

DECOLONIALITY IN DANGER OR BEING BOOSTED? AN EXPLORATION OF ECOWAS POSITIONS AND CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN THE WESTERN AFRICAN REGION

DIANA SFETLANA STOICA

PHD, DOCTORAL SCHOOL OF PHILOSOPHY, SOCIOLOGY AND POLITICAL SCIENCE

WEST UNIVERSITY OF TIMISOARA, UBUNTU CENTER FOR AFRICAN STUDIES

DIANA.STOICA80@E-UVT.RO



Abstract

This paper aims to explore the notion of decoloniality by examining the decisions and actions of the ECOWAS in response to the coup d'état in Burkina Faso in 2022, as well as other comparable sanctions imposed on Mali and Guinea during internal crisis challenges. These topics were raised and debated in various mass media outlets. For this purpose, readers are invited to imagine, based on ideas interpreted from official positions of the ECOWAS, or perceptions of them, expressed in academic narratives and the media, if decoloniality could be boosted or is in danger, following the decisions, actions, and positions of the ECOWAS. The interpretations through the lens of decoloniality portrayed in African narratives, and these explorations are characteristic of qualitative analysis. In examining how ECOWAS manages potential crises in the region, particularly in the cases of Guinea, Mali, and Burkina Faso, we can identify basic features of decoloniality. Taking a social-constructivist perspective, we can explore how African narratives of development can inspire critical resistance. Specifically, we must consider how power and relationships based on power can be decolonized to prioritize a people-centric view of development. In analyzing the use of violence and safety in the actions of the ECOWAS, we can determine whether they boost or endanger decoloniality. The academic community has shown considerable interest in the impact of the ECOWAS on the political climate of Western African states. However, it is important to consider the philosophical perspective on how the portrayal of ECOWAS actions and decisions can affect the narratives of opposition, anti-ism, and power dynamics. Specifically, in the case of internal conflicts, these portrayals can direct the debate on whether decolonization, as a theory, cultural movement, or process, can continue the work of African resistance initiated during the decolonization process which remains unfinished.

Keywords

decoloniality, power, people-centric, violence, safety

Received: February 2022 | 1st Revision: October 2022 | Accepted: March 2023

Stoica, Diana Sfetlana (2022). Decoloniality in danger or being boosted? An exploration of ECOWAS positions and conflict management in the Western African region. Hungarian Journal of African Studies [Afrika Tanulmányok], 16(3), 79-93.

Introduction

Western Africa is considered to be a fast-growing economic region, and also as a center for promoting narratives of development. The movement of Decoloniality, which has evolved under new paradigms, seeks to challenge the process of dissociation that began with decolonization, which was considered a non-event (Mbembe, 2021, p. 47). This movement, takes inspiration from a culture of liberation that followed the path of the anti-colonialist struggles of the continent, inspired by writings of the early African diaspora in Europe. In the meantime, Western Africa is considered a border region for ideals of Pan-Africanism, inspired by Kwame Nkrumah and other leaders who modelled resistance like, in the case of Burkina Faso, Thomas Sankara, or, considering Nigeria, the evolved root of activism of Afro-American diaspora. Western Africa has been perceived as pragmatic and self-determined, both globally and in terms of knowledge production. It plays a significant role in the economic representation and symbolism of Africa. Thus, to analyze decoloniality, a comprehensive study of a Western African economic community was undertaken. The choice to talk about The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) was not casual, but resulted from the relevance of recent events in some member states and the debate surrounding them.

ECOWAS is formed of 15 states from the western and central African regions, namely; Benin, Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Cote d'Ivoire, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togo.

Debates from recent years, inspired by the acknowledgement of the competition-conflict dyad of neighboring Western African states, have highlighted the place and role of ECOWAS in the regional balancing of powers and the changing images of the states in the global development mapping that is inevitably brought forth when talking about countries still considered to be Third World, but actually are part of an emergent Global South (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2020, p. 50).

In connection with this balancing and the debates about ECOWAS and surrounding it, this paper intends to unpack decoloniality, as “pluriversal epistemology of the future” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018, p. 35), taking inspiration from Walter Mignolo’s (2011) focus on the rise of Global South’s epistemologies where the locus of the decolonial lies (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018, p. 34), and reply to the question of whether, in the context of the actions, portrayal images, and perceptions of the ECOWAS reflected in debates carried African repository, decoloniality is in danger or it is being boosted. The necessity to invite scholars in African Studies to this reflection, although not limited to a mere reflection on the role of ECOWAS, but possibly extending this to include any kind of cooperation form between states in the African continent, was brought forward by the desire to look into decoloniality, not only as inherent to postmodernity but as an expression and symbol of a changing image of the African continent in the global development narrative.

