the capacity to negotiate access to land resources were the two defining features of the polities of precolonial northern Mali, especially among the Tuareg society. In the words of Grémont,

Among the western Iwellemedan⁸³ in the north of Niger bend, any social group that needed access to natural resources, such as land, pasture, watering places, or salt pasture, had to negotiate with all other groups with similar intentions. Access to resources was therefore essentially dependent on recognition by others, and land, pasture, and water were not appropriated in the sense in which we understand “property” today: a legal state justified by a title deed that authorizes exclusive occupation and alienation (Grémont 2012, 134).

These orders of governance transcended the borders of Mali and its neighbours and reunited communities who shared kinship and culture, which, with the advent of colonization, came to be separated by borders. This did not prevent the continuation of these orders, which were often used by colonial and postcolonial authorities to support

⁸³ The Iwellemedan confederation constituted the main Tuareg confederation prior to French conquest of northern Mali and Nigeria, after which they were supplanted by the Kel Adagh/Ifoghas of Kidal. Nowadays, the Iwellemidan are divided between the Kel Ataram of eastern Mali, and the Kel Dinnik of western Niger, following the formation of these two states.

their efforts at governance in these sparsely populated territories. With the advent of independence in Africa, these borders came to define different trade regimes, which were used by these hybrid actors to further their economic capital, and later to promote their own political interests. These subnational actors and their regional dynamics were never captured in the state-centrism implicit in many of the regional organization's approach to security governance, such as ECOWAS.

i. Borders and connectivity in Mali's Sahelian periphery

Colonial presence, mainly in the Southern part of Mali, and the connectivity it created to French West Africa through the railway, disrupted this trans-Saharan network without eradicating it. The reliance of colonial authorities on traditional chieftaincies in the north to project their edicts favoured the preservation of this model of governance while opening access to manufactured products. The trans-state networks in northern Mali escaped colonial authority, and this pattern continued following independence with the resurgence of trade networks, dependent on different fiscal policies between African states, and the existence of networks of affinity organized around religious brotherhoods and familial/tribal identity (Scheele 2012). The trade between Northern Mali and Southern Algeria constitutes an illustrative example of this dynamic where the border and different fiscal regimes became opportunities for actors enmeshed in these informal networks. Algeria, a socialist regime following its independence in 1962, heavily subsidized basic commodities like sugar, oil, and flour, especially in its southern or "Saharan" region. Livestock was the main export from Mali to Algeria, on the other side of the circuit. This policy had a direct impact on consumption habits in northern Mali, which is disconnected from Bamako and the trade hub organized around it because of poor infrastructure and distance (Bensassi et al. 2015, 16). For traders connected to these trans-state networks,

large profits could be made (...) since most basic staples, such as powdered milk, flour, pasta, and semolina were heavily subsidized in Algeria, and the price differential between both sides of the border was considerable. As a result, exports from Algeria to West Africa had become subject to heavy restrictions, but traders who could rely on efficient networks of support on either side of the border and on their own means of transport could relatively easily avoid these (...). In this way, the "Lahda" period – as the 1970s and early 1980s are generally referred to, Lahda being the trade name of Algerian state-produced powdered milk (Scheele 2012: pp. 82-83).

Most of the basic commodities available in Gao, Kidal and Timbuktu resulted from these existing networks and the informal arrangements with security and customs services (Lacher 2012). To alleviate the cost of living among its northern populations, the governments of Mali turned a blind eye to this smuggling route (Bensassi et al. 2015) and subsequently, the networks that survived the long-distance caravan routes with colonization began to expand from the 1970s as businesspersons began to re-connect networks, and the contraband of subsidized Algerian and Libyan goods to northern Mali and Niger thrived (Lacher 2013b). Border cities such as In-Khalil, which constitutes a speck on the map, gained in importance as *gawarij* or logistical depots essential for this economy (Scheele 2012). To illustrate the magnitude of this political economy, Mali's official imports from Algeria were estimated at USD 2 million annually in 2012, but with the inclusion of the smuggling economy, this volume would reach USD 150 million (Bensassi et al. 2015, 11; Cantens and Raballand 2017, 9). The formal trade represented a mere 2% of the volume of the informal business, which escaped official statistics in both Mali and Algeria. The connectivity between the Sahelian parts of Mali, Mauritania, Algeria and Libya was never captured by a uniform regional project⁸⁴. At the same time, the existence of these transborder networks, distinct yet enmeshed within the states, illustrates the importance of local actors in creating regional spaces.

ii. State collusion and the shift from licit to the illicit

In many ways, the political economy of licit goods smuggling served as the foundation for the proliferation of organized crime networks in the Sahel-Sahara region. The smuggling of cigarettes from Mauritania, Benin and Lomé to North African markets through the Sahel, including Mali's northern periphery, in the 1980s laid the basis for the

⁸⁴ The rivalry between these North African countries is most manifest in the competing regionalism projects they have sponsored. In 2010, Algeria formed along with Mali, Mauritania, Niger a Joint Military Staff Committee (*Comité d'état-major opérationnel conjoint*, CEMOC) to tackle terrorism and organized crime in the region. Libya, under Gaddafi, informally supported pastoral tribes in West African countries' Sahelian spaces to leverage its influence; it has also been the main contributor to the Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD) which includes CEMOC member states with the exception of Algeria and 26 other members to promote security and sustainable development.

trafficking of drugs (hashish and later cocaine from South America) in this region (Lacher 2013b)⁸⁵. As with the informal trade of basic commodities, the development of the informal cigarette trade was a way for distributors to break the monopolies of north African states in this industry. Indeed, many of the actors who were central to the smuggling of the licit goods became involved in the smuggling of illicit goods such as drugs and weapons for good economic reasons: the profits to be made from the other trade dwarfed the “Lahda” economy. In contrast, for up-and-coming actors, the illicit smuggling provided a rapid means for enrichment, which could then be converted into political capital (Lacher 2013b). The different tax regimes in neighbouring countries, along with the existence of trans-state networks and the clampdown of the Atlantic drug smuggling route, contributed to the booming of drug trafficking in the Sahel in the 2000s. Combined with the delegation of authority by the Malian state to militias affiliated with it, Northern Mali became a core region through which drugs, goods, and migrants flowed. These flows were connected to global governance patterns on drug policing, as northern Mali only became a route following the US-supported clampdown on drug trafficking, especially cocaine, through Central America. UNODC estimated that 14% of the cocaine that reached Europe in 2008 (USD 1 billion in value and 20 tons in scale) transited through West Africa, following routes that connected Guinea-Bissau⁸⁶, Togo, Benin and Ghana to northern Mali/Niger, Algiers to Europe (Antil 2012; Peduzzi 2010; Julien 2011). Another trade, of cannabis resin, connects Morocco/Western Sahara/Mauritania to Europe via northern Mali and Niger. As with most trade flows in the Sahel, this trade is facilitated by the existence of trans-state networks, in the forms of tribal ties among the Arab

⁸⁵ In 2009, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) estimated cigarettes smuggled along these routes accounted for around 60 percent of the Libyan tobacco market (or \$240 million in proceeds at the retail level) and 18 percent of the Algerian market (or \$228 million). See Lacher, 2013, “Organized Crime in the Sahel-Sahara” and Antil (2010), “Trafic de cocaine au Sahel”.

⁸⁶ Guinea-Bissau has become a hub in the cocaine trafficking route from South America to Europe via the Sahel. The small inhabited landings of its coast have been used for this purpose and several elements of its military forces have been involved in this circuit. In 2010. Its former Chief of Naval Staff, José Americo Bubo na Tchuto was arrested by the US Drug Enforcement Agency, following a sting operation in one of these islands. In 2016, he was sentenced to life in prison. For a discussion of the role of Guinea-Bissau in this circuit, see (Bybee 2011; Chabal and Green 2016; Pierson and Raymond 2016)

communities, straddling Mauritania to Niger, and with the complicity of state officials, whether Malian, Nigerien or Algerian (Julien 2011, 128–29). This trade overlaps with the cocaine flows to Europe, where it arrives via the Balkans (Lacher 2013b; Antil 2012). The development of the drug economy dramatically impacted levels of local violence, given the stakes involved and potential political influence to be gained⁸⁷. It also fostered the renegotiation of inter-tribal relations as tribes that were considered subaltern but heavily involved in drug trafficking progressively challenged, with the support of Bamako, former suzerains (Strazzari 2015)⁸⁸.

Naturally, this political economy depends heavily on trans-state networks but also on complicity from state officials (Sandor 2016). The recurrent rebellions, along with the installation of AQIM in northern Mali in 2003, has heightened the strategic importance of the Sahel for great powers and international organizations, while increasing the dependence of states like Mali and Niger on these economic networks for security reasons. The development of a kidnapping industry, mainly driven by AQIM in the region, has made many of these businesspersons critical individuals in the liberation of Western nationals held in northern Mali (Sandor 2016a, 150–55). In northern Mali, the career of Babaould Cheikh, a businessman active in the Gao region, is illustrative of this interconnection between criminality, state authority, terror and tribal networks. Babaould Cheikh became even more infamous following the discovery of a Boeing 727 carcass in the Malian desert in November 2009, next to Tarkint, a small city of which he is the first magistrate. The plane quickly dubbed *Air Cocaine* in the media (Lebovich 2013), was allegedly used to smuggle 10 tons of cocaine from South America to Europe via northern Mali. More importantly, its existence shed

87 While there was respect for private property in the informal trade of licit goods, such wasn't the case with drug trafficking, which as a "haram" good cannot be mediated by local court systems. Drug convoys were susceptible to high jacking by rival networks, as they were considered as "fruit from the sky" and belonging to no one. Interview with security analyst from Northern Mali (Bamako: 24 February 2018).

88 The contestation by the Tilemsi Arabs of their vassality to the clerical Kounta tribe, along with the clashes between Imghad businesspersons and Kel Adagh chieftains are two illustrative examples of this pattern. The Bamako regime relied heavily on the support of "subaltern" tribes to challenge rebel groups who mostly hailed from "suzerain tribes". In the 2000s, Imghad politicians and generals among the Tuareg, and Tilemsi Arab businesspersons took a more substantive role in political affairs, at the national and local level, challenging the status quo over the payment of tributes and "rights of way". See (Strazzari 2015)

light on the overland trafficking routes in northern Mali, their interconnectedness with Algeria and Europe, and the existence of airstrips that went below the radar of most government and drug enforcing agencies. Despite arrest warrants following the national and international uproar, Baba ould Cheikh was never seriously threatened as he was a key partner of the then-president ATT, who used to fondly call him “my bandit,” and who was alleged to benefit from the trade.⁸⁹ Indeed, beyond being the “special adviser” of the President, Baba ould Cheikh was a key partner of national and international partners in the liberation of Western hostages held by AQIM in northern Mali. The Canadian diplomat Robert Fowler has stressed the role played by ould Cheikh and Compaoré’s advisor ould Limam Chafi in his and his colleague’s liberation in 2009 by AQIM commander Mokhtar Belmokhtar. In Fowler’s words, Baba ould Cheikh drove them to safety, after conducting negotiations from the fringes of the desert in the north, to the most populous city of northern Mali, Gao (Fowler 2011, 278). Baba ould Cheikh is not a unique figure in Mali, nor in the Sahel, where states’ delegation of authority contributes to the mushrooming of figures and groups who hold multiple allegiances and whose actions are driven mostly by economic pragmatism.⁹⁰

Most armed groups in Northern Mali navigate this political economy, where the control of smuggling routes and the constant renegotiation of tribal relationships constitute the main drivers of violence. The formation of armed groups is directly linked to this political economy; economic capital is often transformed into political capital through association with the government and the renegotiation of tribal ties and relationships (Grémont 2012; Strazzari 2015; Lebovich 2017). The security response by ECOWAS failed partly because the regional organization was never part of, and never understood, this political economy whose trans-state networks transcend its area of operations and connect it to Northern Africa. The connectivity between northern Mali and Algeria, a heavyweight

⁸⁹ Interview with Malian diplomat involved in Algiers process (Bamako: 18 October 2017).

⁹⁰ Other examples include Mohamed ould Aghweinatt, a Tilemsi Arab businessman, who was arrested following the Air Cocaine scandal before being freed in March 2012 by the ATT regime, in order to fund a pro-government Arab militia in the Timbuktu region. In Niger, Adam Sandor has highlighted the role played by Mohamed Akotey, a Tuareg, Kel Adagh and Cherif Ghabidine, a Timbuktu-born Berabiche Arab, in national politics, illicit trafficking and counter-terrorism/migration efforts by these countries’ international partners (Sandor 2016a, 152–54).

on security issues at the AU-level⁹¹, created challenges for the subsidiarity principle and stalled the regional response. In this regard, northern Mali, through the existence of commercial flows based on trans-state tribal networks straddling the Sahel, was part of a regionalism from below, driven by nonstate actors for their purposes, notwithstanding their embeddedness within formal state governance structures. The geography of this region, and the dynamics between the state and nonstate actors within it, are distinct from those of the “West African” region in which ECOWAS was the leading regional security actor. Thus, in its attempts to manage and contain the conflict in the north, ECOWAS was stepping into a system of conflict and of trade dynamics, characterized by the hybridity of nonstate actors and the interests of other non-West African states. ECOWAS’ formal security governance frameworks, combined with its capabilities gap, seemed ill-fitted to address the situation in northern Mali.

B. MICEMA and the quest for a West African military response

The African Standby Force’s West African Brigade was activated by ECOWAS in April 2012 to increase pressure on the junta and also to reconquer, if necessary, northern Mali. ECOWAS played a preeminent role in the military response between March and June 2012 when it decided to deploy a multidimensional mission, the ECOWAS Mission in Mali (*Mission de la CEDEAO au Mali*, MICEMA) (Thérout-Benoni 2013a). Despite this earnestness, MICEMA never took off and was dogged by criticism regarding its credibility, the unwillingness of the former junta and of the first transitional Prime Minister, Cheick Modibo Diarra, to allow a regional force in Mali, and the transregional nature of the conflict which to many went beyond the West African region due to the regionalizing actions of hybrid and other subnational actors. Given this reality on the ground, ECOWAS was not necessarily the best positioned to lead the regional response. ECOWAS’ projected military deployment had the triple objectives of securing the transitional government, restructuring and retraining the Malian army, and rolling back

⁹¹ To illustrate this, Algeria has led the main decisionmaking body of the APSA, the Peace and Security Council, since its formation in 2004. This has given it leverage over strategic engagement in the Sahel, with the RECs and with the AU’s international partners.

the jihadist groups which held sway in the north (Security Council Report 2012). A total of 3245 ECOWAS troops were to be progressively deployed, with contributions from the armed forces of Nigeria (694), Togo (581), Niger (541) and Senegal (381). ECOWAS grounded MICEMA's intervention in Mali on the restoration of Malian sovereignty and the preservation of its territorial integrity and estimated its cost at USD 410 million for an unspecified period⁹² (Security Council Report 2012). ECOWAS' capacity to implement such a comprehensive mandate was far from certain, and the former junta and its supporters opposed the military deployment.

The strained relations between ECOWAS and the transitional authorities in Mali undermined the legal basis of this projected intervention. Questions also lingered about the duration of MICEMA and the potential role that the Malian army would play in the achievement of its objectives⁹³. Indeed, the *coup d'état* of March 2012 led to the collapse of the military command and even to factional fighting between pro-junta elements and army units loyal to the deposed president. One section of the Presidential Guard, the 33rd Regiment of the Paratroopers, launched a counter coup on 30 April 2012 against troops loyal to Captain Amadou Haya Sanogo (Offner 2012), four days after ECOWAS mobilized its Standby Force⁹⁴. The failure of the counter coup led to mass reprisals and extrajudicial killings within the Malian army and raised the distrust of the junta and its supporters towards any military intervention. ECOWAS' failure to isolate the junta within Mali, and the lack of consultation with Malian officers in the military planning, were sharply criticized. Indeed, for ECOWAS, and especially for its then-President of the Authority of Heads of State, Côte d'Ivoire's Alassane Dramane Ouattara, the former junta had no role to play in any

⁹² The ECOWAS note verbale is not clear about the duration of the MICEMA mission, and for how long the USD 410 millions will cover its costs. But it states that humanitarian component will be tackled in six months, and that MICEMA will transition "after an acceptable level of stability has been achieved", after which the responsibility will be handed to the AU and the UN. See (Security Council Report 2012)

⁹³ Most of the elements regarding MICEMA are contained in a note verbal submitted by Côte d'Ivoire to the UN Security Council in 2012. "The note verbale is not exact about the mission's duration, stating only that the humanitarian component will be tackled in six months, and the entire mission will transition "after an acceptable level of stability has been achieved". See Security Council Report 2012).

⁹⁴ The Paratroopers of the Presidential Guard are often colloquially called the "Red Berets" to distinguish them from the pro-junta "Green Berets" of the Army.

regional intervention in Mali⁹⁵. The Malian army might have been in poor shape, but the lack of credible interlocutor in Bamako, and the lack of consensus regarding a military deployment and skepticism over its funding, ensured that MICEMA never went beyond the planning stages.

The divisions within the international community over MICEMA also reduced its chances of success. Indeed, while France supported ECOWAS and several of its member-states, the United States was more cautious given its concerns about the military capabilities of ECOWAS, stalling international support and supporting a gradual intervention that would start with thorough training and capacity-building of the Malian army in the south before launching an offensive in the north (L.-A. Warner 2012). Indeed, the UN Security Council showed less enthusiasm regarding MICEMA, and through its Resolution 2056 encouraged ECOWAS to collaborate with Mali's transitional authorities, the AU and neighbouring countries and asked for "detailed options for the objectives, means and modalities" of MICEMA, elements that were vague in Côte d'Ivoire's *note verbale* (UNSC 2012). Internal opposition to MICEMA in Mali played a central role in the UN's cautious approach as it made its support to MICEMA conditional on an explicit request from Mali. Different assessment missions and planning sessions in Bamako with the AU, Algeria and Mauritania did little to alleviate the strong opposition to MICEMA on the part of the pro-junta elements in Mali's government. This was made evident in August 2012, when the pro-junta Defense Minister, Col. Yamoussa Camara, stated during a meeting with ECOWAS military commanders that MICEMA should not be deployed in Bamako and that the Malian army would not delegate the reconquest of the north to a regional stabilization force (Security Council Report 2012; Théroux-Benoni 2014). The sentiment expressed by the Defense Minister was largely echoed in the Malian political class⁹⁶ and denounced by ECOWAS as a misplaced national pride. At a more normative level, the controversy over MICEMA reflects debates at a continental level

⁹⁵ Interview with former senior MINUSMA diplomat (Dakar: 27 December 2017).

⁹⁶ One important political figure, Ibrahim Boubacar Keita, who would become president in 2013, opposed any reconquest of Mali that would exclude Malian security forces.

over security and state sovereignty that followed the development of the APSA. Several member-states accept the principle of “sovereignty as responsibility” and favour regional intervention when there is a failure of responsibility in a country in the context of a conflict with potential regional spillover (de Witt 2013). ECOWAS member-states tend to align with this vision, given their history of regional interventions and their developed regional security frameworks. Other states are more cautious about issues of sovereignty and the responsibility to protect; they view “sovereignty as possession” (de Witt 2013) and see the doctrine of human security as a pretext for military interventions by Western actors or their proxies. This position has been regularly advanced by Mugabe’s Zimbabwe, Sudan, Qaddafi’s Libya and, to a lesser extent Algeria.

In this regard, ECOWAS’ position on its prerogative to intervene in Mali’s internal affairs given the exceptional circumstances of the transition was challenged by the AU and the UN. These actors refused to support MICEMA due to the transitional government’s opposition to its deployment. More importantly, the abandonment of MICEMA highlighted the growing gap between ECOWAS’ normative approach and the realities in Mali concerning the opposition by Malian authorities and to the presence of hybrid orders. The fate of MICEMA also highlighted the “capabilities gap” of African security actors, who, despite their overt earnestness, remain dependent on the financial and strategic support of extra-continental partner to implement security policies.

C. Bringing in Mali’s neighbours: Algeria and Mauritania and the ECOWAS response

When it came to deal with the security situation in the north, ECOWAS could not overcome the challenges fostered by the transregional nature of the conflict, which closely mirrors its political economy. While it took the lead on the regional response, especially regarding the situation in Bamako, a rift soon emerged between ECOWAS member-states, supported by France, and some neighbouring countries, who did not belong to ECOWAS, but were more threatened by the security situation in Mali’s northern regions. For most of 2012, Algeria and Mauritania supported a political solution to the conflict, unlike ECOWAS, which privileged a military solution despite its own capabilities gap. ECOWAS had activated its Standby Force in April 2012 to put pressure on the junta. Still,

ECOWAS' lack of prior engagement on Mali's governance of its northern regions, the lack of preparedness of its Standby Force, its unfamiliarity with the rough desert terrain where armed groups operated limited the credibility of its threat. The regional dynamics of trade and kinship affinity are independent of the formal existence of the states, and their regionalism projects such as ECOWAS. They were closer to the dynamics in Algeria and Mauritania, whose borders and decisions were essential for the activity of the armed groups, and whose nationals were among the members of the Islamist factions in Mali. Algeria, in particular, had previous experience dealing with an Islamist insurgency in the 1990s and following its military victory, establishing a national reconciliation policy that led to its improved stability. Furthermore, Algeria's trade policies and policing of its borders, have a direct impact on the economic resources of the hybrid actors in Mali, including the armed groups; leverage over hybrid actors and informal structures that ECOWAS did not have.

Indeed, while ECOWAS was dealing with the constitutional crisis in Bamako and brokered the Framework agreement of 6th April 2012, the MNLA unilaterally proclaimed the independence of the Azawad from Mali on the same day. Between April and June 2012, the unity among the northern armed groups collapsed due to differences between the MNLA and Ansar Dine. While Tuareg tribesmen from the Kel Adagh (Kidal) led both groups Ansar Dine was overtly Islamist in its objectives; unlike the MNLA, secession and the establishment of a northern state was not its goal. Ansar Dine, allied with the MUJAO and AQIM, quickly took over most of the cities of northern Mali in June 2012, driving the MNLA from Kidal and assisting the MUJAO in the capture of the city of Gao from the MNLA. From late June 2012, most of northern Mali was occupied by Islamist groups which governed according to their interpretations of Islamic law. The MNLA had a minor presence in the east and would soon be driven out by Islamist factions from Ménaka.

Algiers' stance in support of a political dialogue with all armed groups was also supported by extra-continental actors such as the United States, with whom Algiers has enjoyed a long strategic partnership on counterterrorism. The US and some EU countries encouraged Algiers to lead the regional response, given its military capabilities, its

economic influence in northern Mali and its experience in dealing with Islamist groups (Lacher 2013a). Algeria, along with Mali, Mauritania and Niger, had formed a Joint Operational Staff Committee (*Comité d'état-major opérationnel conjoint*, CEMOC) in 2009 to tackle the spread of Islamist groups and organized crime in the Sahel, headquartered in Tamanrasset. A regional intelligence unit (the *Unité de fusion et de liaison*, UFL) was also formed a year later to foster intelligence collection and sharing among Sahelian countries. Yet despite its transregional membership, the Algeria-led CEMOC had little impact on the regional response to the Mali conflict and was, for the most part, a forum for Algiers to preserve its influence in the Sahel. Rivalries between Algeria and Morocco, which was deliberately excluded from the Algerian-led CEMOC and UFL, and between Algiers and Libya, constituted significant obstacles to these initiatives, as they became progressively stalled⁹⁷.

Many of the commanders of the Islamist groups were veterans of the Algerian civil war, combatants from the Sahrawi Polisario, and sometimes nationals from Mauritania⁹⁸. Algeria and Mauritania were more exposed than most ECOWAS member-states to the consequences of a military intervention so close to their borders. Besides, the political economy connectivity of their Sahelian regions translated itself into the security realm, which raised the stakes of a rushed military intervention. For this reason, both countries participated in most ECOWAS meetings regarding the situation in Mali. Yet, divergences remained as Algeria, and many international actors such as the United States doubted the capabilities of ECOWAS to launch and sustain a military intervention against the jihadist groups in Northern Mali. Algiers privileged political dialogue between Bamako and the Tuareg rebel groups calling

⁹⁷ Algeria and Morocco have been locked into a rivalry over the issue of the occupation of the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) by Morocco since 1976. Algiers supports the independentist Polisario Front against Morocco. Libya, under Qaddafi, on the other hand had always developed an independent Saharan policy based on supports to tribes, and West African regimes, especially through the CEN-SAD. Both countries tried to scuttle efforts to develop a regional security framework in which they would be marginalized, as was and is the case with the CEMOC, in their relations with Mali and Mauritania. See Chena (2011) on regional rivalries and the limits of Algeria's hegemony in the Sahel. Chena, S 2011 *Portée et limites de l'hégémonie algérienne dans l'aire sahélo-maghrébine. Hérodote* 142(3): 108–124.

⁹⁸ Among the Islamist commanders, Mokhtar Belmokhtar and Abu Zeid (AQIM), were veterans of the Algerian civil war; Hamadou ould Kheirou of MUJAO was a Mauritanian citizen along with many of his colleagues, while Adnan Abu Walid al-Sahrawi was a (former) member of the Sahrawi Polisario movement, supported by Algeria.

for secessionism and advocated for more comprehensive engagement against terrorism and organized crime networks. Mauritania adopted the same policies regarding the control of armed groups in northern Mali, where its nationals, along with Algeria's, constituted the second most crucial contingent of foreigners among the Jihadist groups (Lacher 2013a). Little distinction was made between the MNLA and Ansar Dine, which, although both Tuareg-dominated, had very different perspectives on the future of Mali. Algeria believed that it was possible to negotiate with both groups and to find a political solution to the conflict and to redeploy the Malian state in the north, without intervening militarily so close to its borders. This position was most eloquently expressed by Algeria's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Abdelkader Messahel, during the July 2012 AU summit in Addis Ababa; in his words:

“there is a lot of confusion on this topic [i.e. on the proximity between Ansar Dine and AQIM]. Ansar Dine members are not Salafists, we all too often forget that this movement has a Tuareg component, and we would be wrong to exclude Iyad ag Ghaly, its chief [from the negotiations]. Wasn't he years ago one of the negotiators of the National Pact⁹⁹? He is an interlocutor like the rest” (Kappès-Grangé 2012).

Algeria's attitudes regarding the armed groups in the north is partly explained by its role as “mediator par excellence” of the different peace agreements between the government of Mali and Tuareg rebel groups. But also by its recent political history, which saw its government defeat a violent Islamist group and then lead a national reconciliation process that saw them abandon the recourse to violence. Algeria also denounced the complacency of Mali under ATT towards its allies, who were involved and benefiting from the illicit trade to the detriment of the political agreements it had brokered (Lacher 2013a; 2013b). The 1991 Tamanrasset agreement along with the 2006 Algiers agreement were both mediated by Algeria; the resurgence of rebellions following these agreements is partly due to the lack of implementation by the Malian state. Decentralization provisions of the 1991 Tamanrasset agreement, negotiated by the then-Transitional government, were not implemented by Mali's first democratic government (1992-2002), leading to communitarian conflicts and the formation of a pro-government Songhay

⁹⁹ The national Pact of 1992 ended the 3rd Tuareg rebellion

militia, the Ganda Koy in 1994 (Thurston and Lebovich 2013, 23; D. Diarra 2012; Boisvert 2015). The same scenario occurred following the non-inclusive Algiers agreement of 2006, when rebel Tuaregs under Ibrahim ag Bahanga and Hassan ag Fagaga resumed fighting in 2007, before being driven out of northern Mali by the pro-government Tuareg and Arab militias (Lebovich and Thurston 2013: 24). Besides, some of the government's initiatives following the rebellions, such as the decentralization of authority, were poorly implemented, sometimes deliberately, sowing mistrust between the parties¹⁰⁰.

ECOWAS followed Algeria's recommendations about the armed groups without abandoning the military option. ECOWAS initiated talks with the armed groups in the north, but without credible military pressure, the Jihadist groups had little to fear. ECOWAS' dialogues with the groups were conditional to the respect of Mali's unity and territorial integrity, similar red lines to Algeria's. Blaise Compaoré consulted several times with representatives of both the MNLA and Ansar Dine in Ouagadougou over the summer of 2012, while his Plenipotentiary Bassolé held several meetings with Ansar Dine and MUJAO jihadists in Gao and Kidal in 2012 (United Nations Secretary-General 2012a). Bassolé's goal was to convince Ansar Dine and MUJAO to dissociate themselves from AQIM and organized crime networks and to articulate their demands in advance of formal negotiations coherently. Meanwhile, the Transitional Government, following the return of Dioncounda Traoré and the formation of a more inclusive government, started working on the possibility of holding negotiations with the armed groups under ECOWAS auspices, despite the reluctance of the Prime Minister and the leader of the former junta. A National Commission for Negotiations was set up in 29th July 2012 to lead the talks, after the following conditions were agreed on:

- the reaffirmation of the territorial integrity of Mali;
- the centrality of the 1992 Constitution;

¹⁰⁰ This is the opinion of a Malian governmental figure involved in decentralization and local affairs, who lamented the poor funding of decentralized institutions by the Malian government. Interview, former Minister of Decentralization and Local Affairs (Bamako: 24 October 2017).

- the outright rejection of terrorist and criminal groups, as well as of armed rebellion;
- the imperative of allowing humanitarian access to rebel-controlled zones.

These initiatives bore little fruit throughout 2012 as the armed groups consolidated their hold over northern Mali. In spirit, ECOWAS and the transitional government had followed Algiers' input by trying to distance Tuareg groups from jihadist and criminal networks, to build on the previous Algerian-mediated agreements. The military defeat of the MNLA in June 2012 and the ascendancy of the Jihadist groups limited these possibilities. Throughout 2012, Algeria, which is a heavyweight in the Sahel and led most military and diplomatic initiatives in the region, opposed ECOWAS' stand on military intervention and pressured the MNLA and Ansar Dine to engage in negotiations with the West African body. Despite the initiation of talks, the lack of a credible interlocutor in Bamako and the absence of military pressure on the AQIM-affiliated groups controlling northern Mali negatively affected the chances of fruitful dialogue with the Tuareg-dominated groups.

D. Bridging the transregional: subsidiarity in practice in Mali

The transfer of the regional lead from ECOWAS to the AU eased divergences between ECOWAS and Algeria, and between ECOWAS and the pro-junta elements in Mali. At a more global level, the UN's main interlocutor in Africa remains the AU despite its political relations with ECOWAS through the UNOWAS. Within the APSA framework, ECOWAS must first seek and receive the endorsement of the AU before approaching the United Nations in the context of a regional military intervention (Döring 2018a). ECOWAS' developed background on regional security governance and influence over the normative elements of the APSA, such as the African Standby Force (Birikorang 2013), has led to different interpretations of this issue. Indeed, ECOWAS often sees itself as a regional organization covered Chapter VIII of the UN Charter, whose relations with the UN are independent of its links with the AU through APSA (Döring 2018a note 26). Tensions were somewhat alleviated by a joint meeting of the UNSC and the AU Peace and Security Council of 13th June 2012, where ECOWAS was requested to collaborate more closely with the AU, Algeria and Mauritania and to find a compromise with Malian actors (Théroux-Benoni 2014).

Algeria, which is a crucial player at the continental level, lobbied for AU-led management of the conflict in Mali; the UN's rejection of MICEMA led directly to this outcome in August 2012. In June 2012, a Support and Follow-Up Group on the Situation in Mali, co-chaired by ECOWAS, the AU and the UN, was established to ensure a "more inclusive and coherent transitional government," as a prerequisite to a regional intervention¹⁰¹ (Buyoya 2014, 67). This higher level of security governance also meant greater coverage of the political dynamics of the conflict by bringing in countries who were connected to the conflict theatre at both economic and security levels. The AU-led regional response brought back into the picture the former junta and the Malian military, by making their contribution central to any international effort to restore the country's territorial integrity. Unlike ECOWAS, the AU and the UN limited any intervention to "assisting the Malian armed forces in recovering the occupied regions in the north" and showed more overtures towards the disrupted military command. Yet it also added pressure on the former junta and the Malian military, by supporting ECOWAS' efforts to dissociate the military from involvement in political affairs.

It also meant more interaction with the UNSC, which has pushed for an "Africanization" of its interventions and peacekeeping missions since the turn of the century. Through this policy, the UN has encouraged African regional actors to take the lead on regional security governance policies on the continent. Indeed, the second half of 2012 was marked by a revitalization of polycentric diplomatic efforts to effectively contain the crisis in northern Mali, with multi-level coordination between the UN, ECOWAS and the AU to develop a framework for intervention. Multiple planning sessions were held in Abidjan, Addis Ababa and in New York, on the margins of the UN General Assembly of September 2012, to coordinate the regional response to the conflict in Mali. In this context, the UN presence in Mali was expanded through the nomination of Romano Prodi as Special Representative of the UN in the

¹⁰¹ The SFG on Mali included high-level representation from all the neighbouring countries of Mali, other countries of the region, ECOWAS, the United Nations, the European Union, the International Organization of la Francophonie (OIF) and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), as well as a number of bilateral partners, including all the permanent members of the Security Council.

Sahel, distinct from the Office of the Special Representative of the UN for West Africa¹⁰². Following an official request by Mali's transitional authority, the UNSC pushed forward the possibility of an African-led mission in Mali, and through Resolution 2071 declared its readiness to provide "international military force assisting the Malian Armed Forces in recovering the occupied regions in the north of Mali" and "military and security planners to assist ECOWAS and the African Union, in close consultation with Mali, the neighbouring countries of Mali, countries of the region and all other interested bilateral partners and international organizations, in the joint planning efforts to respond to the request of the Transitional authorities of Mali for such an international military force" (United Nations Security Council 2012b).

These developments accelerated the possibility of regional intervention and marked a shift in the management of the situation in Mali. The multi-level effort, under the Support and Follow-Up Group on Mali, focused its October 2012 meeting on analyzing a draft Strategic Concept for the Resolution of the Crises in Mali by ECOWAS, which gave the lead role to the Malian army. This constituted a break from ECOWAS' previous concept of operations under MISMA, in which the junta could possibly be a target, rather than a partner (Thérroux-Benoni 2014: 176). The strategic concept would form the basis of AFISMA, which fell under the framework of the African Standby Force (AU PSC 2012) and would include contributions by Mali's northern neighbours "in terms of intelligence, logistics and troops." The harmonized concept of operations marked a milestone in the polycentric management of the situation in Mali, as, for the first time, a common approach to conflict resolution was developed between the different APSA components and Mali's neighbours to the north. It also followed up on the UNSC's calls for closer collaboration and a more detailed concept that would pave the way for the reconquest of the north that would act on counter-terrorism, in advance of the deployment of a peacekeeping force, a role more suitable to the UN (United

¹⁰² The AU nominated also a Special Representative of the Chairperson of the Commission for Mali and the Sahel on October 2012. Pierre Buyoya, former military ruler of Burundi, has been at this office since then.

Nations Security Council 2012c). The projected AFISMA would rely on 5000 trained Malian Defense and Security Forces, and the generation of 3300 troops from the West African Standby Force. West African TCCs like Nigeria, Burkina Faso and Niger would train the Malian army, set up bases in the southern part of the country and support the national army in combat operations for the reconquest of the north (Caparini 2015).

All seemed ready when the UNSC consented to this plan and approved the immediate deployment of AFISMA on 20th December 2012, through Resolution 2085, despite its reservations about the planning. Indeed, the capabilities gap of the ASF, both in terms of its ability to generate and deploy forces and to train the Malian army, soon became apparent. UNSC Resolution 2085 authorized the deployment of AFISMA but did not provide the financial and material support that was requested by the AU and ECOWAS (Théroux-Benoni 2014:177). For the UN, African actors' request to the Security Council to authorize a UN support package for an offensive military operation raised serious questions' about the UN's involvement in offensive operations and gave rise to concerns that it might compromise the UN's credibility on humanitarian and peacekeeping issues (United Nations Secretary-General 2012b). Given that the AU and ECOWAS relied on UN support to train the Malian army before supporting them in the reconquest of the north, the lack of a support package in UNSC Resolution 2085 dashed any hopes of a short-term deployment of AFISMA in Mali. African actors' requests to the UNSC were based on the AMISOM model, through which financial support was provided to African TCCs by the UN and EU, following negotiations (Ambrosetti and Esmenjaud 2014; Williams and Boutellis 2014). The lack of concrete support package redefined the modalities of AFISMA and Resolution 2085 underwhelmed many African actors. In the words of a regional diplomat, "nothing happened with UNSC Resolution 2085". It "authorized the deployment of AFISMA in theory, » but « nothing was in order. UNSC Resolution 2085 authorized the deployment but still stressed that the problem [in Mali] was political, and there was a need to find political solutions to the Malian issue"¹⁰³. In this new context,

¹⁰³ Interview with ECOWAS Diplomat (Bamako: October 2017).

AFISMA's deployment was projected to come much later, with boots on the ground expected in September 2013 at the earliest (Caparini 2015; Williams and Boutellis 2014), creating friction between African TCCs, regional actors, and the UN.¹⁰⁴ Potential TCCs like Nigeria, who could have supported a regional intervention (as they did 20 years ago through the ECOMOG model) were less interested, due to the financial burden and their internal problems such as the Boko Haram insurgency.¹⁰⁵ Other concerns related to the professionalism of the projected regional forces; indeed "troops of the proposed leader of the regional intervention, Nigeria, were noted to have stoked domestic sympathy and support for the insurgent group Boko Haram due to their reckless and abusive behaviour towards the civilian population" (Caparini 2014).

AU's leadership of the regional response might have led to better outreach with Mali's northern neighbours, and more engagement with the UN and global actors, but it also highlighted the fundamental gaps between the rhetoric of the APSA and its actual limitations (Théroux-Benoni 2014). Indeed, the failure to deploy the ECOWAS brigade of the African Standby Force as scheduled led to more ad hoc arrangements involving extra-continental actors. It also gave more leverage to the former junta and its supporters, who, despite the Islamist hold on the north, were still determined to delineate the parameters of any regional intervention in Mali. The duel between the former junta and ECOWAS, backed by France, was once more central to the regional response. In this context, the southwards advance of jihadists affiliated with AQIM and MUJAO from Douentza to Konna, 600 km from Bamako, in January 2013 exposed not only the transitional authorities but regional actors (T. Diallo 2013). The situation

¹⁰⁴ ECOWAS diplomats echoed the sentiment that they were not supported enough by the global community, including the UN, over the second half of 2012, as they developed plans to stymie the spillover of the Malian conflict. UNSC Resolution 2085 was in this regard, a false promise, after several joint planning sessions between ECOWAS, AU, Malian transitional authorities and extra-continental actors. Interview with senior ECOWAS diplomat in Mali (Bamako: 17 October 2017)

¹⁰⁵ Several ECOWAS diplomats and Malian actors how the Boko Haram insurgency negatively impacted on Nigeria's leadership over the Mali conflict in 2012-3, despite President Jonathan's role as Associate Mediator. See Former Minister and Special Advisor to Transitional Prime Minister Cissokho, (Bamako: 10 October 2017) and with senior ECOWAS diplomat in Mali (Bamako: 17 October 2017).

became urgent since Konna was the last main city before Mopti-Sévaré, the main city in Central Mali, where a part of the Malian army was garrisoned. Capturing Mopti would open the way to Bamako, and the total takeover of Mali by the Islamists.

ECOWAS took on an even more critical role in early January 2013, and ad hoc arrangements became once more central to its response. First, Côte d'Ivoire's President Ouattara, the Head of the Authority of Heads of State, mobilized member-states ahead of the mission since "no one was willing while pressing for a French commitment in the context of the jihadist advance. On 6th January 2013, President Ouattara sent a mission to Nigeria's Goodluck Jonathan, headed by General Soumaila Bakayoko, head of the ECOWAS Defense Council. The objective of the mission was simple: to convince Nigeria of the urgent nature of the situation in Mali and the necessity of intervening immediately and "to take charge of things"¹⁰⁶. Nigeria obliged to the request by providing Alpha Jets to the projected force, and technical staff to oversee the Malian army's aerial capabilities. On the 8th, the mission was reinforced when General Shehu Abdulkadir of Nigeria arrived in Bamako to prepare the ground. By then France's President, François Hollande, had assured ECOWAS "that it could rely on French troops if the jihadists attacked Mali [i.e. the southern regions]" and that "it was up to the regional organization to express its real needs". On the following day, the ECOWAS mission briefed Mali's Minister of Defense and the different army chiefs of staff on their emergency plan and on the necessity for the national security forces to be ready to counter the projected offensive of AQIM and MUJAO. It is important to note that no Malian security chief participated in the development of ECOWAS' contingency plan. According to many regional diplomats and Malian political actors, the former junta attempted a coup on that night.¹⁰⁷ In the words of a transitional government figure associated with the interim president Dioncounda Traoré, the military besieged the house of the interim president and even threatened to end his life:

¹⁰⁶ Interview with senior ECOWAS diplomat (Bamako: 17 October 2017)

¹⁰⁷ Interview with journalist close to transition authorities, Bamako, Mali (16 October 2017) and ECOWAS diplomat, Bamako, Mali (17 October 2017).

it could have happened during the night of the 9th to the 10th January 2013 as we were besieged in Dioncounda's house by the junta. And the Westerners intervened [to save us].¹⁰⁸

This threat was corroborated by ECOWAS officials, on whose behalf the French ambassador in Mali called Sanogo to warn him against any harm towards the interim president.¹⁰⁹ The subsequent unrest in Bamako as pro-junta elements occupied the main arteries of the capital and opposed the projected regional intervention, demonstrated to many that this was a coordinated coup against the transition, one that was thwarted only at the last minute. The subsequent jihadi advance from Konna to Mopti was met by the French-led Opération Serval, following an invitation to intervene by Interim President Traoré sent to the French President on the 10th, with the ECOWAS President of the Heads of State Conference acting as a go-between.

4. CONCLUSION

Tensions between the Malian actors marked the management of the crisis in Mali between April 2012 and January 2013. These pitted pro-junta elements opposed to regional intervention and the FDR which sought to sideline the military from political affairs. They opposed also international actors, over the best course of action to contain the dual crises, in the north and Bamako. ECOWAS was at the center of these tensions, as the subsidiary organization responsible for West Africa, under the framework of the continental African Peace and Security Architecture. ECOWAS' political Mediation was characterized by a misreading of the political situation in Mali but also by contradictions within its mediation mechanisms. The West African organization's strong stance against the junta clashed with the widespread support of the CNRDRE, which was itself rooted in the poor reputation of the post-democratization political class, judged complicit in President ATT's corrupt "consensual politics" (Baudais and

¹⁰⁸ Interview with journalist close to transition authorities, (Bamako:16 October 2017).

