

Nigeria and the Prospects of Integration in the Economic Community of West African States

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Abstract

Expectedly, forty-nine years since the establishment of Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), there has been significant transformation in West African socioeconomic and political integration. Nonetheless, very recent developments in West Africa indicate a retreat in integration arrangements; most evidently, the resurgence of military rule in some member countries, followed by threats of withdrawal from ECOWAS. Invariably, there appears to be a mismatch between the level of institutional transformation and the extent of integration. As a matter of policy and multilateral exigency, Nigeria played a leading role in the formation of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in 1975. In view of Nigeria's dominant posture, and underlying challenges, a more concerted effort from Nigeria would guarantee a genuine integration of West Africa. This research therefore examines how Nigeria advanced the course of regional integration and the prospects thereof. Data from Primary and Secondary sources was analysed using the descriptive method. Dependency Theory was adopted to explain the enduring external strains on integration initiatives. Findings indicate that West African integration must correspond with transformation in democratic principles and practices, beginning with Nigeria, the dominant member, and extending to others.

Keywords: *Regional Integration, Globalisation, Hegemony, Foreign Policy, National Interest.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The combined arable land area of 5,112,903 square kilometres, occupied by a population of about 4-5 hundred million people who have related with each other for Centuries prior to their contact with Europeans and the fateful Berlin Conference, which altered their political or territorial, economic and social relations, and left them with artificial borders and a new system (worldometer,2024; ECOWAS, 2021; Eze, 2010; Kwanashie, 2010; Nwoke, 2010 in Chidozie & Eniayekan, 2015). Comprised of 15 member states, and purportedly the youngest population of any world region, there is a deep colonial Anglophone/francophone divide in political, economic and security considerations resulting from years of colonization (ECOWAS, 2021). Nigeria, with

more than half of the GDP of West Africa, became committed to regional cooperation in West Africa as a reflection of its principles and foreign policy. However, this commitment was intensified by Nigeria's dual experiences: the civil war experiences, such as the recognition of Biafra by Ivory Coast, Gabon, Tanzania and Zambia (Sinclair, 1983). This phenomenon inspired the sensitivity that African states' tendentious over-reliance on foreign countries was detrimental to Nigeria's security and counter-productive to African freedom, unity and cooperation (Aluko, 1981). The other factor responsible for Nigeria's commitment to West African integration was the oil fortunes of the early Seventies; and the ambition to make Nigeria an industrial Centre in Africa in order to achieve a balanced growth through horizontal trade relations (Gana, 1989).

Regional cooperation was perceived as the most suitable response to these experiences; which development prompted Nigeria to become more active (in the early '70s) in the processes leading to the formation of the ECOWAS. In furtherance of this dream, the Nigerian government also perceived that unless the converse favoritism granted to the European Economic Community (EEC) countries and restrictions such as tariff and non-tariff barriers were removed, it would be impossible to establish a West African economic community. Nigeria's trepidations over the associate status of some African States in the EEC and the accession of Britain, Denmark and Eire to the European Economic Community as from January 1973 further reinforced Nigeria's resolve (Sinclair, 1983; Aluko, 1981).

An Economic Charter drafted for the Secretary General of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), including a ten-point agenda, to guide in negotiations with the EEC was adopted at the Lagos Conference of forty-two African, Caribbean and Pacific states in July 1973. The Nigerian government succeeded in holding the African states together, a feat which resulted in the common ACP/EEC Joint Agreement in February 1975 (Aluko, 1981), and also inspired the formation of regional economic structure. Eventually, what resulted in the establishment of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) was the outcome of a Nigerian-Togo Ministerial meeting held at Lome, Togo, which set up series of meetings to work out the draft treaty to be signed and adopted by a summit of Heads of State and Government in May, 1975 (Sinclair, 1983; Aluko, 1981).

Nigeria, representing more than half of the population of the entire West Africa and being the dominant economy in the subregion as earlier noted accounts for 62% of the regional GDP in 2007 (ECOWAS, 2021; Aribisala, 1985). Nigeria is said to have contributed nearly 50 per cent of the Community Levy of ECOWAS members (Premium Times 2020). Notably, from the era of General Olusegun Obasanjo to President Shehu Shagari in the early 1980s, Nigeria relaxed its observation of the ECOWAS Protocol on Free Movement of Citizens and on Residence in member countries. However, in what appears to be a twist of fate, several ECOWAS citizens were deported from Nigeria under the guise of involvement in criminality (Aribisala, 1985; Sinclair, 1983; Aluko, 1981). Furthermore, the government of General Muhamadu Buhari closed all land borders with neighbouring West African countries and further expelled ECOWAS citizens the administration labelled illegal aliens, mostly Ghanaians, probably in retaliation for the 1969 Ghana incidence (Sinclair, 1983). It was the General Ibrahim Babangida's government that relaxed the restrictions and allowed ECOWAS citizens to move into Nigeria once more (Aribisala, 1985).