Although decoloniality is seen as a theory, a research method, and a process that affects both the culture of the colonizer and the colonized (Alhuwalia, 2001 p. 50),

for the purpose of this discussion, the relevant perspective is one that encompasses the decolonial turn, which aims at the realization of a utopian world characterized by a lack of hierarchy, resistance to coloniality in the domains of knowledge, power, and being (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018, p. 39). Decoloniality deals with the alternatives of considering the power and the use of a taxonomy of narratives that keep the attention on the meanings of power while also deconstructing it.

The examples for reflection are the positions and actions of the ECOWAS in relation to the military coup in Burkina Faso and the situation in Mali, in order to explore and compare not only the decoloniality expressed by the recognition and acknowledgement of power to manage its own processes and situations but also the decoloniality shown by the ability to separate these processes and narratives from the European or global ones and avoid or reduce the influence of western narratives.

Finally, it is valuable to consider whether decoloniality is being boosted or endangered with respect to violence and safety and the actual role of an economic community in a region of conflict and competition. In order to deconstruct the meanings of power and explore decoloniality in its pathways from being in danger to being boosted, with ups and downs or back and forths, the proposition of the present paper is to depict an alternative reflection, with a poststructuralist background on ECOWAS, in reference to Burkina Faso and Mali, but also, on the features of decoloniality represented by violence and safety, thus bringing a contribution to a theoretic frame of decoloniality, based on a critical interpretation and connection to different views of African scholars.

Exploring decoloniality features in the conflict management actions of ECOWAS

Critical reflections on the ways ECOWAS has managed and responded to conflicts in the western area of the African continent, especially in relation to the coups d'état and the terrorist attacks of Burkina Faso, Mali and Guinea, with a focus on the first two states, are central issues to construct a decolonial frame for the possible perceptions on the role and image of the ECOWAS, for the improvement of the African continent's image on the globe, but mostly, for the actual development in the region, or the African epistemic freedom.

In valuing the ways ECOWAS manages the situation in the region and how it positions itself as an economic community, some questions on the paths of the evolvement of decoloniality, as process and critical resistance, are to be put forth, and consequently, answered with the help of old and new or continued views on the sources and foundations of power, violence, or resistance in contemporary philosophy and narratives of development.

The first interesting fact to reflect upon is the different treatment of Burkina Faso, having been suspended from ECOWAS due to the military coup, but not having suffered additional economic sanctions, like Mali and Guinea previously¹. In fact, according to Africa News², ECOWAS would have soon requested the newly come to power after the coup d'état of Burkina Faso, Lt. Col. Sandaogo Damiba, to provide a report on his mandate. It appears that there is a strong interest in exploring

the potential for Burkina Faso to reintegrate with expected standards. However, it is important to recognize the existence of a regional structure that manages and oversees relationships between member states of ECOWAS. This structure also respects national sovereignty within each member state.

At the Summit of ECOWAS in Accra on the 22nd of March 2022, the role it exercises is highlighted, foremost, by the strong position of condemnation of the coup d'état, the demand to release President Kaboré and the request for an acceptable transition plan, with a deadline after which Burkina Faso would also risk economic and financial sanctions, like with Mali.³ Currently, Guinea is being closely scrutinized by ECOWAS, which is criticizing the absence of a transition timetable in the country and emphasizing the need for a facilitator to oversee the transition process. Meanwhile, Mali is facing sanctions and is in need of humanitarian aid. Finally, the relationship between ECOWAS and Burkina Faso is characterized by clear hierarchical perspectives, with Burkina Faso having been suspended from all ECOWAS institutions until constitutional order is restored. One positive development is that a mediator has been appointed to help resolve the situation in Burkina Faso.

When considering ECOWAS' involvement in the internal political affairs of a current or former member, their actions in the name of peace and democracy are subject to academic debate and criticism for potentially being led by neo-colonial powers, as noted by Wiredu (Eze, 1997, p. 314). It is a common narrative to consider, from an African academic perspective and African public dialogue, that agents of global coloniality have always tended to "keep Africa within the ambit of a Euro-North American-centric world system" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2020, p. 50).

For example, it was said about the francophone block of ECOWAS that tended to hijack the initiative of ECOWAS in regard to the ECO currency (ISS, 2020), while in 2019, French President Emmanuel Macron, and President Alassane Quattara of Ivory Coast, stated that countries who have suffered from monetary imperialism would need to adopt the ECO currency. Still, the situation gave reason for major debate on the part of the Anglophone block of the organization (Ibid), in addition to levels of convergence criteria that would be more beneficial for francophone states, especially a newcomer such as Nigeria. The situation reveals more than just the persistence of monetary imperialism by dominant western nations or the sub-imperialism by powerful members of ECOWAS. It also exposes the Global North's agenda to strip ECOWAS of its initiative, thereby diminishing its regional power and relevance.