¹⁰⁹ The French ambassador was warned by a leader of the anti-junta FDR and former Foreign Affairs Minister, Tiébilé Dramé. Interview with senior ECOWAS diplomat (Bamako: 17 October 2017)

Chauzal 2006). ECOWAS' Mediation was also fraught with "transactional arrangements" for political progress with the former junta, which created tensions within the organization, and within Mali. Despite these challenges, ECOWAS was key in the establishment of the transitional government in Mali and the restoration of civilian order, even though the former junta remained influential behind the curtains.

This chapter has explained how Mali's statebuilding history and the hybridity of its governance modes, especially in the north, posed a challenge to ECOWAS' response to the conflict and the constitutional crisis in 2012. ECOWAS' mediations and demands were challenged by the CNRDRE and its local supporters, who faulted the organization for not considering their grievances towards the political class, and for putting the priority on restoring civilian rule, rather than supporting them in dealing with the rebellion in the north. Furthermore, the presence and influence of hybrid actors in the north, compounded with the lack of capabilities of the regional organization, limited the ability of ECOWAS to deploy and lead a military operation against the armed groups. While ECOWAS was unchallenged in the management of the Malian constitutional crisis, its attempts to contain the security fallout in the north quickly showed the limitations of the regional conception underlying the APSA. The political economy of northern Mali which favoured the establishment and development of alternative local orders of governance, due to the geographical features of the region, transcends "West Africa" as a region, and involves a variety of actors connected by clientelist relations (Sandor 2016c). Algeria's influence over the economy of northern Mali and its history in mediating the conflict between Tuareg rebel groups and the Malian state, constituted comparative advantages in security governance, compared to ECOWAS. Besides, the insecurity continuum from southern Libya to Mauritania, showcased the "trans-regional" nature of the conflict, in the framework of the APSA, which warranted a higher-level of management. The greater involvement of the AU in mediating the conflict, beginning in June 2012, and the collapse of ECOWAS' MICEMA, following the UN's demands, are illustrative of this reality. The jihadist advance was checked, but the regional response between April 2012 and January 2013 highlighted the gaps within

APSA due to the transregional nature of the conflict but also to the gaps in military and financial capabilities, among African actors.

Yet despite this, African regional actors failed to act militarily in northern Mali and had to rely on extra-continental actors to stop the southward advance of the jihadists. France's deployment, along with Chad highlighted once again the capabilities gap of the African regional organizations in the field of security, but also France's continued role as a military actor in its former Sub-Saharan Africa colonies, including Mali. The January 2013 international military intervention gave new life to a stressed transitional government by increasing its leverage against the former junta and the armed groups in the north. These groups became more receptive to negotiating with the transitional government, in the face of a credible military force.

The deployment of the AFISMA, mostly by West African TCCs, followed the trend of "Africanization" of the peacekeeping operations on the continent that has been favoured by the Brahimi report. Yet the deployment of AFISMA would lead to tensions over the doctrinal differences between the AU, African countries including Mali and its neighbours (Niger, Burkina Faso) and the UN over the nature of peacekeeping, in complex settings where jihadist groups operate. More importantly, it fostered more security cooperation between African actors, with the support of extra-continental actors, that would overlap and sometimes clash with the blueprint of the APSA. The main distinguishing feature of these new initiatives was their trans-regional and trans-scalar nature, following the lessons of their early intervention in Mali.

Chapter IV: Failure to launch? AFISMA, Africanization and the international military intervention in Mali

This chapter examines the multilevel governance of the Malian conflict by national and international actors, after the French-led military intervention of January 2013. The previous chapter showed how ECOWAS' intervention was hampered by a disconnect with the mixed legacy of governance and state consolidation in Mali, and how the regionalizing action of hybrid orders led to a contestation of ECOWAS' leadership in responding to the conflict. This chapter will focus on the international intervention in Mali and how it redefined the behaviour of Malian actors, formal and hybrid. It will address why AFISMA never took off despite the UNSC resolution, and how the international intervention led to more multilevel management of the conflict due to the limitations of the APSA.

This intervention constituted a critical juncture in the conflict, as it dramatically shifted the balance of power between Malian actors (the transitional government and the different armed groups in the north). It also marked the beginning of greater involvement of extra-continental actors (France, the UN and the EU) in defining the parameters of conflict management in Mali and the region. *Operation Serval* led to the gradual reconquest of Mali's northern regions and the defeat/retreat of AQIM, Ansar-Dine and MUJAO, the principal armed groups governing the northern regions. These military victories unlocked the political stalemate in Bamako and tilted the balance of power towards the transitional government, for the first time since April 2012. Armed groups in the north became more open to negotiating with the transitional government, and under the aegis of the ECOWAS, an agreement was brokered between them and the transitional government in Ouagadougou (in January 2013), that paved the way for the election of a legitimate Malian president in August 2013. This chapter is built around three key arguments.

First, I argue that confronted with the scale of the military challenges in Mali, West African leaders worked outside the framework of the APSA, leveraged postcolonial relations with French political elites and welcomed *Operation Serval*, which despite its decisive impact on the military situation, contradicts the ideals of the APSA.

The postcolonial history between African and French elites is mainly informal and heavily dependent on the protection of regimes but was used in this context to legitimate French intervention. *Serval* showed the limitations of APSA and was seen as a “humiliation”¹¹⁰ by several non-West African countries at the AU. It also redefined the political attitudes of armed groups in northern Mali, as many shifted alliances, shedding their proximity to groups deemed as ‘terrorist’ and became more open to a political settlement with the Malian government.

Second, while the re-hatting of AFISMA into a UN peacekeeping force showed the persistent challenges to Africanization, lingering questions emerged over the AU-UN partnership in a context like Mali, where the two organizations have doctrinal differences on peacekeeping and the use of force. The re-hatting also generated tensions regarding the subsidiarity between ECOWAS and the AU, as both organizations jostled over their relationships with the UN Security Council, given the fact that most AFISMA/MINUSMA troops were generated by ECOWAS member-states.

Lastly, the state-centric nature of APSA’s regional mapping was not representative of the regional impact of the armed groups in the north. This mismatch of the theoretical division of labour and the consequences of the conflict favoured the emergence of parallel mediation channels to ECOWAS’ following the election of a legitimate government in Bamako in August 2013. The leadership of the mediation was taken from ECOWAS, which brokered the Ouagadougou agreement in June 2013, and entrusted to an Algeria-led international mediation in Mali, involving a host of countries (Mauritania, Niger, Burkina Faso, Chad) and organizations (AU, UN, ECOWAS, EU, OIC) with strategic interests in security developments in Mali. This shift is illustrative of the transregional dimension of the conflict and the recourse to ad hoc mechanisms in order to meet pressing challenges.

¹¹⁰ This is the term used by an AU senior official to describe the mood in the continental organization following the French military intervention in Mali, in January 2013. Interview with senior AU official (Addis Ababa: 30 May 2019).

The first section of this chapter reviews the international intervention in Mali and specifically the French-led *Operation Serval*, and how decisions that would have long-lasting consequences on the peace process and the relations among the Malian government, the UN peacekeeping force and the armed groups were made. The second section analyzes the role and limitations of AFISMA in Mali, and the AU-UN dynamics that favoured the re-hatting of the international presence in Mali. The doctrinal differences between African actors and the UN over peacekeeping and “peace enforcement” led to a division of labour between UN and French troops, and blurred the divisions between peacekeeping and counterterrorism, given the presence of various spoiler groups in Mali. The section also looks at the tensions between the AU and ECOWAS regarding their relations with the UN Security Council. The last section of this chapter demonstrates how interpersonal relationships and the necessity of incorporating informal governance and economic processes in northern Mali played an important role in the shift of the peace process from Burkina Faso to Algeria.

While the first chapter explained how a poor assessment of internal politics in Mali and the inability to engage with hybrid orders of governance hampered ECOWAS’ action in 2012, this chapter will explain the transfer of the management of the conflict from the APSA to the UN due to postcolonial dynamics between France and several ECOWAS member-states, but also to serious concerns about the capacities of the AU to fulfill the mandate of UNSC Resolution 2085. Formal processes of security governance were complemented with informal relations between West African governments and extra-continental actors. To be more specific, postcolonial relations between West African elites and French elites were leveraged in parallel to the deployment of AFISMA in order to supplant the formal structures of regional security governance in Africa, which were anticipated to not be up to the task in Mali. The 2013 international military intervention marked the end of the preeminence of ECOWAS and the AU in Malian affairs; while still involved, their role became more and more symbolic as the UN steered the process. The cartography of regional security changed in this context as the concerns of extra-continental actors weighed on the

international intervention in Mali, building on postcolonial dynamics and in partnership with national and subnational actors.

1. THE INTERNATIONAL MILITARY INTERVENTION IN MALI

A. *Operation Serval*

The international military intervention began with the hasty deployment of *Operation Serval* on 11 January 2013 to check the southward advance of armed Islamist groups. Indeed, while the deployment of AFISMA was being negotiated in the UN corridors in December 2012, AQIM, Ansar Dine and other Islamist groups began to mass in Douentza (Mopti region) and defeated the Malian army in Konna (Mopti region), advancing beyond the northern regions. They also threatened Sévaré, a strategic city marking the border between the northern and central regions, which, if taken, would render even more complicated the defence of the southern regions.

While these developments occurred, AFISMA was far from ready to be deployed, and other means had to be found to counter the advance of the armed groups. The transitional president, supported by his ECOWAS counterparts, asked the French government to provide air support to Malian troops¹¹¹ (Jauvert and Halifa-Legrand 2013; Boeke and Schuurman 2015; Chevènement and Larcher 2013) for the defence of the country. *Serval* was supposed to be a stop-gap operation that would allow the African troops to do most of the fighting. It had a threefold purpose:

- To stop the terrorist aggression;
- To secure and stabilize a country where several thousand French nationals resided;
- To allow Mali to regain control over its national territory (Chevènement and Larcher 2013).

The French military presence in the region allowed them to intervene very quickly. The first airstrikes stopped the advance of the terrorist groups between Konna and Diabaly and facilitated the deployment of French special

¹¹¹ For the ECOWAS Head of Mission in Mali, the letter inviting France to intervene, signed by Mali's transitional president, was drafted by the cabinet of the Ivorian president. Other authors suggest that the letter was written by the Élysée itself, to justify its intervention. See Jauvert and Halifa-Legrand, 2013.

forces from Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso)¹¹² in Mopti, the main city in Mali's central region, and only 10 km from Sévaré. The slow pace of the deployment and the limited abilities of the Malian forces convinced the French to deploy boots on the ground. Indeed, President Traoré's letter to President Hollande asked only for air and intelligence support (Jauvert and Halifa-Legrand 2013) to prevent the capture of Mopti. French officials expected the Malian regular forces to undertake the brunt of the reconquest operations initially. In the words of a French military officer:

On the first day, we did not think that we will retake Gao and Timbuktu by ourselves. We only decided to deploy boots on the ground and to move them north, only the day after, on Saturday 12, when it became evident that the Malian regular army had just melted and that the jihadists were able to avoid our airstrikes" (Jauvert and Halifa-Legrand 2013).

This view is echoed by General Garnier, a member of the planning staff of *Operation Serval*, who argued that the initial plans were limited to stopping the jihadist advance and was based on the belief that the Malian soldiers and AFISMA would subsequently reconquer the northern regions (Shurkin 2014b, 8). *Serval* was expected to be a repetition of Operation Manta, a military deployment in Chad in 1983, which stopped the southward progress of the rebels supported by Gaddafi's Libya by "drawing a line in the sand" during the Chadian-Libyan war (Azevedo 1998, 142; Shurkin 2014b). A rebel attack on 14 January convinced military officers that they had to expand the military effort and seize the north without waiting for AFISMA to step in (Shurkin 2014b, 8).

France used its prepositioned bases in West and Central Africa, which it had negotiated with many of its former colonies, to deploy troops into Mali (Shurkin 2014b, 14). Between 12 and 15 January 2013, a continual stream of conventional forces landed in Bamako (Tramond and Seigneur 2014), beginning with a "200-man-strong combined arms tactical subgroup (*sous-groupement tactique interarmes*, SGTIA)¹¹³ that arrived from Ndjamena (Chad)

¹¹² France has had special forces deployed in Ouagadougou to protect the interests of its nationals in West Africa, as part of Opération Sabre. See Shurkin 2014: 13.

¹¹³ A SGTIA is the basic unit of the French expeditionary force model and "consists of, at its most basic form, three infantry or armor platoons and one platoon from the other arm (i.e., three infantry and one armor, or vice versa), with some associated support elements and a company-level command capability, all led by two captains, one with a fires

(Shurkin 2014b, 14). By 15 January 2013, almost 2000 French troops were deployed in Mali, and the first contingent of AFISMA was also arriving in the country. The reconquest of the northern regions was swift. Gao was retaken on 26 January, Timbuktu, on the 27 and Kidal on 30 January 2013 (Chevènement and Larcher 2013). Over three and a half months, the jihadist factions were decisively tracked and defeated. Estimated to number around 2000 fighters in January, they lost a fifth [430] of their number, during the first three months of *Opération Serval*¹¹⁴. A substantial number also fled to Niger and Libya or melted into the general population (Boeke and Schuurman 2015). If during the first phase of the Operation (11-15 January 2013), which consisted of stopping the advance south of the jihadists, the Malian army played an important role at the frontline containing the jihadist progress, French troops bore the brunt of the fighting and clearing operations in the north subsequently (21 January- 1 May 2013). For these operations, they operated in tandem with 2000 Chadian troops that arrived in late January. These Chadian troops operated outside of the framework of AFISMA initially (Chevènement and Larcher 2013; Boeke and Schuurman 2015, 814)¹¹⁵.

One consequence of the military intervention was to alter the political situation in Bamako. The decisive victory over the jihadists in urban areas constituted a relief for the transitional government, against the pressures of the former junta. Several major AQIM commanders, such as Abu Zeid, who commanded Timbuktu, were killed in the fighting (Rémy 2013). On 9 January 2013, the transitional government was almost overthrown by forces loyal to the junta. With the presence of international forces, it was strengthened in its position as the legitimate interlocutor of international actors. In a few days, *Serval* was able to strengthen the transitional government against the junta

coordination responsibility (...) More platoons and support elements can be added as required, with the limit being eight platoons total" (Shurkin 2014: 14). For a discussion of the French SGTIA model, see *Manuel du sous-groupement tactique interarmes*, Centre de doctrine d'emploi des forces, 2009,

¹¹⁴ French estimates put the number of jihadist casualties at between 400 and 500, while Malian forces estimate that around 600 jihadist fighters died. Also, a substantial amount of weaponry (tens of tons) was seized during *Operation Serval* according to a French Senate report on the operation. See (Chevènement and Larcher 2013).

¹¹⁵ Six French troops and, according to official accounts, 38 Chadian soldiers were killed in the fighting during this phase.

through military might, in a way, ECOWAS and the AU were never able to achieve after eight months of engagement.

B. Serval, as a surprise war?

Operation Serval has been described as a hastily planned operation to prevent an imminent catastrophe in Mali (Jauvert and Halifa-Legrand 2013). But evidence shows that contingency plans for a French intervention in Mali were already being developed by summer 2012, as the prospects of an African force under MICEMA/AFISMA dwindled in the face of the United Nations Security Council reservations. The contingency plan built on the already existing French military footprint and was supported by West African states, who were already doubtful of their ability to intervene promptly in Mali (Boeke and Schuurman 2015, 810). ECOWAS leaders, who even though they had activated the regional standby force in April 2012, had doubts about the capacities of AFISMA to act decisively against the advancing jihadists.¹¹⁶ Thus in January 2012, while ECOWAS Chiefs of Staff were drafting plans for a regional deployment, President Ouattara, President of the Authority of Heads of State of the organization, sought a French deployment in Mali. This back-channel diplomacy contradicts the views expressed by French officials following the deployment of troops in Mali, which stressed their “expectations” to handover to AFISMA and Malian troops for the reconquest of the north. That the French cabinet was not unanimous in supporting the intervention is well documented. Several reports indicated that the French Foreign Office preferred to support a multilateral intervention by West African forces while the Defense ministry preferred a stronger engagement, irrespective of AFISMA troops (Henke 2017, 8; Notin 2014, 179–80; Lasserre and Oberlé 2013, 191). The Director of the French intelligence service (DGSE, Direction Générale de la Sécurité Extérieure) was said to have been skeptical about the strategic prospects of a full-scale military intervention in Mali (Notin 2014, 179–80; Henke 2017, 8). The French

¹¹⁶ Interview with Senior ECOWAS diplomat in Mali (Bamako: 17 October 2017).

Defence Minister, Jean-Yves Le Drian, a close ally of President François Hollande, is said to have played a significant role in pressuring for a full-scale intervention by creating a narrative, as early as September 2012, inscribing the conflict in Mali within the framework of the Global War on Terror, and spreading and selling this narrative through the French media and policy circles (Henke 2017). Le Drian's support for a full-scale French intervention outside the framework of AFISMA was due to his "strong doubts that the ECOWAS mission could resolve the Malian crisis" (Henke 2017, 8), and a belief that the French military operated best alone (Lasserre and Oberlé 2013, 26). For Henke, more mundane logic dictated the push by the French defence ministry for a military intervention:

Le Drian also saw an opportunity in a French unilateral deployment to strengthen the importance and standing of the French Defense Ministry. The latter had been one of his key political objectives when taking over as the new French Defense Minister. He was eager to establish a new equilibrium between the various French government actors that were involved in French defence policy decision-making, notably the Elysée (the Office of the President) and the Ministry of Defense (Henke 2017, 9–10).

Combined with the lobbying of West African leaders for a French military intervention, the groundwork for a full-scale French intervention was already laid even if its long-term consequences could not yet be discerned. Indeed, while AFISMA troops began to be deployed one week after the first French troops, they played little role in the offensive operations against the jihadist factions. French and Chadian soldiers carried most of the offensive operations. Chad, as a member of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), was and is not part of the West African brigade of the ASF, and thus operated outside the framework of the AFISMA. France has had a longstanding military presence in Chad since the country's independence, and several times had supported incumbent governments when they were threatened by rebel factions (Azevedo 1998; Debos 2013; Powell 2017; Eizenga 2018).

In this regard, the intervention stopped not only the jihadist advance but saved the transitional process in Mali, after months of infighting between internal factions. The tactical gains of *Serval* have been much praised (Chevènement and Larcher 2013; Shurkin 2014b; Boeke and Schuurman 2015), but it also meant a longer-term

presence in a conflict characterized by complex dynamics between the state and armed groups. For Boeke and Schuurman, “France secured key regional political and economic interests in the short term, at the cost of becoming coproprietor of a complex set of security and governance problems in Mali” (Boeke and Schuurman 2015, 802), while for Susanna D. Wing, France intervened to preserve a government that failed its people (Wing 2016, 20) (Wing 2016: 60). The intervention could be justified only through the necessity of supporting a desperate transitional government, and regional organization, and consequently was decontextualized from the primary drivers of the Malian conflict when it became framed in the context of the Global War on Terror (Sears 2013; Charbonneau and Sears 2014; Wing 2016). Thus, different threats such as drug and human trafficking became associated with the instability in Mali and as threatening the transitional government, favouring a militarized response (Wing 2016).

With the international military intervention, the former junta’s ability to strongarm the transitional government declined as international actors sought the transitional government as their interlocutor. Furthermore, the diplomatic lead on the management and resolution of the conflict started to shift at this point, from African regional actors to extra-continental ones, with France in the lead. Indeed, the EU upscaled its presence in Mali soon afterwards, when it deployed an EU military training mission (EUTM) to strengthen the capacity of the Malian army. The EUTM mission consisted of 400 to 500 personnel, and was authorized one week after the beginning of *Operation Serval*, and deployed a month later (Boeke and Schuurman 2015).

2. THE CONTRASTED FORTUNES OF SERVAL AND AFISMA IN MALI

A. France and its history of interventions in sub-Saharan Africa

The French military intervention in Mali highlighted once more the tensions between the ambition of the APSA and the postcolonial links between France and its former colonies, built on informal relations between national elites. Despite its substantial shifts since 1960, when most of its African colonies became independent, France’s security footprint in Africa remains still impressive and has clashed at times with the regional security governance framework, such as APSA, especially during the civil war in Côte d’Ivoire (Wyss 2013; 2017a). In Mali, these

informal channels were leveraged by ECOWAS leaders to overcome the challenges they faced in deploying troops, in the context of the southward advance of jihadists towards Sévaré-Mopti. In this regard, African actors paved the way for a greater French involvement in Malian and Sahelian affairs, an involvement that was not welcomed at the continental level and perceived as a humiliation. The existence and persistence of these informal links, and the possibility of having recourse to them in cases of emergency (such as the one in Mali in January 2013) constitute one of the challenges for the full operationalization of the APSA.

France has a long history of military intervention in its former African colonies. Since 1960 where Mali and most former French colonies acceded to independence, France has launched 50 military interventions on the continent (Powell 2017). This history is rooted in security agreements between the former decolonized countries and the former colonial power, and in the informal relations between Franco-African elites that focus on regime stability and the defence of French economic interests. Decolonization was usually negotiated between French and African political elites rather than resulting from liberation struggles, as was the case in former Portuguese (e.g. Guinea-Bissau, Angola, Mozambique) and with the subsequent white-minority rule of former British colonies (e.g. South Africa, Zimbabwe). It was engineered by Franco-African elites to sustain French hegemony and the defence of the first post-independence regimes, through cooperation and training agreements (Charbonneau 2008). Dubbed as “*Françafrique*,” the relationships between French and African political elites have often been linked with support for illegitimate political regimes and the defence of French economic interests through the securing of natural resources in Africa, through networks of former military officers, private advisors to African presidents, and law firms associated with Franco-African elites (Powell 2017). During his first visit to the continent, in Dakar (Senegal) in October 2012, President Hollande, conscious of this historical past, stressed that “*Françafrique*” had ended and that diplomatic relationships would be formalized by excluding back-channels and powerful vested interests. In his words, “the era of *Françafrique* is over: there is France, there is Africa, and there is a partnership between France and Africa, based on respect, clarity, and solidarity” (Le Monde and AFP 2012). Hollande’s discourse was as much

political as symbolic: it contrasted with his predecessor, Nicolas Sarkozy, who also preached the end of *Françafrique* (Bernard 2008; Gouëset 2010) without really breaking with it (Thiam 2008). In the context of *Operation Serval*, a hasty link was made between France's intervention and its economic interests in Niger, which could be potentially threatened with a takeover of Malian territory by jihadist factions (Boeke and Schuurman 2015, 8–9; Adebajo 2014).

The policy is supposed to preserve its influence in its traditional “*pré-carré*” (hunting ground), composed of its former colonies in West and Central Africa, and strengthen its international prestige, while also contributing to the discourse on the historical responsibility of France towards African states and societies (Charbonneau 2008). The economic, social and political dimensions of France's policy in Africa are thus closely tied with its security and military cooperation dimensions. Indeed, the policy is viewed as much more resulting from the interpersonal and thus informal relationships between African political and economic elites and their French counterparts, than emanating solely from the *Élysée*, as can be seen in the influence of the Ivorian President Houphouët-Boigny in the French support towards the secessionist Biafran republic during the Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970). (Wauthier 2002; De St. Jorre 2012)

Charbonneau finds the origins of French security policy in Africa in the tensions between “Symbolic France” and “Historic France”. France's “symbolic state” is based on the implications of the historical construction of the French nation-state which views “the crusades, the wars of conquest, the Revolution, the colonial expansion and all the episodes of “French” history (...) as natural (and almost divine) series of events leading to modern France. France was always and always will be” notwithstanding the epoch and the regimes (Charbonneau 2008:21). The long historical process of centralization of authority over centuries and of the consolidation of state authority is directly linked to the “civilizing mission” of the colonial project during France's Third Republic (1871-1945), undertaken by a “minority of adventurers, soldiers, explorers and sociopolitical elites” in partnership with local African collaborators (Charbonneau 2008: 38-9). There has been continuity in the relations among Franco-African elites before and after colonization, and in the justification of French security interventions. For Charbonneau,

France's security policy in Africa was never decolonized because the policy becomes the rationalization of the political Self and Other that underwrites French hegemony and marginalizes the struggle of Africans for equality and justice. The different security cooperation between France and its former colonies after 1960 remains rooted in this actualization of the French "symbolic state".

Symbolic France is manifest in De Gaulle's *politique de grandeur* during the Cold War and justified by "a certain idea" of France's role in world history. This linear and totalizing perspective on French history marginalizes the voice of the nations and populations defeated by French imperialism and "promotes a view of the political and sectional interests" that "maintains consensus on the workings and politics of the French state" (Charbonneau 2008: 21). The characteristics of the French symbolic state resides in its influence on French foreign policy, which promotes the country's grandeur, especially via its security policy.

For Powell, even though the patterns of Franco-African relations have changed over the last five decades, informal patterns and networks remain central to these dynamics. Military interventions are justified by the securitization of threats affecting African regimes in France's sphere of influence through "ideological terms that privilege grand narratives over local agency and issues" (Powell 2017, 49). This securitization process has given an important influence on France's African partners in determining policy. This is apparent in the context of *Operation Serval*, where President Alassane Dramane Ouattara of Côte d'Ivoire, as Head of the ECOWAS Conference of Heads of State and Government, played an important role in lobbying for French military intervention in Mali, given the limitations of the APSA security framework. This congruence between African regimes' stability and France's securitization process has also exacerbated internal issues related to state-society relations that are often at the root of security crises on the continent. For Powell, "past [French] interventions often contributed to the very processes of political and social decomposition that French policymakers hoped to prevent" (Charbonneau 2008, 21).

The accelerated pace of globalization and the democratization of African regimes in the 1990s has led to a redefinition of the modalities of Franco-African relations. While during the Cold War, the policies were justified

based on the need to support friendly regimes, the imperative of cooperation and capacity-building between French and African armed forces was used to legitimize the relations afterwards, even though the hegemonic nature of the dynamic was not questioned (Charbonneau 2008). *Operation Serval* was justified on the basis of securing the Malian state and supporting the restoration of its authority over its whole territory, notwithstanding the unease it generated at the AU due to its hegemonic undertone.¹¹⁷

There is no doubt that the nature of France's military interventions has substantially changed, compared to the early years following independence, and that France has become more supportive of regional and continental initiatives such as the APSA. The APSA has been heavily dependent on external support to operationalize its pillars, despite the rhetoric around "African solutions" (Franke and Gänzle 2012, 94; Engel and Porto 2009b; Williams 2008). France and several other bilateral partners have developed capacity-building programs with individual African countries and regional ones, in order to facilitate the "Africanization" of peacekeeping organizations (Berman 2002; Chafer and Cumming 2010, 1134; Wyss 2017b). The French-led RECAMP program (*Renforcement des capacités africaines de maintien de la paix*/ Strengthening African Peacekeeping Capabilities), developed in 1998, mirrors a trend in which Western countries, such as the UK and the USA, sought to strengthen the conflict-management capabilities of African countries and multilateral organizations (Ministère des Affaires Étrangères undated; IRSEM 2005). The objective of the RECAMP mirrors that of APSA in the sense that both prioritize strengthening the capacity and possibility of African-led responses to conflict.

Capacity-building of African peacekeeping forces is done through the training of African military staff (middle to senior officers) in peacekeeping by French troops already present in the country's military bases on the continent. The training is done in liaison with the UN and used to be done in partnership with regional peacekeeping training

¹¹⁷ This was the case of President Abdel Fatah al-Sissi of Egypt, who allegedly lambasted ECOWAS' heads of state for supporting another French military intervention. Interview with journalist close to transition authorities, authorities (Bamako: 17 October 2017).

schools (IRSEM 2005). Military exercises, done in partnership with RECs such as ECOWAS, to train battalions scheduled to operate in a multinational setting. These military exercises are done every two years and are complemented by tactical operational training for staff and units at the brigade-level through a series of bilateral and regional exercises. RECAMP also supported the capacities for UN peacekeeping operations on the continent, through the provision of logistical and material support to African troops by French troops, pre-deployed in different bases.

Most of the RECAMP participants hail from former French colonies, although RECAMP welcomes non-Francophone countries. The program has also been regularly adapted over the 2000s to reflect the changing security environment in Africa, especially following the deployment of French troops (*Opération Licorne*) during the civil war in Côte d'Ivoire (IRSEM 2005). Also, in order to share the financial burden and to avoid “accusations of Francophone bias” (Wyss 2017b, 491), the European Union has become more involved in building the peacekeeping capabilities of African multilateral actors by assuming the “responsibility over the major training cycle at the strategic level, under the name of EURORECAMP, while France remains [ed] responsible for operational and tactical training under its original RECAMP name” (Boulanin 2014, 54). Despite this support to Africanization, France’s strategic objectives in its former colonies are still about projecting its influence and maintaining its interests; for Boulanin, policy changes such as RECAMP did not result from a shift in mindset but served to “maintain its military influence by reducing the military and economic cost” (Boulanin 2014, 44) while for Charbonneau, RECAMP reflects a hierarchical Franco-African relationship in which France decides the agenda and retains ownership of the means of legitimate violence, by lending equipment to African peacekeeping troops (Charbonneau 2008a, 117, note 25). France has often been a “primus inter pares” despite RECAMP and its support to Africanization and multilateralization, as can be seen from its leading role in the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI) (Wyss 2013) and in Mali (2013-) (Charbonneau and Sears 2014).

B. AFISMA in the shadow of Serval

AFISMA was a short-lived mission (January 2013 - July 2013) that operated under the shadow of *Operation Serval*, and that exposed the severe limitations of the APSA. The debates preceding the approval of the Mission in December 2012 were characterized by the expression of serious doubts concerning the capacity of African actors to meet the security and political challenges in Mali. The United States doubted the readiness of an African-led mission to mitigate the jihadist threat in the north and manage the constitutional crisis in the south, and also expressed concerns about the “democratic credentials” of Mali’s transitional government (Boeke and Schuurman 2015, 809). Most African actors, both bilateral and multilateral, saw in AFISMA the next-best solution to the crisis after the failure to launch MICEM, and expected UN support to the African Mission. However, this optimism was not shared and was frustrated by the different priorities and perspectives of UN Security Council members. Susan Rice, the US Ambassador to the UN, was one of the skeptics, and as the representative of the most important P5 member, embodied the hybrid paternalism underlying UN-AU relations. In the words of a French official, “[she] would not stop ranting against this African force, she did not believe in it and did all she could to delay its authorization” (Jauvert and Halifa-Legrand 2013)¹¹⁸.

Differences over what the Mission ought to do are manifest in its comprehensive mandate, which included rebuilding the capacities of the Malian army in partnership with the EU; supporting Malian soldiers in reconquering the north and reducing the threat posed by jihadist groups, and transitioning to stabilization activities in support of Malian transitional authorities (United Nations Security Council 2012d). However, first, the UN required the AU and ECOWAS to further refine its military planning before starting offensive operations (UNSC Resolution 2085). For this endeavour, the UN authorized the deployment of the United Nations Office in Mali (UNOM) in January

¹¹⁸ The US ambassador to the UN, Susan Rice, allegedly called the AFISMA plan “crap”. See (Jauvert and Halifa-Legrand 2013).

2013 to support both the deployment of AFISMA and the political dialogue among Malian parties (United Nations 2013b, 5, paragraph 26).

The contrast between the cumbersome deployment of AFISMA with the speedy deployment of Serval appears to justify the US' concerns. The idea that the AU played "catch-up" (Weiss and Welz 2014, 897) is hard to dismiss when we consider the military actions of the two forces. The PSC could only condemn the southward advance of the jihadists, express its solidarity with the Malian transitional authorities and its gratitude to France, and exhort West African TCCs to accelerate the deployment of troops (African Union 2013a). Despite the threat to the southern regions, most TCCs were not ready to deploy troops in Mali in January 2013. The West African brigade of the ASF existed only on paper, and ECOWAS could not always count on the availability of the different national contingents that comprised it¹¹⁹.

The first AFISMA troops were deployed on 18 January 2013, a week after the jihadist advance was thwarted, and would trickle progressively into Mali (Weiss and Welz 2014, 897). By the end of that month, only 1000 of the planned 3300 AFISMA troops were in Mali, and according to one journalistic source, they "were nowhere near the frontline" (Al Jazeera 2013). The AU had to revise its concept of operations for AFISMA as many of its original assumptions had been rendered moot by *Operation Serval*. This marked a significant shift as the possibility of quickly re-hatting AFISMA as a UN mission was already being considered soon after Serval since many of its mandated tasks (as laid out in UNSC Resolution 2085) were being fulfilled either by France (regarding the neutralization of the jihadists and the restoration of state authority), or the EU (capacity-building for the Malian army). Limited financial resources and a heavy dependence on external partners facilitated the replacement of the AU by France and the EU, in the fulfillment of UNSC Resolution 2085.

¹¹⁹ Interview with ECOWAS Standby Force officer, PAPS Directorate (Abuja: 19 July 2019).

Another challenge that explains the slow deployment of AFISMA is its unpredictable funding scheme. The AU and ECOWAS held a consultative meeting on 16 January 2013 to ponder its financing. On 29 January 2013, a donor conference was scheduled in order to mobilize financial and logistical support for AFISMA and the Malian military (African Union 2013a). While the UN considered various funding packages for AFISMA in late 2012, its support was contingent on a clearer evaluation of the situation in Mali (United Nations Security Council 2012d). If it was willing to support an African-led mission in Mali, the UN was not willing to support combat operations due to the operational challenges posed by the hasty deployment of AFISMA, and “the force’s need for training, equipment and enablers, including in combat logistics” (United Nations Secretary-General 2013a).

In a letter to the UNSC, the UNSG identified three options available for supporting AFISMA:

- The first option relied on bilateral contributions to support and provide all logistics to AFISMA.
- The second option would be based on UN assessed contributions and involved a support package to AFISMA for all of its operations in Mali, from training Malian soldiers to combat operations and stabilization. This option represented a challenge given that from December 2012 to January 2013, AFISMA’s finalized concept of operations was still under development, and any support package was dependent on its approval by both the AU and the UN.
- The last option envisaged bilateral logistical support to AFISMA during combat operations and a separate UN support package to AFISMA during the deployment and stabilization phases.

This last option was more appealing to the UN, as it would exclude direct UN involvement in combat operations. Besides, this funding package mirrored the one provided to the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) since 2007 and would limit the risks to the UN in delivering stabilization operations. The UN Secretary-General was generally wary about the potential impact of such support, towards its personnel and missions in the Sahel and beyond but found the last option to be the least risky. In his words,

The security risks for United Nations operations in the Sahel are already high. A dramatic shift in the posture of the Organization would have a further negative impact on its ability to implement essential mandates in the humanitarian, development and human rights areas. I am obliged to bring to the attention of the Security Council the assessment of the Secretariat that, if the United Nations were to provide logistics support to military forces engaged in an offensive operation, it would place United Nations civilian personnel at grave risk and undermine their ability to carry out their current tasks in the region (United Nations Secretary-General 2013a)

Endorsing the view of the Secretary-General about the potential pitfalls of supporting AFISMA's offensive operations, the Security Council approved the third option. Through that decision, it acknowledged the difficulties AFISMA would face in carrying out its mandate and implicitly supported the re-hatting of AFISMA into a UN peace operation once combat operations were over. Already in December 2012, a trust fund was set up by the UN through which individual member-states could provide financial support to AFISMA and/or training to the Malian army, and the UN called for a new donor's conference where bilateral partners could pledge their financial support to the AU-led Mission (United Nations Secretary-General 2012a). Despite the professed will to "Africanize" peace operations in Africa and despite the establishment of APSA a decade earlier, AFISMA could only meet its objectives through the heavy support of international partners. The Mission also suffered from faulty assumptions and planning that became manifest with the events of January 2013. The proposed budget doubled after the operational context was considered, going from 460 million (all figures in US dollars) to 950 million (BBC Africa 2013). Pledges only reached half of the overall budget (455 million) by 30 January 2013, with the AU pledging to allocate 50 million to AFISMA (including 5 million in financial support to the Malian army) (France 24 2013). Other pledges came from developed countries such as Japan (120 million); the United States (96 million); Germany and the United Kingdom (20 million), India and China, but also from ECOWAS, Ethiopia, South Africa, Ghana, Nigeria and Sierra Leone (1 million each) (Government of Ethiopia 2013).

Furthermore, African actors were progressively being left out of the strategic planning for the international presence in Mali, following the deployment of Serval. France, taking a leading role, lobbied the European Union to scale up its presence in Mali by deploying a training mission that would conduct SSR with the Malian Army and

lobbied for a UNSC authorization of this endeavour without consulting either the AU or ECOWAS (Weiss and Welz 2014, 903). This clashed with AFISMA's mandate in UNSC Resolution 2085, which tasked the force with the training of Malian troops, even if doubts over its capacity to do so lingered.

For these various reasons, AFISMA was considered as having been set up for failure (Adebajo 2014). The absence of developments between 20 December 2012 and the beginning of *Operation Serval* (11 January 2013) has been singled out in this regard. However, this perspective ignores the discussions between ECOWAS member states and the transitional government that took place during that period and the intense diplomatic activity undertaken by the AU at the UN to actualize AFISMA.¹²⁰ It was rather the rapid pace of events, between the demonstrations in Bamako and the capture of Konna by the jihadist factions in January 2013, that surprised national and regional actors in Mali. African regional diplomats also point out the absence of a regional leader during this period, especially within ECOWAS, to articulate and lobby for the African force at the international level.¹²¹ Despite the historical “Francophone/Anglophone” divide in ECOWAS and the progressive formalization of ECOWAS' conflict management/resolution protocols in the 1990s, there is a sense that a strong Nigerian presence was missing at this time.¹²² Nigeria has played a substantive role in the ECOWAS' institutional developments but was (and is still) preoccupied with the Boko Haram insurgency in 2012-3. This internal security issue limited its potential contribution to AFISMA, even though it was the first African country to deploy air assets to Mali. The absence of a regional leader to spearhead AFISMA contrasts with the roles played by Kenya and Uganda in AMISOM, where they have provided a political and military anchor to the AU mission for more than a decade (Freear and Coning 2013).

¹²⁰ Interview with Senior ECOWAS diplomat in Mali (Bamako: 17 October 2017).

¹²¹ Interview with senior ECOWAS diplomat in Mali (Bamako: 17 October 2017), and with Special-Representative, MISAHÉL (Bamako: 16, October 2017)

¹²² Interview with Special Representative, MISAHÉL, (Bamako: 16 October 2017). See also (Okeke 2014) on Nigeria's role in West African peace operations. Despite this, the Special Representative, ECOWAS Chairperson, magnifies though Nigeria's diligent support to the planning and deployment of AFISMA in 9-19 January 2013.

Beyond the financing challenges, AFISMA was also established in a rag-tag manner following the offensive of the jihadists in January 2013. Operational details such as the location of Headquarters, office leasing and purchase of equipment, and an official Status of Mission Agreement with the Malian government were still not finalized by the end of January 2013, as the first African troops began to arrive in Mali and played a support role to *Operation Serval*. More importantly, AFISMA's concept of operations was revised after the arrival of the first troops, as important assumptions regarding training and logistics no longer applied given the new operational context. AFISMA was organized by the AU, in consultation with the President of the ECOWAS Commission and TCCs, in the week following *Operation Serval*. The AU High Representative for Mali and Sahel, Pierre Buyoya, was appointed Head of AFISMA, with the ECOWAS Special Representative in Mali as his Deputy. This constituted a hybrid model of regional collaboration as the Head of AFISMA reported to the AU Chairperson of the Commission, while the Deputy Head reported to the ECOWAS Chairperson of the Commission. Moreover, while the High Representative was responsible for the Mission's mandate and supervised civilian, military and police personnel, the Deputy Special representative managed the civilian units. This division of responsibility was a compromise between the AU and ECOWAS, two important pillars of the APSA, whose approach to the resolution of the conflict differed in important details.¹²³

In Addis Ababa, the AU established a Mali Integrated Task Force (MITF), with representatives of the AU, ECOWAS and the UN, to coordinate logistical support to AFISMA (African Union 2013a). In Bamako, a Joint

¹²³ Rumors circulated of different understanding of the division of labor between AU and ECOWAS, with each organization's representative considering itself to be mandated by the UN. The subsidiarity principle, which is not legally binding, but structures the AU's relations with the RECs and RMs became problematic, as ECOWAS sought to have a direct relationship with the UN Security Council, an initiative that contradicts AU doctrine. The AU's position on this issue is also not supported by the United Nations Security Council, which does not differentiate between RECs and the AU on the issue of Chapter VIII mandates. This led to compromises in the leadership structure of AFISMA which incorporated both AU and ECOWAS Special Representatives, two political actors that had different lines of reporting. Interview with regional researcher (Dakar: 12 September 2017) and with a former AFISMA/MISAHÉL senior official (Addis: June 2019). See also (Williams and Boutellis 2014, 262).

Coordination Mechanism (JCM) was established to coordinate tactical activities. The JCM was led by the Head of AFISMA, but also included representatives of ECOWAS, the UN, and Mali's transitional government, among other partners. Inter-organizational collaboration between civilians and military experts also led to the finalization of the Mission's revised joint concept of operations on 21 February 2013. By this point, the jihadist groups had been cleared from most of their positions in the north, and the Franco-Chadian offensive had cornered them in the Adrar of Ifoghas area (Kidal region), where they put up fierce resistance using their superior knowledge of the terrain (Shurkin 2014a). At a more strategic level, a European Training Mission in Mali, (EUTM-Mali) tasked with training and rebuilding the Malian armed forces, was deployed in Bamako (Boeke and Schuurman 2015, 808). The deployment of this Mission, along with Serval, meant that AFISMA's mandate was being reassessed and substantially scaled down, to reflect better the Mission's limited capacities to neutralize armed groups and train the Malian army on its own. More importantly, this process had an important effect on "Africanization" as some of the extra-continental actors' perspectives differed from the AU and ECOWAS on Mali and the Sahel. The EU, for example, had a comprehensive Sahel strategy in place since 2011, which saw a continuum between the region's security issues and its development challenges and identified regional coordination as a critical obstacle to be overcome.

Thus, despite an increase in personnel, from 3300 to 9620¹²⁴, AFISMA's strategic objectives were limited to supporting the efforts of Mali's transitional government. This included mobilizing resources to support SSR, restoring state authority and territorial integrity, implementing a transitional roadmap and reducing the threats posed by terrorist groups and criminal networks even though the brunt of the kinetic operations were done by Serval. This was all to be achieved through distinct phases: an expansion and consolidation phase which began in January 2013 and was still underway when the concept of operations (CONOPS) was approved by the AUPSC in March 2013; a

¹²⁴ This included 8,859 troops, 171 civilian staff, and 590 police personnel. See UNSG. 2013. "Letter dated 15 March to the President of the UN Security Council).

stabilization phase which would include the election of a legitimate government, and finally a transfer of responsibilities to the Malian army. The CONOPS also relied on a combination of Mission-owned, TCC-owned and contracted assets and services to support the Mission's objectives: and while AFISMA supported the small civilian component of the Mission immediately following their deployment, TCCs were expected to cover most of the expenses of their troops for at least three months (90 days), before being reimbursed. On 3 March 2013, 7,727 military and personnel had already been pledged, but only 6,127 troops were deployed in Mali, essentially by West African countries¹²⁵. Chad, which had until then operated mostly outside the framework of AFISMA, and in tandem with French forces, was the only non-West African TCC to AFISMA with its two thousand troops, constituting almost a third of the Mission's force.