■ **When considering ECOWAS' involvement in the internal political affairs of a current or former member, their actions in the name of peace and democracy are subject to academic debate and criticism for potentially being led by neo-colonial powers.**

This move aims to thwart the African continent's resistance and reaffirmation, as well as the decolonial narrative of the Global South in the balance of global power relations. And in this regard, the demands for decoloniality became urgent (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018, p. 174).

Since this resulted in greater confusion among the member states, after debates on the ECOWAS Cease-fire Monitoring Group (ECOMOG), the actual resistance constructed around the subject reflected that Africa tried to fight for the "turning over of a new leaf," entailing "depatriarchization," in the words of Sankara (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2020, p. 7), and projecting new perspectives for the narrative of their development, from Philosophy to Economy as well as Politics.

Although the conclusion drawn from research papers and workshops on ECOWAS' role in the region point to the perspectives coming from below, including people-centered standpoints⁴, this is only reflected in the case of Burkina Faso, that did not suffer from immediate financial sanctions, but was not the case for the other states facing crisis situations. The lack of equality among members is apparent, and the focus on financial sanctions, whether previously established or not, suggests that they will be applied at some point. This highlights that ECOWAS' actions are not centered on the people as the ultimate goal but rather as a starting point. That is, financial sanctions that are ultimately more likely to affect people than states are preferred in cases of internal conflicts that, in fact, does not depend on individuals. But individuals do become victims of ECOWAS' conflict management measures, and their position as the victim could nourish the transition process that the state concerned faces, escalating, in the portrayal and narrative, the sovereignty of national governments and increasing the role played by ECOWAS in the supervision of the nation's transition processes from one regime to another.

In the African theorizing of decoloniality, people-centrality should be a destination point and not just a premise because the construction of the Self should be an ongoing process linked to development. In this scenario, centrality needs to be created or re-conceptualized in an African manner using African methods, particularly in the context of development. Narratives of the people in Africa record the quest for "the second independence" (Ake, 1996, p.159), so organizations that promote development, and would like to situate themselves on the side of those guaranteeing bottom-up initiatives, should act by integrating people in the discourse of development, to be molded after them, and not to the contrary.

In fact, choosing to put people at the center of sanctions could be a sign of the paternalistic attitudes of ECOWAS towards member states, necessarily recalling attention and active contestation, relative to a substantive democracy opposed to patriarchy (paternalism) recalled by decolonization/decoloniality (Ndlovu-Gatheni, 2018, p. 175). But, also considering the focus on democracy promotion as the aim of ECOWAS, it was reflected that in the end, the contestation was more a reaffirmation of ECOWAS intervention and also that of the African Union (Witt & Schanbel, 2020, p. 283).

The actions taken by ECOWAS in response to conflicts and social changes in West African states have failed to involve African people. This highlights the need

for a people-centric approach, as well as a reliance on Western models and suggestions and a weak epistemic position in the debate over neo-colonialism in the region. Such criticism was stronger in Mali, or in The Gambia 2017, where the presence of ECOMOG in order to defend Gambian peace, was covered by scepticism of “someone’s hidden interest” (Witt & Schnabel, 2020, p. 283). However, in the conclusion of research from Witt and Schanbel in 2020 on ECOWAS’ interventions in the political crises in the region, the actions of ECOWAS would not have been looked at from the point of view of legitimacy, but under its forms and aims, while notwithstanding this, the contestation of illegitimacy served ECOWAS to reaffirm its position in the region (p. 283).

According to an article on the online edition of Reuters, written by Thiam Ndiaga and Christian Akorlie, Ghana’s President Nana Akufo Addo stated that ECOWAS may have felt the need to assert its importance to the world by taking a firm stance on the coup d’état in Burkina Faso.⁵ Moreover, according to Western diplomacy, no other organization besides ECOWAS could have such a singular position as mediator and advisor among political and military actors in the Western African region (Yabi, 2010, p. 33), due to proximity, historical background, and indirectly put, colonial memory. This rhetorical “protection” from the West could signify decoloniality being in danger.

Meanwhile, James Tasamba and Enoch Fiifi Forson published on Anadolu Agency in March 2022, that the same president described the three states (Burkina Faso, Mali, Guinea) as recalcitrant in their dialogue with ECOWAS, on the norms and deadlines imposed by it.⁶ In this frame, relations of power are highlighted within ECOWAS at a rhetorical level as well, and the top-down approaches of ECOWAS reflect the limitations of a mediation capability in the region (Saidou, 2018).

A change of perspective in the relations and management of ECOWAS in situations of conflict is shown by the paradigm shift from preventive diplomacy adopted in the case of Guinea in 2005 (Yabi, 2010, p. 21) to a sort of *conceited diplomacy* in the present cases, diplomacy whose model could be inspired by interventionism. Although in the case of Guinea, the preventive diplomacy was one-sided on the part of ECOWAS, the actual conceitedness appears to be a feature of both parties in the dialogue, even with those countries at the bottom of the ECOWAS inner power balance who chose to oppose some of the traditional diplomatic behaviours (such as the case of Col. Assimi Goita of Mali, declining the invitation to attend the ECOWAS summit in Ghana in person).⁷ From this perspective of conceited diplomacy, people-centricity is underscored.

Looking from both angles, people-centricity and conceited diplomacy, the decolonial feature seems to be boosted, considering the power relations between conceited actors on one side, the president of Ghana, who expressed a firm position regarding the internal conflicts of ECOWAS member states, and the attitudes of these states towards him. There is resistance to what is perceived as a top-down traditional intervention. So, on one hand, the narrative of the United States becoming a model of regionalism being defended by Kwame Nkrumah as a response to a post-

colonial predicament and unity, potentially having been embraced by Ghanaian actual narratives, (Gettachew, 2019, p. 117), while resistance is recalled in African repository in the case of European interventions in Mali undermining the free movement, as the aim of ECOWAS (Langan, 2018, p. 166), despite clear anti-colonial positioning of Mali's Prime Minister reported by france24.com .

In the case of sanctions applied to Burkina Faso, reflections can be made from the point of view of the 1958 union between Guinea, Ghana, and Mali, marking one of the first African continental unities (Ndlovu-Gatheni, 2018, p. 109), potentially causing higher expectations from Guinea and Mali, in comparison to a soft tolerance towards Burkina Faso, in the decisions made by ECOWAS. Examining the internal relations of ECOWAS and the instruments of power used to manage the crises that occurred, such as intervention, supervision, mediation, negotiation⁸, or neutrality for the

purpose of regional cooperation, all manifest different levels of power, are characterized by epistemic violence (Mbembe, 2021, p. 68), and highlight a commitment to ensure the safety of individuals both within individual states and across the region. An exploration of these features will be examined in the next section.

One of the missions of ECOWAS is promoting democracy, which can be viewed from the perspective of protecting decoloniality, considering that the expansion of ECOWAS's role in the monitoring of elections in the member states, besides adopting the Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance in 2001, encourages the manifestation of election monitoring power and the power to impose sanctions against illegitimate governments (Johan Tejpar and Adriana Lins de Albuquerque, 2015), when the illegitimacy of the new government is not holistically confirmed, nor are there yet instruments to measure the implications of people in the state that suffered the coup d'état, to the realization, interpretation, adaptation, and the validation of it. However, opposition to election monitoring could be qualified as opposing the principles of democracy. As a consequence, besides encountering "no delinking from the colonial matrices of power", the condition of decoloniality according to Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018, p.122), the opening to multiple "anti"-isms, like "anti"-isms of postmodernity (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018, p. 43) would highlight decoloniality.

Presupposing that ECOWAS member states and ECOWAS itself as an organization, should share the desire to "turn over a new leaf" in the making of Africa in the

The actions taken by ECOWAS in response to conflicts and social changes in West African states have failed to involve African people. This highlights the need for a people-centric approach, as well as a reliance on Western models and suggestions and a weak epistemic position in the debate over neo-colonialism in the region.

world and continuing the call of Kwame Nkrumah (1963) to African Unity, which is opposed to disunity as the trademark of colonialism (Ndlovu Gathseni, 2020, p. 15), the differentiated treatment of member states experiencing internal crises produces disunity as a result of resentment and debates, thus decolonial features of ECOWAS actions are endangered.

Notwithstanding this, seeing that producing disunity would be counterproductive for the mission and aims of the ECOWAS itself, since unity represents the expression of a *vital force* or a constructed western imagined Bantu ontology (Imbo, 20, p. 370), *amandla* (power), *revolutionary spirit*, *relationality* and *the future*, according to Ndlovu Gathseni(2020, p. 15), the different treatment of member states confronted with crises, and particularly the attention and lack of economic sanctions regarding Burkina Faso, beyond a hypothetical interest of stronger western African states, could reveal the belief that unity should be strengthened by understanding and accepting differences, and not creating them, as colonial order did (Ndlovu-Gathseni, 2018, p. 44; Serequeberhan, 1994, p. 78), by the acknowledgement of relativity, and by boosting the power of the critical society to stand up and denounce decisions that are not linked to development, but to mere regional economical politics. As an example that highlights this issue regarding relations between neighbours, Burkina Faso is historically an important supplier of emigrants to Ghana (Adeniran & Ikuteyijo, 2018, p. 423), so economic sanctions in Burkina Faso could deepen the problems of this situation at Ghana's expense.