Despite the ideational goal, the conditions were not met for AFISMA to effectively confront the security and political challenges in Mali. Limited financial resources, logistical challenges, lack of training along with the political situation in Mali all contributed to making the African Mission not fit for purpose. The skepticism is apparent in the words of Thomas Yayi Boni, the President of Benin, who lamented the slow pace of deployment of AFISMA troops in Bamako and thanked France for intervening, as he handed over to Ethiopia's Haile Mariam Desalegn, as President of the AU Conference of Heads of State and Government (Al Jazeera 2013; Lough and Maasho 2013). Despite the revised concept of operations, AFISMA played a secondary role in the reconquest of northern Mali, and in the stabilization operation. The lack of funding along with logistical challenges meant that African regional actors could only play a temporary and supporting role, especially as West African leaders lobbied for a French intervention in Mali. The belief that AFISMA was made of "thin air, and would be too weak, too ill-equipped and would not be able to reconquer the north [of Mali] without French air support" (Jauvert and Halifa-

¹²⁵ On that date, the different TCCs were Benin (300) Burkina Faso (498), Ghana (125), Guinea (144), Niger (675), Nigeria (1,186), Senegal (501), Chad (2,015) and Togo (723). They were deployed in in Bamako (Benin and Ghana), in Markala and Diabali (Burkina Faso), in San (Guinea and Senegal), in Ansongo and Gao (Niger), in Banamba (Nigeria), in Kidal and Tessalit (Chad), in Sévaré, Bandiagara and Koro (Togo).

Legrand 2013) was held not only by the US Ambassador to the UN, but also by West African leaders who, although they were the ones who deployed troops in Mali, were never sure they possessed the capacity to meet the challenges. Funding remained an issue more than two months after the beginning of the operation in a context where the UN was exploring the possibilities for re-hatting the Mission (United Nations 2013b, 18).

C. The transition from AFISMA to MINUSMA and the challenges of Africanization

The UN, the Malian transitional government, and ECOWAS considered the possibility of re-hatting AFISMA into a UN mission, soon after the international military intervention (United Nations Secretary-General 2013b). If there was consensus on the re-hatting, the parties disagreed on the modalities and the mission of the projected UN mission.

In his letter to the UN Secretary-General of 7 March 2013 conveying the deliberations of the Peace and Security Council, the AU Commissioner for Peace and Security, Ramtane Lamamra, urged the UN to respect specific parameters in the transitional process in order to consolidate the gains and strengthen the prospects of ending the Malian conflict. One of the most important parameters outlined was the necessity of giving a peace enforcement mandate to the prospective mission. For the AU, this meant that the UN should side with the Malian government and actively participate in the fight against armed groups and not merely deploy a neutral and impartial interposing force. Illustrating African actors' desire to remain involved in significant orientations, the AU asked to be consulted, along with ECOWAS, by the UN Security Council in the discussions over the composition and the leadership of a potential UN mission in Mali.

The UNSC ignored these demands in its Resolution 2100 of 25 April 2013, which established a United Nations Multidimensional Integrated and Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) and transferred the authority of AFISMA to the new mission, effective 1 July 2013. MINUSMA's original mandate did not include the offensive operations suggested by the AU. It rather focused on stabilizing key population centers; supporting the restoration of state authority in Mali's territory; providing humanitarian assistance, cultural preservation, and

national/international justice; protecting civilians and UN personnel; and supporting the implementation of Mali's transitional roadmap and the political dialogue between the government and the armed groups. In a related development, the UNSC Resolution 2100 endorsed *Operation Serval*, and delegated to it, the offensive operations sought by African actors. The resolution asked French troops in Mali to “use all necessary means (...) to intervene in support of elements of MINUSMA when under imminent and serious threat upon request of the Secretary-General,” welcomed the deployment of the EUTM mission, and asked the EU Special Representative for the Sahel to coordinate closely with MINUSMA on security sector reform (United Nations Security Council 2013, 9, paragraph 18). Serval's flimsy legal jurisdiction was strengthened by the resolution that gave way to close collaboration between the blue helmets and one of the parties to the conflict. Furthermore, the AU's and ECOWAS' orientations were curtailed as the UN entrusted other actors with undertaking peacekeeping in Mali. The pillars of AFISMA's initial mandate in UNSC Resolution 2085 were thereby transferred to the UN, France and the European Union due to the operational challenges faced in troop generation and the doubts regarding its abilities. That the UNSC would take this decision despite its commitment to Africanization was not a given. In his recommendation to the UNSC in March 2013, the Secretary-General outlined two options for a future UN presence in Mali:

- The first option would consist of an integrated multidimensional mission alongside AFISMA, where the UN would focus on the political component and logistically support the AU-led mission, as is the case with AMISOM.
- The second would consist of a multidimensional stabilization mission under Chapter VII, which would subsume UNOM and AFISMA under UN authority. The second option would strictly be a peacekeeping force and thus would need to be supported by a national or counter-terrorist force to mitigate the risks to the UN presence (United Nations 2013, 13–14).

UNSC Resolution 2100 endorsed the second option, a decision that was not welcomed by the African Union. For AU officials, Mali was in a similar situation to Somalia in 2007, and the operational context in April 2013 was

not conducive to traditional peacekeeping due to the presence of armed groups challenging the sovereignty of the government. The context was also different: AMISOM was established as an exit strategy for the Ethiopian military, which had intervened in Somalia, with strong US backing, in order to support Somalia's Transitional Government and defeat the Islamic Courts Union (ICU) (Williams and Boutellis 2014, 272). The AU's rationalization of UNSC Resolution 2100 emphasized the importance of geopolitical considerations on the scoping of MINUSMA and its mandate. For an official involved in the negotiations:

a mission with a robust mandate as the one with AFISMA, if supported by the UN-assessed contributions, would give a say to Africans on the matter, beyond their real power. The different resolutions 2071, 2085 and 2100 attempted to dilute that voice. UNSC Resolution 2100 was particularly difficult for us to swallow. What we wanted was a UN mission with a counter-terrorist dimension, in the model of AMISOM¹²⁶.

The UN, on the other hand, considered the re-hatting as necessary due to political, operational and diplomatic dynamics; the early successes of *Operation Serval* made the deployment of a peacekeeping mission possible (United Nations Office of Internal Oversight Services 2018, 12). The re-hatting of AU-mandated missions into UN ones (in Mali and the Central African Republic) ones has always led to the reduction of the budget support to the missions by all donor countries, and the diminution of the leverage of specific African TCCs within these missions (Okeke 2014). By taking full control over these missions, the UN also reduced its dependence on TCCs and undermined the security rent that might arise with this dependence, as was the case with the Ugandan contingent within AMISOM. In Mali, the re-hatting was made possible by the victories of *Operation Serval*, which allowed for the deployment of AFISMA after much delay. After months of back and forth with African actors, in the end, the UN, while welcoming the actions of ECOWAS and the AU in Mali and encouraging further coordination, asserted its primacy in peace and security on the continent through UNSC resolution 2100 and pointed out that AFISMA had failed “to

¹²⁶ Interview with senior AU official (Addis Ababa: 30 May 2019)

report as requested in paragraph 10 of resolution 2085 (2012) ... and [was] looking forward to the submission of those reports”¹²⁷ (United Nations Security Council 2013, 3).

Moreover, the AU’s desire to be involved in the composition of the mission’s leadership was also ignored. Pierre Buyoya, who had been acting as the AU’s High Representative for Mali and the Sahel since October 2012 and as the Head of AFISMA since January 2012, was favoured by the AU to lead MINUSMA, in recognition of the efforts of African actors in Mali. However, the UN Secretary-General had a different perspective and nominated the Netherlands’ Bert Koenders to lead MINUSMA, with Rwanda’s Jean-Bosco Kazura as the mission’s force commander. In this case, the personality of Buyoya was problematic. As a former president of Burundi who acceded to power twice through coup d’états, and with his problematic human rights record, he was a potential source of criticism for the UN, especially compared to Koenders, who has extensive experience not only as a minister in the Netherlands but also in the United Nations Operation in Côte d’Ivoire (Weiss and Welz 2014).

The decision to transfer the authority of AFISMA from the AU to the UN left a bitter taste in the mouths of African actors. In its response to UNSC Resolution 2100, the Peace and Security Council denounced the fact that the resolution was “not in consonance with the spirit of partnership that the AU and the United Nations have been striving to promote for many years, based on the provisions of Chapter VIII of the UN Charter”. It stressed that it “does not take into account the concerns formally expressed by the AU and ECOWAS and the proposals they constructively made to facilitate a coordinated international support for the ongoing efforts by the Malian stakeholders” (AU PSC 2013a, paragraph 10). The blunt words of the communiqué clearly showed both the AU’s lack of leverage vis-à-vis the UN, despite two decades of Africanization, and its disapproval of the process leading

¹²⁷ In this paragraph, the UNSC requested the African Union, in coordination with ECOWAS, the UNSG and other actors in involved in the Malian crisis, to report to the Security Council every 60 days, on the deployment and activities of AFISMA, including, before the commencement of offensive operations in the north of Mali, and other issues covered by its mandate.

to the definition of MINUSMA's mandate¹²⁸. This disapproval was also echoed by the AU Assembly, which during the 50th anniversary of the Pan-African organization in May 2013, stressed “the need to build an innovative, flexible action-oriented and balanced partnership with the international partners, notably the United Nations, to ensure that Africa's concerns and positions are adequately taken into account by the Security Council when making decisions on matters of fundamental interest to Africa” (African Union 2013d; 2013e, 1, paragraph 1).

The Mali experience shows the difficult partnership between the AU and the UN. The two organizations have different perspectives on neutrality in the context of peace operations, differences that came to the fore during the transfer of authority of AFISMA to the UN (Boutellis and Williams 2013; Williams and Boutellis 2014; Thérroux-Benoni 2014; Weiss and Welz 2014). The partnership is characterized by the asymmetric capabilities of the two organizations; their different degree of casualty tolerance during peace operations; the unequal relationship between the UNSC and the AU PSC and lastly, issues of pre-eminence regarding the AU's claim to primacy over peace operations on the continent, especially with the attempts to operationalize the “African solutions to African problems” ideal (Weiss and Welz 2014, 899). While the UN is capable of deploying sophisticated peace operations, especially with the support of the P3 in the Security Council, the AU, through its Constitutive Act (Article 4h and 4j) and the PSC Protocol, aims to resolve complex conflict situations but remains dependent on external partners for financial and logistical support. The rigid mapping of the continent into regions where specific RECs operate also poses a challenge to the flexibility and creativity of peace operations through the APSA. The primacy of the sovereignty principle has served as a guiding framework for the actions on peace and security by African actors; in Mali, it has led to an inability or unwillingness to consider the nature of statehood beyond backdoor discussions, and to engage with hybrid orders, for political reasons. Due to its resources and its global mandate, the UN has been less constrained in its engagement with RECs and neighbouring countries, while its financial and political capabilities

¹²⁸ Interview with senior AU official (Addis Ababa: 30 May 2019)

make it a more credible actor in the eyes of conflict parties. This lack of financial and logistical autonomy exposes African contingents to higher risk compared to UN peacekeeping operations, requiring an increased toleration of casualties among troop contributors. This is the case of AMISOM in Somalia, where AU-mandated troops, principally from East Africa, suffered around 3,000 casualties by 2013¹²⁹, close to the total number of UN casualties in peacekeeping operations between 1948 and 2015 (Weiss and Welz 2014, 899). Furthermore, despite the existence of a memorandum of partnership, and annual consultations between the two organizations, the AU-UN partnership is also affected by tensions between the AU's will to lead on operations on the continent with the support of the UN, and the UN Security Council's desire to exercise political control over emerging crises, including in Africa. This is epitomized by the reply of US Ambassador to the UN Susan Rice to the Kenyan ambassador's concerns that the UNSC tended to disregard African voices:

(...) some Security Council members feel that African Union member States have not always provided unified or consistent views on critical issues, and that the African Union has, on occasion been slow to act on urgent matters. Beneath those perceptions and frustrations, however, is a deeper issue, that is, who is on first? Under the Charter, the Security Council has a unique, universal and primary mandate to maintain international peace and security. The Security Council is not subordinate to other bodies, or to the schedules or capacities of regional or sub-regional groups. Nonetheless, the Security Council wants and needs to cooperate closely with regional organizations, as demonstrated by our growing collaboration with the African Union over nearly a decade. Such collaboration, however, needs to be based on the exigencies of the issue at hand, and that cooperation cannot be on the basis that the regional organization independently decides the policy and that United Nations Member States simply bless it and pay for it. There can be no blank check, either politically or financially. The Security Council should, and will, take into account the views of regional and sub-regional institutions, while recognizing that sometimes there is disagreement among them (United Nations Security Council 2012a, 15).

Despite these frictions, the re-hatting process unfolded at a quicker pace than previous ones, and the transition “was considered quicker than the six to nine months minimum required by the UN when deploying troops from elsewhere,” with RECs and TCC's considering it more financially appealing for their contingents (United Nations

¹²⁹ The number of AMISOM casualties is murky as the AU does not compute the number of casualties and leave this task to the TCCs. This has generated controversy between the AU and the UN over the number of casualties in 2013, when the Deputy UN-Secretary General said that 3000 African peacekeepers died in Somalia, before being disavowed by AMISOM (through their official Twitter account). Later, the UN retracted the words of its Deputy UN Secretary-General on the grounds that they were based on “informal sources” and should not be considered as official. (Williams 2015)

Office of Internal Oversight Services 2018, 12). The quicker pace also meant that it was an ad hoc process emphasizing force generation rather than a clear transitional process between the AU and the UN, with the first days being described as “chaotic”¹³⁰. A preliminary assessment of six of AFISMA’s 13 military units identified critical capability gaps. Consequently, it warned about the potential reduction of effectiveness, suggesting the exclusion of those units that failed to meet the UN peacekeeping standards (United Nations Office of Internal Oversight Services 2018, 16). However, these recommendations were not ultimately included in the transitional process: the UN DPKO re-hatted all thirteen AFISMA units, including the seven that were not assessed, mainly due to the troubles in getting other countries to deploy troops to Mali. Chadian troops that were deployed as part of Serval and then under AFISMA were flagged by UN staff members in DPKO and OHCHR, among others, because the Chadian army was suspected of recruiting and using child soldiers. This caused a hasty visit by UN DPKO to the Chadian contingents in Mali, one day before the day of transfer of authority (1 July 2013), to make sure that no child soldiers were present among their troops, and increased engagement on the part of the UN with the Chadian government on this issue (United Nations Office of Internal Oversight Services 2018, *ibid.*).

These challenges notwithstanding, MINUSMA quickly took up its role, especially on the inter-Malian political dialogue that had been mediated up to that point by ECOWAS and which led to the Ouagadougou Preliminary agreement of June 2013. The re-hatting progressively rendered African regional actors redundant in the management of the Malian conflict. Even though the AU deployed an Office of the High Representative of the Chairperson of the Commission for Mali and the Sahel (MISAHÉL) on the same day of the transfer, with Pierre Buyoya at its head, its impact on the political process was limited in comparison with that of MINUSMA and France. MISAHÉL, as a political mission, was a matter of “actorness” [sic] rather than effectiveness¹³¹. The poor institutionalization between

¹³⁰ Interview with senior AU official (Addis Ababa: 30 May 2019)

¹³¹ Interview with AU/PSD official, Conflict Prevention and Early Warning Division (Addis Ababa: 3 June 2019)

the Chairperson of the Commission and its High Representative meant that the latter had much latitude to define and act on its mandate. MISAHEL under Buyoya hoped to play a significant role in the political process but was hampered by limited means and resources¹³². While the AFISMA experience left a sour note at the AU, the organization continued to be present in Mali and supported the UN's efforts in advancing the peace process in Mali over the next years.

3. THE POLITICAL IMPACT OF THE INTERNATIONAL MILITARY INTERVENTION

A. Readjusting to the new state of play: armed groups, hybrid actors and the international intervention.

i. A new breath of life? The MNLA during the military intervention

The international military intervention caused a shift in the conflict dynamics in Mali, strengthened the transitional government, and kickstarted the peace process. On the first issue, armed groups and hybrid orders of governance readapted to the new reality by entering into alliances and forming new groups that would allow them to be part of the upcoming peace process. Many of these actors saw in the intervention a window of opportunity to further their ambitions and maintain their interests. For example, the secessionist MNLA, which had been sidelined in the north following the Islamist takeover, provided intelligence and acted as auxiliaries to French forces in the reconquest of the city of Kidal. By presenting themselves as a secular armed group with legitimate grievances related to the “Tuareg question” in Mali, the MNLA managed to present itself as a legitimate interlocutor to Serval and international forces. But this legitimation was not welcomed by Malian authorities, as the regular troops were prevented from entering Kidal, the historical fief of the rebellion and MNLA's main base, leading to long-term resentment that would impact the peace process.

Indeed, during the reconquest of the north, French troops coopted the MNLA, one of the groups that articulated the Tuareg cause in Mali. The MNLA was driven to the margins of the northern regions by its erstwhile allies, the

¹³² Interview with former senior member of the MISAHEL (Bamako/Skype, February 2018)

AQIM-affiliated factions, following disputes over the governance of the northern region. The decision to ally with the MNLA was taken by France, without consulting the Malian transitional government, which viewed the MNLA as a rebel organization, or African regional actors. The MNLA has been described as an “opportunistic ally” (Shurkin 2014), which used the French offensive against the jihadists to reclaim some sort of legitimacy by preventing Malian government forces from entering Kidal. Indeed, while Malian forces, in tandem with AFISMA, reoccupied most of the northern cities soon after the Franco-Chadian offensive, they were prevented from entering Kidal by France to appease the MNLA. The decision was a *fait accompli* and could not be fully justified by the French. If the goal was to drive the jihadists from the north and support the return of the Malian state to the north, why then prevent it from entering the historic fief of the rebellion? For Roland Marchal, the decision was made by the DGSE, the French intelligence service, and was opposed by other governmental departments, including the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Marchal 2013). The DGSE has been involved in negotiations for the release of French nationals held by AQIM and was seen as close to Tuareg figures. For them, it was critical to address Tuareg grievances, and one way to do this was by taking the MNLA seriously.

With the advent of the international military intervention, the MNLA downplayed its earlier proximity with Ansar Dine and supplied the French with intelligence and political support in their campaign against the jihadist groups. For this and because the French did not want to alienate the Tuareg by allowing Malian forces to enter Kidal, the MNLA received the support of Paris in driving out Ansar Dine from the city of Kidal and was allowed to control the city afterwards.

The MNLA benefited from a second life following *Operation Serval*, which was meddling with domestic governance in Mali by seeking allies among the Tuareg armed groups. In this new context, the group posed itself as an anti-jihadist group and quickly embraced the overtures of the French-led *Operation Serval*, which was seeking allies among the Tuareg. Using this role as partner to the international force, MNLA benefited the most from the immediate aftermath of the Islamist defeat by controlling the city of Kidal and the custom posts of In-Khalil and

Talhandaq, next to the Algerian border. As the peace process unfolded in Mali, the MNLA was in a commanding position and would form the Coalition of Azawad Movements (*Coalition des Mouvements de l'Azawad*, CMA) in 2014.

ii. *The formation of the HCUA*

Beyond the MNLA, groups split and merged following the international military intervention to appear as credible interlocutors to international forces. Some factions of Ansar Dine, the jihadist group which controlled Kidal before the military intervention, broke off when it became clear that their leadership was not interested in distancing itself from AQIM. The High Council for the Unity of Azawad (HCUA) was founded in 2013 by two brothers, Alghabass ag Intallah and Mohammed ag Intallah, following the merger of the High Council of Azawad (a splinter group from the MNLA) and the Islamic Movement of Azawad (a splinter group from Ansar Dine)¹³³. This group's ambition was to unite all Tuareg armed groups and to facilitate peace with the government. In this regard, it was a useful platform to prevent the exclusion of the Kel Adagh chieftaincy from the peace negotiations and any possible dividends from them.

By dissociating itself from Ansar Dine, the HCUA became an acceptable interlocutor for the Malian government and its international partners despite the presence of former jihadists among its ranks. Beyond this incongruity, two of the movement's leading members, Mohamed ag Intallah and Hamada ag Bibi, are members of Mali's national assembly under the banner of the ruling party, the RPM (*Rassemblement pour le Mali*). This pattern of behaviour of the HCUA is illustrative of its rent-seeking behaviour. Indeed, the close proximity with the Malian state allows the group to be acceptable to both the government and the international community while preserving the interests of the traditional ruling elite in Kidal. By joining the CMA, the HCUA ensured that it would not be left out of any new

¹³³ These first armed group was the High Council for Azawad (HCA) which, under the leadership of Mohammed ag Intallah, splintered from the MNLA. The second group was the Islamic Movement of Azawad, which defected from Ansar Dine, under the leadership of ag Intallah's brother, Alghabass. The HCUA was an amalgamation of these two movements.

political arrangements that would develop after the international intervention. Ideology was a relatively insignificant factor in the decision to ally with the MNLA, as the HCUA had a much less uncompromising position regarding the secession of northern Mali. Negotiations were more critical than secession for the group in 2013-4.

The HCUA's presence in the peace process and its earlier proximity to Ansar Dine has also been a controversial issue. Several elements, among which the timing and the background of its leaders, show that the creation of the HCUA was a bargaining mechanism through which former jihadists could reinsert themselves into Malian politics and play a role in post-conflict northern Mali (Guichaoua and Pellerin 2017, 103–4). The group's shadowy financial and military capabilities were cause for concern, not only for the Malian government but also for the peacekeeping forces¹³⁴. The HCUA's ability to raise funds and mobilize military resources is most likely connected to its relationship with Ansar Dine, the Islamist group from which many of its commanders defected in March 2013. Indeed, while the MNLA has been regularly attacked by Islamists in Kidal and Ber, the HCUA, on the other hand, has never been targeted by the Islamists¹³⁵. This coincidence is explained by the supposed connections between the HCUA's leadership and that of Ansar Dine.

iii. The scissions within the Arab Movement of Azawad

Factions that participated in the governance of Gao under the MUJAO also broke off and formed a new armed group: the Arab Movement of Azawad (*Mouvement arabe de l'Azawad*, MAA). Originally founded following the defeat of the Malian army in the north as the National Front for the Liberation of Azawad (*Front national pour la liberation de l'Azawad*, FNLA), to defend the interests of Arab business people from Timbuktu, several leaders of the MAA established a *modus vivendi* with Islamist factions following their takeover of the north, especially in the city of Gao. This allowed them to pursue their business activities, but the international military intervention and the

¹³⁴ Interview with senior MINUSMA official (Bamako: 24 February 2018)

¹³⁵ Interview with senior MINUSMA official (Bamako: 24 February 2018)

labelling of Ansar Dine and MUJAO as “terrorist groups” constituted a political obstacle for several of these groups, who were closely allied with the government against Tuareg rebels in the 2000s. The MAA fragmented into two factions in early 2013 as the international intervention was securing victories against the Islamists: one loyal to the state, and one favourable to the rebels, as competing economic interests and rent-seeking opportunities led to different postures. This fragmentation is closely aligned with tribal affiliations and business interests that were already instrumental in the government of Mali’s delegation of authority to hybrid actors during the 2000s.

The Arab community constitutes 10% of the population of the north (McGregor 2015) and can be classified into three major tribes:

- the Kounta, a clerical tribe which is present in several neighbouring countries (Algeria and Mauritania) and which has played a significant role in local politics during the last two centuries;
- the Berabish, who are mainly located in the region of Timbuktu and Taoudeni, and who have extended trade networks across the Sahel;
- The last Arab sub-group, the Lamhar¹³⁶, were the last to settle in Mali in the 19th century, and are present mostly along the Niger river, especially in the Tilemsi valley (Gao region).

The pro-Bamako faction of the MAA (MAA-Bamako) is mainly composed of Lamhar and Tilemsi Arab combatants who were formerly associated with MUJAO when they took control of Gao in 2012. They are primarily present in the region of Gao and in the southern parts of the region of Kidal (Anéfis and Tabankort). The Lamhar tribe has traditionally been subordinate to the clerical Kounta tribe of northern Mali. But relations between these

¹³⁶ The epithets of “Tangara Arabs” and “Tilemsi Arabs” are also used to reference the Lamhar. For an analysis of their historical role and relationship with the Kounta, see Judith Scheele, 2012.

subgroups have shifted over the years: while the Lamhar had a subaltern relationship to the Kounta in the 19th and most of the 20th century (Briscoe 2014; Strazzari 2015), their growing ascendancy in the economy (licit and illicit) and their proximity to political and security elites have led to a renegotiation of their relationships with the Kountas. The leadership of the MAA has been linked with several suspected narco-traffickers belonging to the Lamhar tribe, such as Yoro Ould Daha and Hanoune Ould Ali (Antil 2012; Jeune Afrique 2015). Businesspeople close to the MAA-Bamako have managed to secure their commercial interests through rents from drug trafficking and their proximity to political circles in Bamako, which they try to parlay into political influence and legitimate business interests. Indifferent to the suspicions over their illicit activities, the ATT regime often relied on Lamhar powerbrokers to weaken other Arab and Tuareg groups that were suspected of duplicity¹³⁷. Several local business people strongly suspected to be drug traffickers have successfully managed to transform their financial standing into influence within their local communities (Lebovich 2017, 10). They were also part of the Malian army's fight against Tuareg rebels in 2007-2010. Under the leadership of Colonel Abderrahmane Ould Meydou, Arab militias acted as proxies for the Malian regular army while also defending key business interests. According to a Tuareg notable interviewed by US authorities:

[They] received their vehicles, fuel and other items from Arab traffickers with a private business interest for ridding the north of Bahanga [the main leader of the 3rd Tuareg rebellion] to reduce risks incurred by smuggling convoys moving across territory haunted by Bahanga and his band (US Embassy in Mali 2009).

Many of these businessmen sided with the MUJAO against the MNLA and were involved in the governance of Gao during the period of Islamist rule (June 2012-January 2013). The defeat of the Islamists in early 2013 led to a

¹³⁷ To compensate for this, the ATT regime appointed Mohamed El Moctar, a Tilemsi Arab, as Minister of Communications. In 2013, Mohamed Ould Mataly was elected as MP for Bourem and became the first Lamhar elected to the National Assembly. Interestingly enough, Ould Mataly is a kinsman of several alleged narco-traffickers such as Hanoune Ould Ali and Cherif Ould Taher, who are financiers of MAA-Bamako. Hanoune Ould Ali is also the son-in-law of Mohamed Ould Moctar.

readjustment of their positions, and several of these actors flocked to the MAA, leading to the fragmentation of the group into opposing factions.

The pro-Azawad faction of the MAA (MAA-CMA) emerged following internal divisions within the MAA after the French-led intervention in Mali. Its leadership and membership are mainly constituted of Kounta and Berabish, two Arab tribes present in the region of Timbuktu and Taoudeni next to the border with Mauritania. The MAA-Azawad also includes members from the Mashdoug faction of the Tilemsi Arabs, rival to the Lamhar¹³⁸. The Kounta tribe has a long history of Islamic scholarship in the Sahel, from Senegal to Southern Algeria. In the middle of the 19th century, the Kounta became one of the key actors in the governance of the city of Timbuktu, serving as mediators in inter-tribal disputes among the Arabs and the Tuaregs, and developing patron-client relationships with other Arab tribes such as the Berabish of the Timbuktu region, and the Arabs of the Tilemsi valley. The Kounta's network of *zawiyas* (Sufi religious circles) was crucial to their role in the trading networks, for which they often employed Lamhar and Berabish tribesmen (Scheele 2009; 2011; 2012; Strazzari 2015). The emergence of the Tilemsi Arabs, especially the Lamhar, as clients of the Malian state in the 2000s, constituted a serious challenge to the control of the Kounta/Berabish over local politics in the Timbuktu/Gao region.

The fragmentation of the MAA into two fractions is a consequence of both tribal rivalries and the existence of overlapping informal governance mechanisms in Mali. But it was made possible by the 2013 international military operation, which not only drove the jihadists out of the main urban centres but also led to mass defections, especially Tilemsi Arabs, from their ranks. The international support given to the government of Mali, their traditional ally, led to this strategic reconsideration among the Tilemsi Arabs. Many of these businessmen who successfully navigated the arrival of the Islamists in their cities had prior links with the government, who used them as proxy

¹³⁸ E-mail correspondence, security analyst based in northern Mali (Bamako: 9 January 2018).

actors at the local level while keeping a blind eye to their role in trafficking¹³⁹. With the defeat of AQIM from the urban centers in 2013, pre-conflict alliances between the government and hybrid orders composed of Tilemsi Arabs were simply reconstituted.

B. The impact of the intervention on the peace process

Beyond the armed groups, the international military intervention also led to the development of a roadmap for the end of the transition period that would guide relations between Mali's internal actors and their external partners. The transitional roadmap fell short of the national sovereign conference demanded by civil society organizations such as COPAM,¹⁴⁰ but it did lay out a broad path to a legitimate government in Bamako after a year of crisis. The roadmap was a requisite for Mali's international partners and, in particular, the UN, which regularly asked for a document that would guide its intervention in the country¹⁴¹. Due to the polarized political climate of the transition, and the weakness of the transitional government relative to the pro-junta factions, the establishment of a roadmap, first mentioned in the April 2012 framework agreement, was delayed several times (Keita 2012). These repeated delays were sharply criticized by groups favourable to the coup. Still, they were supported by the pro-democracy organizations, which did not want the political process to fall under the control of the junta (Keita 2012). The international military intervention tipped the balance of power in favour of the transitional government, enabling it to consult CSOs and other key national stakeholders while maintaining control of the process. Through the

¹³⁹ This is the case of Babaould Ahmed, the mayor of Tarkint, and special advisor to the President of Mali, and Mohamedould Aghweynatt, a Tilemsi Arab businessman close to the ruling circles. Both were accused of being involved in Air Cocaine in 2009, a drug smuggling ring that burnt the fuselage of a plane that illegally landed in Tarkint and from which cocaine was offloaded. Babaould Cheikh was never indicted, but Mohamedould Aghweynatt was detained and then freed at the beginning of the 2012 rebellion so that he could support financially Arab militias loyal to the government.

¹⁴⁰ Interview with former leader of pro-junta platform in 2012 (Bamako: 18 February 2018). COPAM and MP-22, two of the most hardline civil society organizations participated in the demonstrations of 9-10 January 2013, asking for "sovereign national consultations" from the transitional government. The transitional government was almost toppled during those days and the transitional president, Dioncounda Traoré, was besieged in his residence.

¹⁴¹ A roadmap has been regularly demanded from the transitional government by the UN through its UNSC Resolutions 2056, 2071 et 2085

document, the interim government set itself the mission of restoring the state's territorial integrity and holding free and fair presidential elections¹⁴². In this regard, the roadmap established a clear schedule for the handover of executive power to a duly elected government. To guarantee the process, the transitional president, the transitional Prime Minister and all members of the transitional government were excluded from being candidates (Primature du Mali 2013).

Furthermore, the roadmap settled debates among the political class on the technicalities of the electoral process. Conforming to the wishes of the majority of political actors (RFI 2013a), the roadmap opted for a biometric electoral register, based on the 2009 census, with the possibility of new enrolments by citizens who became eligible to vote in 2012. In February 2013, the government provided a date for the elections [7 July and 21 July 2013 for the first round and run-off of the presidential elections, respectively; and 21 July for parliamentary elections] (M. Diarra 2013) and set up a consultative framework between the government and the various political parties that allowed for the discussions of electoral conditions (Primature du Mali 2013). These decisions alleviated the concerns of internal and external actors, even though doubts about the country's ability to organize elections in such a short timeframe lingered (ICG 2013, 23). The unanimous vote by Mali's National Assembly in support of the roadmap, along with the vocal support of political and social actors, strengthened the transition and allowed for the resumption of Mali's relations with Western actors, which had been suspended since the 22 March *coup d'état*.

i. ECOWAS and the road to Ouagadougou

By setting an end date for the transition, the roadmap also gave a new impetus to the informal discussions between Mali's transitional government and the armed groups that were being mediated by ECOWAS from Ouagadougou. Since December 2012, a new round of negotiations had opened between the different parties to the

¹⁴² The roadmap did not provide a date for the presidential elections, but the transitional president said during the January 2013 Mali's donors' conferences, that they would be held by 31 July 2013.

conflict, namely the transitional government, MNLA and Ansar Dine. These would end with a ceasefire, the possibility of holding elections in regions where the armed groups were present, and the timeline for future negotiations between the duly elected government and the different armed groups.

Negotiations between the parties to the conflict were already ongoing in July 2012. Still, they drifted as the armed groups dithered and as attention focused increasingly on a regional military intervention, spearheaded by ECOWAS. The ECOWAS Mediator, Compaoré, maintained links with the MNLA, despite their reduced presence in the north, during the last months of 2012, as well as with Ansar Dine, whose jihadist ideology did not prevent it from negotiating with regional actors (ICG 2013). Due to the limited influence of ECOWAS over conflict dynamics, and over the different armed groups, Algeria also became more involved during the last months of 2012 and tried, without success, to detach Ansar Dine, led by Iyad ag Ghaly, from AQIM and MUJAO, whose membership and leadership was more international. The ECOWAS mediation tried to force the MNLA and Ansar Dine, two former allies with distinct ideology and capabilities, to establish a common platform ahead of discussions with Mali in November 2012, without much success (ICG 2013).

The absence of a common platform did not prevent a tripartite discussion among the MNLA, Ansar Dine and the new Minister of Foreign Affairs, Tiéman Hubert Coulibaly, on 3-4 December 2012. During this round, the armed groups presented their political grievances, while Coulibaly stressed the need to respect national unity, territorial integrity, secularism and the republican form of government (Ministère des Affaires Étrangères (Burkina Faso) 2012). MNLA's secessionist demands contradicted Mali's insistence on national unity and territorial integrity, while Ansar Dine's jihadist ethos contradicted Mali's secularism and republicanism. Despite these contradictions, the communiqué from the December 2012 negotiations called for an inclusive, inter-Malian dialogue that would include northern communities. It also called for dialogue and negotiation, the respect of national unity and the country's territorial integrity and rejected extremism and terrorism, among other pledges (Ministère des Affaires Étrangères (Burkina Faso) 2012). The sincerity of these different pledges is highly doubtful. Coulibaly stressed that the time

was not yet ripe for negotiations, but left open the possibility of dialogue with the armed groups (Soares 2012). On the other hand, the MNLA did not renounce its desire to secede the northern regions from Mali (ICG 2013), while a month later, Ansar Dine participated in the southward offensive that would pave the way for the international military intervention¹⁴³. The round of negotiations also generated some frustrations among the regional heads of state, with Chad's President lamenting "the time wasted" in resolving the crisis, and underlining the necessity for ECOWAS and the AU to speak with one voice (Soares 2012).

The January 2013 military intervention gave new impetus to negotiations by upending the balance of power between the Government of Mali and its allies, and the different armed groups in the north. The scheduled presidential elections in the transitional roadmap necessitated a political agreement with the armed groups to be feasible. In this regard, President Traoré showed a renewed will to actualize these goals. Tiébilé Dramé, a former Foreign Affairs Minister, and a staunch critic of the March 2012 *coup d'état* was nominated as Mali's chief negotiator. In the words of a journalist close to Traoré, the negotiations resumed because

we [the transitional government] needed an agreement, a compromise with the armed groups in the north (...) All that could pose a security challenge in the north were the jihadists [Ansar Dine, AQIM and MUJAO] and they were very disorganized [following the Franco-Chadian offensive]. All that was needed was a compromise with the political rebellion [the MNLA], and that's how the Ouagadougou process began, ending with a deal on the elections and future negotiations.

Informal discussions soon began with armed groups in the north and with some tribal leaders from Kidal, including Mohamed ag Intallah, the son of the Aménokal of the Kel Adagh¹⁴⁴, and Hamada ag Bibi, a former rebel leader and kinsman to Iyad ag Ghaly. Dramé, the Malian lead negotiator, wanted an honest discussion among Malians, and sought to limit relations between the MNLA and international actors (UN, EU, ECOWAS) in order

¹⁴³ Interview with Senior ECOWAS diplomat in Mali (Bamako: 17 October 2017).

¹⁴⁴ Mohamed ag Intallah is also one of the co-founders of the HCUA with his brother Alghabass. He has succeeded his father as Aménokal of the Kel Adagh, following his death, in December 2014.

not to grant legitimacy to the former, and also with countries, such as Algeria, that he felt limited the Malian government's room to maneuver.¹⁴⁵ The objective of these demands was to force the different armed groups to negotiate with Dramé, and not to take advantage of informal diplomatic channels to stall the process. In his view, regional partners were to facilitate the inter-Malian dialogue, and not to mediate. This was made relatively easier given the functional objectives of the Malian transitional authorities ahead of the June 2013 negotiations, and with the necessity for the armed groups to signal their peaceful intent.

The new round of negotiations that began in Ouagadougou in June 2013 was also more inclusive than previous rounds. While the MNLA still participated in the inter-Malian dialogue, Ansar Dine was excluded and labelled as a “terrorist group” by the UN for failing to distance itself from AQIM and MUJAO. Ansar Dine's reluctance led to a “split” among its leadership, with the formation of the HCUA, led by Alghabass ag Intallah. Ag Intallah led the Ansar Dine delegation to Ouagadougou in the second half of 2012 and was still determined to pursue a political agreement with Mali (ICG 2013). Furthermore, those non-Tuareg armed groups present in the north who fought alongside the Malian army also participated in the discussions. Ganda Koy Ganda Izo¹⁴⁶ merged into the CM-FPR [*Coordination des Mouvements-Front Patriotique de resistance*] to represent the positions of black ethnic groups [Songhay, Bozo, Fulani, etc.] that represented the majority of the population in the “Azawad”. The Malian negotiator-in-chief played an important role in their inclusion, and their organization, in order to better reflect the diversity of communities and perspectives on the Tuareg question. In his words,

[He] told them [MNLA, HCUA] that there could not be an agreement with the Malian government, rebel groups, and only Tuareg communities. The north is vast and complex, and it was important that members of communities who took arms, or sticks, participate in the discussions. This is how I met Arabs in Nouakchott [Mauritania], and how I gathered small groups belonging to sedentary communities because they did not play an important role. There were a dozen small groups claiming to be “Ganda Koy” and “Ganda Izo”. We met in a room of Hotel Salam and told them: “Listen, this is not serious. Twelve small groups were claiming to be Ganda Koy, Ganda Izo, General Command, Consultative

¹⁴⁵ Interview with Malian diplomat and political actor Bamako, October 2017.

¹⁴⁶ Ganda Koy means « Masters of the Land” in Songhay, the lingua franca in the Gao region, while Ganda Izo means “Sons of the Land”. The name reflects the militia's stake on autochthony and legitimacy in their region, compared to Tuareg armed groups.

framework, this and that.”. I told them to stop because this was not credible. This is how CM-FPR was created and how they participated in the last round of the Ouagadougou negotiations, where we honestly discussed about everything among Malians.¹⁴⁷

This position contrasts with other observers’ who noted that the agreement was hastily negotiated between the armed groups and the transitional government, both under different pressures.¹⁴⁸ If the armed groups wanted to demonstrate to the international community their willingness to negotiate, the transitional government was under pressure to organize elections to the satisfaction of national and international actors. The Ouagadougou agreement was, therefore, a quick compromise between the parties, who all needed a deal for different reasons.

The Malian parties reached a preliminary agreement on 18 June 2013, following two weeks of discussions (Boutellis and Zahar 2017). A ceasefire agreement (article 4) between the HCUA, the MNLA and the transitional government, endorsed by the MAA and the CM-FPR, allowed for the holding of elections in the regions of Kidal, Gao and Timbuktu, and the redeployment of state administration in the north, including in Kidal, which had been under the effective control of the HCUA and the MNLA following its reconquest by French and Chadian troops. The agreement also opened the way for more thorough negotiations between the duly elected government and the different armed groups, two months after the presidential elections. And to monitor the implementation of the agreement, a Joint Technical Security Commission [*Commission technique mixte de sécurité*, CTMS] and a Monitoring and Evaluation Committee [*Comité de suivi et d’évaluation*, CSA] were established. The CTMS was tasked with monitoring the ceasefire between the different parties, investigating eventual ceasefire violations, and arranging for the cantonment and disarmament of rebel groups and the redeployment of the Malian security and defence forces in the north. Headed by the AFISMA/MINUSMA force commander, it included representatives from the Malian security and defence forces (4), signatory armed groups (4), *Operation Serval* (1), the Mediator (1), and

¹⁴⁷ Interview with Malian political actor and former diplomat (Bamako: 18 October 2017)

¹⁴⁸ Interview with former senior MINUSMA diplomat (Dakar: 27 December 2017).

of the ECOWAS Associate Mediator (1). The CTMS fell under the authority of the CSA¹⁴⁹, which had, among other tasks, to evaluate the implementation of the agreement through at least one meeting per month. The judicial processes against members of the signatory armed groups were also suspended as a trust-building gesture, except for war crimes, crimes against humanity, genocide, sexual violence and other “serious violations” of human rights and international humanitarian law (Article 17).