However, like many African regional economic communities, ECOWAS seems to be more efficient politically than economically, not having escaped criticism and scandals in relation to military and police exchanges between the governments, including ostracism of leaders, such as, but not limited to, Thomas Sankara, leader of Burkina Faso (Bayart, 1993, p. 200). Or, as the intervention in Guinea has previously shown, the aim of ECOWAS to try to “bring states up to the standard in the region” (Yabi, 2010, p. 52), even if he was referring to the security sector and the encouragement of initiatives in cooperation with supporting more ambitious reform programmes, it is likely, that many measures taken by ECOWAS as a result of the crises in the region, especially in particular states, were meant to maintain the standards projected for the region, failing, meanwhile, to help improve the bilateral cooperation of member states already weakened by internal conflicts, further deepening the negative competition existing between them, in light of the different sanctions.

Although it could be regarded as negative, this type of management in the region could give shape to a form of decolonial booster because analyzing the Communiqué of March 25th, 2022, from Accra, Mali, and Burkina Faso, both are put under the call of humanitarian intervention, whilst they are in different phases of transition after a crisis. Regarding Guinea, it is important to direct the call for help to its government rather than involving third parties. This highlights the need for responsibility and unity, following the legacy of Nkrumah's belief that Western aid and power politics contribute to vulnerability. (Langan, 2018, p. 169) On the other hand, it would reveal the need to overcome the colonial memory and experience in order to use all avail-

able means, e.g., humanitarian intervention, to overcome the crises even if these means could signify neo-colonialism.

When considering the role of ECOWAS in Western Africa, it's important to compare it to the European Community's role in Europe. However, it's necessary to move beyond surface-level portrayals and rhetoric. To explore a de-colonial aspect of ECOWAS, it's interesting to consider that the formation of the European Economic Community was predicated on the colonization of Africa. This was pointed out by Hansen and Jonsson in 2011, as cited by Aman (2018, p.14). Therefore, decolonization must be considered as a crucial step in the formation of ECOWAS. This would be sustained also by the challenge to the African continent's unity, in the perspective of narratives of the division of the continent coming from Eastern and Southern Africa (Langan, 2018, p. 207).

Unpacking violence and safety within ECOWAS: A philosophical perspective

The concern of ECOWAS to assure a peaceful climate in the region, including interference in the legitimacy of governments and their alternation to power in member states with sanctions, control, and recommendations that result from such interference, also seems highlighted and justified by the narratives of African unity, development through regional cooperation, legitimacy and standards of the region, human rights, and last but not least, by the decolonization that is never just a local process (Mbembe, 2017, p. 172). As a regional organization that upholds these values, ECOWAS has a vested interest in participating in the continuation of these efforts, even if it involves interference.

In the light of these narratives, exploring the situation in Burkina Faso after the coup d'état and the reaction of ECOWAS to this situation, in comparison with reactions of preventive crisis management in the region related to conflicts in Mali and Guinea, the analysis of the cause-effect relation for the shaping of a decolonial booster or jeopardizer was preferred. For this objective, the relation of cause-effect is contextualized to violence-safety, considering the effect of "safety" as being the aim of crisis management and, in this context, the declared objective of the ECOWAS. Both elements are used several times, in a colonial historical and post-colonial political context, for the unpacking of power, under the form of resistance and the pragmatic perspective of its purposes.

Violence is indeed a form of resistance, a "cleansing force" in the words of Eduard Said (Alhuwalia, 2001, p. 48), and any resistance implies a form of violence including all actions that are imposed from a top-down scheme that pretend to prevent or solve different crises. This form of violence could have been inspired by ECOWAS, that both united, and at the same time caused, disunity, due to common exposure to not only threats, but singular and specific critical resistance, as a continuation of the resistance over the course of many decades, from the independency of the African States to the actual discourses on decoloniality.

In fact, the debates over the differential treatment of member states by ECOWAS highlight the notion that such differences could be indicative of a decolonial narrative,

as suggested by Abdelkabir Khatibi. Khatibi refers to a “rhetoric of the empire”, and even if decolonization is only applied to thought, it implies that this logic extends to other senses as well and “is an openness to plurality and a free subversion of the powers that inhere in a discourse” (Spurr, 1993, p. 200). Also, Ndlovu Gatsheni saw in decolonization the expression of a unity comprising relationality (2020, p. 15) and unavoidable violence because it is not a choice, but would be imposed by the colonizer on the colonized (Serequeberhan, 1994, p. 78), decolonization according to Franz Fanon (Mbembe, 2019, p. 4), being an instrument of resurrection (Mbembe, 2019, p. 129), or a resistance to discourse, in the context of the free subversion of inherent powers that characterize said discourse.

From another perspective, states like Mali and Burkina Faso, having been confronted with terrorist attacks for several years, would express a major concern of vulnerability in regards to its international portrayal, as the standard of stability that ECOWAS established would not be met in situations when support and access to power in the member states are not yet clear. For this, ECOWAS has set transition periods and deadlines for explanations for each country that, based on specific circumstances, were extended. The manifestation of power is evident in this process, which reaffirms the sovereignty of member states. It involves the transfer of responsibility to ensure that standards are met, allowing for the lifting of suspension and the return of the state as an active ECOWAS member. Besides meaning empowerment, this reflects the conviction of other ECOWAS states, shown from the rhetoric of Ghana’s President, cited above, that membership is an honor, brings privileges of integration and development, and should almost be mandatory. However, the recalcitrance to which President Nana Akufo Addo was referring, shows that some states do not see membership to ECOWAS as a number one concern, or at least not extending to their sovereignty to decide whether or not to be part of its contemplation.

It is important to recognize that there are various forms of violence that highlight the nuances of colonialism and its effects. Franz Fanon and Achille Mbembe (2019, p. 118) have both emphasized the need to create unity, but also acknowledge the potential for disunity and destruction (Mbembe, 2021, p. 55) when resistance is met with forceful integration into a new system of power that still carries the remnants of its predecessor. This requires even stronger resistance, especially when there are intermediary authorities involved. While ECOWAS may have valid arguments for why member states should participate, it is important to scrutinize its actions and avoid any potential for imperialism. The economic vulnerabilities in the region could attract unwanted “new colonizers,” (Kivunja, 2017, p. 40) so it is crucial to prioritize decoloniality in all actions taken.

Regarding safety, as a presupposed effect of the actions of ECOWAS for the region, people-centricity is again relevant. As an aim to pursue, the guarantee of safety and a peaceful climate, not only for the individual, but also for the ECOWAS member states, the political climate in the Western African region and the economic relations between member states from an overall perspective, is by itself the representation of resistance to the violence manifested in the member states. Often this resistance

looks like the promotion of democracy in the region, with the limitation of doubts on its meanings and endings related to its deviations, like the “imperialism as democratic despotism,” of Dubois (Getachew, 2019, p. 38), thus criticized in an African repository.

According to Achille Mbembe safety “would require a redistribution of feeling and affect, of perception and speech” (2017, p. 34), elements that are highly valuable in the considerations of how decoloniality was expressed by narratives of liberation from the colonization of thinking, models of behavior and acting, according to an African trend

seen as pathetic (Rahaman, Yeazdani & Mahmud, 2017, p. 22), in a context where neither isolation would be the right choice. Could imposition set by ECOWAS to suspend member states to report their transition status, even in the case of their suspension, represent a safety feature? In a people-centered vision, the need individuals naturally feel to be safe could be transposed in the interest of the state to assure them of this safety, which means more than just peace and non-violence, the lack of which allows the perpetuation of political instability (Tshibambe, 2020, p. 38).

In the context of ECOWAS, it would be essential for the newly transitioned political power to address the concerns of ECOWAS, while flatly allowing for election monitoring and supervision, especially after a suspension due to a coup d'état. The successful transition of power would make it a positive example of democracy that ECOWAS promotes and help overcome acceptance challenges both internally and externally. Kapoor (2008, p. 116) emphasizes the importance of the state being central to democracy. In particular, citizens across the continent also want laws and rules that set benchmarks and frameworks for the exercise of power for everyone, just as they do for other economic and social activities (Tarrósy, 2019, p. 129). In this case, safety is an image, or a perception, a reason for which violence is to be resisted by any means possible, as well as stability in the context of relations between states or inside supranational organizations.

But the matter of safety is still two-fold. Judging within the limits of these reflections, since safety is seen as resistance to violence, and being the preferred tool in settling differences (Benyera, 2020, p. 23), therefore, returning to the discussion of differences in reference to unity (as opposed to disunity imposed by colonial order) from the previous section, unity is important for decolonization. However, relying on safety measures implemented by organizations like ECOWAS could potentially undermine the decolonization process and reinforce power dynamics rooted in colonialism. This could perpetuate learned behaviors from the colonial era that have not yet been unlearned.

In fact, the debates over the differential treatment of member states by ECOWAS highlight the notion that such differences could be indicative of a decolonial narrative, as suggested by Abdelkabhir Khatibi.

From a completely different angle, the call to cooperation and other sorts of action taken by ECOWAS, in relation to suspended states being weakened by internal conflicts and also rising terrorist movements like Boko Haram (Ikuteyijo & Olayiwola, 2020, p. 90), that challenge the security of all ECOWAS member states, shows the need for mutual recognition (acceptance or validation) and respect, if based on responsible reporting (of transition phases, transition projection, etc.), highlighting their call for solidarity to assure the safety of single states and the region, and to safeguard intraregional relations (Serequeberhan, 2015, p. 68).