The Ouagadougou preliminary agreement was an important milestone in the peace process. Presidential elections were held in Mali in July 2013, leading to a run-off between two former candidates of the cancelled April 2012 polls: Ibrahim Boubacar Keita of RPM, the ultimate winner, and Soumaila Cissé, of URD. The Ouagadougou preliminary agreement constituted thus the end of 14 months of regional involvement, spearheaded by ECOWAS, but characterized by the poor institutionalization of the organization’s mechanisms, internal tensions in Mali, but also by tensions over APSA and subsidiarity. The role of regional organizations became much reduced after this point, with the newly elected government preferring to engage directly with Algeria, France and the UN, actors that had a much more decisive impact on the behaviour of the armed groups. If the Franco-Chadian offensive of January 2013 showed the limitations of the ASF, and if the re-hatting of AFISMA into MINUSMA showed the pitfalls of “Africanization,” the limitations of the regional mapping of the continent by APSA became even more apparent as new mechanisms for coordinating the regional response were devised, failed and competed during the negotiations that led to the May and June 2015 Bamako agreement.

ii. The shift from ECOWAS to Algeria: Informal diplomacy and the pitfalls of limited statehood

The Ouagadougou agreement constituted the first joint document in which the government of Mali and the armed groups agreed on a way forward. It also marked the high point of the ECOWAS mediation process as it played

¹⁴⁹ CSA members included a representative of the ECOWAS Mediator, of the ECOWAS Associate Mediator, of the ECOWAS, AU, UN, EU, OIC, France, Switzerland, Algeria, Mauritania and Niger.

a decisive role in the peace process, after much tumult. ECOWAS' leadership in responding to the conflict ended shortly afterwards due to a combination of factors. The limited institutionalization of its mediation framework had given much influence to its Mediator, Blaise Compaoré. This meant that personal charisma and informal relationships with the parties played an essential role in the success of the regional response, rather than formal structures and resources. The election of a new and assertive president, after an electoral process backed by all Malian and international actors, also meant that his relationship with the Mediator would determine ECOWAS' future involvement in Mali. In this regard, President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita's strong reservations about ECOWAS, and his determination to restore Mali's control over all its territory, led to tense interactions with the Mediator soon after his election. The timeline for the beginning of the post-election negotiations was delayed as the Malian government still chafed at the control of the city of Kidal by MNLA following the French intervention (Boutellis and Zahar 2018). The shift to an Algerian-led mediation resulted from personal differences, but also from Algeria's political and economic influence over northern Mali. In this regard, it showed that formal mechanisms centred around states were not enough to positively impact on conflict dynamics where hybrid orders prevail and where state control tends to be negotiated rather than accepted *de jure*. Algeria had long diverged with ECOWAS over the appropriate response to the conflict in 2012-3 and had unsuccessfully pressured Ansar Dine to commit to the peace process in December 2012.

While not a member of ECOWAS, Algeria had a substantial comparative advantage as a mediator in Mali. The conflict in Mali involved actors that were part of governance frameworks, and a shadow economy, that was dependent on the border region with Algeria. This gave Algeria leverage that ECOWAS did not enjoy over the armed groups operating in Northern Mali, due to the importance of the informal smuggling economy. Beyond this, Algeria had an interest in managing the 'Tuareg question' in Mali, given the cultural continuity between Southern

Algeria and Northern Mali and the recurrent calls for the recognition of Berber cultures since the 1990s.¹⁵⁰ Algeria's experience with jihadist insurgency as a result of its civil war (1991-1999), along with its prior role in mediating between Mali and rebel groups during both the 2nd (1990-1996) and 3rd (2006-7) rebellions constituted additional advantages.

Challenges to the ECOWAS-led mediation appeared soon after the election of Keita in July 2013. Indeed, the new government was elected on a wave of nationalist sentiment and disillusionment with the security situation, and wanted to regain control over the process, and to assert itself not only against the armed groups but also against the international actors present in Mali. This contrasted with the weak and contested transitional government, which often followed the lead of regional and international actors. The nationalist posture of President IBK was supported by the population but caused friction with the armed groups, who mistrusted the government. A pre-concertation meeting in September 2013 with the representatives of the signatory armed groups did not contribute to the smoothing of relations but generated conflict among the armed groups themselves. The perception that the new government in Bamako wanted to control not only the process but also its interlocutors appeared in the responses to the pre-concertation (International Crisis Group 2014, 22). Sidi Mohamedould Sidatti, the Deputy Secretary-General of the MAA, was prevented from participating, leading to strong criticism by the MAA's military commander Husseinould Ghoulam. The MNLA representatives (Bilal ag Achérif and Ibrahim ag Mohamed Assaleh) that did participate were also openly criticized by their colleague, Mohamed Djeri Maiga.

Peace negotiations aimed at achieving a definite solution to the conflict between the government, the other signatories of the Ouagadougou agreement, and the northern communities, were scheduled to begin no later than sixty days following the election of the new government [Ouagadougou Agreement, Article 21]. As Keita was sworn

¹⁵⁰ Interview with Malian diplomat involved in the Algiers peace process (Bamako: 18 October 2017).

in on 4 September 2013, discussions should have started by 4 November 2013. If the transitional government had begun to build trust with the signatories in Ouagadougou, all of that capital was progressively eroded following the election of a national president with a solid majority (77%) in August 2013. The MNLA and the HCUA suspended their participation in the follow-up mechanisms to protest the continued detention of some of their members by the Malian government. The dialogue between the government and the armed groups was limited despite the existence of the CSE and the CTMS. Indeed, these two mechanisms presided over by MINUSMA in partnership with other regional and bilateral actors

failed to overcome the deep mistrust between the parties. They could not achieve progress on key confidence-building measures such as the release of detainees and stopped meeting by October 2013 due to the lack of political will on both sides (Boutellis and Zahar 2018).

The return of the Malian administration in Kidal, in July 2013, did not mark an end to the mistrust between the signatory parties. Despite a heavy international presence in the city (*Operation Serval* and MINUSMA), tensions were rife between the Malian army on the one hand, and the MNLA/HCUA on the other, and regular demonstrations were organized with the tacit support of armed groups to criticize the redeployment of state authorities in Kidal (International Crisis Group 2014, 21, note 105). The perception that the Malian army was billeted to its barracks in Kidal (International Crisis Group 2014, 21–22), while the rebel groups were free to move when it should have the other way around as per the Ouagadougou preliminary agreement, was another sore point between the signatory parties.

Another difficulty surrounded the poor relations between Compaoré [the ECOWAS Mediator] and President Keita, who did not see eye-to-eye regarding the future of the process.¹⁵¹ President Keita reproached Compaoré for his proximity to some of the armed groups, in particular the MNLA, and for the use of the term “Azawad” to refer to northern Mali, a usage that did not sit well with the Malian government because it was perceived to give legitimacy

¹⁵¹ Interview with journalist close to transition authorities, (Bamako: 16 October 2017).

to the secessionist movement.¹⁵² The perception that IBK did not like the Ouagadougou agreement and did not like Compaoré's [and by extension ECOWAS'] proximity to the MNLA explains his desire to exert control over the peace process during the first months of his presidency.

Other measures widened the wedge between the government and the signatories of the Ouagadougou agreement. The government organized a national conference on its decentralization policies (the Estates-General of decentralization) on 21-23 October 2013 with CSOs and customary authorities. This conference revealed the government's preferred political solution to the recurrent security crises in the north: decentralization was viewed as Bamako's answer to the perceptions of marginalization among some northern communities and to the gap between government and society in general (International Crisis Group 2014, 23). But neither the MNLA, the HCUA or the MAA, all signatories of the Ouagadougou agreement, participated in this conference that was set up to design the future governance of northern Mali. Decentralization has been a recurrent theme of the different peace agreements between Mali and rebels Tuareg groups since the 1990s, but the decentralized local authorities always remained dependent on the central government, in terms of both resource mobilization and political direction.¹⁵³ Another conference specific to the northern region (The National Assizes for the development of the Northern regions) was organized by the government between 1-3 November 2013 and brought together representatives from all corners of Mali to discuss ways to improve governance and social conditions in the country. In his opening speech, IBK was conciliatory towards the armed groups and praised their sincere will to further the discussions, while highlighting that "autonomy" and "independence" constituted red lines for future discussions (RFI 2013b). Despite this, the assizes were marred by demonstrations in Gao over the government's alleged manipulation of the list of regional representatives (RFI 2013b).

¹⁵² Interview with journalist close to the transition authorities (Bamako: 16 October 2017).

¹⁵³ Interview with Minister of Decentralization and Local Affairs (Bamako: 24 October 2017).

The government-led initiatives to reassert control over the peace process irritated the armed groups that signed the Ouagadougou agreement and did not lessen the pressure from the international community in favour of starting the inclusive inter-Malian talks. The situation in Kidal constituted a thorn that the Malian government wanted to remove before engaging further with the MNLA and the HCUA. Through this stance, it implicitly criticized *Operation Serval* for its partnership with the MNLA, and MINUSMA for not doing enough to implement the Ouagadougou agreement. This also put the government at odds with the ECOWAS Mediator, Blaise Compaoré, who was already viewed with suspicion by President IBK¹⁵⁴.

During the December 2013 Franco-African summit in Paris, President IBK berated the international community for “forcing his government to negotiate with armed groups” and even went as far as to say that international forces were preventing the full restoration of full state authority in the north. For the President,

The presence of these troops (MINUSMA and Operation Serval) prevented Mali from restoring state authority in Kidal, as we did it in Gao and Timbuktu. For which reasons? We are not naive. The Tuareg rebellion of the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) returned to Kidal in the wake of the troops [French and Chadian] who came to liberate us. The liberation was done jointly [with the Malian soldiers] until the outskirts of Kidal, where there, the Malians were prevented [from entering]. Why? ... I do not understand why Kidal was an exception. For a friend of France like me, I am very angry at the ebb of enthusiasm for France among the Malian population who had applauded the French intervention at the beginning of the year. Today, Malians are wondering. (...) The Malian army, cantoned in a fort, cannot patrol in Kidal, where there was ethnic cleansing. All those with black skin were asked to leave the city. That is not said loudly. (...) The international community forces us to negotiate on our soil with people who have taken arms against the state. I would like to remind them that we are an independent country. The Malian state is forced to negotiate with an armed group that boasts about it, in what Commedia dell ‘Arte [sic] are we? (Sangaré 2013)

The status of the armed groups in Kidal, as noted above, was part of an informal arrangement made between the French and the MNLA during the reconquest of the northern regions from the jihadists. If the transitional government had been too grateful to the French to be able to challenge their latitude in making such strategic decisions for the future of Mali, the inability of the Malian troops to patrol the city despite the terms of the

¹⁵⁴ Interview with former UN Senior Diplomat, MINUSMA (Dakar: 27 December 2017); Interview with journalist close to the transition (Bamako, October 2017).

Ouagadougou preliminary agreement still chafed among the Malian population. The government of Mali capitalized on this to delay the inclusive talks and even floated the military option in order to address the situation in Kidal. After the death of two Senegalese peacekeepers in Kidal in December 2013, President Keita seemed to dismiss the possibilities of negotiating with the armed groups during a speech at an opening ceremony for a new dam in Félou: “There is no doubt that Kidal is part of Mali’s history. I will no longer negotiate with armed groups (...) No rebel shall stand as my equal to negotiate, it’s enough!” (Baba Sangaré 2013). By the end of 2013, the peace process appeared to be at a dead end, with little dialogue between the parties. The poor relations between the ECOWAS mediator and the Malian President also meant that the West African regional organization faced serious challenges in rebuilding trust among the parties to the conflict, less than six months after the Ouagadougou agreement had been signed.

The difficult relationship between the ECOWAS Mediator and the Malian President also compromised ECOWAS’ ability to continue its mediation efforts. These differences were personal more than anything else and are rooted in President Keita’s longstanding criticism of the transitional government and of ECOWAS’ handling of Mali’s internal issues in 2012-3. The newly elected Malian government showed its determination to control the process and to take it away from ECOWAS, which it judged as too deferential towards the armed groups.¹⁵⁵

This tension naturally affected the role of ECOWAS in Mali and in the broader Sahel region. By early 2014, most Malian parties were looking for a new facilitator. The visit of the UN Security Council to Bamako, in February 2014, aimed to kickstart the dialogue after months of delay, but it did not succeed in bridging the key differences. While the government sought proper cantonment before beginning a meaningful dialogue, the MNLA and the HCUA wanted the inclusive dialogue to take place before agreeing to be cantoned (Boutellis and Zahar 2018, 12). At a more informal level, Morocco and Algeria, two countries with competing interests in the Sahel, sought to take

¹⁵⁵ Interview with former senior MINUSMA diplomat (Dakar: 27 December 2017).

over the lead mediator role from ECOWAS by courting the Malian parties¹⁵⁶. In this diplomatic tussle, Algeria had a comparative advantage over Morocco and other actors due to its longstanding history of mediating conflict in Mali, and its ability to control and exert pressure over the informal political and economic processes that were driving insecurity in Mali. Indeed, the economy of northern Mali is more strongly integrated with southern Algeria than with southern Mali, due to geographic realities and the preexistence of tribal and kinship networks straddling the borders between the two countries (Scheele 2009). Smuggling (al-frud¹⁵⁷) along the Mali-Algeria border, organized around kinship affinities, is one of the main commercial activities in northern Mali (Scheele 2009). Despite the weak presence of customs, smuggling is very much dependent on the collaboration with state representatives, on both sides of the border (Scheele 2009). Basic foodstuffs (milk, pasta, flour), often subsidized by Algeria, are bought and resold in the main cities of northern Mali, such as Gao, Kidal and Timbuktu. This volume of trade, tolerated by the successive political regimes of northern Mali for practical reasons, is seldom captured by the two countries' official statistics (Cantens and Raballand 2016:16).

Beyond the economic dimension, the Tuareg question was as much an Algerian statebuilding issue as it was a Malian one (Boutellis and Zahar 2018, 8). The process of constructing a national identity in Algeria has been contested by the irredentist claims of Berber groups, including the Kabyle in the north and the Tuareg in the south, whose claims were formerly supported by Libya under Colonel Muammar Qaddafi (Zoubir 2012, 3). Preventing the development of Tuareg secessionism was a matter of national concern for Algiers and this, among other concerns, is captured in this Malian perspective of their role in managing the crisis:

Algeria being a stakeholder of the Malian crisis, afraid to wake up and suddenly see France at its borders, could not be quieted. And since the new power was not hostile to her, [Algeria] negotiated. She quickly evoked points that did not help; and quickly led the rebellion to demand the reopening of the negotiations, as it is the rear base of Ansar Dine,

¹⁵⁶ In January 2014, Bilal ag Achérif, the Secretary-General of the MNLA visited Morocco with a delegation to brief him about developments in Mali while Ibrahim ag Assaleh, the former lead negotiator of MNLA, and leader of the splinter group, the Peoples' Coalition for Azawad (Coalition du peuple pour l'Azawad, CPA) favoured an Algerian mediation. See (Atlasinfo 2014; Maïga 2016, 5)

¹⁵⁷ From the French word for smuggling, "fraude".

the only force on the ground. Faced with all these facts, the realpolitik demanded that Mali be attentive to the requests of Algeria.¹⁵⁸

The axis between the twin cities of In-Khalil (in Mali) and Bordj-Badji Moktar (Algeria) and Gao-Kidal-Timiauouine-Tamanrasset are one of the most dynamic in the Sahel. The smuggling economy is facilitated by the long distances between northern and southern Mali. For the populations in northern Mali, it is less expensive to trade with southern Algeria, and to be involved in the smuggling economy, than to transport goods from southern Mali at a higher price (Cantens and Raballand 2016). This also means that Algeria has increased leverage over political developments in northern Mali, as it can easily close off its official customs and limit cross-border trade.¹⁵⁹ This, in turn, is facilitated by the proximity between the main economic actors of northern Mali and some of the armed groups that signed or endorsed the Ouagadougou preliminary agreement¹⁶⁰. Added to the fact that several of the jihadist commanders in Mali were its nationals, Algiers had a more critical stake than most in calming the situation in Mali. According to a diplomat involved in the negotiations between Mali's government and the different armed groups, Algeria was a more credible mediator than ECOWAS because it had the means to pressure armed groups into conceding ground on issues, thus furthering the process. ¹⁶¹ This is due to the fact that:

Many Malian Tuareg has part of their family in Algeria, and also are often dual nationals [of Mali and Algeria]. Algeria is also worried about the possibility of autonomy [and/or] independence of the Tuareg in northern Mali. This is due to the question of its Sahara, where many Tuareg live, but also by the Kabyle question that has traumatized Algeria since its independence. Besides, several Algerian generals, as well as senior Malian officers, were involved in drug trafficking in the Sahel. Algiers knows how to put pressure when it's needed, making it a more credible mediator compared to ECOWAS¹⁶².

¹⁵⁸ Interview with journalist close to the transition authorities (Bamako: 16 October 2017)

¹⁵⁹ Interview with security analyst from northern Mali (Bamako: February 2018).

¹⁶⁰ It is the case with the two wings of the Arab Movement of Azawad (MAA), whose main financial backers include individuals like Dinaould Daya, Mohamedould Aghweynatt and Cherifould Taher, who went from playing an important part in the smuggling economy into having stakes in the illicit economy. Iyad ag Ghaly, the leader of Ansar Dine, and the current Al-Qaeda chieftain in Mali, is also described as having thrived in this context, benefiting from the insecurity economy and brokering deals between the government of Mali and the government of ATT.

¹⁶¹ Interview with Malian diplomat involved in Algiers process, (Bamako: 18 October 2017).

¹⁶² Interview with Malian diplomat involved in Algiers process (Bamako: 18 October 2017).

Thus, Algeria had the means to pressure formal and informal governance and security actors active in Mali in ways that neither ECOWAS, Morocco nor Burkina Faso could. This did not mean that the dialogue between the parties resumed as soon as Algiers showed its willingness to mediate. The Malian army was still determined to assert its territorial control over all corners of its territory, before proceeding to dialogue.

President IBK had more trust in the ability of Algeria to deliver a peace that would not be too detrimental to Mali, than in either Burkina Faso or ECOWAS. This was mainly informed by Algiers' influence over hybrid orders and its ability to constrain their resources through its domestic policies and its management of its border posts. If IBK's nationalist discourse found an echo among Malians, especially those from the south, his position on ECOWAS and on the delegation of authority to facilitate the intra-Malian dialogue did not generate consensus among the Malian political class. The recurrent rebellions against the Malian government in the north were rooted in the non-implementation of the different peace agreements since the 2nd rebellion (1990-1996), and most of those were facilitated by Algiers¹⁶³. Yet Algeria had both strategic leverage over the armed groups in Mali and a stake in the stabilization of northern Mali. On 24 April 2014, Algeria hosted a meeting of the foreign ministers of Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger along with the Chadian ambassador, to discuss regional cooperation, the security situation in Mali and the implementation of the Ouagadougou agreement (aOuaga 2014). During that meeting, the Malians argued that the conditions for dialogue needed to be established and requested Algeria to support this effort, by creating "coherence among and between the armed groups before negotiations with the government" (United Nations Secretary-General 2014, 3). The Malian government had nominated a High Representative for Inter-Malian Inclusive Dialogue two days before the Algiers meeting and consultations were initiated, but the situation remained tense with the different armed groups. The MNLA denounced the delay in the beginning of the inclusive dialogue

¹⁶³ Interview with former prime minister and with former leader of pro-junta platform in 2012 (Bamako: 16 October 2017 and 18 February 2018)

and reaffirmed its readiness to negotiate during its congress in Kidal (29 April-2 May), while the HCUA called on the government to resume the dialogue without preconditions (12-13 May) (United Nations Secretary-General 2014, 3).

Despite this, the dialogue in Mali would only resume following the government's failed attempt to conquer the contested city of Kidal in April 2014. Indeed, the situation of Kidal was still a contentious one, despite the parties' professed will to engage in negotiations when pressured by the international community. The government of Mali was determined to assert its control and authority over the fief of the rebellion, and this explains the military clashes between government forces and the MNLA/HCUA, in May 2014, after months of ceasefire.

The battle for the control of Kidal occurred during the visit to the city of Prime Minister Moussa Mara on 17 May 2014. The Malian Prime Minister was welcomed by pro-rebel demonstrations as he visited the Malian army camp in the city¹⁶⁴. While sporadic shots were fired by suspected rebels, the situation turned into a full-fledged military clash between the Malian army and the MNLA/HCUA as the official convoy proceeded to the governorate of the city. The governorate was actually stormed and set on fire, with several civilian government employees killed while several others, along with Malian soldiers, were taken prisoner by the MNLA and the HCUA. The Prime Minister escaped only with the support of MINUSMA forces, who took him to the UN camp and then exfiltrated him by helicopter to the city of Gao (United Nations Secretary-General 2014).

The Malian government's attempt to reassert control and authority in Kidal backfired spectacularly. The wisdom of the visit was questioned by MINUSMA and by the Malian Minister of Defense, Soumeylou Boubeye Maiga, due to the delicate security situation before 16 May. MINUSMA preferred the visit to occur after a government technical

¹⁶⁴ Demonstrations regularly happened in Kidal asking for secession or the resumption of the discussions between the Malian government and the armed groups. The armed groups had a role in these protests, which was another way to pressure the government and the international partners. Prior to Prime Minister Mara's visit, the Minister of Interior, General Sada Samaké, and the former Prime Minister, Oumar Tatam Ly, respective visits in Kidal (on 13 September 2013 and 28 November 2013) were also met with protests and belligerent declarations by MNLA officials. Prime Minister Oumar Tatam Ly aborted his visit due to the security situation.

assessment mission, but its counsel was ignored (Koné 2015). The fact that controlling Kidal before the start of negotiations was a priority for the Malian government added to the humiliation and explained the Malian army's attempt to reconquer the city by force in the following days. This is apparent in the rhetoric of the Prime Minister, who, after being airlifted to Gao, declared that the attacks by the MNLA and HCUA constituted a “declaration of war” and denounced the passivity of MINUSMA and Serval (Thibault 2014). The events of 17 May 2014 provided the *casus belli* that the Malian government was seeking, despite repeated warnings from neighbouring countries, MINUSMA and the AU, against further escalating the situation.

On 21 May 2014, 2000 Malian soldiers from the garrisons of Anéfif, Gao, and Bamako converged on the outskirts of Kidal, intending to retake the city from the HCUA and MNLA. If the Malian army expected to face a few hundred soldiers in this battle, they were surprised to encounter around a thousand (Carayol 2014). Despite their heavy weapons and their early successes in the fighting, the Malian army's assault was repulsed by the armed groups who assaulted the army camp in Kidal and routed the supporting corps of the assaulting forces. The operation constituted a debacle for the Malian government. The army was decisively defeated by the rebel factions, who also took the Malian army camp in Kidal, including many prisoners and all their weaponry, while fleeing troops sought refuge in MINUSMA's camp in Kidal. Furthermore, the army's garrisons in Anéfif, Aguel' hoc and Ménaka were taken by the rebel factions in the following days, while the other garrisons in the north were also threatened. Between 16 and 21 May, 41 persons were killed during the fighting, including eight civilians (among whom were six Malian civil servants) and 33 Malian soldiers (United Nations Secretary-General 2014). Dozens of soldiers were also taken prisoner by the MNLA and the HCUA. On the evening of 21 May, the Malian government acknowledged the debacle and requested, through the President, an immediate ceasefire.

The May clashes in Kidal marked a dramatic shift in the intra-Malian dialogue. If the Malian government had reason to question the prominence of the MNLA and the HCUA in the city, it lost its moral ascendancy following the battle. A ceasefire, hastily brokered by the AU Chairman and Mauritania's President Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz

on 23 May, saw the government commit to the terms of the Ouagadougou preliminary agreement, and promise to engage immediately in peace negotiations with the support of the international community (United Nations Secretary-General 2014). The May 2014 ceasefire agreement has been described as an “unbelievable humiliation.”¹⁶⁵ In this regard, the events of Kidal upended the balance of power between the government and the rebel groups as they made their way to the negotiation table. The first months of the presidency of President IBK were marked by a strong preference for a military solution to the conflict. In the words of one Malian political actor,

The will was so strong that between them [in the government] they spoke of the jurisprudence of 1963[reference to the first Tuareg uprising] And in this jurisprudence, the rebellion is dealt with through military intervention. That explains the different expeditive ways through which the government sought to buy armaments and weaponry during its first months. And let’s not forget the words of the President when he went to Kayes on behalf of OMVS [OMVS, Senegal River Basin Development Authority] to inaugurate the dam in Gouina [in December 2013] he said that no rebel will rise to his level to negotiate. So, I think that’s even what explains the imprudence of the Prime Minister by visiting Kidal [in May 2014]. And this explains why the Malian army attacked the rebel groups on 21 May to retake Kidal. And after that defeat of 21 May, all we had done was to suffer the shift in the balance of power [which now favoured the rebel groups].¹⁶⁶

It was only after Kidal that the Malian government resolved itself to privilege negotiations over other options¹⁶⁷. The process began in June 2014 with a bruised Malian government and confident armed groups in Algiers. Going to Algiers in June 2014 was widely assumed to be an implicit admission on the part of the government that its policies had failed ¹⁶⁸. The beginning of the Algiers process also constituted a recognition of the limitations of the rigid APSA framework in managing a conflict where hybrid orders and their regionalizing actions from below played such an important role. This is manifest in the international mediation team that facilitated the intra-Malian dialogue under the leadership of Algeria, but which also included MINUSMA, the AU, ECOWAS, and the EU, and also countries that were viewed as having a stake in the resolution of the conflict in Mali such as Burkina Faso, Chad,

¹⁶⁵ Interview with former Malian cabinet member and negotiator (Bamako: October 2017).

¹⁶⁶ Interview with journalist close to the transition authorities, (Bamako: 16 October 2017).

¹⁶⁷ Interview with journalist close to the transition authorities, (Bamako: 16 October 2017).

¹⁶⁸ Interview with journalist close to the transition authorities, (Bamako: 16 October 2017).

Mauritania, Niger and France. In this context, the framework of the APSA became obsolete as a reference point, despite the participation of ECOWAS and the AU in the mediation efforts. More than ever, the Algiers process opened another phase in the conflict where the role of African regional actors diminished in contrast to extra-continental partners. At the same time, armed groups split and merged to advance their interests in the post-conflict outcomes.

The first phase of the Algiers process began in July 2014. Armed groups in Mali coalesced into two coalitions, which diverged on their ideology and relations with the central government. The Coordination of Azawad Movements (CMA) which was formed in November 2013, was composed of the MNLA, the HCUA, of the dissident wing of the MAA. CMA's goal was the secession of the northern regions from Mali. The other coalition of armed groups was the *Plateforme des mouvements du 14 Juin d'Alger* ("Platform") and regrouped groups that never took up arms against the Malian state. The first two founding members were the CM-FPR and the loyalist wing of the MAA (MAA-Bamako), whose leaders had often acted as security and governance actors on behalf of the Malian government. In August 2014, the Tuareg Imghad and Allies Self-Defense Group (*Groupe d'autodéfense Touareg Imghad et allies, GATIA*) was formed out and joined the Plateforme, soon becoming its most effective force. Interestingly enough, elements that would form GATIA were involved in the May 2014 battle for the control of Kidal, under Colonel El Hadj ag Gamou.

Rebel coalitions and armed groups during the Algiers process

	Signatory coalitions		Excluded armed groups
Ethnic composition	<i>Coalition of Azawad Movements (CMA)</i> ¹⁶⁹	<i>Plateforme des mouvements du 14 juin d'Alger ("Platform")</i>	
<i>Tuareg-dominant</i>	National Movement for the liberation of Azawad (MNLA) Leader: Bilal ag Achérif	Tuareg Imghad and Allies Self-Defense Groups (GATIA) Leader: Fahd ag al-Mahmoud	Ansar Dine Leader: Iyad ag Ghali
	High Council for the Unity of Azawad (HCUA) Leader: Alghabass ag Intallah		
	Peoples Coalition for Azawad (CPA) Leader: Ibrahim ag Assaleh		
<i>Arab-dominant</i>	Arab Movement of Azawad-CMA (MAA-CMA) Leader: Sidi Brahimould Sidatti	Arab Movement of Azawad-PF (MAA-PF) Leader: Ahmedould Sidi Mohamed	AQIM Leader: Yahya Abou el-Hammam
			Al-Mourabitoun Leader: Mokhtar Belmokhtar
<i>Others</i>	Coordination of Movements-Patriotic Resistance Front (CM-FPR II)	Coordination of Movements-Patriotic Resistance Front (CM-FPR I)	

¹⁶⁹ Several other groups that splintered from the MNLA after the formation of the CMA in October 2013, claim to be members of the CMA, but this claim is rejected by the CMA's three founding members. Many of these groups participated in the Algiers process and signed the agreement. They are Coalition du Peuple pour l'Azawad (CPA) led by Ibrahim ag Assaleh former leader of the MNLA, and a dissident wing of the CM-FPR II.

		Leader: Younoussa Toureh	
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In July 2014, the Malian government and the coalition of armed groups signed a joint roadmap in Algiers, which recognized Algeria as the chief mediator of the conflict (Boutellis and Zahar 2018, 13). The roadmap structured the discussions between the parties around respect for several red lines: Mali's territorial integrity, national unity and the secular nature of its government.¹⁷⁰ The international community, including many of the actors involved in the Ouagadougou preliminary agreement, a year earlier, guaranteed the Malian peace process. The negotiations followed its course in the shadow of continued violence between armed groups of the two coalitions over, among other issues, control of Kidal. Indeed, the cantonment of armed groups that was one of the main provisions of the Ouagadougou agreement was not a precondition to the negotiations; in this context, many of the armed groups tried to maximize their control over territory it to have a stronger hand during the process, leading to regular violence despite the ceasefire.

After five rounds of negotiations, which occurred while the Platform and the CMA fought over the control of key cities in the northern regions and particular Kidal, a draft agreement was ready by March 2015. This was approved by the Malian government and the Platform, who initialled the document in Algiers, but was shunned by the CMA. For the CMA, the agreement removed any possibility for secessionism or even federalism, although, with its decentralization provisions, substantial autonomy from Bamako would be given to the regional assemblies. This was a hard sell to its base, which clamoured for independence. The CMA refused to consent (by only initialling the document) if all references to 'Azawad' as a geographical and political entity was removed and if there was no clarity regarding how security would be administered in the north. The CMA also doubted the international

¹⁷⁰ Interview with Malian diplomat involved in the Algiers process (Bamako: 18 October 2017)

community's willingness to guarantee the implementation of the agreement and called for more time to consult its members (Boutellis and Zahar 2018).

This back and forth happened in the context of intense fighting between the CMA and the Platform over the control of cities in northern Mali (such as Tabankort, Anéfis and Ménaka). In this context, the Bamako peace and reconciliation agreement was signed under intense international pressure and at two separate points in time: the government and the Platform signed the agreement on 15 May 2015 and during another ceremony, in June 2015 in Bamako, the CMA finally signed the document after Platform troops withdraw from Ménaka.

The Bamako agreement prohibited the secession of the northern regions from Mali but increased their number from three to five (Taoudeni and Ménaka became regions). Structured around four pillars (institutions; security and defence; social, economic and cultural development; reconciliation, justice and humanitarian issues); the agreement granted extensive powers around education, fiscalism, development and security to the northern regions through the regional assemblies. It scheduled an interim period of two years after the signing of the agreement to revise Mali's constitution in order to mainstream into it the principal dispositions of the agreement. During this period, armed groups would be disarmed, demobilized and reinserted (if possible) into Mali's regular forces, which would undergo security sector reform with the support of international partners. A Joint Operational Mechanism (*Mécanisme opérationnel conjoint*, MOC), including members of all signatory parties, would be set up to police the northern regions prior to DDR and SSR. "Azawad" was recognized as a cultural, memorial, and symbolic reality in Mali while a National Concord Conference would be organized to assess the root causes of conflict in Mali, and to formulate recommendations for the government. The agreement also scheduled the establishment of a Northern Special Economic Zone that would be tasked with providing basic resources (water, electricity) and supporting youth employment in the northern regions. An agreement monitoring committee (*Comité de suivi de l'accord*, CSA) composed of the international mediation was also set up to meet every month to monitor, coordinate, control and oversee the implementation of the agreement.

Despite the 2015 agreement, the status of Kidal remains still a contentious issue between the government of Mali, the CMA and Mali's international partners. Indeed, the city is still under the control of the CMA since its victory against Malian troops in May 2014. The CMA has resisted all of the attempts of the pro-government groups such as the GATIA to retake from them the control of the city. Furthermore, the slow and tedious implementation of the Bamako agreement since 2015 to progressively institutionalize its governance of the city, and to further entrench itself as a credible ally to Mali's international partners.

Soon after its victory in May 2014, the CMA established several commissions to manage public services such as health, water, education and energy. The foremost of these governance initiatives was the CSMAC (*Commission de Sécurité Mixte de l'Azawad à Kidal*) to maintain law and order within the city, given the absence of Malian state representatives¹⁷¹. The CSMAC is also in charge of detention centers and has become a key security outfit in Kidal and given the belated deployment of the MOC scheduled by the 2015 agreement.

On the administration of justice, the CMA has attempted to give a more institutional role to the Qadis, the Islamic judges that arbitrated between tribes and between individuals, and whose influence remained high despite the establishment of a formal justice system in the north. A commission of Ulamas (Islamic scholars) composed of Qadis was set up to pronounce judgments and administer justice under the CMA, based on Islamic law. The installation of interim authorities in February 2017, whose selection was negotiated between the government and the CMA, and mediated by MINUSMA, did not equate with the restoration of state control in Kidal. Without the deployment of armed forces and the quarrels regarding the implementation of the 2015 agreement, the CMA remains the main governance actor in the city. The armed coalition has shown itself eager enough to provide governance and to show itself capable in the absence of the Malian state. In February 2019, the CMA edited new rules to the city's

¹⁷¹ Interview with security expert from northern Mali and with Interview with senior MINUSMA official (Bamako: 24 February 2018)

residents that included the prohibition of the sale and use of narcotics, the sale and consumption of alcohol, and the promotion of alcoholic beverages within the city before backpedalling (Coordination des Mouvements de l'Azawad 2019). In March 2019, the CMA's attempt to deliver residence permits to control access to the city caused a national uproar, further highlighting how the increase of its influence contrasted with the absence of the Malian state, within the city and the region. The CMA justified the delivery of residence permits to the influx of populations in the city, of nationals from other countries, due to the gold rush and artisanal gold mining since 2017 (Bamada 2019).

The impact of the control and governance of Kidal by the CMA is not limited to Mali's territory. ECOWAS has regularly called for the restoration of state authority everywhere in Mali, and in August 2019, following an attack against a military outpost in Inatès, next to the Malian border, the Nigerien president faulted the CMA and its supposed ambiguity towards violent Islamist groups. In his words, "the status of Kidal constitutes a problem [for Niger]. Kidal is a sanctuary for terrorists and those who attack us, retreat there. Kidal is a threat for Niger, and it is imperative that the rights of the Malian state are restored there" (Soudan 2019). President Issoufou's strong words were echoed just after by the public declarations of ECOWAS and G5 officials lamenting the absence of the Malian state from Kidal, and the threat it poses to its neighbours (AFP and Le Point 2019). These accusations were rejected by the CMA, which denounced them but in the context of heightened tensions between states and armed groups linked to the continued attacks against army positions by non-signatory groups, the CSA meeting that was scheduled in Kidal for September 2019 was cancelled.

Thus, the 2015 agreement has not yet resolved what initially spurred the Malian government to finally enter into talks with the armed groups. The slow implementation of its institutional provisions and the opposition to it, in several quarters of the population, has further entrenched the authority of armed groups in the field (Boutellis and Zahar 2018; Bencherif 2018b). MINUSMA, tasked with supporting the implementation of the peace agreement, has had to protect its peacekeeping troops from attacks by AQIM-affiliated groups since 2013 and to respond to criticisms from within Mali and the increasing impatience of the UN Security Council's members such as the United

States. The controversy between the Nigerien government and the CMA was mediated through the recourse to the tribal networks that bind communities from Mali and Niger. In November 2019, the Nigerien president received a delegation from the CMA to show mutual goodwill and address all lingering concerns (Jeune Afrique 2019), proving once more the entrenchment of the CMA in northern Mali and its connections beyond the borders.

Overall, the agreement extensively revised Mali's institutional dispositions and delegated the definition of some of its provisions to the Malian parties, given the impossibility to find consensus among the parties on issues such as the country's territorial integrity. The informal economy was not tackled head-on as many of the armed groups were involved in the smuggling economy. A few months after its signature, clashes resumed between the CMA and the Platform and became increasingly communitarian. GATIA and the MAA-Bamako attacked the CMA in Tabankort and Anéfis and even threatened Kidal, which forced MINUSMA to establish a security corridor around the city. Indeed, most of the fighting continued despite the signing of the agreement and was linked to the dynamics of the informal economy in the northern regions. To prevent further violence, some local actors associated with the armed groups initiated parallel talks on issues that could not be addressed at Algiers, beginning in September 2015. These efforts were undertaken outside of the framework of the Bamako agreement, signed earlier, and often conflated the armed groups with the communities they claimed to represent. The Anéfis honour agreements of September and October 2015 were agreed upon by Tuareg and Arab communities, by local businesspersons involved in the illicit trade, and by the armed groups, and aimed to sort out their political and economic quarrels, to establish a *modus vivendi* in the context of the Bamako agreement, and to reduce the intra-tribal tensions that were exacerbated by the violence (ICG 2015). Tribal chieftains participated in the discussions but mostly as witnesses to the talks by the leaders of the armed groups and businesspersons in the north. These secret agreements, which were steered by influential actors in the north, informal and hybrid, to discuss local political and economic issues have been described as a form of "peace from below" (ICG 2015). They complement the macro-orientations defined by the Bamako agreement and also reflect the necessity and pitfalls of engaging with hybrid orders of governance in peace and

conflict issues: the discussions at Anéfis may have led to a respite in the violence but did not constitute structural responses to the governance and security challenges in northern Mali. Instead, they consecrated the influence of strongmen over communities and in local affairs in northern Mali, a rise that may have sown the seeds of future instability.

4. CONCLUSION

This chapter has demonstrated how the difficulties faced in deploying AFISMA led to greater international attention to Mali, starting with the French military intervention of January 2013. *Serval* allowed for the peace process to unfold by defeating the Islamist armed groups in the north, and by consolidating the strength of the transitional government to the detriment of the former junta. In a matter of weeks, it broke through the impasse in Mali in a way that ECOWAS and AU were not able to do. Yet for all of its successes, *Serval* sowed the seeds of future tensions between the Malian parties, by deciding, instead of the Malian government, who would govern the city of Kidal.

The international military intervention opened a new phase in the management of the conflict, which saw greater involvement of the UN and France, and a receding role for ECOWAS and the AU. The multi-level security governance led to political frictions between the AU and the UN, but also disagreements on the proper course of action among African actors. The limitations of APSA were complemented by the recourse to informal postcolonial dynamics. With the southwards advance of the jihadist groups, West African leaders lobbied for and welcomed the French international military intervention, in a break with the stated goals of the APSA, but in continuity with a history of French military interventions in its former colonies, as part of its *politique de grandeur*, despite its decades-old bilateral capacity-building programs with West African countries and with ECOWAS as a regional community. *Serval* stood on a tenuous legal footing but had a decisive impact on the ground; it contributed to consolidating the Malian transitional government against its critics and led to a restructuring of the different armed groups in the north, which became more receptive towards a peace process. *Serval*'s tactical alliance with the

MNLA, one of the rebel groups, also had a lasting impact on the resolution of the conflict, and the government of Mali's openness to the process, especially concerning the control of the city of Kidal.

The successes of Serval contrasted with the travails of AFISMA, the mission authorized by the UN Security Council, that was plagued with problems from troop generation to technical capacities to financial support. The quick re-hatting of the AU-led mission in Mali, and the perceived marginalization of the AU PSC during this process, illustrates the limitations of Africanization. The AU and the UN are asymmetrical organizations, with different perspectives on peacekeeping/peace enforcement, and on their roles on peace operations on the continent. African regional actors, which took a leading role in Mali since the inception of the crisis in April 2012, progressively lost their preeminence relative to the UN and other extra-continental actors like France and the EU. Indeed, AFISMA's original mandate through UNSC Resolution 2085 was redistributed among the UN (stabilization), France (counterterrorism) and the EU (SSR in Mali) through UNSC Resolution 2100. ECOWAS' role in negotiating the preliminary agreement in Ouagadougou, constituted the last breakthrough in the resolution of the conflict that was led by African regional organizations.

Indeed, the end of the transitional period and the election of a new president changed the dynamics between Mali and African regional actors. Poor interpersonal relations between the new president, Ibrahim Boubacar Keita, and the ECOWAS Mediator, Blaise Compaoré, soured the peace process while ECOWAS' role came to be increasingly questioned by Malian and international actors. Algeria was called upon due to its influence over formal and informal economic and governance processes that grafted onto the conflict in northern Mali, but also due to its past experience brokering deals between the Malian government and Tuareg insurgents. The new mediation process was led by Algeria but guaranteed by the international community, that is other "core" Sahelian countries (Mauritania, Niger, Burkina Faso, Chad) and organizations (AU, UN, ECOWAS, EU, OIC) with strategic interests in security developments in Mali.

This shift marked the beginning of the regionness of the Sahel, which went from a regional space to a regional society, in which government actors met regularly to devise ways to address their shared security concerns. As a region, the Sahel is not one of the five around which the APSA is built; it includes countries from West, North and Central Africa and is mainly spurred by the Malian conflict. To address this blind spot in its continental peace and security architecture, the AU developed new initiatives that were “transregional” and informed by the challenges it faced in the Malian conflict. These initiatives ran parallel to a regionalism project spearheaded by Sahelian countries and their international partners to address their security and development concerns.

Chapter V: Between regionness and readjustments: the impact of the Malian conflict on regional security governance in the Sahel

This chapter focuses on the developments in peace and security governance that occurred at the level of the AU and Mali following the experience of APSA in 2012-3. At the time, most African actors realized that the APSA was confronted with important challenges that needed to be addressed to avoid a relapse into conflict of Mali, or a wider destabilization. To prevent this, initiatives were developed both at continental and state levels, based on the different lessons learnt from the security governance experience in Mali; through these processes, the Sahel became progressively imbued with regionness, reflecting the necessity to rethink the APSA's underlying assumptions on region-making in the continent.

I argue, first, that the Sahel as a region has a contested geography but that it became progressively centered around five countries with similar geographical and demographic profiles, but more importantly, facing similar security and development challenges. The speech acts – regular references to ‘the Sahel’ in policy documents - that spurred the creation of this new region, which lies at the intersection of West, North and Central Africa, were rooted in the international interests in the region following the Malian conflict, and in the different Sahel strategies that were put forward to address the structural causes of conflict in the region. More importantly than their successes, the Sahel strategies and the coordination mechanisms that were set up to implement them constituted a forum for contestation between actors over the geography of the emerging region, and the role each actor would play in addressing the region's challenges.

This chapter will also examine the competing security initiatives driven by African actors in the Sahel. The AU saw the need to operationalize the APSA in the “Sahelo-Saharan region” soon after the lumbering deployment of AFISMA in Mali. The Nouakchott Process was initiated shortly after, and the ACIRC was developed as a temporary measure, pending the operationalization of the ASF, in order to overcome the obstacles, the AU faced in deploying troops in Mali. These initiatives generated much expectation but stalled due to political differences within the AU,

but also between the AU and the UN, over the deployment of an African counter-terrorist force. Both organizations were also competing with the G5 Sahel, an ad hoc initiative developed by the five countries identified as the “core Sahelian countries” in the Sahel strategies, but which emerged out of a pattern of increasing military cooperation between these five countries and France following the re-hatting of AFISMA into MINUSMA. This rivalry was mainly arbitrated by extra-continental actors who saw in the G5 Sahel a ready interlocutor on Sahelian issues. Despite its momentum and the international interest towards it, the G5 Sahel is also affected by the same structural challenges that the APSA has encountered, linked to financial dependence and technical incapacity.

Finally, I argue that the new cartography of security in the Sahel with the emergence of ad hoc coalitions may serve as a framework to circumvent the limitations of the APSA without really replacing it. Despite the varied political commitments towards regional security, the rigidity of the APSA in responding to conflict has favoured the development of overlapping security initiatives that are rooted in different conceptions of “regions” and based on the existential threats many of its members face along their shared borders. The APSA will continue to cede ground to these emerging initiatives and risks being relegated to a manifestation of the AU’s desire to influence discussions in the Sahel rather than an effective security framework. Confronted by the limitations of its framework in responding to the multidimensional challenges in Mali, the APSA will be increasingly challenged by initiatives that originate from outside of its framework and driven either by member-states on their own, or with the support of extra-continental actors. These initiatives have a narrower focus than APSA and aim to respond to a specific issue in a localized area, through reactive measures. They emerged in response to the unfitness of the existing framework of the APSA in addressing quickly and effectively, security challenges that arise at the peripheries of these states. In this new reality, the African Union and the other components of the APSA may not be at the center of the action, but they will continue to demonstrate their relevance by supporting the new initiatives through strategies and policies that they may not themselves be able to operationalize. Through this, they stake a claim as security actors towards

national states and extra-continental actors, rather than demonstrate their capacities to lead the regional response to emerging crises.

The first section of this chapter will focus on the emergence of the Sahel as a region, beginning in 2013, with the development of intervention strategies by different actors. In this context, the AU developed a strategy more to show its regionness while Sahelian states began to form a regional society through regular meetings. The second section will discuss the readjustments to the APSA by the AU through the development of an *African Capacity for Immediate Reaction to Crisis* (ACIRC) and another trans-regional security framework, the *Nouakchott Process*. These initiatives will be contrasted with the G5 Sahel, an ad hoc arrangement formed in 2014 by Mali, Mauritania, Burkina Faso, Niger and Chad to deal with the security and development challenges affecting their peripheral regions, in partnership with France's *Operation Barkhane* (2014-). The last section of this chapter will consider what these new initiatives portend for the future of APSA and regional security governance in West Africa, given the fragility of its member states and the overlapping of mandates and interests of the different regional actors.

1. THE INTERNATIONAL INTERVENTION AND THE SAHEL'S INCREASING REGIONNESS

One consequence of the international military intervention in Mali in 2013 was renewed interest in addressing the structural factors that caused the near collapse of the Malian state and led to ongoing instability in the Sahel. What happened in Mali and the difficulty faced by regional actors in coordinating an effective response exposed many structural flaws within West Africa's postcolonial states: bad governance had alienated many populations from central governments, and weak security architecture made them vulnerable to opportunistic groups, such as AQIM, which feed on popular grievances to establish and expand their power base (Dowd 2015).

The various strategies developed in 2013 by international and regional actors emanate from a new understanding of a geography of threats, first apparent in the discourse of extra-continental actors, and progressively among African nations and regional organizations, that saw a continuum of threats in the Sahelo-Saharan belt that transcended categories such as "West" and "Central" Africa and that was also linked with threats to southern Europe. The idea

of “core Sahelian countries” and the emphasis on a militarized response is evidence of a continued securitization of areas of limited statehood. At the same time, of a shift of meaning of the term “Sahel”, which went from a geographical space ranging from Senegal to Djibouti, into a strategic region with its own regionness in which a regional society is being built due to shared concerns that force national actors to act and respond together and in a coherent way to the issues they share in common. The regionness of the Sahel became more consolidated around five core countries following the international intervention in Mali and manifested itself through a flurry of initiatives aiming at filling the gaps within the existing peace and security framework.

A. Imagining the Sahel: from a geoclimatic notion to a strategic one

The war in Mali and the weak regional response were the main catalysts for a strategic shift in the conception of the Sahel: from a geographical area vulnerable to climate shifts to a strategic set of countries that have to be strengthened to prevent one or many of them from collapsing in the face of the Jihadi threat. The Sahel, in the eyes of policymakers, became less a geo-climatic referent and more a strategic one, defined by the Islamist insurgency, increased instability and the possibility of state collapse. This redefinition of the Sahel region was manifest with the 2013 UN Integrated Sahel Strategy, which formalized the scholarly notion of core Sahelian countries. A report to the UN Security Council by the UN Secretary-General further develops this notion and argues for greater investment by international actors in these “core countries”, “to maximize the impact of our collective efforts in this area (...) emphasis [must] be placed on the core Sahelian countries of Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and the Niger” (United Nations 2013c, 10)

Some of these countries were long involved in various regional security governance mechanisms, as shown above, but they became more or less “the Sahel” after the Mali conflict. Core countries have never been agreed

upon¹⁷²: while Mali, Algeria, Mauritania and Niger considered themselves as belonging to same security-development nexus, the inclusion of Chad and Burkina Faso into the core countries has more to do with these countries' involvement in the Mali conflict, whether it was due to their diplomatic activity or their military engagement in *Operation Serval*.

The “creation” of the Sahel, a region whose meaning shifted from a geographical space to a security hotspot, is the outcome of the securitization of the development challenges of Mali and its neighbours, especially in the wake of the 2013 military intervention. The notion of “ungoverned space” was put forward as a likely cause underpinning the instability. The emphasis on the absence of the state and its corollary assumptions regarding the prevalence of terrorism, drug and arms trafficking, obscures the structural conditions that generated them (Charbonneau 2015), which are often rooted in patterns of domestic governance and the delegation of state authority to non-state actors. In the framework of the GWOT and the re-imagining of the Sahel as a hotbed for terrorism, the necessity of addressing the root causes of the securitized symptoms is traded for the sake of stabilization and statebuilding (Richmond 2005). Through this perspective, the process leading to the particular type of governance is ignored due to normative considerations about how a state ought to be and what it should do. This posturing also allows for the privileging of solutions to problems that are closely linked with the internal governance of these territories, and which may be more complex than the stabilization interventions (Nhema and Zeleza 2008; Paris and Sisk 2009). The framework of ungoverned states/failed states implies that the absence of the state is in itself a risk since the vacuum has been filled by non-state actors, with the epithets of terrorist/traffickers/criminals whose action is a prelude to state collapse and further regional instability (Charbonneau 2015). But this framework also reveals a bias since the Westphalian state model has always been more of an ideal than a reality in the region. By focusing

¹⁷² For example, Reitano (2014) defines the core countries of the Sahel as Mali, Niger and Mauritania in “Comparing Approaches to the Security-Development Nexus in the Sahel and their Implications for Governance”, 2014.

essentially on the non-state actors and identifying the problem as the “terrorist” in the “ungoverned space”, license is given to security interventions for the sake of stabilization to contain conflict and minimize the threat to international society. (Duffield 2005; Willett 2005).

The Sahel, as a region, is the outcome of discourses on threats linked to the absence of state authority and the responses to it, often based on the imperative of preventing state failure by restoring and strengthening state authority, through military actions but also through development projects that are supposed to increase its legitimacy. In a sense, the regional threats and the security practices that are being implemented there (capacity-building and stabilization policies) are mutually constitutive. Similar to the Middle East, the representations of the region enable certain security practices that imagine and later actualize objects and subjects to be secured and governed (Bilgin 2004). They contribute to the formation of “regions”, and “regional security dynamics” that become progressively operationalized, without any consideration of the state-society relations and the governance challenges that are at its roots (Dowd 2015). For Charbonneau, these representations of security issues “constitute normative frameworks that enable and enact specific limits, norms and exceptions to security practices and regional formation” (Charbonneau 2017b, 410).

Following the international intervention in Mali, policymakers prioritized restoring or strengthening state authority in a region that became identified with the nexus of crime, terrorism, and challenges to state authority. Extra-continental actors played a large part in the securitization of the Sahel and its emergence as a region, which went from bearing a geographic and environmental reference, to a more strategic one, over the last two decades. In this regard, they highlight how “regions are made and unmade, intentionally or unintentionally, endogenously or exogenously, by actions, interactions, routines, practices, discourses, and narratives” (Whitehouse and Strazzari 2015, 214), but also the importance of the social construction of threats and regions, and how they may challenge established but limited security architecture.

These representations have often been uncritically appropriated by African actors, national and regional, who remain heavily dependent on external support for the implementation of their policies and programs. The discourse regarding the lack of an appropriate regional organization to manage the early phase of the Malian conflict (2012-3) and the following regional remapping in the Sahel, driven by the states and also by existing organizations such as the AU, are illustrative of this dynamic (Francis 2013; Whitehouse and Strazzari 2015). The “regional nature” of the Malian conflict has oscillated for a time between a “West African” and a “Sahelian” space, which sits uneasily with the rigid conceptions of regions, and their ensuing security governance, as articulated in the African Peace and Security Architecture. This is most manifest in the development of “strategies for the Sahel”, rooted in the security-development nexus, which has been a dominant framework for interventions in the Sahel.

In the case of the strategic Sahel, while there were historical precedents with the formation of the Permanent Interstate Committee for drought control in the Sahel (*Comité permanent inter-états pour la lutte contre la sécheresse dans le Sahel*, CILSS) in the 1970s and the Joint Operational Staff Committee (CEMOC) in 2010, this new construction resulted from the securitization of the Sahel by national leaders and international actors. As shown by the UN Strategy and even before by the 2011 EU Integrated Strategy for the Sahel, international actors have played a key role in the redefinition of the Sahel and the identification of five countries, as representing “core countries” in the Sahel. These five countries, namely Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Chad and Burkina Faso, represent the ones meant to serve as a bulwark against Islamist threats in the Sahel, to the exclusion of Algeria, which is wary of any international presence near its borders.

In a sense, the various strategies and action plans that were developed following the Mali conflict focused on these countries because they were more likely and eager to cooperate on security and development issues with each other and with their international partners. Besides, unlike Chad, their porous borders with Mali have made them wary of any potential “non-governance” of northern Mali by the state, as well as exposing them to potential radical Islamist attacks from these same areas.

B. Sahel strategies and region-building

The various regional strategies that have been developed to address the issues in the Sahel have in common their recognition of the interdependence between security and development. For Reitano, “the problems in the Sahel are cross-border and closely intertwined, and few regions better exemplify inter-dependence of security, governance, human rights and development challenges” (Reitano 2014). This idea is epitomized in the maxim of the World Bank’s 2011 *World Development Report*, which stressed that “there is no development without security and no security without development” (World Development Report, 2011).

One common denominator of these perspectives is the linkage they make between the vulnerability of populations, their lack of resilience to climate change, and the minimal political, military and economic investment of the states in these regions, and the development of illicit economic networks and the consolidation of alternative governance orders. Thus, the propagation of the Islamist threat, although a security flashpoint, is due less to the global Islamist agenda and more a product of lapses in political governance and lack of economic opportunities for the inhabitants of these regions (Dowd 2015).

The security-development nexus has been broadly accepted and embedded in many post-conflict policies (Stern and Öjendal 2010) despite criticisms by some scholars of its foreign ontological roots, assumptions, and directions (Duffield 2001; Duffield 2005; Chandler 2007; Duffield 2010). The various regional mechanisms that were developed to govern regional security adopted an integrated multidimensional approach, addressing immediate security threats and long-term governance issues. Restoring security will mean, therefore, not only fighting militarily against its symptoms (i.e. AQIM and the other terrorist groups) but also addressing the root causes of insecurity, i.e. better governance, enforcement of human rights and socio-economic development.

The conflict in Mali led to the development and orientation of various strategies targeting the security situations in the Sahel by African and international actors. Regional organizations with limited capacity, international ones and recently created groups put forward multiple strategies and action plans, with the question of legitimacy and

efficiency looming over them. These strategies constituted the actualization of a new region, the Sahel, whose geographical borders transcended the regions as defined through the APSA, but on which there was no agreement about relevant responsible actors. They constituted an arena for the contestation of the emerging region, but also of negotiation of its geography, which came to be consolidated around the five core countries. These five countries share similar political and demographic profiles and are among the poorest in the world. A Ministerial Coordination Platform (MCP) was put in place in November 2013 to coordinate these various strategies and constituted a technical forum on the path towards the creation of a regional society in the Sahel.

i. The United Nations

Following the successes of *Operation Serval* in the first half of 2013 and the deployment of MINUSMA in Mali in July 2013, the UN developed a strategy for the Sahel with the view to tackling the structural problems (poverty, underdevelopment and poor governance) that have made the region vulnerable to conflict, through having a regional and integrated approach among its different agencies and national offices. The UN Integrated Strategy for the Sahel (UNISS) revolves around three strategic objectives:

- Enhancing inclusive and effective governance;
- Strengthening national and regional security mechanisms to address cross-border threats;
- building resilience through the integration of humanitarian and development plans (United Nations 2013a).

A Special envoy for the Sahel was appointed in 2012 for the development and the implementation of this strategy¹⁷³. The UN Strategy adopts a holistic approach in dealing with the challenges faced by the five core Sahelian countries by attempting to tackle both pressing security issues and long-term governance challenges (Helly et al.

¹⁷³ The first Special Envoy was the former Italian Prime Minister Romano Prodi. He was later replaced by the Ethiopian Hiroute Guebre Selassie (2014-2016)

2015, 5). The UN Strategy is also based on a flexible geography for the region that encompasses Western, Central and Northern Africa, but focuses its activities on “five priority countries”. The UN peacekeeping operation in Mali, despite the robustness of its mandate (Tardy 2013), has been hard-pressed to address the violent actions of AQIM, Ansar Dine and other radical Islamist groups following the withdrawal of French troops from Northern Mali in August 2014. This has led to criticisms of the UN peacekeeping operation, concerning both its mandate to protect civilians and its unwillingness to lead offensive operations against spoiler groups (Tozona 2015). Despite its merits, the UNISS suffered from several implementation challenges linked to the lack of synergy among different UN agencies working on its sectoral pillars, the multiplicity of “Sahel strategies” and development actors in the region, and the lack of absorptive capacity among the region’s national governments.

Furthermore, the UN Integrated Strategy was designed to “guide collective interventions in the region” but did not have dedicated funds; the UN’s actions were based on its three regional inter-agency working groups for the region (i.e. the UNDP, the UN Office for West Africa and the Regional Humanitarian Coordinator for the Sahel). Despite its ambitions, the UN Strategy has been dismissed by local and international observers for paying little attention to local communities during its development. Described as “lovely [but], ineffective pieces of paper” (International Crisis Group 2015, 20), the implementation of this strategy has been hampered both by lack of national ownership and by competing regional strategies.

In 2017, the UNISS was recalibrated following an internal review that highlighted the challenges with the 2013 strategy. The merging of the Office of the Special Envoy for the Sahel (OSES) into the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) due to the redundancy of their activities and their reporting requirements (What’s in Blue? 2018) and the nomination of a Special Adviser for the Sahel in March 2018 gave a new impetus to the UN’s regional approach to the Sahel. The 2018 UN Support Plan for the Sahel identifies six priority areas (United Nations 2018a):

- Promoting cross-border and regional cooperation for stability and development;

- Preventing and resolving conflicts; violent extremism and crime; and expanding access to justice and human rights;
- Promoting inclusive and equitable growth and increasing access to basic quality services;
- Building resilience to climate change, and decreasing natural resource scarcity, malnutrition and food insecurity;
- Promoting access to renewable energy;
- Empowering women and youth for peace and development in the Sahel.

The UN Support Plan constitutes a peacebuilding framework for the region and targets ten countries, namely: Senegal, Guinea, The Gambia, Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Nigeria, Chad and Cameroon. The Support Plan is leaner than the 2013 strategy in its ambitions and is anchored in endogenous initiatives, such as the AU's Agenda 2063 for the development of the continent, but also in global initiatives such as the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

ii. The African Union

The AU sees itself as being best positioned to facilitate the resolution of the Sahel crisis due to its continental scope and the fact that the Sahel transcends the geographical area of RECs such as ECOWAS. Its 2014 strategy revolves around three pillars:

- **Governance:** considered as one of the main drivers of conflict, due to the “absence of the state” and corruption. The AU strategy links governance with the issue of inclusivity, whether it is regional, ethnic-based or religious. Directly inspired by the conflict in Mali, governance was viewed as primordial to the consolidation of peace and the prevention of conflict by the AU.

- Security: considered as the most critical pillar by the AU and implemented through the Nouakchott Process, a security initiative that reunited 11 countries¹⁷⁴ of the region to enhance cooperation on economic and security issues (Buyoya 2014). This process is coordinated by the High Representative of the AU Mission for Mali and the Sahel (MISAHEL) that was established in 2014.
- and development: considered as the “weak point of the strategy”¹⁷⁵ for which the AU did not have much leverage due to its limited financial capacities. This pillar was mostly delegated to external partners, and the AU’s approach was limited to demonstrations of “regionness” through largely symbolic programs targeting women and youth.

Legitimacy played an essential part in the development of this strategy. According to the AU Strategy, “three areas [governance, security and development respectively], especially the first two, are issues on which the AU has a clear comparative advantage, as per its continental mandate, its experience in the subject matters and its familiarity with the issues at hand” (AU PSC 2014, 3). This assumption is rooted in the travails of ECOWAS in Mali during the initial stages of the conflict (2012-3) and the progressive involvement of the AU and Algeria in peacebuilding activities in Mali.

As with the UN Strategy, the AU vision for the Sahel is based on a holistic approach to addressing the security challenges of the region. The strategy includes both targeted actions for each pillar and monitoring mechanisms for the region (Helly and al. 2015). The AU strategy emerged out of an attempt by the continental organization to “streamline its engagement in the Sahel” and is built on a December 2011 report on the situation in Mali, that preceded the rebellion, and on the AU’s joint declaration with ECOWAS and MINUSMA of 20 March 2012.¹⁷⁶ This

¹⁷⁴ These 11 countries are Algeria, Burkina Faso, Côte d’Ivoire, Guinea, Libya, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal and Chad.

¹⁷⁵ Interview with AU senior official (Addis Ababa: May and June 2019).

¹⁷⁶ Interview with senior AU official (Addis Ababa: 30 May 2019)

report linked the collapse of the Gaddafi regime to a potential destabilization of its neighbours, including Mali, which saw during that period an inflow of combatants from Libya. One of the main comparative advantages of the AU Sahel strategy is the inclusion of Algeria and Nigeria in the Nouakchott process mechanism. But its main weakness, as is the case with many other Sahel strategies developed by African organizations, lies in its funding gaps. The AU is heavily dependent on international partners, like the EU [which developed a Sahel Strategy before the AU] to finance its regional strategy, which identifies the funding gap as one of the strategy's key implementation risks. A central assumption underpinning the strategy was "the availability of the necessary financial resources from the funding sources identified in the Action Plan for each priority action and/or other sources and the absence of any last-minute withdrawal of donors committed." (AU PSC 2014, 20)

Thus, for or all of its merits, the AU strategy was never implemented save for its security component, the Nouakchott Process. The reasons for its non-application remain murky, and several versions have been put forward. For one AU official, the 2013 Sahel Strategy "was never implemented because it was never validated by the Heads of State. MISAHHEL was mandated, but since the AU is a political institution, there were many disagreements. Priorities changed, and the strategy remained simply on paper".¹⁷⁷ The MISAHHEL, which was formed expressly following the re-hatting of AFISMA into MINUSMA, was deprived of its original mandate and came to devolve most of its action to supporting the peace process in Mali. Beyond the political differences at the AU, financial difficulties and competing initiatives are the likelier cause of the non-implementation of the AU Sahel Strategy. Indeed, the strategy should be seen as demonstrating the AU's legitimacy claim in Sahelian affairs during a period of international engagement in the region, rather than an effective action plan. This situation also defined the parameters of action of the MISAHHEL, which, although intended to be the executor of the strategy, had to define its activities on the ground, with limited resources, and sometimes with a fractious relationship with the PSC in Addis

¹⁷⁷ Interview with AU/PSD official, Conflict Prevention and Early Warning Division (Addis Ababa: 3 June 2019).

Ababa.¹⁷⁸ In a sense, the 2013 AU Sahel strategy was developed by senior officials to push the regional organization into remaining engaged in the region, in a context where there was a global attention on the Sahel. Financially, the AU could never compete with the UN or the EU on its strategy; this is evident in the lack of an action plan and the little use made of the non-security pillars. Yet by developing its strategy, the AU was trying to influence the conversation on what should be priority areas in the region and staking a claim at a coordination role because its strategy was more inclusive and legitimate than the other existing ones. In more basic terms, the strategy was developed and framed to show that the AU existed and wanted to be involved in the discussions on the Sahel, through MISAHHEL in Bamako.

Despite the difficulties faced by its 2013 strategy, the AU is in the process of actualizing its framework document for the Sahel. The latest version of the strategy, from October 2018, differs from the 2013 one by its focus on targets, duration and budget.¹⁷⁹ The new strategy is inspired by the Lake Chad Basin Commission regional strategy for stabilization, recovery and resilience, developed as part of the fight against Boko Haram. Protection of civilians, climate change, youth and gender, migration, good governance and socio-economic developments are some of the issues that are considered as “transversal” in the AU’s developing strategy, which will also be informed by sociocultural and anthropological considerations on communitarian dynamics in the Sahel. The view is to not “expend efforts by trying to address all issues but to limit the AU’s actions to activities in which it has an added value”.¹⁸⁰ Security will likely play a significant role in the AU’s engagement in the Sahel, primarily through the reactivation of the Nouakchott Process, and its desire to engage positively with the G5 Sahel. This poses the question of why strategies are developed, despite the inability of some regional actors to implement their visions. Rather than a tool for governance, the AU strategy serves as evidence of the AU’s legitimacy claim on peace and security affairs,

¹⁷⁸ Interview with AU/PSD official, Conflict Prevention and Early Warning Division (Addis Ababa: 3 June 2019).

¹⁷⁹ Interview with official, AU/PSD, Conflict Management and Post-Conflict Reconstruction Division (Addis Ababa: 11 June 2019)

¹⁸⁰ Interview with AU/PSD official, Conflict Prevention and Early Warning Division (Addis Ababa: 3 June 2019)

and as a framework of engagement to lobby for the AU's vision for the region, in its dealings with national and international actors.

iii. ECOWAS

Three country members of the G5 Sahel (Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger) are also members of the Economic Community of West African States. ECOWAS, in partnership with the West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU) and the CILSS, developed the Regional Action Programme in West Africa for the stability and development of the Saharan-Sahelian areas (*Programme de cohérence et d'action régionales de l'Afrique de l'Ouest pour la stabilité et le développement des espaces saharo-sahéliens*, PCAR) which focuses more on socio-economic development (education and infrastructure investment in particular) and resilience than on security. Unlike the AU's approach, ECOWAS prioritized development and resilience issues in its Sahel strategy, and less so security. For one ECOWAS official, "peace and security are a cross-cutting issue; even though the strategy is primarily developmental and focuses on infrastructure, resilience and food security, education and promoting a culture of peace"¹⁸¹. The development of PCAR can be explained by the need to "ensure greater consistency in the service of regional governance, development and security" (Gnanguenon 2014, 67).

The PCAR focuses on the five core countries identified in the UN Integrated Strategy, which makes it redundant. Although this could provide for synergy, it raises issues around unnecessary duplication given the UN's superior means and resources. The PCAR should be seen as an instrument where the regional organization expresses its political presence in a context where the focus is on a regional space where ECOWAS has played a crucial role in 2012-2013 (Gnanguênou, 2014:62). ECOWAS has developed several action plans (2016-2020; 2021-2025) to implement its Sahel strategy, more to show what it believes constitute priorities for the region than out of a

¹⁸¹ Interview with ECOWAS PAPS/SSR official (Abuja: 18 July 2019).

commitment to effectively deliver on these priorities. Legitimacy and the need for visibility might have led to the development of the ECOWAS-WAEMU-CILSS strategy but the presence of G5, which includes, but is not limited to, ECOWAS member states can be viewed as a vote of non-confidence in this regional organization.

iv. The European Union

The European Union adopted in 2011 a comprehensive Sahel strategy, the *EU Strategy for Security and Development*. This strategy predated most of the other regional strategies and was the first to recognize the necessity of an integrated approach to tackle security and development issues in the Sahel. Indeed, it outlines clearly that “security and development in the Sahel cannot be separated, and that helping these countries achieve security is integral to enabling their economies to grow and poverty to be reduced” (European Union External Action Service 2011, 1). For Europe, the Sahel is a concern due to the impact of disruptive activities by criminal and terrorist groups, the presence of “ungoverned spaces” which enable illegal immigration into Europe by way of the Sahara, and the disruption of energy supplies into the EU, especially following the Libyan civil war (Bello 2012; Korteweg 2014, 3; Lebovich 2018).

The four pillars of the 2011 EU Strategy for Security and Development are meant to tackle the core drivers of insecurity. These pillars are:

- Development, good governance and internal conflict resolution;
- Political and diplomatic action;
- Security and the rule of law;
- Countering violent extremism and radicalization.

While it focused on Mali, Mauritania and Niger and on border management issues at its inception, Burkina Faso and Chad were incorporated in the EU’s vision in 2014. Coordinated by a Special Representative, EU’s priority actions for 2015-2020 in the Sahel region include preventing and countering radicalization, improving conditions for youth, managing migration and mobility and strengthening border management, and the fight against illicit

trafficking and transnational organized crime. As mentioned above, investment in infrastructure, resilience and security by the EU is being implemented in partnership with the G5. France, an EU member, has been a key actor in the war against AQIM in Northern Mali since 2013. Since August 2014, *Operation Serval*, the codename for its military intervention in Mali, has morphed into a regional military operation, *Barkhane*, spanning Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Chad, and Burkina Faso. Its principal objective is to counter militarily the threats posed by AQIM and other Jihadi groups in the region. France's advanced military bases are located across the sovereign territory of G5 member states; thus, collaboration with these countries has been crucial for French military operations.

Through its early engagement and comprehensive strategy, the EU is a key actor in regional security governance in the Sahel. Over the years, it has developed several programs at the bilateral and multilateral levels, aiming to address security, development and migration issues in the region. Indeed, since 2015, the EU has developed a close partnership with the G5 Sahel for the implementation of its regional action plan (2015-2020) for the Sahel (European External Action Service 2016). The EU has also deployed three missions under its Common Security and Defence Policy. The first one, the EUCAP Sahel Niger, was deployed in 2012 with the goal of fighting terrorism and organized crime, through EU assistance to Nigerien security services (Police, Gendarmerie, National Guard), in part to facilitate interoperability and coordination. EUCAP Sahel Mali was deployed in January 2015 as part of the EU's contribution to reforming the security services of Mali in the wake of the 2012 conflict. The mission is tasked with supporting the Malian security forces (Police, Gendarmerie and National Guard) in ensuring constitutional and democratic order, putting in place the conditions for a lasting peace as well as expanding state authority throughout the entire territory. Beyond these two civilian missions, the EU also deployed a military mission, the EU Training Mission in Mali (EUTM Mali), in February 2013 to support SSR, especially concerning command and control, international humanitarian law and troop training. Since 2015, the EUTM Mali also participates in MINUSMA's work on DDR as part of the 2015 peace agreement. This support consists of training sessions with the different

belligerents for the purpose of establishing an inclusive Malian army. Beyond Mali, the EUTM Mali also supports the G5 Sahel in the coordination and interoperability of their national armies.

The EU is one of the most important development actors in the Sahel, and its partnership is sought out by various national and multilateral actors. Its interest in the Sahel predates the conflict in Mali and is partly informed by its perception of the continuum of threats that link the situation in the Sahel to Europe. Policing borders and curbing migration flows from Sub-Saharan Africa to southern Europe via the Sahel has become one of its priority actions, and its interventions on this issue have, at times, conflicted with regional efforts at integration. The migration crisis has led the organization to place a heavy emphasis on border management. This had had an impact on endogenous African initiatives, primarily through the delocalization of the EU border in Agadez (Niger), which conflicts with the ECOWAS protocol on the free movement of persons, goods and services, for example. Indeed, the EU has outsourced its border control policies to Niger and other Sahelian countries by investing in the capacity of their security forces to control migration outflows to Europe, and by treating requests for asylum in Agadez, an important hub for northbound migrants. The Nigerien government's Law 036/2015 has banned transportation and the provision of shelter to migrants. This new legal context has slightly reduced migration flows from Agadez but also made them more precarious and dangerous (Development and Cooperation 2019). With the support of the International Organization for Migration (IOM), there has also been a spike of deportations and expulsion of migrants from Niger (Puig 2019) These migration control policies could also change the dynamics within the transit cities in Niger whose local economies has benefitted from the presence of migrants (Molenaar and van Damme 2017, 22) while many former rebels have reconverted themselves into transporters for migrants. Thus, the imperative of controlling borders will affect not only migrants but also the broader economy and could potentially have a negative impact on the relations between the Nigerien government and former Tuareg rebels.

The EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa is one of the main instruments of its policy in the region. The Trust Fund was set up to address the root causes of irregular migration and displacement in Africa and is active in the

Sahel/Lake Chad, Horn of Africa, and North Africa (European Union 2015). Between 2014 and 2020, the EU disbursed almost € 8 billion for development assistance to national and multilateral organizations, of which €930 million were budgeted for the Emergency Trust Fund. For 2014-2020, the EU development fund has allocated €628 million for Burkina Faso, €542 million for Chad, €664 million for Mali, €160 million for Mauritania, and €686 million for Niger (Council of the European Union 2019). Its legitimacy might be questioned, but through its engagement with the G5, it has established a partnership that combines political legitimacy and economic leverage.

v. *The Ministerial Coordination Platform and its challenges*

These four organizations are not the only ones that have developed regional strategies in the Sahel, but they are the most important. Indeed, 18 strategies were developed between 2011 and 2015 by a variety of actors to address the security and development issues for the region. Although there is cooperation among some of these organizations, they have struggled to bring into coherence these various strategies and stifle any potential rivalry between them. This was most apparent in the UN Integrated Strategy for the Sahel, which sought to guide international engagement in the region. Competition for visibility and legitimacy has been rampant in the governance of regional security in the Sahel, to the clear detriment of local communities that are supposed to benefit from these strategies (Helly and Galeazzi 2014).

Members of the Ministerial Coordination Platform

<i>Organizations</i>	United Nations (OSES/UNOWAS)
	African Union (MISAHÉL)
	European Union (Special Representative for the Sahel)
	G5 Sahel
	ECOWAS
	Organization for the Islamic Conference
	World Bank (WB)

	African Development Bank (AfDB)
	International Monetary Fund (IMF)
<i>Core Sahelian countries</i>	Chad
	Burkina Faso
	Mali
	Mauritania
	Niger
<i>North African countries</i>	Morocco
	Libya
	Algeria
	Sudan
<i>European countries with “Sahel strategies.”</i>	France
	Spain
	Luxemburg
	Italy
	Germany
	Norway

Given the number of regional actors with their specific strategies for the Sahel region, a Ministerial Platform (MCP) for the coordination of these strategies was put in place in November 2013, just after the regional tour of development partners in the region. The Platform’s main task is

to ensure coherence between the various initiatives and strategies for the Sahel and enhance coordination and synergy of actions in their implementation for better efficacy and efficiency” (Office of the Special Envoy for the Sahel nd).

All of the actors mentioned above are members of this platform, although they are not the only ones¹⁸². Duplication and coordination were a risk, and the capacity of the national bureaucracies to absorb all those development projects was also questioned. The sense that there were “too many cooks in the kitchen”¹⁸³ was prevalent, and the need for coordination is a recurrent theme in the conclusions of Sahel-related meetings. For this reason, the MCP was set up to streamline international efforts, and some actors such as the AU preferred to focus on one pillar of their strategy (security in this instance) where they felt they had a strong advantage, and deferred to other international actors on other pillars of their strategy¹⁸⁴.

When the AU Sahel strategy was adopted, it was decided to put in place the Ministerial Coordination Platform. The coordination of the Platform was held jointly by the AU and the UN, with MISAHEL’s Buyoya and OSES’s Hiroute Gebre Selassie at the helm. There were several ministerial meetings geared towards creating synergy across different strategies, evaluating different development projects, and strengthening local absorption capacities. The MCP has a weak institutional framework with only a Technical Secretariat, co-chaired by the UN (through the Office of the Special Envoy for the Sahel) and AU (through MISAHEL) that meets once a month, and biannual ordinary plenary meetings involving member state and multilateral organizations. It is an institutional compromise between institutional legitimacy and efficiency in the governance of security in the Sahel. Legitimacy has been a key determinant in shaping the MCP, but little progress has been made on integrating strategies or on improving the livelihoods of Sahelian populations. Indeed, formed in November 2013, the four thematic working groups (governance, security, resilience and development) that are supposed to inform the MCP were only established in

¹⁸² The World Bank, African Development Bank, the Arab Maghreb Union, the Organisation for Islamic Conference and the Islamic Development Bank are members of the Ministerial Coordination Platform.

¹⁸³ This is the term used by a Malian leading political actor to describe the different Sahel strategies and the multiplicity of actors in the region. Interview (Bamako: 17 October 2017).

¹⁸⁴ Interview with senior AU official (Addis Ababa: 30 May 2019 and 2 July 2019)

November 2015 (UN, 2015). And the articulation between the Technical Secretariat and the Presidency of the Platform remains shaky more than six years following its formation (Gouvernement du Tchad 2019).

Despite the ambitions of the various Sahel strategies through their comprehensive approaches, they have yet to be fulfilled (Helly, 2015), and the MCP has progressively lost steam compared to other platforms like the Alliance Sahel and which is composed of donor countries. Despite the will to coordinate, institutional actors such as the AU and the UN are not among the main development partners in the region and cannot constrain the targets of these actors. Strategies have been made, public financing pledges to development sectors made, and the MCP's platform has met five times since November 2013, yet not much has been achieved in improving the security situation and governance in the region. This has even been acknowledged by the body during its 5th Meeting in November 2015 (ibid.).

The MCP is more a political consultative forum than an impactful governance mechanism: indeed, many of its members such as the EU and the United Nations continue to implement their regional strategy while involved with the MCP while regional organizations such as ECOWAS and G5, despite their participation into the MCP, consider themselves as a better forum to ensure coherence and efficiency of the various Sahel strategies. Its similarity to other coordination mechanisms such as the G5 Sahel and the OECD-led Global Alliance for Resilience (*Alliance globale pour la résilience*, AGIR) has hampered its ability to provide leadership. Since 2015, there has been a duplication of coordination platforms rather than a “merging of certain coordination structures (...) and (...) a pragmatic focus on a select number of priorities in the short term, namely counter-terrorism, security and migration” (Helly, 2015) that was expected. The merger of the OSES and UNOWA into UNOWAS in 2016 streamlined the UN's activities in the region and strengthened the capacity of the MCP (United Nations Secretary-General 2016, 2–3). But this had minimal impact on the activities of the MCP, which continues to this day, but in a wider context of overlapping mechanisms. Coordination and cooperation among key partners remain an important stumbling block in Mali and in the Sahel, and every regional actor attempts to put forward its own comparative advantages. Despite the seven

ministerial meetings of the MCP, the discourse on coordination has not really translated into practical results due to weak leadership and the emergence of competing platforms.

The Alliance Sahel, driven by France and Germany, has a very similar mandate to the MCP and includes the Sahel's main development partners. Furthermore, it has a closer relationship to the G5 Sahel, which has come to "actualize" the Sahel as a region. The MCP continues to exist and to meet because, as a platform, it goes beyond the five core countries of the Sahel and constitutes a useful forum for international actors to engage in the region. But it remains an artifact of a specific moment in 2013 when there was consensus among policymakers about the need to develop a regional approach, focusing on security and development, to prevent conflict in the Sahel. Still, its legacy remains important as it was a milestone in the formation of a new imaginary, the Sahel, that tied development needs to security concerns, and that needed to be addressed for regional stability. The definition of what constituted the geography of the Sahel became clearer as these strategies were put forward. It went from a regional space, in which several countries are neighbours in a geographical area with their territories sharing similar characteristics to a regional society, spurred by the international interest in the development and security challenges, and leading to the formation of a regional project by five Sahelian countries to confront their shared development and security issues with the support of African and international actors. The innovative element in the formation of this shift to a regional society in the Sahel is its emancipation from the cartography of the continent into five rigid regions through the APSA. The Sahel, as we came to understand it following the Malian conflict, includes Western, Northern and Central African countries if we follow the framework of the APSA; the regional project emerged following the development of APSA and not before as is the case with ECOWAS for example. The common development and security challenges that were identified in the various Sahel strategies came to define the sense of belonging among the five countries. In this sense, the different intervention strategies matter less for their effectiveness or success but more in the impact they have had on redefining the contours of the Sahel, and in spurring change in the APSA's approach to peace and security, in the wake of the Malian conflict. The five countries of the

new region shared the same structural challenges and were the focus of similar attention of their international partners, who were keen on supporting them to address their development and security challenges.

2. ADAPTING TO A NEW REALITY: APSA AND THE REMAPPING OF THE SAHEL

The AU developed two important initiatives in the wake of the international intervention in Mali, meant to fill in the gaps in the AU's intervention framework in Mali and the Sahel. This was supposed to be done by operationalizing the APSA in the Sahelo-Saharan belt, and by augmenting the AU's crisis-response capacities. Scaling up the autonomy of the AU in security interventions was central to these initiatives, given the prominent role played by extra-continental actors, such as France, in compensating for the limitations of the AU's peace and security architecture.

The two initiatives, the Nouakchott Process and the African Capacity for Immediate Reaction to Crises (ACIRC), were established respectively in March and May 2013, as the AU was evaluating its Malian experience and while AFISMA was transitioning into a UN peacekeeping mission. They differ from previous continental initiatives in the sense that they are not constrained by APSA's strict regional division of the continent as enshrined in the 2008 Memorandum of Understanding between the AU and different RECs, including ECOWAS. In this regard, they are not restricted to operating in one region only but are transregional.

In the case of the Nouakchott Process, it involves actors from West Africa (ECOWAS countries), North Africa (Algeria, Libya and Mauritania) and Central Africa (Chad), but also non-state actors including RECs and other institutional bodies. They conceive a new space out of the coordination challenges they faced in Mali. The meaning of the Sahel shifted progressively from a regional space, sharing physical borders and geographical features, to a regional society, with the development of regional projects and initiatives, reflected both in the minds of the continent's policymakers and in their interactions with extra-continental actors such as France and the European Union, which are free from the AU and APSA's rigid conception of regions. In the words of Döring, they create a

“new geography for the ASF [African Standby Force]”, one of the pillars of the APSA, that is both trans-scalar and trans-regional (Döring 2018a).

I argue that these two new initiatives, informed by the AFISMA experience, also contributed to the actualization of the Sahel as a region at the continental level. Still, these new initiatives became mired in debates at the AU over the necessity of developing new initiatives rather than operationalizing and streamlining existing ones, and in the determination of Sahelian countries themselves to “work together and faster” on the challenges they commonly faced, under the framework of the G5 Sahel. The Nouakchott Process lost steam as the G5 Sahel rose and became a privileged partner of international actors, sparking debates about the influence of extra-continental actors and creating frictions with the continental body. These dynamics reflect discussions about the APSA and how the architecture designed at the continental level in 2004 has been translated into action in response to emerging crises affecting the continent.

The first part of this section will analyze how the Nouakchott Process and the ACIRC emerged at the continental level, before delving into the parallel initiative of Sahelian countries, that is the G5 Sahel. The second part will probe the dynamics between these different initiatives, between Sahelian imperatives and continental directives, what they have achieved so far and what they portend for the future of the APSA.

A. The Nouakchott Process

The Nouakchott process on the Enhancement of Security Cooperation and the Operationalization of the African Peace and Security Architecture in the Sahelo-Saharan region was adopted by the AU on 17 March 2013, following a meeting by Sahelian countries convened by Mohamed ould Abdel Aziz, the then AU President, in Nouakchott. The meeting, which occurred as AFISMA was being re-hatted into a UN peacekeeping mission, aimed to enhance “security cooperation and the operationalization of the African Peace and Security Architecture in the Sahelo-Saharan Region” and saw the participation of representatives (ministers and ambassadors) of Algeria, Burkina Faso, Chad, Côte d’Ivoire, Guinea, Libya, Mali, Niger, Nigeria and Senegal with representatives of the UNSC’s P5

participating as observers (Döring 2018a footnote 66). Several non-governmental institutions working on security in the Sahel participated as well, as did the AU's African Centre for the Study and Research on Terrorism (ACSRT), the Joint Operational Staff Committee (CEMOC), the Committee of Intelligence and Security Services in Africa (CISSA), the Fusion and Liaison Unit (UFL), ECOWAS, the EU, and the UN. These different actors

acknowledged that the Sahelo-Saharan region continues to face serious security challenges linked especially to terrorism, transnational crime and the proliferation of weapons. They affirmed their determination to make renewed efforts to address these challenges (African Union 2013c, paragraph 6).

The Nouakchott Process was not the first security initiative in the region; the CEMOC was created in 2009 among Mali, Mauritania, Algeria and Niger to fight against Islamist groups in the Sahel, and the UFL, one year later, to foster intelligence sharing among the four CEMOC members plus Burkina Faso, Libya, Chad and Niger. But these initiatives never really took off and played only a marginal role as the conflict in Mali unfolded in the north and progressively shifted to the south in Central Mali, threatening neighbouring countries such as Niger and Burkina Faso. The Nouakchott Process, on the other hand, was developed in the framework of the APSA, unlike the preceding initiatives, and was characterized by the diversity of its participants, which showed a shift from the institution's traditional regional rigidity to greater flexibility, driven by the reality of the conflict in Mali. Spearheaded from Bamako by the MISAHÉL and a key pillar of the AU's Sahel Strategy, the Nouakchott Process constituted a first manifestation both of the resolutions of the PSC meeting of 25 January 2013, which urged neighbouring countries to support Mali and actualize AFISMA, and of the meeting in Brussels (5 February 2013) of the Mali Support and Follow Up Group, which

reiterated the crucial importance of cooperation between the neighbouring countries of Mali in the field of intelligence and effective border control, to enhance the effectiveness of the fight against terrorism and transnational crime and facilitate the execution of the mandate of the African-led International Support Mission in Mali (African Union 2013b).

In this regard, the objectives of the foundational meeting were:

- To enhance the effectiveness of the fight against terrorism and transnational crime, through appropriate border monitoring measures and exchange of intelligence information;
- To facilitate the fulfillment of the mandate of the African-led International Support Mission in Mali (AFISMA) and particularly the fight against terrorist and criminal networks; and
- To initiate a reflection on operational security arrangements within the APSA, that will enable countries of the Sahelo-Saharan region to effectively deal with the common challenges facing them in terms of security (AU PSC 2013b).