The decisions made by ECOWAS regarding Burkina Faso and Mali may seem unusual given the importance of state authority in promoting African economic growth and regional trade expansion. However, it is worth noting that both countries were instrumental in founding CEN-SAD in 1998 (Ikuteyijo & Olayiwola, 2020, p. 88), which demonstrates their commitment to seeking safety through economic integration and unity among neighboring states. This aligns with ECOWAS' collaborative approach to promoting regional interests.

From the perspective of this analysis, a major issue that resumes reflections on decoloniality is the epistemology of power transformation from violence to safety, or from intention to solution, in regards to how ECOWAS represents the competition in the region under the sign of critical resistance and hegemonic images, besides the struggle to temper them while cultivating unity. Or, in the words of one scholar: "the constant seek of states [...] to curb [...] acts of benevolence that the neighbors within the region [mis]construed as hegemonic tendencies." (Adesanya, 2020, p. 18)

End reflections on decoloniality

Based on the ideas discussed, it appears that the concept of decoloniality should play a significant role in ECOWAS' decision-making, image portrayal, and actions. This potential for ongoing improvement has been emphasized by most of the analysts cited in this discussion.

However, there is also a threat of overemphasizing the relations of power and allowing states in competition to concentrate more on supporting the conflict, instead of allowing external forces to intervene, pursuing principles of freedom and sovereignty that imply the transformation of violence, as a feature of power and decoloniality into safety, another feature of it. Safety and violence are yet two terms with infinite operation modalities in the narrative of decoloniality, the space herein being limited from exploring deeper. It is necessary to recognize that the concept of safety can be linked to colonialism, as it can enable authoritarian regimes and unequal power dynamics to thrive under the guise of protection.

The paper has also expressed the concept of people-centricity, generally used in regard to the actions of the ECOWAS, in the debate on top-down/bottom-up directions, applied in a reflection over the financial sanctions, alongside conceited diplomacy, in the case of induced dynamics of diplomatic relations. The research around this term is very limited, and the call is to imagine its potential and develop

a theoretical frame for it, to design the paths toward sustainable development and peace in the region and the safety of relations between ECOWAS member states.

This would be, to the last degree, central to the climate of cooperation and the strengthening of an African community of resistance and guarantor of the “decolonial turn” aimed to achieve the “dreamed” finalization of the decolonization process.

Notes

- 1 <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/3/18/west-african-bloc-says-will-not-abandon-burkina-faso-after-coup>, accessed on March, the 3rd, 2022, 11:23 a.m.
- 2 <https://www.africanews.com/2022/03/18/burkina-faso-ecowas-worried-about-the-duration-of-transition/>, accessed on March, the 3rd, 2022, 13:15 a.m.
- 3 <https://reliefweb.int/report/mali/final-communique-extraordinary-summit-ecowas-authority-heads-state-and-government>, accessed on July, the 7th, 2022, 16:29 p.m.
- 4 <https://www.hsfk.de/en/research/projects/local-perceptions-of-regional-interventions-au-and-ecowas-in-burkina-faso-and-the-gambia>, accessed on July, the 20th, 2022, 10:30 a.m.
- 5 <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/w-african-bloc-ecowas-suspends-burkina-faso-after-military-coup-sources-2022-01-28/>, accessed on May, the 5th, 13:54 p.m.
- 6 <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/west-african-bloc-issues-ultimatums-to-mali-burkina-faso-junta-leaders/2546248>, accessed on July, the 3rd, 18:30 p.m.
- 7 <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/west-african-bloc-issues-ultimatums-to-mali-burkina-faso-junta-leaders/2546248>, accessed on July, the 3rd, 18:30 p.m.
- 8 <https://reliefweb.int/report/mali/final-communique-extraordinary-summit-ecowas-authority-heads-state-and-government>, first accessed on May, the 3rd, 21:20 p.m.

References

- Adesanya, O. P. (2020). “The Dilemmas of ECOWAS Peacekeeping Missions in West Africa,” in Adegboyega A. K., (Ed) (2020) *In Search of Peace and Security in Africa: Essays in Honour of Professor Amadu Sesay* (Abuja: National Institute for Security Studies, 2020. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/356542988_The_Dilemmas_of_ECOWAS_Peacekeeping_Initiative_in_West_Africa_1
- Ahluwalia, P. (2012). *Politics and post-colonial theory: African inflections*. Routledge.
- Ake, C. (2001). *Democracy and development in Africa*. Brookings Institution Press.
- Aman, R. (2017). *Decolonising intercultural education: Colonial differences, the geopolitics of knowledge, and inter-epistemic dialogue*. Routledge.
- Atoyebi, T. A. (2018). Emergent Dynamics in Female Migration in West Africa. In: Adeniran, A. & Ikuteyijo, L. (eds.) *Africa Now!: Emerging Issues and Alternative Perspectives*. Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 415-442
- Bayart, J. F. (1993). *The State in Africa: The Politics of the Belly*, translated from French by Mary Harper, Christopher and Elizabeth Harrison
- Benyera, E. (2020). The colonial state is the problem in Africa. In: *Reimagining Justice, Human Rights and Leadership in Africa*, pp. 21-35. Springer, Cham.
- Eze, E. C. (1997). *Postcolonial African philosophy: A critical reader*.
- Getachew, A. (2019). Worldmaking after Empire. In *Worldmaking after Empire*. Princeton University Press.
- Ikuteyijo, L., & Olayiwola, P. (2020). The Security Challenges of a Borderless Africa: Issues and Perspectives. In: Nshimbi, C. C. & Moyo, I. (eds.) *Borders, Mobility, Regional Integration and Development*. Springer, Cham, pp. 85-99