While the second strategic objective would become moot months after the first meeting with the re-hatting of AFISMA, the institutionalization of the process was incremental. The Nouakchott process, for example, outlined several measures aimed at addressing the security challenges in the Sahel, namely a meeting of the Ministers of Security at least once every six months, while the country's heads of intelligence and security services would meet every two months to devise ways to cooperate, share intelligence, and prevent attacks in the region. At the third ministerial meeting in Niamey on 19 February 2014, participating ministers of foreign affairs resolved to hold a summit to mobilize greater political support and to foster ownership among the member-states (African Union 2014b). At the strategic level, the Nouakchott Process formalizes the Sahel as a region at the continental level, precisely where the APSA needs to be operationalized. It attempts to bridge existing borders by pooling the resources of the relevant brigades of the APSA (West, North and Central) to strengthen control of the region's notoriously porous borders and foster intelligence sharing among countries facing a similar challenge.

The AU was confronted in Mali with the difference between a state's domestic sovereignty and international recognition. Mali's problems were fundamentally local and rooted in its postcolonial history. Yet identifying them did not mean that the AU was able to address them due to the nation-state's jealousy over its sovereignty. To address this gap, the AU stressed the necessity of going beyond Westphalian conceptions of statehood to capture the reality of how states function in the region. Without questioning state sovereignty, the Nouakchott Process aims to

circumvent its rigidities by channeling resources and capabilities to tackle a threat that is seamless, transnational and even transregional. For one of the chief architects of the process, the regional compartmentalization of peace and security initiatives should not be a hindrance to the AU and its other regional partners. In his words,

Article 16 [of the 2008 Memorandum] does not mean that the AU must work exclusively with RECs that signed the Memorandum. It also includes ad hoc and temporary initiatives, and it is on this basis that we set up the Nouakchott Process. The idea was to push a new paradigm for intelligence and that a transnational threat means that we have to develop our capacities and our thinking beyond the prisms of nationhood. The paradox being that national security had to be reevaluated with the presence of a transnational threat. We have set up the Nouakchott Process as a meeting for the heads of intelligence services of the 11 countries, and the AU does not even have to be present at these meetings. Having them for two days in a capital, generates discussions and debates, and this is how we saw the benefits of the process. It worked for a time.¹⁸⁵

Through these meetings, the 11 countries and the regional organizations aimed to identify elements of a “Security Architecture for the Sahelo-Saharan countries” that would involve the three relevant regional brigades (West, North and Centre) of the African Standby Force. Between March 2013 and November 2014, when the fourth ministerial meeting was held, there were six meetings of the Heads of Intelligence and Security Services that resulted in the adoption of operational conclusions, deepened security cooperation and capacity-building initiatives at the national level.¹⁸⁶ The meetings also proved to be a valuable mechanism for building confidence among the members of the process for the purpose of preventing and combating terrorism and transnational crime and overcoming the mistrust that could have been generated by the transnational dimension of the threat in the region. The meetings also constituted an opportunity to build the capacities of the respective nations to collect and analyze intelligence information.

The Nouakchott process constituted a way of bridging the APSA’s rigid cartography of RSG by bypassing subsidiarity, RECs and their challenges. By operationalizing a “Sahelo-Saharan” region, it constituted an ambitious

¹⁸⁵ Interview with senior AU official (Addis Ababa: 30 May 2019).

¹⁸⁶ The first meeting was held in Bamako, on 18 April 2013 ; the second in Abidjan, on 20 and 21 June 2013; the third in N’Djamena, on 10 September 2013; the fourth in Niamey, on 19 February 2014; the fifth in Ouagadougou, on 19 and 20 May 2014; and the sixth in Dakar, on 13 and 14 November 2014. (African Union 2014b)

attempt to build cooperation where it did not exist before and facilitate the sharing of experiences and intelligence between countries with differing capacities. It also marked the return of Algeria in its traditional area of influence (the Sahel). It

cut through the scalar and in particular hierarchical relationship between the member states of a region and the various regional bodies by including all of them equally and somewhat outside the usual manifestations of the APSA norm on subsidiarity and the principles for regional arrangements enshrined in Chapter VIII of the UN [Charter]” (Döring 2018b, 45).

Beyond capacity-building and intelligence-sharing, the process initially envisioned the deployment of a regional force brigade in Mali in late 2014 as the UN peacekeeping mission was grappling with low-level insurgency and attacks against civilians. The African troop-contributing countries gathered in Niamey in November 2014 to stress the need for the early enhancement of MINUSMA, in terms of means and resources, with a view to enabling it to fulfill its mandate more effectively. This perspective was also endorsed by the Chairperson of the Commission in her report on the process, where she asked the UNSC to accelerate the full capacity for MINUSMA and requested that consideration be given to the establishment of a rapid intervention force for northern Mali, within the framework of the Nouakchott Process on the Enhancement of Security Cooperation and the Operationalization of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) (African Union 2014a).

It was during the 4th ministerial meeting of 17 December 2014 that the possibility of deploying an African offensive force in the Sahel, similar to the Force Intervention Brigade against the M23 rebellion in Eastern DRC, was formally proposed. Two options were considered for the region to address the multifaceted threats it faced: the establishment of joint patrols or either the formation of mixed and integrated units to police the borders and fight against illicit networks in the region. The joint patrols could have operated on an ad hoc basis on different sides of a shared border or within a specific country, following the signature of bilateral and multilateral agreements. They would have been tasked with operational reconnaissance surveillance and monitoring missions that would be jointly planned and implemented. The objectives of these patrols, to have separate national commands but a common coordination cell, ultimately would be to collect intelligence information on terrorist groups and criminal activities,

show presence and deny opportunities to these same actors, monitor crossing points, support existing security services at the border, and if necessary, neutralize terrorist and criminal groups. Contributions by member countries could be in the form of operational units (with battalions ranging from 700 to 850 personnel) or logistical support.

The mixed unit option was viewed as a higher level of commitment that would pool capacities and facilitate coordination. They were envisioned to be of a minimum size of a joint battle group (1000 to 1500 personnel) and composed of infantry units, special forces and force multipliers that would perform tasks similar to the joint patrol units.

Neither military option was ever implemented due to a lack of consensus among the member-states and the development of similar initiatives at the state level. The AU expected MINUSMA to support the initiative, but the UN stressed the “exceptional nature of the FIB in DRC, and that [the AU] does not refer to it”.¹⁸⁷ This thinking contrasted with the AU, who believed that “MINUSMA was not up to the threat faced by Mali and in the region”; the UN was expected to do more than defend its mandate and its peacekeeping troops, and do more on the protection of civilians. With MINUSMA’s inability to take offensive operations, an African force under the Nouakchott Process could have stepped in for that task even though the French were already present via *Serval*. These debates reflected the necessity of “breaking at the doctrinal level with the thinking of the UN. A threat must be fought because the existence of some of the countries is at stake, and there is no other option than fighting it”.¹⁸⁸

The Nouakchott process constituted a promising development that linked a cluster of conflicts going from Mali to Nigeria and Libya. But four years after the first meeting, its objectives are far from being met, and the process seems to have been marginalized given that many of its participants are involved in the G5 Sahel, which is seen as more viable in the short term. The stalling of the process is mainly due to political hurdles, which undermined the

¹⁸⁷ Interview with senior AU official (Addis Ababa: 30 May 2019)

¹⁸⁸ Interview with senior AU official (Addis Ababa: 30 May 2019)

deployment of a regional counterterrorist force. These obstacles reflected the reactive nature of the process, which was initiated as a supporting framework for AFISMA, and as a commitment to overcome the limitations that were apparent in the AU's intervention in Mali. After a few years of dormancy, the Nouakchott process was "reactivated" in 2018 with the view of supporting the G5 Sahel, a security mechanism initiated by core Sahelian countries in 2014.

B. The African Capacity for Immediate Reaction to Crises (ACIRC)

The AU also developed the African Capacity for Immediate Response to Crises (ACIRC), another initiative drawn from its experience in Mali, to quickly address emerging security hotspots on the continent (Williams, 2016: 206). The Chairperson of the Commission first proposed ACIRC in April 2013 for two reasons: the first was the need to address the slow generation and deployment of ill-fitted and ill-equipped troops in Mali, which led to *Operation Serval*. In her report, the Chairperson stressed the

considerable delay in the operational readiness, logistical preparation and strength build-up of the units placed at the disposal of AFISMA, due, in particular, to logistical and financial constraints", "Africa's inability, despite its political commitment to Mali, to confront the emergency generated by the offensive launched by the terrorist, criminal and armed groups and to respond adequately to the Malian government's request for assistance.

and

the geographical position of Mali in the Sahel-Sahara region, at the crossroads of the Western, Northern and Central regions of Africa and the deployment of units belonging to two different RECs [which] initially presented challenges in terms of coordination" (African Union 2013f).

The report also stressed that the Rapid Deployment Capability of the ASF was far from being operational. There was a gap to be filled in one of the main pillars of the APSA, and the 21st Ordinary Session of the AU Assembly of Heads of State and Government did so by establishing the ACIRC in May 2013 (Zabadi and Ichite 2016, 69).

Unlike the regional brigades of the ASF, ACIRC is an exclusively military instrument without a civilian or a police component, designed to respond rapidly and independently of external support in case of emergencies. It aims to establish an efficient, robust and credible force, which can be deployed very quickly to conduct operations of

limited duration and objectives or contribute to creating enabling conditions for the deployment of larger AU and/or UN peace operations (African Union 2013f, 7). More concretely, the ACIRC is supposed to be deployed for:

- stabilization, peace enforcement and intervention missions;
- neutralization of terrorist groups, other cross-border criminal entities, armed rebellions; and
- emergency assistance to the Member States within the framework of the principle of non-indifference for the protection of civilians.

ACIRC is to be enabled by the voluntary contributions of a select number of AU member states, from different regions, to contribute to a rapid African response when summoned by the AU PSC¹⁸⁹. Thus, it is not constrained by the geographical divisions of the ASF but draws from a reservoir of 5,000 troops, composed of three tactical battle groups (consisting of three infantry battalions of 850 soldiers each), an artillery support group, and an air component (400 soldiers) that includes aircraft and helicopters, logistical support and strategic support (African Union 2013f, 10). The 1500-strong tactical battle groups are to be deployed by a lead nation or a group of AU member states.

The tactical battle groups are supposed to be the vanguard of the ACIRC, and the troop-contributing countries are supposed to sustain their operations for 30 days at least, independently from AU support. By using the provision of tactical groups as vanguards to its larger operations, the AU recognized the importance of individual states in determining the success of regional military interventions. The national interests of the states were given space through their willingness to contribute to the ACIRC. Indeed, as history has shown, the success of regional interventions by ECOWAS was determined by the willingness of individual states to provide leadership: militarily,

¹⁸⁹ The ACIRC volunteering countries include Algeria, Egypt and Mauritania (North Africa); Ethiopia, Rwanda, Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda (East Africa); Cameroon and Chad (Central Africa) ; Angola and South Africa (Southern Africa); and Benin, Burkina Faso, Guinea, Liberia and Senegal (West Africa). It is understood that South Africa played a leading role in the development of the ACIRC (Karuhanga 2015)

politically and financially. Such was the case of the ECOMOG, which was mainly funded by Nigeria, and the ECOMIG, which was spurred forward by the will of Senegal to pursue a political change in neighbouring Gambia (Hartmann 2017).

The new initiative constituted a streamlined procedure for the deployment of African troops in areas of conflict when compared to the cumbersome process of the ASF. It is modelled on a coalition-of-the-willing basis under a lead nation, and self-funded initially, to make the response more rapid. For Williams, ACIRC was supposed to address several limitations of the ASF that were glaring in the context of the African response to the conflict in Mali and elsewhere (Williams 2016).

The first was the cumbersome and problematic decision-making process that would authorize the deployment of the ASF regional brigades in case of conflict, especially in Scenario 6, where the international community does not act promptly when cases of human security violations are imminent (Williams 2016, 207). Scenario 6 deployments require the authorization of the AU Assembly, a body that meets twice a year usually. In the context of the ACIRC, the authorization would arise out of the Commission, especially the PSC, which is to iron out a working coalition from the pledged volunteer countries. In the context of Mali, the October 2012 concept note of the AFISMA scheduled the deployment of troops in September 2013 and it was only the resolve of France and Chad in the face of the southward advance of jihadist groups that led to the progressive deployment of regional troops beginning in January 2013.

The second limitation of the ASF that would be covered through ACIRC was the initial support from the AU: through the ACIRC, TCCs are footing all the bills for the deployment of the 1500-strong tactical battle group during the first 30 days (Warner 2015). Only after this initial period would they receive support (logistical, financial) from the African Union.

The third limitation of the ASF that would be overcome by the ACIRC is its regional approach to rapid responses. The scope of the ACIRC is continental and is not constrained by the geography of regions, as designed by the APSA. It is based on the willingness of individual African states to intervene.

The ACIRC was inspired by the actions of Chad and Algeria in Mali, two countries that do not belong to ECOWAS but that were decisive in the regional response (Williams, 2016:207), but also by rapid response deployments of South Africa and Tanzania in eastern DRC against the M23 rebellion through the Force Intervention Brigade in 2013. It is no wonder that these countries, along with Uganda, have shown their commitment to the initiative which is being steered by the AU Commission. The French involvement in Mali was not welcomed by African powers in the AU and many saw it as an embarrassment for the AU and its member states (Warner 2015); South Africa and Algeria which often have similar positions based on their liberation struggles saw it as a *fait accompli* and pushed for the development of the ACIRC. Under President Zuma, South Africa hosted the first ACIRC summit in Pretoria on 5 November 2013, while the SANDF was involved in the FIB in DRC.

For all of its prospective benefits, ACIRC was not received with universal acclaim but instead reflected the tensions and embarrassment within the AU concerning the deployment of AFISMA and Serval. Its development has thus been linked to the tensions between “anti-imperialist” and less militant member-states of the AU, with the successes of *Operation Serval* in Mali, during the 50th anniversary of the AU, reminding the continent of its continued dependence on extra-continental partners (Ambrosetti and Esmenjaud 2014). In this view, the development of the ACIRC in the four months after the deployment of AFISMA felt like a political necessity to fill the gaps of the ASF and the APSA. The Malian experience forced the AU to establish a rapid response capability to address similar conflict situations if it wanted to remain a credible security actor in the continent (Apuuli 2013). Still linking it with the response to the situation in Mali, de Coning argued that the development of the ACIRC results from frustrations related to the heavy investment of the AU and its financial supporters in the ASF since 2003, and the limited usefulness of the ASF in emergencies like Mali (de Coning 2014). ASF was expected to be

ready in 2006, then 2010 and later in 2015, when it was declared operational following the exercise Amani Africa II in Lohotla, South Africa, which was still marred by logistical failings in the deployment of troops. De Coning also highlights the disconnect between the peace operations support model of the AU and the reality of conflict on the continent, leading to discussions over the utility and the necessity of financing the different brigades of the ASF, whose staff services are efficient at planning, training and logistics, but slow to deploy. In this regard, the challenges faced by the AU and ECOWAS in Mali stem more from the lack of preparedness on the part of national contingents of the regional brigades, than from a fault in strategic planning.¹⁹⁰

The development of the ACIRC generated considerable debate at the AU over the broader continental security architecture. While South Africa, especially under President Zuma, saw the ACIRC as a necessity given the Malian experience and the successes of the SADC's Force Intervention Brigade against the M23 in late 2013, several other countries (Ethiopia, Kenya and Nigeria among others) saw it as an unnecessary duplication of the mandate of the ASF¹⁹¹ (Warner 2015; Williams 2016). It also had an intra-organizational dimension, as many countries saw in the new mechanism a means of increasing their influence within the AU. While all countries within the regional brigades have equal standing within the ASF, it is different with the ACIRC. Volunteering countries increase their influence within the AU but also among international partners, through their contributions to ACIRC. This has led to turf wars within the AU, primarily between South Africa and other southern countries, against Nigeria.¹⁹² As one of the pillars of the Protocol on Peace and Security, the AU holds ultimate control over the deployment of the ASF and individual states have little leverage over each other. The situation is different with the ACIRC.

¹⁹⁰ Interview with senior military official #1, AU PSD (Addis Ababa: 31 May 2019), and with member of the ECOWAS Standby Force (Abuja: 19 July 2019). The ECOWAS official highlighted during the interview the small control held by ECOWAS over the availability and equipment of national contingents earmarked for the ESF for example.

¹⁹¹ Interview with several AU senior military officials (Addis Ababa: May and June 2019)

¹⁹² Interview with senior military official #1, AU PSD (Addis Ababa: 31 May 2019 and 28 June 2019)

Several countries saw the failure in Mali as another reason for the quickening of the operationalization of the ASF, rather than the creation of a new security mechanism that could derail the existing one. For example, Nigeria was not receptive to the ACIRC “based on the fact that the ASF was yet to be fully consummated, and so did not see the need to rush into the development of another mechanism” (Zabadi and Ichite 2016: 69). This assessment becomes more relevant when we consider that despite its conceptual differences with the ASF, ACIRC is still “plagued by the same constraints – regional and continental buy-in, UN approval and money – that have prevented the ASF from successfully deploying up to now” and for this reason, it might be more cost-effective to prioritize the existing ASF (Louw-Vaudran 2016b).

These divisions had a lasting impact on the future of the ACIRC, which, although foreseen as a temporary stop-gap measure until the full operationalization of the ASF, constituted a political manifesto of the “African solutions to African problems” ideal. The declaration of the operationalization of the ASF in late 2015 meant theoretically that the ACIRC was no longer necessary. As of July 2019, the AU is working on harmonizing the ASF and the ACIRC into a single pillar despite their very different models of force generation and financing. The creation and then decision to harmonize the ACIRC within the ASF was first and foremost a political statement from some AU member-states, embarrassed by the travails of AFISMA¹⁹³. In many ways, it reflected the organization’s reactive stance on the promotion of its ideals and the tensions within the body. The decision to form the ACIRC was met with many pledges by member-states and a certain enthusiasm that became progressively diluted as the organization, buffeted by political differences among its member states, was working to make it operational. ACIRC became a hindrance to the AU when the ASF was declared operational in November 2015.

Even the issue of harmonization remains conceptually obscure. While the different communiqués of the heads of state talk about harmonization, the Defense Staff Committee within the PSC works more towards integrating

¹⁹³ Interview with senior military official #1, AU PSD (Addis Ababa: 31 May 2019 and 28 June 2019)

ACIRC in the ASF. It is hard to see how the innovative features of the ACIRC will be safeguarded with the harmonization process, and how the “coalition of the willing” model could be maintained with the regional brigades¹⁹⁴. Once more, the process reflects the predominance of political considerations over strategic orientations at the AU. It is a compromise between supportive countries such as South Africa and less supportive ones such as Nigeria.

Reflecting on these developments, one senior AU official stressed that

ACIRC was never deployed anywhere, and with the statement that ASF has become operational, it is unlikely to be. It was more a political decision than anything else since there is nothing technical on [ACIRC]. From the moment we decided that ASF was ready [even though it may not be], there is no more need for the ACIRC. The talk about harmonizing it within the ASF is just a political courtesy [to some of the states from southern Africa that were very enthusiastic about the ACIRC]”.¹⁹⁵

The modes of operation of the ACIRC have evolved during this harmonization process, and now, the AU seems to consider the possibility of deploying a regional brigade of the ASF, beyond its original region, in crises.¹⁹⁶ In some interpretations of the ASF, nothing prevents the AU from asking one of the REC’s to deploy its regional brigade in another region. The Southern brigade that has been put in “operational standby” since 2015 could intervene anywhere on the continent. This stratagem reproduces the trans-regional dimension of the ACIRC into the ASF. But it is unlikely to be ever acted upon, given the firm stances of some member-states towards peace operations in their backyard and the uneven development of the different brigades of the ASF. The opposition to the ACIRC remains strong, and it is unlikely that its innovations will be harmonized within the APSA, with the development of ad hoc coalitions in the Sahel.

Indeed, these developments also parallel ad hoc initiatives taken by AU member-countries, outside of the framework of the APSA, in their backyard to tackle national and security threats. The two most relevant examples

¹⁹⁴ Interview with senior AU military official #2 (Addis Ababa: 30 May 2019)

¹⁹⁵ Interview with senior military official #1, AU PSD (Addis Ababa: 28 June 2019)

¹⁹⁶ Interview with senior AU military official #2 (Addis Ababa: 30 May 2019).

of these ad hoc initiatives are the Multi-National Joint Task Force (MNJTF) through which Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad and Niger pool their military resources to tackle the Boko Haram insurgency, and in the Sahel, in the wake of the Malian conflict, the G5 Sahel and its Joint Force, which reunited Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Burkina Faso and Chad against AQIM and other spoiler groups, with a heavy support of the international community.

3. THE SAHEL'S "CORE COUNTRIES" RESPONSE: THE G5 SAHEL

The formation of the group of five Sahelian states into the G5 Sahel is a direct consequence of the challenges faced by the APSA and existing regional actors in effectively coordinating the regional response to the Malian conflict, but also of the renewed international interest in the Sahel. The regional grouping aims to address the trans-regional nature of the Malian conflict, which is a poor fit with the task division between regional economic communities and regional standby forces as outlined in the APSA.

The G5 Sahel was formally launched in February 2014 in Nouakchott (Mauritania) by Mali and four of its neighbours: Mauritania, Chad, Niger and Burkina-Faso. The group's stated objective was to address the transnational security challenges affecting the peripheral areas (Sahelian regions) of its member countries but also to meet the development needs of the populations of these regions (ICG 2017). In this regard, the G5 Sahel's objectives reflect the "security-development nexus" that has been central to several initiatives in the Sahel, especially the EU's Sahel strategy, which sees a continuum between development challenges and security risks. Through this dual approach, the G5 Sahel attempts to address the security-development nexus that has long been highlighted as a source of instability by the country's external partners, such as the European Union. This reflects both a shift and a continuity in the governance of security in the region: a shift in the sense that the G5 Sahel's authority is located at the level of the Sahelian states and not at the PSC, as is the case with the Nouakchott Process and the ACIRC, but also a continuity given that many of the G5 Sahel's objectives and institutions align with the strategic goals of the most important extra-continental actors. This is particularly apparent in the unequal relationship of the EU and the AU towards the G5 Sahel. While the EU has played an essential supportive role in the development of the G5 Sahel

and even in its strategic orientations, the AU has had a fractious relationship with the new organization, especially at the beginning.¹⁹⁷ The G5 Sahel was created at a critical moment in 2014, at the peak of the international interest in the Sahel, and when international organizations such as the EU, the World Bank, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and the African Development Bank, developed comprehensive development strategies for the “Sahel”. Indeed, the formation of the G5 Sahel occurred just three months after a multi-stakeholder visit to discuss and assess development issues in the region by the Heads of the UN, World Bank, EU and OIC among others in Mali, Chad, Mauritania, Niger, Burkina Faso and Senegal, in November 2013. Five of these six countries reunited in the G5 Sahel to position themselves as critical partners for these “Sahel strategies”. In this regard, the G5 Sahel participated in the transformation of the Sahel from a “space” to a “region” with its proper regionness, independent of existing regional and continental mechanisms. It also reflects the inadequacies of the APSA in confronting threats unconfined by national borders, which has led affected states to band together to mitigate these threats. The Multi-National Joint Task Force (MNJTF) of the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC) which since 2012 brings together Benin, Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria¹⁹⁸ to fight the Boko Haram insurgency is also symptomatic of this trend, where states coalesce to pursue a militarist strategy against threats on their shared borders.

The G5 Sahel is structured similarly to ECOWAS and the AU with three main governance bodies. The supreme authority rests with the Conference of the Heads of State, which establishes the strategic policies of the G5 Sahel and that meets at least annually for its ordinary session¹⁹⁹. The Conference is headed by a President who is usually elected for a two-year term. The second institutional pillar of the G5 Sahel is the Council of Ministers, which advises and also translates into policies the decisions of the Conference of the Heads of State. Composed of the Ministers tasked with Economic Affairs and Development of member-states, or of any ministerial departments whose

¹⁹⁷ Interview with several AU officials of the Peace and Security Department (Addis Ababa: June 2019).

¹⁹⁸ Cameroon and Chad belong to the Central African Region while Benin, Niger and Nigeria, as ECOWAS member-states belong to the West African region, per APSA’s regional mapping of the continent.

¹⁹⁹ The conference can also meet for extraordinary sessions at the express demand of one of the 5 heads of state.

responsibilities are on the agenda of the Conference, the Council meets two times per year for its ordinary session, but also for extraordinary sessions when a request is made by its President of the Conference or by a majority of the ministers of the Council. The Presidency of the Council is held by the representative of the nation, which holds the President of the Conference of Heads of State. The Council of Ministers also carries out any other tasks set for it by the Conference. The last pillar of this governance structure is the Permanent Secretariat of the G5 Sahel, which runs the day-to-day operations of the organization and executes the decisions of the Council of Ministers. The Permanent Secretariat also manages issues related to administration and finance and provides technical expertise to the five member-states and with the execution of the organization's development and security strategy. Headquartered in Nouakchott, the Permanent Secretary is supported by four experts on "Resilience", "Defense and Security", "Infrastructures," and "Governance" in its missions. These four sectors reflect the strategic objectives enunciated in the organization's Strategy for the Sahel.²⁰⁰

The formation of the G5 Sahel has been ascribed to the political deadlock of the Nouakchott Process, which has led several of its members, those most hard-pressed by security challenges, to unite together in order "to move faster forward and together".²⁰¹ This view, although greeted with skepticism at the formation of the G5 Sahel (Slate Afrique 2014), has come to be more accepted within the AU, as the continental organization realizes the imperative of collaborating with and supporting the G5 Sahel. The skepticism stems from the predominant role played by France and other international actors involved in Malian and Sahelian affairs in supporting the G5 Sahel, support that comes to the detriment of existing regional mechanisms such as ECOWAS and the AU. In this view, the skepticism may stem from inter-organizational rivalry among African organizations, heavily dependent on external funding for their programs, in a region that is of increasing interest (and concern) to international partners. But beyond this, other

²⁰⁰ Each expert hail from a different country of the G5 Sahel.

²⁰¹ Interview with former political advisor to Operation Barkhane commander (Skype/Dakar: 12 January 2018).

questions have beset the G5 Sahel membership since 2014; the absence of Algeria has been a regular question mark among observers, given that Algeria has considerable experience not only fighting jihadist groups within its territories (during its Civil War, 1991-2002) but also developing and implementing reconciliation and peacebuilding policies after conflict; in both senses, Algeria's experience could have been useful to the emerging organization. Other perspectives on the membership of the G5 Sahel point out the limitations of the Algerian-led CEMOC during the conflict in Mali, which frustrated several of its member-states, but also the traditional Algerian refusal to deploy military troops outside of its territory, which could become a hindrance for the newer organization.²⁰² Considering the makeup of the G5 Sahel, one AU senior military official involved in the APSA opined that

G5 Sahel does not include all Sahelian countries. There are 13 countries in the Nouakchott Process [which covers all Sahelian countries, per the AU]. Among those, five decided to work together, due to the specific challenges they faced within the process, mainly security and counterterrorism. It was a legitimate decision to see that nucleus within the group work together in a tighter framework.²⁰³

More than five years after its creation, the development aspect of the G5 Sahel's objectives has taken a secondary role compared to the more pressing security challenges faced by its member-states. This shift reflects the fluidity of an organization that has been trying to find its footing within a region crowded with security initiatives, and which is dependent on its external partners for several of its activities. The development dimension of the G5 Sahel, while equal to its security dimension in the organization's foundational declaration

Has gradually receded into the background as the G5's initiators have turned their attention to the area of most interest to the international community: security. The priority has, therefore, shifted toward the construction of a joint armed force, a task that has proved very difficult, especially in terms of its financing" (ICG 2017: 1).

A. The G5 Sahel and the development needs in the Sahel

To coordinate development projects in the G5 Sahel region, donor countries, led by Germany, decided to create a new platform, the Alliance Sahel, to coordinate their activities and prevent the duplication of efforts. The Alliance

²⁰² Interview with Malian diplomat involved in the Algiers peace process (Bamako: 18 October 2017). This is echoed in another interview I had with an AU official who said that "Algeria was interested in joining Sahelian mechanisms in order to control them rather than see them forward" (Addis Ababa: 31 May 2019).

²⁰³ Interview with senior military official #1, AU PSD (Addis Ababa: 30 May 2019).

Sahel was set up in July 2017 by key international and national development agencies to support the G5 Sahel's development agenda through six priority fields:

- Education and youth employment
- Agriculture, rural development, food security
- Energy and Climate
- Governance
- Decentralization and basic services
- Internal security

Members of the Alliance Sahel

France	<i>French Development Agency (AFD)</i>
Germany	<i>Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development</i>
European Union	<i>European Union (EU)</i>
The World Bank	<i>The World Bank (WB)</i>
Africa	<i>African Development Bank (AfDB)</i>
UN	<i>United Nations Development Program</i>
Italy	<i>Italian Development Cooperation</i>
Spain	<i>National Development Cooperation</i>
UK	<i>UK Aid</i>
Luxemburg	<i>Luxembourg Aid and Development</i>
Denmark	<i>NA</i>

The Netherlands	<i>NA</i>
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Coordinated by the EU, the G5 Sahel is the Alliance’s main interlocutor. This partnership aims to facilitate coordination and the rapid implementation of development and humanitarian projects prioritized by Sahelian countries. Indeed, it is the G5 Sahel that defines the projects and objectives to be achieved, and the Alliance facilitates their implementation through “innovative” and “flexible financing methods” that may involve contracting with NGOs, local authorities and private actors. It has taken some time for the partnership to take off due to the need to streamline working methods and clarify priority development projects. Each partner has their priorities for the Sahel, and these may not align with the objectives of G5 Sahel member states. For example, Germany’s emphasis on policing rather than military support is at odds with the G5 Sahel’s focus on strengthening military capacities and operationalizing their joint force.²⁰⁴ Yet the Alliance Sahel reflects donor priorities on issues that are relevant to them (and also to Sahelian countries) such as migration and trafficking, which they are attempting to contain through development programs. Indeed, the G5 Sahel was born out of a desire to implement several development portfolios in tandem with its bilateral and multilateral partners.

One of the primary structuring documents of the development dimension of the G5 Sahel is its Priority Investment Plan (PIP), a framework policy designed to address the short, medium- and long-term governance and development needs of these states’ Sahelian territories. First developed in June 2014, the PIP has been revised several times to better reflect the common priorities of the five member-states and to align it with the strategic objectives of their partners in the Sahel.

The first PIP of the G5 Sahel (June 2014) listed dozens of projects structured around governance (USD 336mln), infrastructure (USD 567.5 mln), security (USD 175 mln) and resilience (USD 441 mln), and was designed as a

²⁰⁴ Interview with EU senior advisor (Abuja/Skype: 13 August 2019).

framework document with international actors in the Sahel (Desgrais 2019). The unbalanced nature between the security and development dimensions of the G5 Sahel has contributed to the lack of coherence and synergy between its policies on “security” and those focused on “development” (Desgrais 2019). Indeed, the first PIP was developed a few months after the creation of the organization, in June 2014, and before the development of their Sahel Development Strategy (Desgrais 2019: 100). The first iteration did not align perfectly with the pillars of the strategy; it reflected first and foremost, the development needs of individual member-states and was designed quickly under pressure to submit projects to development partners. Indeed, the G5 Sahel, its emphasis on the security-development nexus, and its first PIP emerged in the wake of a regional tour by the leadership of several multilateral organizations, aimed at operationalizing the UN integrated strategy in the Sahel. A G5 Sahel official, quoted in Desgrais, stressed that:

The Heads of State pressured us because there were many funding pledges for the Sahel following Ban Ki-Moon’s visit. The Heads of State believed that they had to capture the pledges quickly: “Ministers had to meet and establish an investment program that will be presented to partners”. The first plan amounting to XOF 7000 bn [USD 12mln] reflected the funding pledges made by Ban Ki-Moon (Desgrais 2019, 102).

Following the decision to deploy a Joint Force in February 2017, the G5 Sahel member countries decided to revise their PIP and to address development issues in their space, in partnership with the donor organizations of the Alliance Sahel. Between 2014 and 2018, there have been several iterations of the PIP, the development program for the G5 Sahel. The cost of the PIP and the timeline for its realization were both considered problematic by the G5 Sahel’s partners in closed forums (Desgrais 2019: 104). The November 2016 version developed for 2017-2019 amounted to €8.8 billion; it was further reduced to €6.2 billion in February 2018, and later to €1.9 billion in the latest version (November 2018) for the 2019-2021 period (Desgrais 2019; G5 Sahel 2018). Many of the initial projects were deferred due to reservations of the G5 Sahel’s international partners, who were expected to fund them without being involved in their development.

The last version of the PIP was finalized in June 2017 and reflected a hierarchy of projects as outlined by the G5 Sahel and the Alliance Sahel. Some 40 development projects were considered “top priority” based on:

- Their transboundary nature, i.e. projects that would cover governance issues in the Mali-Mauritania border (Western sector), Mali/Burkina/Niger borderlands (Central sector) and Niger/Chad border (Eastern sector).
- Their impact: in the model of the UN’s Quick Impact Projects (QIPs), to showcase the positive presence of the state in marginalized areas through short-term projects.
- Their feasibility over two years (2019-2021) based on their convergence with the priorities of international partners in the Alliance Sahel.
- Their subsidiarity: that is through the comparative advantage of the G5 Sahel in complementing existing efforts of national governments, and other regional organizations.
- Their convergence with security needs: that is based on the impact they have on addressing pressing security issues (G5 Sahel 2018, 3).

The latest PIP of the G5 Sahel still reflects its outward posture towards its international partners. Although sensibly less expensive than its first version, the different projects of the PIP for 2019-2021 amount to almost €2 billion, out of which 87% (€ 1.7 bln) of the funding is yet to be found (G5 Sahel 2018:3). Different donor conferences have led to important pledges to the G5 Sahel on issues of development, but the disbursement of these funds has been slow so far, and even when they were timely, they may not necessarily fit into the 40 projects outlined in the latest version of the PIP. By January 2019, the Alliance Sahel announced the availability of €11 billion for its strategic objectives in the Sahel, but despite the close collaboration, they may differ from the projects identified in the updated PIP.

There is a tension inherent in the G5 Sahel’s approach to peacebuilding. If the organization was set up to move forward faster and has progressively become a key player in the region, it is yet to find its voice amid the different

interventions in its region. The emphasis on the security-development nexus reproduces the EU's different strategies in the Sahel since 2011, while the securitized responses remain heavily dependent on the support of France but also of MINUSMA, contributing to blurring the rigid line between peacekeeping and counterterrorism (Charbonneau 2017a; Karlsrud 2017; 2019).

B. The G5 Sahel Joint Force

The possibility of a joint force for the G5 Sahel has been on the table since the formation of the regional grouping. Already announced during a G5 Sahel summit in Chad in November 2015, it only became official in February 2017 following a summit of the organization's Heads of States and Government in Bamako. As a response to the insecurity in Mali and beyond, the G5 Sahel's origins are closely linked with the French military intervention, and distinct from the framework of the APSA. Before this formalization, the five member-states were already collaborating, in partnership with France through *Serval* and *Barkhane*, to address the security vacuum that was created by the downfall of the Gaddafi regime in Libya (Robinet 2018). Indeed, while terrorist groups were defeated militarily through the international intervention in Mali, the lack of effective state presence in southern Libya and the ineffective control of borders by Sahelian countries allowed these groups to retreat and launch regular attacks against national and international forces in Mali. The principle of coordinated patrols along a border area (OMCT, *opérations militaires conjointes transfrontalières*), by two national armies was agreed upon on 12 July 2013 during a meeting of France plus the future G5 Sahel member-states. The first operations took place along the border between Mali-Mauritania, Burkina Faso/Mali/Niger and Niger/Chad beginning in mid-2013. The first joint operation (*Opération Roussette*) was deployed in November 2013 on the border between Mali and Niger. A collaboration framework spearheaded by the six partners was already emerging, independently of the APSA framework, to better control the Sahelo-Saharan band by denying any safe haven to insurgent groups. This framework was mainly military and brought together the Sahelian states' joint chiefs of staff to secure their shared borders. The idea was to facilitate the interoperability of these armies, but also to build trust and confidence between states whose past collaboration

has been beset by friction and second-guessing (Robinet 2018). During the Niamey meeting, joint operations were scheduled for the Mali/Mauritania, Burkina Faso/Mali/Niger and Niger/Chad borders. These operations would be supported by Serval through planning, communications, aerial support and medevac, and also by the deployment of troops on both sides of these borders. For the implementation of these strategic decisions, an Operation Coordination Committee (CCO, *Comité de coordination opérationnelle*), composed of *Barkhane*'s commander and the five countries' Chiefs of Defense Staff, began to meet every three months, starting in October 2013. A different strategic framework for allied coordination (*document-cadre de coordination inter-alliés, DCCI*) would be agreed upon by these partners to establish a biannual schedule for joint border operations (Robinet 2018).

To support these coordinated operations, France amalgamated its interventions in Mali (*Serval*) and Chad (*Épervier*) into a regional counter-terrorist force in August 2014, that would support²⁰⁵ the operations in these countries' "ungoverned spaces" and deny spoiler groups safe havens, logistical caches and mobility. Through this, it is evident that France found in the future G5 Sahel member-states' an ideal and crucial partner for the stabilization of the Sahel, and this is echoed in the words of General de Villiers', the then French joint chief of staff, who told the French Parliament that the G5 Sahel was "the best framework to push forward security in the region" (Tisseron 2015, note 1).

The new French-led counter-terrorist operation, *Operation Barkhane*, headquartered in Ndjamena, played an essential role in supporting the rise of the joint force but also at the bilateral level in supporting the G5 Sahel member-states in their national territories. Indeed, *Barkhane*'s area of operation and deployment was tailored to the G5 Sahel's common space; *Barkhane* was conceived through the support provided by Serval to the joint border

²⁰⁵ The support was in planning, transmissions, aerial support, medical evacuation and through the deployment of Special Forces (Robinet 2018)

operations that were being undertaken by Mali and its four neighbours, beginning in November 2013. According to the former political advisor to *Barkhane*'s commander,

To strengthen its support to the African operations [on their shared borders] and to neutralize residual terrorist groups which were dispersing in the region, the [French] Joint Army Staff started thinking towards a potential regionalization of its regional presence: this process would lead to the deployment of Operation Barkhane. But this new cooperation framework did not wait however, for the formal deployment of Barkhane (Robinet 2018).

By the time Serval and Épervier were restructured into *Barkhane*, there had already been four joint border operations along the Mali/Niger/Burkina Faso, Mali/Mauritania and Niger/Chad borders. (Robinet 2018). The tasks that the French set for *Barkhane* are wide-ranging, and include fighting terrorism in the Sahel, contributing to the capacity-building of the G5 Sahel, and facilitating the efforts of both the joint force and MINUSMA, the UN's peacekeeping mission in Mali that has struggled to fulfill its protection of civilians mandate. For these tasks, *Barkhane* deployed about 4500 soldiers, 21 helicopters, 370 armoured vehicles, 330 light vehicles, eight fighter aircraft, eight transport aircraft, five drones over 14 distant bases in a territory larger than Western Europe (Sénat Français 2018).

Barkhane operates from three main bases in the region: its Headquarters at Ndjaména where the strategic command is located; its operational base Gao in Mali, from which 1000 of its 4500 troops are deployed for missions in Mali and beyond and lastly, Niamey (in Niger) where its drones and strike/transport air vehicles are deployed (Sénat Français 2018). In this regard, the French regional counter-terrorist operation has had a decisive impact by supporting not only the joint force in their tasks but also other international forces in the Sahel, such as MINUSMA, as well as US Special Forces operations in Niamey²⁰⁶. The military footprint of *Barkhane* in the Sahel remains impressive, with forces operating in Mali's Niger Bend region (between Menaka and Gao) while another French operation, Sabre, headquartered in Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso) and composed exclusively of special forces, often

²⁰⁶ *Barkhane* played an important role in supporting the withdrawal of US Green Berets and Nigerien soldiers, following an ambush by the ISGS in Tongo-Tongo, in 4 October 2017.

raids jihadist positions in the northern parts of Kidal and Timbuktu. *Barkhane* has secured tactical victories over the course of 2018 through their combined strike operation (involved special forces and air support) at Tin-Zaouatene in February 2018 and in northern Timbuktu (22 February 2019). The Tin-Zaouatene raid led to the deaths of several important GSIM (Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims) commanders close to Iyad ag Ghaly, such as Abdallah ag Ofata and Malick ag Wanesnet while the Timbuktu raid caused the death of Yahya Abou el-Hammam, the former AQIM emir for the Greater Sahara and then GSIM shadow governor for northern Timbuktu. Beyond these raids, *Barkhane* also leads sustained campaigns against jihadist factions through its “Koufra” operations, which involve deployments of 700 troops and 160 vehicles in a 10km column, operating for four weeks in remote areas with aerial support. Over the years, *Barkhane* has expanded its operations following the requests of specific Sahelian countries, in Burkina Faso against the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) and Ansarul Islam, and more controversially in Chad, to support the Déby regime against rebels based in Libya.

Thus, when the Joint Force of the G5 Sahel was announced in February 2017 and validated for a year by the AUPSC, it was only another milestone in a cooperation framework that was decided four years previously. If the joint force had been justified by the necessity of addressing threats that were not covered by existing frameworks, the pre-existence of the OMCT and the different DCCI negates the idea that the G5 Sahel was developed due to the Nouakchott Process’ failure to take off. These two processes developed in parallel, with the Nouakchott process beginning in March 2013, and what would become the joint force, starting with the meetings of Joint Chiefs of Staff in Niamey in July 2013. The proximity of the joint force and *Barkhane* cannot be overstated. Between August 2014 and October 2017, “more than 5,300 military personnel from G-5 Sahel have taken part in 250 joint operational instructions with Operation Barkhane” (United Nations 2017, 7).

As an ad hoc initiative, the security dimension of the G5 Sahel has been conceptually driven by Chad and France, who were the two main partners in the 2013 international intervention in Mali. The joint force scheduled operations are rooted in the experience of the Chad-Sudan joint Force (FMTS, *Force mixte tchado-soudanaise*),

created in 2010 as a monitoring force to secure their 2000 km shared border after nearly five years of proxy war through different rebel groups. Concretely, the FMTS is a civilian-military operation consisting of 3000 personnel originating from the two countries and under a joint rotating command between Abéché and El-Geneina²⁰⁷. The FMTS was designed initially to prevent incursions by rebel groups into the countries' respective territories but led to confidence-building between the two countries. Successful at preventing incursions from rebel groups, the FMTS progressively shifted its activities into fighting cross-border cattle rustling and securing the free flow of people and goods in the border areas.

Initially announced to include 10,000 personnel (RFI 2017) before being reduced to 5000, the joint force is divided into three sectors, where seven battalions, each consisting of 650 troops²⁰⁸ would be deployed to secure the different borders in the same fashion as with the OMCTs. These different sectors are:

- The Western sector which consists of the border region between Mali and Mauritania, with its headquarters in Nbeiket el Ahouach (Mauritania);
- The Central sector which consists of the border between Burkina, Mali and Niger, with its tactical headquarters in Niamey (Niger);
- The Eastern sector, which is the border between Niger and Chad, with its tactical headquarters in Wour (Chad).

²⁰⁷ Interview with former operations commander Barkhane, and commander of French troops in Senegal (Dakar: 19 January 2018)

As for the FMTS, the joint command is rotational and supported by two base commanders in Abéché (Chadian side of the border) and El-Geneina (Sudanese side of the border). In Abéché, the commander is Chadian while his deputy is Sudanese while in El-Geneina, the commander is Sudanese, and his deputy is Chadian. The operational commands rotate between the two posts every semester.

²⁰⁸ Each battalion is composed of 650 troops divided into 550 soldiers, and 100 police officers (or mounted police).

During these joint operations in these corridors, the relevant national components of the G5S would have the right of “hot pursuit” against terrorist and other spoiler elements within 50 km of each border, pending approval of their request by the joint force Commander at its Headquarters in Sévaré (Central Mali) (United Nations 2017, 6).

The formation of the Joint Force was met with an alliance among jihadist factions in Mali, with the different groups coalescing on 2 March 2017, into the GSIM under the leadership of Iyad ag Ghaly, the erstwhile commander of the 2nd Tuareg rebellion and later commander of Ansar Dine. The jihadist factions in Mali, far from being defeated by the French-led international intervention of January 2013, retreated into the rural and remote areas in order to reorganize. Moreover, they became an even clearer and present danger to Mali and its neighbours such as Burkina Faso and Niger, by establishing smaller cells in areas where they had not previously operated under the leadership of veterans of the 2012-3 conflict. Thus MUJAO became al-Mourabitoun under the leadership of Mokhtar Belmokhtar in the Gao region; AQIM consolidated its links with the disaffected tribes (namely the Ould Idriss and Ould Souleyman) of northern Timbuktu, while Ansar Dine continued to have an influence in the border region of Mali and Algeria, between Timiaouine-Boughessa and Tin-Zaouatene, and even in Kidal, through the HCUA, a group formed by some of its former commanders. As the peace process unfolded in 2014-2015, Ansar Dine became one of the main Islamist insurgents, and progressively extended its attacks on the central regions by coopting the grievances of other ethnic communities such as the Fulani of central Mali. Thus, in 2014, a new armed group, Katiba Macina²⁰⁹ emerged in Central Mali (region of Ségou and Mopti) to launch attacks against local and traditional authorities seen as collaborating with national and international forces; the group operated under the leadership of Hammadoun Kouffa, a Fulani former itinerant cleric and Ansar Dine commander presumed to have died during the battle of Konna in January 2013. Further east, another brigade, Katiba Serma, replicated this strategy in the Gourma-Rharous region, between Mopti and Timbuktu.

²⁰⁹ Sometimes labelled as the Macina Liberation Front (Front de libération du Macina) by the media.

Further south of Mopti, in the region of Burkina Faso, another faction, Ansaroul Islam, led by another veteran of the 2012-3 conflict, Mallam Ibrahim Dicko, emerged in 2015 to launch an insurgency against the Burkinabè state, demonstrating the possibility of spillover from the Malian conflict into other countries. The jihadist attacks against MINUSMA, compliant armed groups and state security services, but also against soft targets in Bamako, Ouagadougou and Grand-Bassam²¹⁰, constituted the most critical threats to the peace process and regional stability. The formation of GSIM was the conclusion of a four-year process of expansion, insurgency and consolidation of the jihadist groups active in Mali.

The full operational capability of the joint force was scheduled for March 2018 (Desgrais 2017), but by May 2019, it had only attained 75 percent of its authorized strength after having been delayed twice (United Nations 2019). The UNSC approved the CONOPS of the joint force in June 2017 through its Resolution 2359 (United Nations Security Council 2017). The UNSC Resolution gives legal backing to the regional force, without putting it under Chapter VII.

The three sectors of the G5 Sahel are scheduled to follow the same principle as the FMTS, although it will follow a bottom-up approach dependent on the expressed needs of the participating countries. The degree of cooperation along the three corridors could be different, as it is dependent on patterns of state collaboration. Currently, the central sector which is the border between Burkina Faso, Niger and Mali is where most of the activity is happening and where most of the international attention is focused; this may have generated aloofness from the two other partners, namely Mauritania and Chad, who were not as involved in the Central sector²¹¹.

²¹⁰ The al-Mourabitoun faction was responsible for a series of attacks in the region, including the attack against the Radisson Blu hotel (November 2015) and “La Terrasse” restaurant (7 March 2015) in Bamako, the Hotel Splendid and Cappuccino café in Ouagadougou (January 2016) and the Grand-Bassam resort in Côte d’Ivoire (March 2016). See (Bencherif 2017)

²¹¹ Interview with Malian diplomat involved in the peace process (Bamako: 17 October 2017) who even talked of a G3 in the G5 Sahel, due to the late financial contributions of Chad, and the tardiness of the deployment of the Mauritanian contingent in the joint force’s headquarters in Sévaré.

Although they both emerged out of the incapacity of the current security architecture to address transregional threats, the G5 Sahel and its military component suffer from capacity challenges of their own. As a new security arrangement that has been positively received by extra-continental partners, the G5 Sahel is heavily dependent on their financial, logistical and technical support to achieve its objectives. The joint force was launched in a context where international partners were pondering whether to downscale their involvement in the Sahel, due to the complexity and seeming intractability of the threats (environmental, illegal trafficking, migration, radicalism/jihadism). It is supposed to be more flexible and assertive than traditional security mechanisms. Still, what it means to be successful, given the limited capabilities of its member states (except perhaps Chad and Mauritania) and its current dependence on *Barkhane*, remains unclear. Along with the MNJTF operating in the Lake Chad Basin, the G5 Sahel is part of a process where following the failure of conflict prevention, ad hoc operations with a mandate going beyond peacekeeping are adopted by the AU or at the level of African states.

The ultimate purpose of the G5 Sahel joint force is to restore state authority, and this state-centric framework that depoliticizes the parameter of governance has been a regular hallmark of peacebuilding initiatives by African regional actors. This approach has not been complemented by a society-wide initiative that would focus on governance and local dynamics. The G5 Sahel member-states have struggled in developing a coherent governance approach to face the challenges in their peripheries, as do attest to the different versions of their PIP, and the increasing role taken by the Alliance Sahel in providing humanitarian assistance. They remain dependent on the support and cooperation of international partners to funds its investment and development programs but also to address the insecurity in its backyard. The G5 Sahel was developed in parallel to the AU's Nouakchott Process and ACIRC. Unlike the AU initiatives, the joint force was perceived by the G5 Sahel as "a force that can work," and that can make a difference in a region exposed to a vast array of threats.

Between its authorization by the UNSC in June 2017 and March 2019, the joint force has launched ten joint border operations with mixed results, mainly due to training and equipment shortfalls²¹². If these operations contributed to destroying the arms caches of jihadist groups and neutralizing some combatants, they did not have a wider strategic impact on the broader insecurity in Mali and the Sahel. They reflected the tactical limitations and cautious commitment of the Sahelian armies²¹³. Some of the mission's operations were also hampered by the poor equipment of the different battalions, whose capacities in intelligence, communications and rapid response remain limited.²¹⁴ The ability of the different battalions to cover the breadth of territory around the border has also been questioned: the two-three battalions scheduled to police each of the three sectors are seen as insufficient to deter spoiler groups. To supplement this deployment, several member-states have delegated security prerogatives to non-state armed groups, a decision that has facilitated the expansion of communitarian conflicts.²¹⁵

The challenges faced by the joint force were demonstrated in dramatic fashion in June 2018, following an attack on its headquarters that hampered it for half a year. Indeed, the terrorist attack against the HQ of the joint force in Sévaré in June 2018, which occurred when Operation *Ir Go Ka* was deployed in the central sector, showed clearly the extent of the threat and the scale of the challenge faced by the regional force. The complex attack by GSIM, which involved the use of suicide vehicle-borne improvised explosive device (SVBIEDs) and fighters, caused ten casualties (six dead and four wounded) and “dealt a significant blow to efforts aimed at accelerating the full operationalization of the Joint Force and led to a temporary halt of its operations” (United Nations 2018b, 1). It occurred three months after a sophisticated twin attack on the HQ of the Burkinabè army and on a French base in Ouagadougou, in March 2018. General Didier Dacko, the G5 Sahel Force Commander, was in a mission in

²¹³ Interview with EU military advisor (Skype/Abuja: 13 August 2019).

²¹⁴ Interview with senior AU military officer #2 (Addis Ababa: 31 May 2019)

²¹⁵ Interview with senior AU military officer #2 (Addis Ababa: 31 May 2019)

Ndjamèna, while his deputy was in Ouagadougou during the June attack.²¹⁶ The attack led to the total destruction of the headquarters, including the archives of the G5 Sahel, and demonstrated the vulnerability of the regional force. It also had immediate consequences for the military leadership, and on planning and procurement for the regional force,²¹⁷ as the force commander, Mali's General Dacko, was relieved two weeks later by the heads of state during a summit and replaced by the Mauritanian Hanenaould Sidi. General Dacko's deputy commander, Burkina's Colonel-Major Yaya Séré, was also replaced by the Chadian Oumar Bikimo. The decision, far from surprising, was preceded by the declaration of Mauritania's President who denounced the "failures" of the joint force command and stressed the necessity of addressing the issues that led to the attack if there was any chance of "stabilizing the Sahel" (Le Monde avec AFP 2018).

Since this attack, the JOINT FORCE no longer has a permanent headquarters, and its command structure is divided between Sévaré and Bamako, where MINUSMA and EU support them in their activities. According to a UN report, this new situation had a significant consequence on the organization's planning and communication capabilities. In October 2018, the Defence and Security Committee decided to permanently relocate the HQ of the force to Bamako (United Nations 2018b), a decision that has fostered anger and resentment among the civilian populations in Sévaré and Bamako, who have become very pessimistic about the ability of the force to fight the insurgency. This attack was also a financial setback on the G5 Sahel, whose funding structure has always been one of its main weaknesses. The cost of the force was estimated to be at €423 million at the beginning, and then €115 million per year after that by the Mauritanian representative to the UN, Ambassador Ousmane Ba, in December 2017 (Conseil de sécurité de l'ONU 2017). With the destruction of the Sévaré HQ in June 2018, another financial burden was to identify and build a secure and fortified base in Bamako that would secure the force's personnel,

²¹⁶ Interview with senior AU military officer #2 (Addis Ababa: 31 May 2019)

²¹⁷ Interview with EU military adviser (Skype/Abuja: 13 August 2019).

arms, ammunition, and supplies. This was estimated at “approximately €80 million” by the new force commander in September 2018 (United Nations 2018b). The heaviest part of this burden would be borne by the G5 Sahel’s financial partners, namely the EU. At the same time, the five states would contribute to the tune of €50 million each, a contribution that was estimated to be minimal by one Malian political actor.²¹⁸

The JOINT FORCE remains an “experimental force” aiming to circumvent the limitations of the current UN peacekeeping framework when facing insurgencies and asymmetrical conflicts (ICG 2017: 1). It is also deeply dependent on *Barkhane*, whose objectives in the medium term appear to be to “reduce the terrorist threat at a ‘tolerable’ level and to facilitate the operational capability of the G5 Sahel Joint Force. Then it will have no reason to exist, and it is not bound to be eternal”²¹⁹.

List of operations of the G5 Sahel between October 2017 and March 2019

#	Name of the Operation	Sector	Duration	Objectives
1	<i>Haw Bi</i> ²²⁰	Central sector	28 October 2017 to 11 November 2017	
2	<i>Pagnali</i> ²²¹	Central Sector (Mali/Burkina Faso border forests between	30 December 2017 to 15 January 2018	Destroy the supply chains of armed terrorist groups and contain their movements in the border area between Mali and Burkina Faso

²¹⁸ Interview with Malian former cabinet member (Bamako: 16 October 2017).

²¹⁹ Interview with senior Western diplomat (Addis Ababa: June 2019).

²²⁰ The first joint operation of the G5S involved three inter-army detachments from Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger commanded by the Force Commander with the support of Barkhane.

²²¹ Opération Pagnali saw the participation of four tactical inter-army combat units and nine aircraft from those two countries participated in the operation).

		Tofagala, Ouro Mana and Serva)		
3	<i>Ir Go Ka</i> ²²²	Central sector (Niger/Burkina Faso border between Markoye and Ouanzerbé and Inates)	15 May 2018 to 30 June 2018	To show the presence of the joint force, win the hearts of the population against jihadist and criminal groups
4	<i>Gourma</i> ²²³	Central sector	13 to 24 June 2018	To disrupt the supply chains of terrorist and criminal groups and reassure the population living in that area
5	<i>Odossou</i> ²²⁴	Eastern sector	1 to 12 July 2018	
6	<i>El-Emel</i> ²²⁵	Western sector	1 to 12 July 2018	To neutralize terrorist armed groups, present in the area extending from southern Bassikounou, in Mauritania, to northern Nampala, in Mali.
7	<i>Sanparga</i> ²²⁶	Central sector	15 January to 2 February 2019	

²²² The operation saw the participation of two inter-army detachments from Burkina Faso and the Niger under the joint force command and in coordination with the relevant national armies and Operation Barkhane. central command post in Sévaré directed the operation, with support of the tactical command post and Sector Central headquarters in Niamey.

²²³ Burkina, Mali and Niger deployed each two inter-army battalions for this operation.

²²⁴ Commanded from Ndjamená by the Eastern sector command, the operation saw the participation of two inter-army battalions from Chad and the Niger.

²²⁵ Done by two Mauritanian battalions without Malian involvement.

²²⁶ The operation saw the participation of two companies from Burkina Faso, one from Mali and three from the Niger

8	<i>Taara</i> ²²⁷	Western sector	26 January to 15 February 2019	
9	<i>Kinassar</i> ²²⁸	Northern area of Eastern sector	4 to 15 February 2019	
10	<i>Ça'igha</i> ²²⁹	Western sector (Wagadou forest)	15 to 25 March 2019	

4. THE APSA AND THE NEW CARTOGRAPHY OF SECURITY IN THE SAHEL

Despite the endorsement of the Joint Force by the AU PSC in April 2017, relations between the G5 Sahel and the AU remain weak, especially as they relate to the G5 Sahel's articulation with AU initiatives in the Sahel. The Joint Force of the G5 Sahel, along with other ad hoc coalitions, aligns with the AU's Common African Defense and Security Policy (Williams 2019), especially paragraphs 9 and 10 on the "common threats to defence and security," and also with the objectives of the AU Constitutive Act on collective self-defence (African Union 2000). They reflect the AU's ideals on peace and security in spirit, even if the AU has, in practice, little control over the activities of the G5 Sahel, or its partnerships.

Endorsement by the PSC is viewed as a matter of courtesy, but not legally binding despite the AU's primary role on peace and security affairs on the continent (Williams 2019). But views on this differ and have evolved among AU officials. The G5 Sahel was first perceived as a concurrent initiative to the AU's Nouakchott Process, an initiative driven by Sahelian states and supported by the EU, the AU's most important financial partner; the similar financial dependence of the two initiatives could be detrimental to the AU given the strategic partnership between the AU and the G5 Sahel (Bagayoko 2019, 47). For a long time, diplomats at the AU also doubted the autonomy of

²²⁷ The operation saw the participation of one battalion from Mali and two companies from Mauritania

²²⁸ The operation saw the participation of one company from Chad and another from Niger.

²²⁹ The operation saw the participation of troops from Mauritania and Mali.

the G5 Sahel and its Joint Force and lamented France's influence in the emergence and consolidation of the new regional organization.

Algeria, among other countries, was not particularly enthusiastic towards the G5 Sahel and preferred to act within the Nouakchott Process, coordinated by the MISAHHEL in Bamako. AU officials acknowledge the original “misconceptions” towards the G5 Sahel but stress that the relationship has become smoother over time.²³⁰ The G5 Sahel is partially self-funded, and its deficit gaps are partially filled with support from the EU, France and other bilateral partners; this reality that makes the AU more or less redundant in the formulation of the GS Sahel's strategic objectives and modes of operation. G5 Sahel representatives often point out that they are not funded by the AU²³¹, and that the organization is an expression of the will of the Sahelian heads of state in the face of a deadlocked Nouakchott Process. The “mixed patrols” option of the Nouakchott Process generated expectations among the Sahelian countries on the frontlines of the fight against terrorism, which were never fulfilled (Bagayoko 2019). Core Sahelian countries resented this deadlock and the lack of explanation for it: indeed, the AU conducted two technical assessment missions in 2016 concerning the possibility of a regional counterterrorist force in the Sahel, but the conclusions of these missions have not to date been shared with member states²³².

This deadlock had important policy impacts, as the Nouakchott Process was to have been the security pillar of the AU's broader Strategy for the Sahel. Between 2015 and 2016, the process failed to move forward despite the activities of the MISAHHEL.²³³ In this regard, the deadlock in the negotiations between the AU and the UN-facilitated

²³⁰ Interviews with AU senior officials (Addis Ababa: June 2019). During those interviews and informal discussions, I was also informed of the importance of personal leadership/relationships in these coordination issues. The coldness of the Commissioner for Peace and Security towards the new initiative was also highlighted as a choking point in the relation between these two organizations.

²³¹ G5 Sahel is partially self-funded and dependent from external partners. For this reason, the role of the AU is becoming redundant. G5 Sahel often complains that to the exception of Rwanda (500K), no African country, nor institution has contributed to its funding. Rwanda's funding has not yet been disbursed; it's a pledge so far.

²³² Interview with Sahelian diplomat (Addis Ababa: 14 June 2019).

²³³ Interview with senior military official #1, AU PSD (Addis Ababa: 31 May 2019) and with Sahelian diplomat (Addis Ababa: 14 June 2019).

the development of the Joint Force of the G5 Sahel in February 2017. It is also important to note that the idea of the Joint Force was first put forward at the G5 Sahel summit of November 2014 in Ndjamena, which preceded the Nouakchott process summit of December 2014 where the “mixed patrols” option was first put forward. Therefore, the Joint Force might have been a necessity due to the regional “security vacuum”²³⁴ generated by the “disillusionment” following deadlock within the Nouakchott Process. Indeed, during its presidency of the G5 Sahel in 2014-2015, Chad was supposed to organize a ministerial meeting and to lead the process, but these meetings never happened; “they did not lead, and this killed [sic] the process”.²³⁵

By joining together to “move forward faster”, the G5 Sahel countries expressed their commitment to act decisively, with or without Nouakchott. There might have been also a desire to “exclude” Algeria, a key player not only in the Nouakchott Process but also in previous Sahelian initiatives such as the CEMOC and the UFL. Algeria has tremendous experience in counterterrorism and peacebuilding but is often suspected of wanting to control what happens in the Sahel, which it considers its “strategic backyard”. Thus, the G5 Sahel constitutes a regionalization that was not anticipated in the APSA and with which the AU has had to adapt to. . But the challenge for the AU is that the G5 Sahel, as a privileged partner for external actors, does not include all the countries of the Sahel, as defined by the AU. The region goes from the Atlantic shores to the Lake Chad Basin, encompassing the hotspots of the Malian conflict and the Boko Haram theatre²³⁶. The necessity of articulating the G5 Sahel’s actions within the AU’s broader Strategy in the Sahel has been a recurrent position of the continental organization. Reflecting on this, one AU observer stressed that

There cannot be one single actor in the Sahel, given the complexity of the situation. It cannot be managed by one state or one single strategic actor. [This is because] the situation in the Sahel has consequences in Europe, and thus cannot be only handled by AU, ECOWAS, G5 Sahel or ECCAS. There needs to be good coordination [among the actors] and

²³⁴ Interview with official AU/PSD, Conflict Prevention and Early Warning Division (Addis Ababa: 31 May 2019).

²³⁵ Interview with senior military official #1, AU PSD (Addis Ababa: 31 May 2019)

²³⁶ Interview with senior military official #1, AU PSD (Addis Ababa: 31 May 2019).

no duplication of the actions. (...) The main task is to strengthen the articulation and complementarity between the G5 Sahel and the Nouakchott process.²³⁷

Per the PSC Protocol, the AU is the only organization mandated with deploying missions in Africa. The G5 Sahel Joint Force, along with the MNJTF and other ad hoc forces, is “authorized” by the AU’s PSC, and is different from “mandated missions” such as AMISOM or AFISMA. Concretely, this means that the AU PSC has no control over force generation, deployment and finances but can nonetheless provide support, through technical advisors, in the development of the mission’s mandate and objectives. It can also send technical missions in the field to assess the readiness of the force.²³⁸ The conventional wisdom is that the Joint Force was authorized because the AU was unable to deploy a mission, despite the existence of a pressing security threat. It is only when the PSC is unable to authorize missions that ad hoc coalitions are given a mandate. In the Sahelian context, the inability for the Nouakchott process to deploy a mission in the framework of the APSA, and the decision by Sahelian states to act nevertheless, forced the hand of the AU PSC.

Beyond these organizational hurdles, dissension and lack of progress within the Nouakchott Process favoured the emergence of the G5 Sahel. This is directly correlated with the extra-continental interest in the Sahel, a region whose securitization is leading to a security interdependence with southern Europe, especially on issues linked to migration and radicalization. The migration crisis that has rocked European countries facilitated the EU’s support to the G5 Sahel, a decision that has been perceived as decisive in the credibility of the new regional grouping and the consolidation of the Sahel as a “region”. The G5 Sahel’s external dependence on the EU is seen, conversely, as a challenge to the ideal of “African solutions to African problems”. For one AU official, it is the “EU that has the money and the portfolio” and has been able to advance some of its strategic priorities in the region, such as the control of migration flows, by investing heavily in the G5 Sahel, and through bilateral partnerships with some of the

²³⁷ Interview with senior military official #1, AU PSD (Addis Ababa: 31 May 2019).

²³⁸ Interview with senior military official #1, AU PSD (Addis Ababa: 31 May 2019).

non-state actors in Libya and with the government of Niger. The delocalization of the EU border to Agadez, a main transit point for migrants in the north, is evidence of the EU's influence. Indeed, the free circulation of persons and goods is in application among member-states of the ECOWAS region, of which Niger is a member-state. This stance is reflected in the PSC's communiqué of November 2017, in which it reassures the G5 Sahel of its support but also

Bearing in mind the innovative nature of the regional initiatives such as the one of the G5 Sahel, in the context of the fight against terrorism and violent extremism, underlined the need for support based on requirements expressed by Members of the G5 Sahel, with a view to enhanc[ing] their ownership of the operation (AU PSC 2017b).

The AU has been powerless in the face of these new developments, which it had rejected previously. But the same dependence also characterizes the AU's relationship with the EU, especially since 2004 and the development of the EU's Facilitation for African Peace, a flagship program whose objectives include, among others, the consolidation of the APSA. Thus, the G5 Sahel, as one of the consequences of weak security governance in the Sahel, still bears the same state-centric perspective and the emphasis on strengthening regimes, that stalled the actions of previous regional organizations.

The G5 Sahel and other ad hoc coalitions constituted surprises²³⁹ to which the AU has had to adapt. Since November 2017, there has been increasing talk of coordinating the actions of the Joint Force, the MNJTF and even the CEMOC and UFL with APSA. In October 2018, the PSC reaffirmed the importance of the Nouakchott Process and stressed

the imperative need for a continuous enhancement of the coordination of all the initiatives and actions to promote peace, security and stability in the Sahelo-Saharan region, bearing in mind that within the context of the fight against terrorism and violent extremism, there is no viable alternative to collective and/or coordinated action (African Union 2018b paragraph 10).

²³⁹ This idea has been stressed by four different senior military officials belonging to different organizations including the EU, ECOWAS and AU, and to other Sahelian country (Addis Ababa and Abuja: June, July, August 2019)

In the same vein, a strategic consultation on the Sahel was held in Nouakchott in March 2018 in order to better articulate the different actors and their policies in the region, where the AU and ECOWAS representatives stressed, once again, the contested nature of the Sahel's geography and the necessity of reactivating the Nouakchott process.²⁴⁰ In the same vein, the Fifth Ministerial Meeting on Strengthening Security Cooperation and Operationalization of the APSA in the Sahelo-Saharan Region (Ouagadougou, 27 November 2018) reiterated the same concerns. It was decided to establish a rotating annual presidency among the states participating in the Nouakchott Process, with Burkina Faso taking on the inaugural presidency. This political resolution was an attempt to strengthen the convergence between the two Sahelian initiatives, as Burkina Faso was also set to assume the presidency of the G5 Sahel in February 2019. It was also decided to have an annual ministerial meeting of the Nouakchott Process henceforth and a biannual meeting of the Heads of Intelligence Services, under the MISAHEL. These new developments might reflect the change within the AU Commission, with the election of the Chadian Moussa Faki Mahamat to the presidency in January 2017. It will take time to assess the lasting impact of these converging initiatives; their success will depend on the degree of engagement by participating states, which remains uneven, according to several sources.²⁴¹

Still, whether ad hoc coalitions constitute the future of the APSA remains an open question. The debates over the ACIRC highlighted the reticence of several countries towards a "coalition of the willing" format in which the AU will play a minor role. The G5 Sahel and other ad hoc coalitions can assume a complementary role, filling gaps left by the APSA. The challenges faced by the ASF regional brigades are mainly due to the lack of political and military commitments on the part of member-states.²⁴² ASF's weakness, in this sense, reflects the weakness of the member-states composing the different regional brigades. The G5 Sahel and ad hoc coalitions constitute an asset

²⁴⁰ Notes of the consultative meeting (Unedited).

²⁴¹ Interview with AU and Sahelian diplomats (Addis Ababa: June 2019).

²⁴² Interview with AU and ECOWAS senior military officers (Addis and Abuja: June and July 2019).

because “those that are facing existential threats are more inclined to act fast. [In the context of the Sahel], Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger are in the eye of the storm.”²⁴³

Still, the road to articulation remains bumpy. Coordination remains a challenge, and the AU often resents the perception that it is insufficiently supportive of the G5 Sahel. This is compounded by the fact that the AU depends for its budget on contributions from member-states and on the support of external partners like the EU, which has developed the European Facility for Peace expressly for the AU²⁴⁴. Given these financial challenges, any direct financial support from the AU to the G5 Sahel would represent a considerable additional burden for the continental body. For what it’s worth, the bureaucratic cumbersomeness of the AU has not facilitated its relations with the G5 Sahel, from the development of the CONOPS in April 2017, to the establishment of a coordination cell, to the disbursement of funds for G5 Sahel operations²⁴⁵. Despite its tactical limitations, the G5 Sahel and other ad hoc forces constitute a flexible, relatively nimble force on the ground, unlike the ASF, whose regional brigades “exist only on paper”.²⁴⁶ The former also constitutes an ideal partner for external actors interested in containing insecurity in these theatres. The coordination structure, laid out in a 2018 Memorandum of Understanding between the AU and G5 Sahel (Xinhua 2018), should enhance the synergy between ad hoc coalitions and the APSA, but at present exists only for the MNJTF and not yet for the G5 Sahel. This might be related to financial constraints, as the members of the MNJTF coordination cell at the AU are national diplomats paid by their own countries and seconded to the continental body. To some, this presupposes that the

AU is not committed to supporting ad hoc coalitions. Since April 2017 [when the PSC endorsed the G5 Sahel CONOPS], the coordination cell for the G5 Sahel has not been set up. Now Chergui [the PSD Commissioner] wants the MNJTF coordination cell to also act as the G5 Sahel coordination unit. But this is not possible because our interests are different.²⁴⁷

²⁴³ Interview with senior military official #1, AU PSD (Addis Ababa: 31 May 2019).

²⁴⁴ Interview with AU and EU senior military official/advisor (Addis Ababa: 28 June 2019 and Abuja/Skype: 13 August 2019).

²⁴⁵ Interview with Sahelian diplomat (Addis Ababa: 14 June 2019)

²⁴⁶ Interview with Sahelian diplomat (Addis Ababa 14 June 2019)

²⁴⁷ Interview with Sahelian diplomat (Addis Ababa: 14 June 2019).

What is certain from this dynamic is that there is “resistance” from both sides, on the issue of the G5 Sahel’s autonomy and its insertion within the AU’s existing peace and security architecture²⁴⁸. Scheduled meetings are often cancelled or postponed at the last minute, a situation that is not contributing to constructive engagement. Despite the reactivation of the Nouakchott Process, the G5 Sahel has taken on a life of its own, tied to but independent of the AU’s initiatives. The two initiatives may have emerged from the same assessment about APSA following the Malian experience (2012-3) and may share common member-states, but that does not mean that the G5 Sahel could be subsumed into the Nouakchott process and become a REC of APSA in the Sahel²⁴⁹. The G5 Sahel has developed bilateral and multilateral partnerships on development and security, which mirror the AU’s broader Sahel strategy but are separate from the Nouakchott Process. Yet it is undeniable that as the years have passed and as the G5 Sahel became an increasing reality, its relationship with the AU has become more functional. There are consultations between the AU and the G5 Sahel, and the AU has a liaison officer tasked with supporting the efforts of the Joint Force in the Sahel. In March 2018, the AU and the G5 Sahel signed a Memorandum of Understanding “to establish a framework through which the AU will support the G5 Sahel in mobilizing additional resources for the operationalization of the G5 Sahel joint force” (Xinhua 2018). It is through this MOU that the coordination structure was established in order to support the Permanent Secretariat of the G5 Sahel in the management of its trust fund, and in the mobilization of additional resources for the implementation of its security and development objectives.

This synergy is mostly due to the preferences of individual leaders, rather than to any broader institutional commitment. For example, the Rwandan Presidency of the AU Conference of Heads of State and Government (2018-2019) was marked by its commitment to streamlining the AU’s peace and security architecture and its support

²⁴⁸ One respondent testified that a general from the AU Military Staff Committee/PSD who was visiting the G5 Sahel for an official purpose in 2018 was not received. But the relations are becoming smoother following a visit of the AU military officials in February 2018

²⁴⁹ Interview with French diplomat liaising with the AU (Addis Ababa: 18 June 2019).

to ad hoc coalitions. Rwanda pledged USD 1 million to the G5 Sahel, the only financial contribution by an African country not belonging to the G5 Sahel; half of these funds had been disbursed by June 2019.²⁵⁰ On the other side of the equation, the G5 Sahel force commander (2018-2019), General Hanoune Ould Ali, was perceived as more forthcoming in his dealings with the AU, and favourable to closer collaboration.²⁵¹ Further, the AU has repeatedly called for financial and logistical support to the G5 Sahel since 2017 in its communiqués and has endorsed a UN contribution through assessed funding (AU PSC 2017a; African Union 2017a; 2017b; AU PSC 2019b; 2018), but the follow-up on these decisions has been haphazard.

G5 Sahel member-states and France have consistently pushed for a UN formal support to the Joint Force, a possibility that has been opposed by the United States, which is keen to not overburden MINUSMA and to force Sahelian countries to find alternative means through bilateral partnerships. Due to these political hurdles, MINUSMA's support to the Joint Force has been limited to its activities in Mali, a geographical constraint that African actors have tried to remove without success.²⁵² For this reason, it is the Central Sector of the Joint Force that has felt the greatest impact of UN support through the provision of military rations and fuel, which are subsequently billed to the EU Fund for the G5 Sahel. Given the joint forces of the CONOPS, where national armies constitute the main instruments in policing their borders, MINUSMA's support has been confined to strengthening the Malian army, a task that is not very different from its original mandate, as per resolution 2100.

It is clear that the APSA, as it stands, has not adapted to the security challenges that have emerged in the Sahel due to financial, logistical and tactical limitations. In order to address these threats, Sahelian countries have established the G5 Sahel and a regional joint force, which despite its shortcomings, has been able to build partnerships with willing external actors and to deploy operations that were initially scheduled to be part of the

²⁵⁰ Interview with Sahelian diplomat (Addis Ababa: 14 June 2019).

²⁵¹ Interview with French diplomat liaising with the AU (Addis Ababa: 18 June 2019).

²⁵² Interview with senior AU official (Addis Ababa: 2 July 2019).

Nouakchott Process None of the scenarios of the ASF, for example, can operate in the context of communitarian conflicts, a new source of conflict intimately linked to the propagation of the jihadi threat from Mali, and multiplied by environmental scarcity, that has been affecting Mali and Burkina Faso, among others.²⁵³ In this regard, the Joint Force might be a more effective tool, provided the respective contingents commit to strict rules of engagement, are rigorously assessed and do not engage in punitive retribution, as was the case with the Malian battalion of the G5 Sahel against civilian communities in Koumaga and Nantaka, in Mali (Mopti region) in June 2018. Ad hoc coalitions constitute the “reality principle” of security governance in the Sahel; despite the AU’s stance that ASF is operational and its decision to allow regional brigades to intervene outside of their home regions, the ASF is still not “working on the ground” and remains a force only on paper. The Malian case has shown how laborious it can be to generate and deploy even the best-rated regional brigade. Yet there is room for synergy between the APSA and ad hoc coalitions such as the G5 Sahel. The arc of conflict extends, after all, from the Western border of Mali to the Lake Chad basin and is fueled by the security vacuum in Libya that emerged following the collapse of the Gaddafi regime in August 2011. In this context, the MNJTF and the G5 Sahel constitute two solid anchors for the APSA, as long as synergy is created between the continental body and these two ad hoc coalitions. The multidimensional crisis in the Sahel affects more than the G5 Sahel countries. The Nouakchott Process has already revived the interest of several countries, including Morocco, Egypt and Cameroon, who may counterbalance Algerian influence and push decisively for greater security cooperation (Bagayoko 2019). Further south, Benin, Ghana, Burkina Faso, Côte d’Ivoire and Togo, all members of ECOWAS, have scaled up their security cooperation in November 2017 through the “Accra Initiative” as the threat in the Sahel expanded from Burkina Faso. In a similar fashion to the G5 Sahel but in a leaner format, these four countries plan and deploy joint operations in their transboundary areas in order to project their presence and deter criminal groups from filling security vacuums. These ad hoc security frameworks

²⁵³ Interview with AU diplomat involved in the development of the APSA (Addis Ababa: 20 June 2019).

are more attractive to the participating states due to the reality of the threat at their borders and the fact that they are based on a “coalition of the willing” model. The AU can do better in this regard by acting as a cornerstone for security cooperation among states, and RECs, willing to act. But this action must be complemented by thorough governance and security reforms, especially by addressing the tensions in the state-society complex rooted in the process of statebuilding, for the purpose of strengthening the bonds through the delivery of public goods and the legitimacy of formal structures of authority.

5. CONCLUSION

The 2013 international intervention had an immediate effect on regional security governance by challenging the assumptions of the APSA, and by kickstarting new processes and initiatives that aimed to address security and development issues in the emerging regional space. The actualization of the Sahel as a region started with the different “Strategies for the Sahel” that were developed in 2013 by extra-continental actors and became progressively appropriated by African actors. This appropriation is partly rooted in the realization of the limitations of the APSA framework in addressing the regional dimensions of the Malian conflict, but also in these actors’ unequal relationships with international actors.

The meaning of the Sahel as a region shifted during this period. It became centred around five countries that were described as “core countries”, i.e. Mali, Burkina Faso, Chad, Mauritania and Niger. These five countries have a similar demographic, geographic and political profile, and rather than representing a geographical reality, they came to epitomize what was at stake in the Sahel and the necessity of addressing developmental challenges to mitigate security risks. The Ministerial Coordination Platform was the first platform for the coordination of these different strategies, but it progressively lost steam due to the diverging interests of its members.

At another level, the AU was developing initiatives to address the limitations of its interventions in Mali. Seeing a gap in the framework of the APSA, the AU started the Nouakchott process to foster security cooperation in the Sahel, and the ACIRC as a temporary measure due to the difficulties in generating troops for the ASF in Mali, in

January 2013. These two initiatives differed substantially from the APSA, while being part of it, due to their “transregional” nature in the case of the Nouakchott Process, and to their conceptual model based on a “coalition of the willing” rather than a regional brigade, in the case of ACIRC. They manifested conceptual flexibility on the part of the AU, spurred by some of its member states based on the regional organization’s experience in Mali. But political divergences among member-states facilitated the emergence of the G5 Sahel, an initiative driven by core Sahelian states and supported by international actors. The relationship between the G5 Sahel and the AU was fractious, characterized by rivalries over the Sahel, and arbitrated in the end by the interests and partnerships built with extra-continental actors. The G5 Sahel constituted the ideal regional forum in the Sahel for extra-continental actors in the wake of the international military intervention. Still, it remains afflicted with the same challenges that have hampered the operationalization of the APSA, and specifically its financial dependence towards international actors and the lack of technical and human resources to address its security and development objectives. After years of minimal engagement, the African Union and the G5 Sahel have found a *modus vivendi* based on the urgency of the crisis in the Sahel and the risks it poses to member-states.

In the end, these new security initiatives actualized a new cartography of regional security governance that highlighted the limitations of the APSA. The emergence of ad hoc security initiatives, authorized but not mandated by the AU PSC, show that countries are progressively looking beyond the APSA and its cartography of regions, to address security on their shared peripheries. These ad hoc security initiatives are likely to proliferate due to the lack of operationalization of the ASF, and states’ willingness to limit, when they can, the AU’s role to political endorsement. The APSA is at a crossroads, and its future will depend on its ability to integrate these new forms of intervention and redefine its cartography of the continent.

Chapter VI: Conclusion

More than seven years after ECOWAS brokered the return to constitutional rule in Mali following the March 2012 coup, and almost seven years following the deployment of AFISMA and MINUSMA, the conflict in Mali is still far from being resolved. If more international actors are undertaking peacebuilding activities in Mali to different degrees over the years, the security situation has worsened at the same time with an increase in the intensity and the geographical scope of the violence, from the northern to the central part of Mali. The role of African regional actors has also diminished since the 2013 international intervention; the will to find ‘African solutions to African problems’ may have spurred the development of the APSA, but this ideational goal was challenged by the complex realities of the conflict in Mali, and the crisis in the Sahel, straining the capacities of ECOWAS and the AU.

What started as a localized conflict in the northern regions as a secessionist rebellion, has become an Islamist insurgency and spread beyond Mali’s territory to affect the whole region. The signature of a peace agreement under the aegis of the international community in May and June 2015 has had a limited impact on the ground where fighting continues, with Malian soldiers and UN troops are regularly attacked by factions, affiliated with AQIM, excluded from the peace process. Worse, the insurgency has taken an increasingly ethnic dimension, pitting for example, in the Mopti region, Fulani and Dogon communities, and threatening social cohesion, overwhelming the capacities of the nation-states and regional organizations, and stalemating counterterrorist operations such as *Barkhane* or the Joint Force of the G5 Sahel. Peace remains still elusive in Mali; the authority of the Malian government has been severely hampered over the years and some of the constitutional reforms needed to implement the peace agreement (such as the devolution of powers on education and police to northern regions) have been met with opposition. Furthermore, the different logics at play among international actors,

ranging from counter-terrorism to development support, are often contradictory and do not always concord with the orientations of the Malian government.

ECOWAS and the AU's approach to the conflict was focused on engaging with the formal structures of the authority of the Malian state, and not enough on domestic governance patterns and the place of subnational actors. At the core of the challenges faced by the APSA in Mali is a fundamental mismatch between how regional security governance is framed in the architecture through a state-centric and rigid conception of regions and the reality of domestic governance in which hybrid actors play an important role, and through their activities participate in a regionalism from below that transcend the borders of the Malian state and even the West African region as understood in the architecture. Governments and regional organizations must be willing to engage with hybrid orders, given the role they play in domestic governance, and adapt the regional mechanisms to this reality. The security challenges are first and foremost located at the national level; in this regard, regional organizations may not be the best positioned to address the challenges, especially if member-states frustrate their actions. This could translate into a compromise of the Weberian features of the state and making space for existing actors involved in ad hoc governance to meet security challenges. The formation of new regional mechanisms such as the G5 Sahel and the MNJTF is a significant development, but they will not deliver transformative peace if they fail to address the governance challenges that have often led to conflict.

It can be tempting to ascribe all the difficulties of APSA in Mali to the lack of financial and military capabilities of ECOWAS and the African Union. This has undoubtedly played a part in the haphazard African response but cannot explain the spread of violence beyond northern Mali since 2013, despite the deployment of MINUSMA, *Barkhane* and the G5 Sahel Joint Force. At the core of the conflict in Mali, and the crisis in the Sahel, are tensions resulting from processes of governance that overlap and compete with each other: state authority is dominant and may be able to influence other sites of authority, but not in areas where its presence is limited due to geographical and environmental constraints, and where non-state actors are the core providers of governance.

ECOWAS and the AU were tasked with responding to structural causes linked to how governance operates in Mali, without really having the support to address these issues for fear of trespassing on Malian sovereignty. The success of regional security governance is dependent on the willingness of member states to look at comprehensively the structural causes of instability and address them.

Thus, contrary to the confidence expressed in the regional security governance literature, regional organizations do not become involved in their member-states' security affairs because they are viewed as "better at it". Regional security governance is characterized by aspirational objectives and the will to showcase actorness and stake legitimacy towards other actors, but not always by effective delivery. The APSA is a case in point of the current challenges to effective security governance, despite the development of elaborate frameworks and mechanisms. The security turn of ECOWAS at the end of the Cold War was ad hoc, mainly driven by Nigeria's willingness to intervene in the First Liberian Civil War (1989-1997). It became institutionalized beginning in 1999 with the establishment of the Protocol Relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peace-Keeping [sic] and Security. But the experience of the Malian mediation in 2012-3 shows clearly how despite this institutionalization, ECOWAS had to adopt ad hoc procedures and transactional postures to negotiate with the actors when confronted with the mismatch between its formal mechanisms and the informal ways through which governance and power are produced on the ground. Institutionalization, even when it exists, does not necessarily guide regional security governance because the assumptions underlying it do not reflect the nature and capacities of the West African states since independence. The AU's approach to peace and security was less incremental and more systematic.

Rooted in its aspirations to find "African solutions to African problems", the AU has integrated existing regional architectures such as that of ECOWAS into its continental framework, based on principles of complementarity, subsidiarity and comparative advantage. Ambitious in its objectives, the APSA is at its core an aspirational framework developed in reaction to the "lost decade of the 1990s", when the OAU was absent from

security governance despite the scale and intensity of civil conflicts in the region. Thus, the APSA's default approach to conflict is to strengthen state authority, an approach whose normative presumptions concerning what governance should be contrasted with the realities of everyday governance in many postcolonial African states. The experience of the Malian conflict clearly shows that African regional actors are still poorly positioned to address the structural causes of conflict, which are often historical and related to longstanding state-making processes. The hybridity in the governance of Mali's northern regions, through the leveraging by military officers of tribal loyalties and enmities to consolidate authority, is not captured in the normative Weberian prescriptions inherent in ECOWAS' regionalism project and APSA's institutions and mechanisms. More importantly, these subnational actors can themselves have a regionalizing dynamic through their economic and political activities, and by grafting tribal and kinship ties into their operations. In the Malian context, this form of regionalism from below coexists, and is often at odds, with the regional projects centred on the state and its formal processes of governance. Regional economic communities play an essential political role in Africa. They have shown a willingness to deal with security issues, yet they have often been hampered in their efforts by foundational institutional problems and crippling capability gaps. If anything, the actions of African regional organizations have shown that regional security governance exists and persists not because it is effective, but as part of an ideational aspiration, where organizations stake a legitimacy claim by developing initiatives and strategies that illustrate their actorness, in the context of a multilayered security governance.