- Imbo, S. O. (2008). Okot p'Bitek's Critique of Western Scholarship on African Religion. In: Wiredu, K. (ed.). *A companion to African philosophy*. John Wiley & Sons, pp. 364-373.
- Kapoor, I. (2008). *The postcolonial politics of development*. Routledge.
- Langan, M. (2017). *Neo-colonialism and the Poverty of 'development' in Africa*. Springer, Cham.
- Mbembe, A. (2017). *Critique of black reason*. Duke University Press.
- Mbembe, A. (2021). *Out of the dark night: Essays on decolonization*. Columbia University Press.
- Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S. J. (2020). *Decolonization, development and knowledge in Africa: Turning over a new leaf*. Routledge.
- Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S. J. (2018). *Epistemic freedom in Africa: Deprovincialization and decolonization*. Routledge.
- Rahaman, S., Yeazdani, R., & Mahmud, R. (2017). The untold history of neocolonialism in Africa (1960-2011). *International Journal of History and Philosophical Research* 5(1), pp.16-27.
- Saidou, A. K. (2018). 'We have chased Blaise, so nobody can resist us': Civil society and the politics of ECOWAS intervention in Burkina Faso. *South African Journal of International Affairs*, 25(1), 39-60.
- Serequeberhan, T. (2013). *The hermeneutics of African philosophy: Horizon and discourse*. Routledge.
- Serequeberhan, T. (2015). *Existence and heritage: hermeneutic explorations in African and continental Philosophy*. SUNY Press.
- Spurr, D. (1993). *The rhetoric of empire: Colonial discourse in journalism, travel writing, and imperial administration*. Duke University Press.
- Witt, A., & Schnabel, S. (2020). Taking intervention politics seriously: Media debates and the contestation of African regional interventions 'from below'. *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, 14(2), pp. 271-288.
- Yabi, G. O. (2010). The role of ECOWAS in managing political crisis and conflict. *FES Peace and Security Series, Abuja*.
- Tarrósy, I. (2019). Demokratizálódás és regionalizáció a szubszaharai Afrikában. In: Marsai, V. (ed.) *Afrika a globalizált világban: Lehetőségek és kihívások*. Budapest: Dialóg Campus Kiadó, pp. 127-145.
- Tejpar, J., & de Albuquerque, A. L. (2015). Challenges to peace and security in West Africa: The role of ECOWAS. *Studies in African Security*, pp. 1-4.
- Tshibambe, G. N. (2020). Perspectives on Contemporary Migration and Regional Integration in Central Africa. In: Nshimbi, C. C. & Moyo, I. (eds.) *Borders, Mobility, Regional Integration and Development*. Springer, Cham, pp. 39-49.

Online resources

- <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/economics-alone-isnt-holding-back-west-africas-eco>
- <https://reliefweb.int/report/mali/final-communique-extraordinary-summit-ecowas-authority-heads-state-and-government>
- <https://www.france24.com/en/tv-shows/eye-on-africa/20220128-ecowas-suspends-burkina-faso-after-coup-stops-short-of-sanctions>
- <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/w-african-bloc-ecowas-suspends-burkina-faso-after-military-coup-sources-2022-01-28/>
- <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/west-african-bloc-issues-ultimatums-to-mali-burkina-faso-junta-leaders/2546248>
- <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/west-african-bloc-issues-ultimatums-to-mali-burkina-faso-junta-leaders/2546248>
- <https://www.hsfk.de/en/research/projects/projects/local-perceptions-of-regional-interventions-au-and-ecowas-in-burkina-faso-and-the-gambia>
- <https://reliefweb.int/report/mali/final-communique-extraordinary-summit-ecowas-authority-heads-state-and-government>
- <https://reliefweb.int/report/mali/final-communique-extraordinary-summit-ecowas-authority-heads-state-and-government>
- <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/3/18/west-african-bloc-says-will-not-abandon-burkina-faso-after-coup>
- <https://www.africanews.com/2022/03/18/burkina-faso-ecowas-worried-about-the-duration-of-transition/>
- <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/economics-alone-isnt-holding-back-west-africas-eco>