The challenges faced by the APSA in Mali stemmed from the disconnect between its dependence on formal structures of governance, member-states' jealous consideration of their sovereignty and the subnational governance dynamics in Mali. How regional actors understand their roles and abilities in conflict contexts may be challenged by state and substate actors, and the different intervention strategies are often contested by these same actors. Member-states play an important role in the successes or failures of conflict management processes by African regional actors, as is shown by a thorough study of ECOWAS' intervention in Mali. Two conclusions

follow from this study. First, without considering the patterns of statehood within their member-states, regional security actors will be condemned to demonstrating aspirational goals, rather than their effectiveness. African regional security actors must be willing to be more than “political organizations” depending on the will of their member-states to be effective at security governance. Their action in Mali has often been hampered by their dependence on the consensus of their member-states to move forward, and by their inability to engage with the hybridity of governance where they intervene, so as not to violate the principle of state sovereignty. Second, the AU’s primacy in peace and security affairs will be further challenged, and the APSA will have to adapt to its member-states’ willingness to address security challenges when they arise in their peripheries. This has important implications for the current architecture, which is dependent on external funding for most of its programs. The experience of the G5 Sahel and the MNJTF has shown the states’ willingness not to wait or defer to the APSA when they face existential challenges. Despite the limitations of these ad hoc initiatives, the APSA will have to adapt to their existence by integrating them when necessary. These two conclusions are particularly relevant as the AU undergoes reform, and the Sahel continues to be the site of multiple interventions that reinforce the capacities of some actors against others, and as they become the subject of contentions between these actors.

1. STATEHOOD, HYBRIDITY AND REGIONAL SECURITY GOVERNANCE

Regional security governance cannot be effective without considering the nature of the state and the role of alternative orders of governance where its authority is limited. Historically, the northern regions of Mali (especially the regions of Kidal and Timbuktu), have been governed differently from the more densely populated southern regions. This meant that in the north, the authority of the state coexists with other sites of authority which the state has sometimes reinforced to shore up its legitimacy, and its ability to govern. These areas of limited statehood have been highly securitized due to the Malian government’s inability to fully implement its authority without relying on subnational orders. Geographical distance from the capital and the absence of state institutions have fostered a smuggling economy in which the ‘border’, rather than representing a barrier, constitutes an

opportunity for the population to benefit from differential legal and trade regimes (Bach 2003). This is facilitated by the existence of strong kinship ties among populations living on the different sides of the border, and the existence of hybrid, and thus informal, forms of authority that are located between these kinship ties. In Mali, the 3rd Tuareg rebellion (1990-1995) has led to a progressive delegation of authority by the state to alternative orders of governance in the north, first to support the regular forces against the rebels, and later to fight them on their own. With the redeployment of the GSPC in Mali in the early 2000s, and the securitization of the region with the Global War on Terror and the development of a kidnapping-for-ransom economy, many of these subnational actors became involved in the illicit economy (including drug trafficking and smuggling) while the state's dependence on them increased.

This domestic setting is not reflected in the assumptions of regional projects, which are based on the state's integral control over its territory. When confronted with non-state actors in these areas of limited statehood and where local governance is done without the state, the APSA is torn between the imperative of engaging these actors and addressing governance challenges for the sake of effectiveness, and with the respect due to state sovereignty and reinforcing its presence and capacities, where they are lacking. Sovereignty-boosting regionalism will not address the issues at the heart of the conflict. Worse, it leads often to militarized solutions to governance problems, centered around the necessity of restoring state authority, where it has often been absent or has been delegated to hybrid actors. Armed groups in Mali have shown the relevance in governance, of informal structures, through their exploitation of tribal and economic affinities to challenge state authority. Still, they have also profited from the international presence and the existence of different trade regimes to expand and enshrine their influence. This is most manifest in the impact of *Operation Serval* in the domestic scene, and the reordering of the behaviour of the armed groups along tribal and economic lines, as they sought to position themselves ahead of the peace process.

This dissertation has demonstrated the necessity of reconciling the particularities of governance in the postcolonial African state with the continental peace and security initiatives that have been developed since the 1990s. There is imperative to consider the modalities of governance at the subnational level, along with their rationalities, in order to understand the difficulties faced by ECOWAS and the AU as conflict managers and chart a more effective path forward. The top-down regionalism projects on which are regional security governance frameworks are built, contrast with the regionalizing dynamics spearheaded by informal and hybrid actors, who are often deeply involved in domestic governance. To be more precise, the framework of the APSA and the division of labour between the AU and the RECs (ECOWAS in this instance) failed to intervene effectively in Mali because they were incapable of making sense of, or engaging with, the political economy linking Mali's northern regions to southern Algeria, and Western Niger and the deep cultural and historical ties binding these territories. In the context of conflict, these ties are easily converted into networks of solidarity that escape state and regional borders. ECOWAS and AU should thrive to confront the state with the realities of their domestic governance by incorporating in their framework the fact that statehood remains limited in several of their member-state's territory. The effectiveness of regional security governance depends on acknowledging the artificial nature of the borders, the relevance of ties linked to pre-colonial governance structures and on the state's willingness to engage with its domestic challenges, where most of the issues are first located.

Effective regional security governance in Africa will require acknowledging and addressing the problems rooted in the state-society complex and in the influence of hybrid actors in domestic governance affairs. By viewing regions as the "sum of states" in a specific area, regional security governance actors have failed to appreciate the peculiarities of domestic governance within their member-states' territory and how it links to similar processes in neighbouring countries. In this regard, the successes of ECOWAS in Mali, such as the establishment of a transitional government following the coup, were neutralized by its misreading of internal dynamics in Mali, which were, in turn, rooted in the country's tumultuous statebuilding process. ECOWAS'

mediation efforts in Mali were frustrated by the demands of subnational Malian actors, whose grievances were with the limitations of governance within the Malian state, and who did not understand why ECOWAS wanted to reinstitute authorities who they deemed as responsible for the 2012 conflict through their failures in governance, and thorough their delegation of authority to hybrid actors in their country's northern regions. It is evident that ECOWAS did not have the best cards in its hands, nor the capacities to implement policies that were unpopular with the former junta, a good portion of the Malian political class, and with most of the armed groups who had gained control of the north in 2012. The West African organization adjusted to these limitations by adopting a transactional approach with the junta to push the process forward in Mali, which undermined its credibility among those opposed to the junta. The criticism towards the ECOWAS illustrate the tensions between the formal and informal governance structures in Mali; ECOWAS is mandated to manage and resolve a conflict that is fundamentally linked to Mali' statebuilding project, while obligated to downplay the role of hybrid orders for the sake of normative prescriptions linked to state sovereignty. Considering the capabilities-expectations gap of ECOWAS and most regional actors, the transactional approach is bound to happen, but the tensions could have been eased through a better institutionalization of its mediation framework and more transparency. ECOWAS mandated President Compaoré to lead its mediation efforts, and to use his networks and resources as President of Burkina Faso, to push the process forward in Mali. Due to its focus on formal structures of governance, the engagement of ECOWAS with the armed groups was very minimal, lacked transparency and generated many rumours in Bamako, hostile to the process, despite regular meetings in Ouagadougou, where the ECOWAS Mediator was located. Whenever ECOWAS engaged with hybrid actors such as traditional authorities or local powerbrokers, it risked the wrath of the Malian government, which wanted in no way to compromise its sovereignty, despite the structural challenges it faced in 2012-3. The situation was made even more complex by the power struggles in Bamako between the former junta, the transitional president and the interim prime minister, which hindered the possibility for the country to be represented by one voice at the regional level. In this context,

the implementation of the APSA's protocols was far from an easy task. The legitimacy of ECOWAS as the leader of the regional response was increasingly challenged. Due to its thorough connections with hybrid actors in northern Mali, Algeria represented a different way for Malian actors, who could be called in, given its historical role in brokering peace deals between the Malian government and rebel groups in the north.

Furthermore, the AU supported a broadening of the intervention process, given the connections between the armed groups in Mali and actors that were located beyond the ECOWAS region and who were, in many ways, more affected by the insecurity than many other ECOWAS member-states. Compared to ECOWAS, Algeria had greater influence over the political economy of northern Mali, and by extension, more potential leverage over the different armed groups based in Gao, Kidal and Timbuktu. Furthermore, Algeria had longer historical connections to the troubled statebuilding process in Mali as it had mediated since 1991 between the Malian state and armed groups in the northern regions. In this context, tensions flared over the conduct of the regional response in Mali, between ECOWAS, which preferred a military response to support the transitional government under a UN mandate, and Algeria, which was confident in its ability to steer the armed groups to dialogue with the Malian government.

ECOWAS and the AU's success in Mali was dependent on the Malian authorities' willingness to address the domestic causes of the conflict and to support the initiatives of regional actors. In settings where the state delegates informally its authority to subnational actors who often leverage different sites of power to provide governance, and where issues related to the nature of the state are still to be addressed, regional security actors should engage with the actors carefully when conflict arises, and know that their action is contingent on consensus and dialogue among domestic actors. Formal and hybrid actors represent different constituencies and invoke different legitimacies which, even if they may be contested by other domestic actors, are still relevant in everyday processes.

The implications of the hybridity of governance in Mali and in many other postcolonial states are important for the APSA. While the architecture focuses essentially on formal structure of governance, it must assess the power dynamics within the states where it intervenes and consider how existing processes favour the marginalization of some demographics, or rather contribute to their inclusion (Bagayoko et al. 2016). This could require an infringement of member-state sovereignty when engaging with those actors; indeed, while the APSA reflects a policy of “non-indifference” and that Scenario VI for the deployment of the ASF implies an overruling of sovereignty in order to protect human security, the trend has been to respect this legal principle and to act in agreement with the states. This is even more acute in the case of ECOWAS where the principle of supranationalism has been the legal regime since 2008²⁵⁴ but despite this, the actions of the regional organization have been resisted by domestic actors, as could be seen in Mali in 2012-3.

This conundrum has been identified by AU diplomats active in Mali who “identified the collusion between the Malian government and some of the hybrid actors, involved in various forms of illicit trade and how the lack of inclusivity in the security forces, along with the nepotism in career advancement, generated much discontent and favoured not only the different Tuareg uprisings but also the March 2012 coup”²⁵⁵. Although they identify the issues, they feel constrained by the attitudes of the governing bodies, which has been very careful about infringing on state sovereignty. The reality is that the APSA was not designed to engage with these subnational actors, and as stated by one informant, it is not “obvious where state sovereignty starts or ends when we intervene and how much authority we have, for example, to confront pro-government militias to whom the state delegates some of its military actions”²⁵⁶.

²⁵⁴ Interview with ECOWAS PAPS/SSR official (Abuja: 18 July 2019).

²⁵⁵ Interview with former Former cabinet member, Mali (Bamako: 16 February 2018)

²⁵⁶ Interview with senior AU official (Addis Ababa: 30 May 2019 and 2 July 2019)

In this context, regional actors should refrain from engaging where the state seeks to use them as a means of asserting their legitimacy or authority. The states have the primary responsibility for resolving conflicts and the actions of regional actors are meant to be complementary to theirs²⁵⁷. It is important to question some of the assumptions about regional security actors, whether concerning their effectiveness instead of the state to address governance issues, or on how they view the postcolonial state and its internal dynamics. They are not always better positioned than states to address regional issues, and they could be used as forums to exclude or to marginalize subnational actors. By focusing on Weberian features, the APSA cuts off a substantial category of actors who are key in governance and in the provision of public goods.

As stressed by one Malian actor, regional actors did not really try to understand why the state collapsed in 2012 due to “their obsession with the constitutional, which led to a superficial discussion on the structural issues affecting Mali and the hasty restoration of the political elites and the processes of governance at the origin of the crisis”²⁵⁸. For this reason, the APSA must better reflect the grounded realities found in conflict settings, without reneging on its principles. To be more precise, the implementation of security governance policies must be more flexible and contextual by considering the roles played by informal governance processes, along with the political, economic and cultural ecosystems of these subnational actors within and beyond the state’s territory.

2. NORMATIVE PRESCRIPTIONS, LEGITIMACY AND EFFECTIVENESS IN SECURITY GOVERNANCE

As it is, the APSA will continue to struggle because its normative prescriptions are underpinning not only by core principles (human security; democracy and good governance) but also by assumptions about the nature of governance in African states, i.e. that they have control and authority over most of their territory and are the main sites of legitimacy. The Malian experience shows that this is not always the case, and as the conflict persists, other

²⁵⁷ Interview with ECOWAS PAPS/SSR official (Abuja: 18 July 2019).

²⁵⁸ Interview with Religious leader (Bamako: 18 February 2018)

subnational actors may be able to establish their authority further while embedded themselves in ongoing peace processes. Hybrid orders remain front and centre in governance processes in the Sahel, and they will continue to be influential over at least the medium term. This is based on their ability to mobilize multiples sites of authority and present themselves as slightly better than the formal state. This does not mean that they have a positive effect in the long term for either governance delivery or statebuilding. Their interests remain parochial, while the state, at least in principle, offers membership benefits to all citizens. Traditional sites of legitimacy and authority can be rearticulated with those of the state, but they can also be in opposition to each other, and even when they are rearticulated, they can serve as instruments to repress rival subnational actors. Indeed, the patterns of violence in northern Mali cannot be understood outside of the tribal rivalries between the Imghad and Ifoghas classes of the Tuareg, and the rivalries and violence that were sustained across the different rebellions over the past 60 years. This tribal rivalry is also reflected in the opposition between the MNLA and HCUA, dominated by Ifoghas, and the GATIA, an Imghad-dominated armed group, supported by the Malian government. The questions regarding the status of Kidal are representative of this knot.

The conundrum that ECOWAS and AU are dealing with is how they can engage with these important subnational actors without frustrating, or running afoul of, their member-states? Can they be effective without engaging with them? Does the sovereignty principle trump effectiveness in security governance? Especially in areas of limited statehood? The sovereignty principle guides APSA's framework of engagement but also serves as an impediment to its ability to engage with subnational actors in times of conflict. There is an overlay of governance orders, in which customary institutions, religious brotherhoods and economic/business cartels intermix, based on informality. At the same time, the APSA's actions and engagements are restricted to the formal domains of governance. The paradox is that the objectives of the APSA are to address peace and security challenges on the continent, while these issues mostly related to the nature of the postcolonial state and its governance patterns, all of which are located at the subnational level. These, then, are national issues that the regional organizations are

attempting to address, without having the proper capacities, often by doubling down on the Weberian attributes of the postcolonial African state. The Malian experience shows the difficulties ECOWAS and the AU had in engaging with the hybridity of governance when all their institutional framework only captures the formal processes driven by the state. For regional security governance to be effective, ECOWAS and the AU will need to go beyond the rhetoric and adapt their institutional framework and procedures to what governance really entails in many of the countries where they intervene. This shift will likely be resisted by their member-states, who have often tended to value regional organizations when they reinforce their authority against subnational actors and invoke their sovereignty whenever these organizations have shown autonomy from them. But as actors graft on the governance challenges of many Sahelian states to extend their hold and challenge national governments, incorporating and leveraging the abilities of hybrid actors become crucial to preserving human security.

Hybrid orders survive and adapt to the evolving governance situation because even though they are not supposed to be autonomous from the state authority, and thus, not worthy of consideration outside of the state's formal structure within regional security governance calculations, they exist *de facto*, especially in areas where statehood is limited. Through this lapse in the governance mechanism, they can challenge peace processes by defecting from existing groups, or by supporting the creation of new armed groups that can "soft spoil" as a means of extracting concessions and dividends from ongoing peace processes. Indeed, their influence increases with the breakdown of domestic sovereignty as is manifest in the case of Mali, where armed groups belonging to the CMA implement governance and refine their mechanisms. In his regard, the debate over the control of the city of Kidal is more than about restoring state sovereignty, but about the fear that alternative orders might be more effective than the state at delivering local-level governance. Indeed, a successful model of local governance by armed groups affiliated with customary institutions could further enshrine their hold over territory and, as time passes, progressively whittle away the legitimacy of the Malian state. Since the defeat of the Malian army during their bid to reconquer the city of Kidal in May 2014, the city has been effectively governed by the CMA, despite the attempts

of the pro-government armed groups to wrestle from it from its hand, and the irritation it causes among some of Mali's neighbours. The lack of progress in the implementation of the 2015 agreement favours the current status quo. Both the government and the CMA express different claims to legitimacy that the international actors present in Mali have thus far been unable to reconcile. There is an agreement, but the authority of the government of Mali is far from being restored; it is hampered by the presence and influence of armed groups who as signatories to the agreement have been coopted by the international community in their peacebuilding and stabilization activities. The risk with the current status quo is that even though the state continues to exist, its authority will be increasingly constrained if there is a lack of progress in the implementation of the agreement, and if the gap between the rulers and the citizens continue to widen. In this regards, the CMA's relative success in governance constitutes a challenge to the state's legitimacy and could pave the way for the institutionalization of other alternative orders in Mali.

In this dissertation, I have highlighted how the control of the city of Kidal by the CMA has been linked to postcolonial dynamics between France and Mali during the early months of *Operation Serval*, and how the defeat of the Malian government in May 2014, in its attempt to recapture the city from groups it views as hostile to its statebuilding project, was the catalyst for the subsequent peace process led by Algeria. One crucial question, as we focus on governance in the context of postcoloniality, surrounds how rebel governance differs from state governance, and to what extent the political economy of peacebuilding sustains it. An approach that looks at the interactions between nonstate actors, local populations and the state gives us a fresh perspective on the dynamics of states (Migdal and Schlichte 2005), and on how governance is produced through a constant negotiation among state and nonstate actors (Hagmann and Péclard 2010) to institutionalize power relations (Lund 2006). The conflagration in the Sahel has often been equated with systems of conflicts elsewhere in the world: the progressive descent of Mali into violence has often been described as "Afghanization" (Ayad 2017; Ben Yahmed 2015; O. 2018), and it is not rare to see news articles worrying about the risks of "Somalization" (Ould Abdallah 2012). But the political dimensions of everyday governance in civil war have seldom been considered, and there are few

comparisons between the governance of Kidal by armed groups, and the autonomous situation of Somaliland within Somalia since 1991. How rebels identify themselves amongst the people they govern and how they negotiate their governance structures in the territories they control during conflict merits further investigation, as it may be related in important ways to processes of state formation. Some of the literature on rebel governance has shown how armed groups face a dilemma between delivering public goods and shoring up their legitimacy with the local populations or succumbing to the “brutal efficiency of coercive tools” to mobilize local populations behind their cause (Mampilly 2015; Schlichte 2005). Building on this tension, the recourse to, and intensity of, violence towards local populations have been ascribed to organizational structures of the armed groups (Weinstein 2006) and their degree of territorial control (Kalyvas 2006). The interest in this literature is that it brings the political to the center of the action of armed groups and highlights the continuity between war and peace (Manning 2007; Müller 2012; Zeeuw 2008) as part of a state formation and consolidation process. This subnational dimension is absent in the understanding and approach to conflict resolution and management by regional security actors in Africa, who usually frame their action around a normative standpoint.

3. IMPLICATIONS: THE CONFLICT IN MALI AND ADAPTATIONS TO APSA

As shown in Chapter V, the AU adapted its instruments in light of the Malian experience by developing new initiatives that aimed to foster greater coordination and better resource mobilization by going beyond the RECs. The social construction of regions is manifest in the AU’s adaptation process to the crisis in Mali. The Nouakchott Process and the ACIRC reflect the actualization of the Sahel as a region, in the period following *Operation Serval*, and the subsequent deployment of MINUSMA. These developments show the dynamic nature of region-making and how international actors can drive them in a specific historical moment. Indeed, the international military intervention upended the dynamics of conflict resolution and management in Mali, out of the difficulties in the deployment of AFISMA in January 2013.

The framework of APSA and its provisions were progressively relegated to the background following *Operation Serval*, which ushered in an era of greater engagement by international actors such as the UN, the EU and France in Mali and across the region. This process was far from smooth and led to friction between the AU and the UN over the mandate and leadership of the UN mission, but also among African actors, concerning their relations with France especially. With the advance of violent extremist groups towards Bamako, West African leaders circumvented the framework of APSA and leaned on postcolonial political and military relationships that they maintained with France. *Operation Serval* was deployed with the blessings of the Malian transitional government and the political leadership of ECOWAS, who doubted the ability of their troops to be deployed on time and with sufficient capacity to meet the challenge. Despite its tenuous legality (Bannelier and Christakis 2013), Serval's successes strengthened the hand of the Malian transitional government against the former junta. They led to a reordering of strategies and interests by the armed groups in the north. By engaging directly with the MNLA and preventing the Malian regular forces from entering the city of Kidal in February 2013, the French operation also sowed the seeds of instability and violence between the Malian government and pro-government armed groups over control of that city.

AFISMA, on the other hand, had much less success and was quickly transformed into a UN peacekeeping mission, MINUSMA. The Africanization of peace support operations on the continent remains far from operational, due to the differences in capacity between the UN and the AU and on their doctrinal differences on peace support operations. Unlike the UN, principles of neutrality or impartiality do not constrain the AU's doctrine and practice. Indeed, the AU is committed to enforce peace where necessary, against spoiler groups, and to support the authority of the national governments against armed groups. In the context of Mali, this peace enforcement operation was given by the UN to *Operation Serval*. The original mandate of AFISMA, as defined by UNSC Resolution 2085, was divided between MINUSMA (stabilization), Serval (counterterrorism) and the EU (SSR) in UNSC Resolution 2100.

Understanding regions as dynamic processes, combined with the incongruity of the normative prescriptions concerning the Westphalian state in many African countries, reorient our perspective on the security turn of African regional organizations. With the international intervention, the Sahel and its meaning shifted from a regional space where the referent was mostly geography and climatic factors, to a regional society centred around five countries facing similar security and development challenges. The new region was located at the intersection of West, Northern and Central Africa and its creation were spurred by international interest in the Sahel, to which the APSA had to adapt. Most of these strategies focused on the security-development nexus, with the emphasis on addressing developmental challenges to prevent conflict. In this context, the Ministerial Coordination Platform served as a forum for the socialization of the emerging region with its international partners, and where attempts at coordination were stalled by the different preferences of the actors intervening in the region.

Whatever else they may have accomplished, the different development strategies were important because they established a forum for engagement between national and international actors on the emerging region's structural challenges. In this new environment, both the AU and ECOWAS developed strategies to coordinate security and development in the Sahel. These strategies were more the expression of their actorness and their need to stake a legitimacy claim. In essence, they were never implemented because they were never backed by sufficient resources, but instead were developed for both organizations to be able to contribute to debates on how to address the Sahel's recurring problems.

The purpose of the Nouakchott Process and the ACIRC were different, however. The Nouakchott Process was initiated to operationalize the APSA in the Sahel, and it emerged out of a recognition of a gap in the continental peace framework, a gap that was manifest in the lack of coordination of the regional response, the weak cooperation between Mali and its neighbours, and in the cumbersome deployment and early end of AFISMA. The ACIRC was developed in the same vein as a stop-gap measure, pending the full operationalization of the ASF. These two initiatives reflected the adaptation of the APSA to situations like Mali, through their

“transregional” nature that skirted the recourse to RECs and relied on willing troop-contributing countries, in the case of ACIRC. They were reactive adaptations to the regionalizing dynamics of subnational actors, but both initiatives failed to meet their potential due to political divergences among member-states. The Nouakchott Process was unable to operationalize the much-vaunted regional counterterrorist brigade for the Sahel, while the ACIRC was shelved progressively and subsumed into the ASF, after the military pillar of the APSA was declared operational in December 2015. In parallel to the AU initiative, the core Sahelian countries formed the G5 Sahel in February 2014, an initiative that thrived with the support of France and other international partners, as the regional project encapsulating the Sahel. The G5 Sahel is an example of an ad hoc coalition, driven by member-states that the APSA has had to adapt to, increasingly over the last years. The emergence of ad hoc coalitions (with the MNJTF in the Lake Chad basin region, in response to Boko Haram) is primarily the result of the limitations of the continental framework and of the willingness of the states at the frontline to address their shared security challenges. The proliferation of these parallel initiatives was initially resisted by traditional RECs and led to competition for resource mobilization among these different actors. The dynamic between the G5 Sahel and the AU was far from smooth: their relations were characterized by competition and various legitimacy claims, despite their sustained engagement. Due to its strategic partnership with the EU and France, the G5 Sahel progressively found its place in the “Sahel security jam” (ICG 2017) and deployed a regional force, along the lines of the one the Nouakchott Process aimed to create at but never operationalized. The G5 Sahel demonstrated genuine regionness and had a legitimacy stake in the Sahel, relative to existing initiatives; yet it bears the same normative prescriptions and is still affected by the same resource challenges that have crippled the actions of ECOWAS and the AU. Indeed, the Joint Force means to restore state authority where it has lapsed, remains heavily dependent on the support of *Barkhane*, the French counterterrorist operation that replaced Serval, while its security program is dependent on the development assistance of the EU and other international partners.

Despite these challenges, the ad hoc coalitions have imposed themselves on the AU's agenda and will likely flourish as long as APSA remains hampered by its own doctrinal and operational challenges. There is some convergence, with the AU's PSC formalizing the Joint Force of the G5 Sahel and the MNJTF by authorizing the mandates that they have defined for themselves. The Sahel crisis has led to some restructuring of the continental architecture, manifest in a new cartography of regional security that circumvents the existing RECs such as ECOWAS and gives a place to ad hoc initiatives developed by states belonging to different RECs. If we are still far from "African solutions to African problems", there is a willingness on the part of member-states to address security challenges by pooling their capacities outside of the framework of the APSA. These initiatives, however, remain reactive and militarized, and not sustainable in terms of their ability to seriously address long term patterns of conflict on the continent. In this regard, the APSA has a role to play, but its success will depend on its ability to integrate these new forms of intervention and its willingness to continue to redefine its cartography of the continent.

On the APSA, the AU is conscious of the challenges it faces as an institution and the necessity of improving both its engagement with the RECs/RMs and its implementation of decisions and resolutions by executive organs. In July 2016, the AU Assembly took the decision to conduct a study on the institutional reform of the AU, and entrusted this task to the Rwandan President, Paul Kagamé, allowing him "to make use of any expertise of his choice to carry out his mission" (Kagamé 2017, 1). The decision to look at ways of reforming the institution was made based on the realization that "Africa today is ill-prepared to respond to current events because the African Union still has to be made fit for purpose" (Kagamé 2017, 2). This is due, among other things, to the chronic failures to implement AU decisions, the overdependence on partner funding, and the unclear division of labour between the AU Commission, RECs and member-states. As demonstrated in this project, these limitations were reflected in the experience of the APSA in Mali, and in the Sahel, since 2012. In its submission to the AU

Assembly in January 2017, the Kagamé report stated that a consolidation of the AU as a political actor would entail reforms that will:

- Focus on key priorities with continental scope
- Realign African Union institutions to deliver against those priorities
- Manage the African Union efficiently at both political and operational levels
- Finance the African Union sustainably, with African resources.

Nineteen recommendations, later expanded to twenty-one that will address these four priority objectives, were submitted to and adopted by the Heads of State and Government in January 2017. The reforms suggested a narrowing down of the AU's actions (which are very comprehensive but of varying impact) to a select number of issues that are continental in scopes, such as political affairs, peace and security, economic integration and Africa's global representation and voice. On peace and security issues, the Kagamé report stressed that the quality of the Peace and Security Commission's decision-making and engagement has failed to meet the objectives and ideals expressed in the PSC Protocol, despite its robust legal framework and enhanced powers and functions (the PSC Commission captures most of the AU budget). The proposed reforms could include a revision of the Peace and Security Council's membership, strengthening the PSC's working methods and its role in conflict prevention and crisis management. Regarding the relations between the AU and RECs/RMs, the document argued for a clearer division of labour between these regional actors and member-states "in line with the principle of solidarity". On the role of extra-continental actors, the reforms reflect the anti-imperialist ethos of the AU in stressing that "external parties should be invited to Summits on an exceptional basis and for a specific purpose" (Kagamé 2017, 12). The decision on the presence of external parties was made concerning the presence, during summits of Heads of State and Government, of development partners, who are key contributors to the AU's programs and operational budget, but who were supposedly hampering the AU's ability to focus on decision-making (Gruzd and Turianskyi 2019, 11). In practical terms, the presence of development partners has been restricted since January 2018, to the opening

and closing sessions of AU summits. But the wording of “external parties” also affects civil society organizations, African and extra-continental, whose presence is even more limited than development partners. Thus, the implementation of the different provisions of the reform contradicts, on this issue, the whole purpose of the exercise, whose goals included, among other things, bringing the AU closer to African citizens (Gruzd and Turianskyi 2019). Discussions have already started between the AU and RECs over their working methods²⁵⁹, and there is scheduled to be a yearly AU-REC summit, but this is only the beginning. The relations between the AU and RECs/RMs are at the core of the APSA and built on political documents such as the 2008 Protocol, which will need to be revised, especially on the issues of mandates, powers and functions (Wachira and Kilonzo 2018). On peace and security, the capacities and experience of the different RECs/RMs differ substantially, and any redefinition of their division of labour will need to take into consideration their differences and comparative advantages.

Perhaps the most important reform suggested by the Kagamé panel focused on the sustainable and independent financing of the African Union by its member-states. The lack of independent and sustainable funding has affected the ability of the APSA to play the role it could have played in Mali and the Sahel, per the AU Constitutive Act, and the PSC Protocol, as the primary responder on matters of peace and conflict. The ideal of “African solutions to African problems” remains a distant goal because the AU was not able to promptly deploy AFISMA in January 2013, nor to implement the strategy it developed in the Sahel, nor to deploy the regional brigade for the Sahel that was proposed during the meetings of the Nouakchott Process in 2014. Indeed, the AU is heavily dependent on the EU African Peace Facility for its peace support operations and on other external partners, who funded half of its budget in 2014, 63% of it in 2015 and 74% of it in 2017 (Kagamé 2017, 13). The case is even direr for specific AU programs, such as “Silencing the Guns by 2020: Towards a Peaceful and Secure

²⁵⁹ The Niamey summit of 6-7 July 2019 was the first Summit reuniting the AU and RECs/RMs as part of the implementation of the proposed reforms.

Africa” or the “Year of Anti-Corruption”, which are 97% funded by donor partners (Kagame report 2017:13). The lopsided financing is essentially because many member-states are in arrears on their contributions, a situation that reflects their rhetorical commitment to the AU project but their parallel willingness to circumvent the framework in cases of national interest (Warner 2016; Gandois 2009). Building on earlier commitments to address this, the reform panel suggested a new financial plan that would progressively lead to a decreased contribution by donor partners, through a 0.2% levy on all eligible exports by AU member-states. The levy was scheduled to generate USD 1.2 billion per year (Gruzd and Turianski 2019: 13), an amount that exceeded AU’s 2017 budget (USD 782 million), the year the panel was formed. But whether this will be implemented remains an open question, as the reforms are already behind schedule. Only 12 member-states were implementing the levy in February 2018, and by July 2019, only 21 out of the 55 member-states have committed to it²⁶⁰ (Gruzd and Turianski 2019). Several member-states have also contested the legality of the measure: Mauritius and the Seychelles have stated that due to legal constraints and economic pressures, they will not implement the levy but will devise alternative means to contribute to the amount of 0.2% of their exports, while Egypt and South Africa, two leading contributors, said that they would not be able to comply with the 0.2% levy, with South Africa citing constitutional provisions which warrant them to deposit all revenues to their national treasury (Okeke 2018). Most of the SADC countries followed the lead of South Africa and opted out of the levy financing scheme, further compromising its implementation.

If the AU is conscious about its need to reform, in order, among other reasons, to be a more effective peace and security actor, it has not yet found consensus among its member states on how to do it. Some of the Kagame reforms on the restructuring of the Commission, for example, are being implemented while important ones on the financing of the organization, and the AU-RECs/RMs, dynamic are being unevenly operationalized. The absence

²⁶⁰ Interview with senior AU official (Addis Ababa: 30 May 2019 and 2 July 2019)

of those who proposed the reforms in its implementation will likely affect their potential impact. This is reminiscent of the momentum generated by the formation of the Nouakchott Process and the ACIRC in 2013, two initiatives whose failure to take off led to initiatives by member-states, in the form of the G5 Sahel, to which the AU has had to accommodate. Furthermore, while it focuses on some critical aspects of the governance of peace and security, the Kagamé reforms do not address how the AU perceives or engages with the role of subnational orders in conflict contexts, an issue that has been central to the failure of the APSA in Mali.

Regional security governance in Africa occurs in a context where state control and authority of its territory are brokered between formal and informal nodes of power. From my trips in Bamako, Abuja and Addis Ababa, it is clear that state authorities, regional diplomats, and national figures (from the political class and the opposition) are conscious of the reality of the gap between the regional security governance framework (and its inherent normativity) and the politics of domestic governance in Mali. In this context, the knowledge of local dynamics and the connection between formal actors who have resources and the law on their side, and hybrid/informal who can draw on other sources of legitimacy, is fundamental for effective security governance. The Malian conflict proves that national figures can resist and challenge intervention by regional organizations to whom they have delegated part of their authority on peace and security governance, and hedge among different interventions taking place at the same time. The shift in the mediation process from ECOWAS to Algeria in 2014 and the formation of the G5 Sahel by Sahelian states reflect how legitimacy claims by regional organizations can be undercut by member-states if they find it in their interest to do so. Regional security governance remains inherently political, and not limited to the provisions established by legal texts and procedures. The political dimension of this process is not limited to the organization or to the interactions between heads of state and government. Still, it begins at the local level where tensions linked to state formation, and the diffusion of state authority has often led to conflict with nonstate actors. Often, regional organizations have been called to address issues that are domestic ones, related to governance, without being always able to discuss and advise on national-level governance reform due

to sensitivities around national sovereignty. This is a conundrum with which the APSA has been contending since its beginning, and which it needs to address to be more effective. Conflict is political, and regional security governance needs to engage with the peculiarities of the postcolonial African state if it is to live up to its ambitions to find “African solutions to African problems”.

Interview Appendix

Bamako:

1. Professor, Political Science and International Relations, University of Bamako (Department of Law and Political Sciences), (Bamako: 1 October 2017)
2. Technical Advisor, Ministry of Human Rights and for State Reform, (Bamako: 4 October 2017)
3. Advisor, Mission of the African Union in Mali and in the Sahel (MISAHEL), (Bamako: 6 October 2017 and 22 January 2018)
4. Analyst, JMAC/MINUSMA, (Bamako: 8 October 2017)
5. Former Minister and Special Advisor to Transitional Prime Minister Cissokho, (Bamako: 10 October 2017)
6. Scholar and Professor of Anthropology, University of Bamako (Department of Studies and Research of Sociology and Anthropology). Former Rapporteur of the Conference for National Reconciliation (27 March-2 April 2017) (Bamako: 11 October 2017)
7. Former Prime Minister and leading political figure, Bamako: 13 and 16 October 2017.
8. Interview with journalist close to the transition authorities (Bamako: 16 October 2017).
9. Interview with Malian former minister involved in negotiations during the transition (Bamako: 18 October 2017)
10. Special Representative, MISAHEL, (Bamako: 16 October 2017)
11. Malian diplomat involved in the Algiers peace process (Bamako: 18 October 2017).
12. senior ECOWAS diplomat in Mali, (Bamako: 17 October 2017 and 23 January 2018)
13. Official, Human Rights Division, MINUSMA. (Bamako: 18 October 2017)
14. Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs Program Officer, MISAHEL. (Bamako: 18 October 2017)
15. Civil Society Member (Bamako: 23 October 2017)
16. Former Minister of Decentralization and Local Affairs (Bamako: 24 October 2017).
17. Researcher and Consultant active in Central Mali (Bamako: 23 October 2017 and 26 January 2018)
18. Malian diplomat involved in the Algiers peace process (Bamako: 18 October 2017 and 24 January 2018).
19. Advisor, ECOWAS Mission in Mali. (Bamako: 25 October 2017)
20. Former President of the National Assembly, Mali. (Bamako: 1 November 2017)
21. Malian diplomat, Office of the High-Representative of the President for the Peace and Reconciliation agreement. (Bamako: 1 November 2017)
22. Technical Advisor in charge of Sahelian Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mali. (Bamako: 6 November 2017)
23. Director, Political Affairs Division, MINUSMA. (Bamako: 7 November 2017).
24. Leader, West African Women CSO. (Bamako: 22 January 2018)
25. Interview with security analyst based in northern Mali. (E-mail: 9 January 2018) and in-person (Bamako: 22 February 2018).
26. Senior official, MINUSMA (Bamako: 22 January 2018)
27. Malian Coordinator, West African CSO. (Bamako: 22 January 2018)

28. Researchers, Institute for Security Studies (Bamako: 23 January 2018)
29. Former MISAHÉL diplomat (Skype: 23 January 2018)
30. Commissioner, Malian Commission for SSR (Bamako: 24 January 2018)
31. Director, Humanitarian organization (Bamako: 24 January 2018)
32. Director and Senior Researcher, Peace and Security foundation (Bamako: 24 January 2018)
33. Senior officer, Political Affairs Division, MINUSMA (Bamako: 25 January 2018)
34. DDR Officer, MINUSMA (Bamako: 25 January 2018)
35. Senior officers, Mediation Unit, Political Affairs Division (Bamako: 25 January 2018)
36. ECOWAS Liaison Officer to Mali Government, (Bamako: 25 January 2018)
37. Senior official, National Commission for DDR (Mali) Kidal (Bamako: 12 February 2018)
38. Former Vice-President, National Youth Council (Bamako: 13 February 2018)
39. Official, National Commission for Truth, Justice and Reconciliation (Bamako: 14 February 2018)
40. Senior Official, Ministry for Human Rights and State Reform (Bamako: 14 February 2018)
41. Tuareg Imghad former MP and politician (Bamako: 15 February 2018)
42. Former leader of pro-junta platform in 2012 (Bamako: 16 February 2018)
43. Malian politician and former cabinet member #1 (Bamako: 17 February 2018)
44. Former cabinet member #2, Mali (Bamako: 16 February 2018)
45. Spokesperson, Coordination of Azawad Movements (Bamako: 17 February 2018)
46. Religious leader (Bamako: 18 February 2018)
47. Journalist (Bamako: 19 February 2018)
48. Senior MINUSMA official (Bamako: 24 February 2018)

Dakar:

49. Regional director for West Africa, think tank (Dakar: 12 September 2017)
50. Military Advisor, UN Office for West Africa and the Sahel (Dakar: 22 December 2017)
51. Former Director, think tank, and civil society member (Dakar: 24 December 2017)
52. Former Senior MINUSMA diplomat (Dakar: 27 December 2017)
53. Former Political Advisor to the commander of Operation Barkhane (Dakar/phone: 12 January 2018)
54. Former operations commander Barkhane (Dakar: 19 January 2018)
55. Military Advisor #2, UN Office for West Africa and the Sahel (Dakar: 20 January 2018)
56. Political Affairs Officer, UN Office for West Africa and the Sahel (Dakar: 31 January 2018)
57. Political Affairs Advisor, UN Office for West Africa and the Sahel (Dakar: 2 February 2018)

Addis Ababa

58. Interview with senior AU official (Addis Ababa: 30 May 2019 and 2 July 2019)

59. Interview with senior military official #1, AU PSD (Addis Ababa: 31 May 2019 and 28 June 2019)
60. Senior military official #2, AU PSD (Addis Ababa: 31 May 2019)
61. AU/PSD official, Conflict Prevention and Early Warning Division (Addis Ababa: 3 June 2019)
62. AU/PSD, Conflict Management and Post-Conflict Reconstruction Division (Addis Ababa: 11 June 2019)
63. AU/PSD Official, Conflict Prevention and Early Warning Division (Addis Ababa: 10 June 2019)
64. Sahelian diplomat based in Addis (Addis Ababa: 11 June 2019)
65. European diplomat based in Addis Ababa (Addis Ababa: 18 June 2019)
66. AU diplomat involved in the development of the APSA (Addis Ababa: 20 June 2019).
67. Senior AU official, Conflict Management and Post-Conflict Reconstruction Division (Addis Ababa: 26 June 2019)
68. AU official liaising on the Sahel, Conflict Management and Post-Conflict Reconstruction Division (Addis Ababa: 26 June 2019)
69. Director, Peace and Security Department, AU Commission (Addis Ababa: 2 July 2019)
70. SSR officer, AU/PSD (Addis Ababa: 3 July 2019)
71. Civil Society Liaison with ECOWAS/AU (Addis Ababa: 3 July 2019)

Abuja

72. Officer, ECPF, Political Affairs, Peace and Security Directorate (PAPS, ECOWAS Commission (Abuja: 9 July 2019)
73. Senior Official, Peace and Security Division, PAPS Directorate, ECOWAS Commission (Abuja: 9 July 2019 and 17 July 2019)
74. Officer, Mediation Unit, PAPS Directorate (Abuja: 12 July 2019)
75. Senior official, Political Affairs, PAPS Directorate (Abuja: 12 July 2019)
76. Early Warning Officer #1, PAPS Directorate (Abuja: 16 July 2019)
77. Early Warning Officer #2, PAPS Directorate (Abuja: 16 July 2019)
78. ECOWAS PAPS officer and former MISAHIL chief of staff (Abuja: 17 July 2019)
79. ECOWAS PAPS/SSR official (Abuja: 18 July 2019).
80. ECOWAS Standby Force officer, PAPS Directorate (Abuja: 19 July 2019).
81. Senior official, Early Warning and Rapid Response (Abuja: 23 July 2019)
82. Former ECOWAS Standby Force officer involved in MICEMA (Abuja: 24 July 2019)
83. Early Warning Officer #3, PAPS Directorate (Abuja: 25 July 2019)
84. Liaison with civil society organization, ECOWAS (Abuja: 1st August 2019)
85. Scholar and former official, ECOWAS PAPS (Abuja: 5 August 2019)
86. Early Warning Officer #4 in charge of Sahel, PAPS Directorate (Abuja: 8 August 2019)
87. Director, PAPS Director (Abuja: 8 August 2019)
88. Interview with EU military Advisor (Abuja/Skype: 13 August 2019)
89. Former senior officer, AFISMA (Abuja: 14 August 2019).

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