Unfolding exigencies prompted reform of the pattern and intensity of integration to meet emerging challenges. These reforms - structural and institutional - includes the transformation of ECOWAS Executive Secretariat into a Commission, revision of ECOWAS treaties leading to

transformed ECOWAS Court and the ECOWAS Parliament (Ajulo, 2009). Most prominently, ECOWAS transited from a body of states to a community of peoples through the Revised ECOWAS Treaty of June 2007, reviewed as Vision 2050 Agenda (ECOWAS, 2021; ECOWAP, 2021). Other mechanisms were the establishment of a Free Trade Zone in the year 2001 in the West African sub-region, including Benin, Cote d' Ivoire, Ghana and Mali; the establishment of the West African Monetary Institute (WAMI) in 2001 comprising of Ghana, Guinea, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Cape Verde and the Gambia, and a West African Monetary Zone of seven countries was established in 2003 to be merged with the UEMOA of francophone origin with the objectives of a common currency in the year 2004 (Ajulo, 2009).

There is a spirited move to transform to ECOSOC of cultural integration in West Africa as a body of Civil Society of West African peoples. A Cultural festival is being organized to promote integration through food security and poverty alleviation from 6-11 October in Uyo, Akwa Ibom State (punchng.com, 2024). There is also an ECOWAS Protocol Against Unconstitutional Change of Government, and Military Rule, and a Convention on Good Governance in West Africa in the spirit of the African Union's African Peer Review Mechanism. A conference of ECOWAS Commission held at Abuja in February 2024 on Judicial matters to consider the maze of non-compliance with ECOWAS Court decisions by states parties and other entities within the community (ecowas.int, 2024).

Despite these reforms and declarations to further regional integration in West Africa, emerging trends of military rule (nine coups between 2020-2023) in the subregion portray a reversal in integration and members' compliance with the Codes and Conventions emanating from these reforms. Among them, respect for legislative and judicial decisions by the ECOWAS Parliament and the ECOWAS Court of Justice, respect for the Free Movement Protocol, compliance with the Common Currency (eco) agreement. Also, despite the progress in regional cooperation and development, the near absence of respect for democratic principles in Nigeria and the subregion, exemplified by the claims and counterclaims during and after elections interrogate the legitimacy of democratic processes or institutions and therefore the ECOWAS itself which is based on interstate relations.

Also worrisome is the level of poverty and debts (based on IMF Debt Sustainability Analysis of February 2021 which indicates that of the fifteen major countries in the West African subregion, eleven are in debt distress, including Nigeria, which is reputed as a poverty capital in the World Poverty Clock Report of 2023. Three of the four members (Guinea, Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger) which are under military rule, in spite of diplomatic and disciplinary measures taken by ECOWAS to return to negotiating table for a program of transition to civil rule, threatened to withdraw their membership of ECOWAS. A living founding father, General Yakubu Gowon intervened, ECOWAS therefore lifted the sanctions and called for further diplomatic negotiations. There is therefore evident need to examine the issue of integration in West Africa through various prisms, in order to situate the relevance or otherwise of the regional system to Nigeria and other members.

Having acknowledged the leading role of Nigeria in the formation of ECOWAS and having assumed an indispensable force in West Africa's integration initiatives, how did Nigeria contribute to the advancement or otherwise of ECOWAS integration? What is the degree of institutional and structural transformation in ECOWAS mechanism? What are the prospects of integration in West Africa? This paper takes historical perspectives of some of Nigeria's contributions to the

promotion of integration in West Africa. It further highlights some of the reforms that reflect the current ECOWAS structure, and observes some of the prospects of regional integration in West Africa.

I.ii Statement of the Problem

The economic integration and wellbeing of citizens reinvented in the ‘ECOWAS of Peoples’ ingenuity of 2007, also known as ECOWAS Vision 2050 was intensified by exigencies of change in global and regional dynamics, such as the end of colonization, the Cold War, the rise of terrorism, increasing multidimensional poverty, insecurity, new forms of domination and renewed global interest in Africa. Despite ECOWAS reform initiatives and the huge resources involved, relation among the states and peoples of West Africa remain insignificant, relative to their overall interaction with the Metropolises. In essence, there appears a vertical structure of assimilation which defied the renewed nationalism and intense need for cultural renaissance. Perhaps, states remain the framework of relations, while the states themselves remain ensnared by the elites who acquire legitimacy by their companionship with the advanced democracies.

A blend of internal and external forces unfolding within the emerging narrative of military resurgence in governance comprises elements of neo-nationalism inspired by Russian support, which rear their heads within the traction of the junta towards the West (France) their impostor (Ruth, 2023; Okafor, 2023). A fall out of the trend is the non-compliance with ECOWAS mechanisms, judicial processes or policy decisions and the absence of binding effects on members including Nigeria (Okafor, 2023). Literature has focused on states despite the ‘ECOWAP’ initiative and the increasing need for society engrossment in a renewed democratic cultural rebirth. In like manner, theoretical explanations for the growing level of inequality, insecurity, poverty, social depravity and misgovernance are focused on the global structure and generalisations that may not account for the peculiarities in this subregion.

Additionally, concerns of most discourse on West African integration have centered on the rationality of ECOWAS integration (whose interest), with less emphasis on how ECOWAS objectives were drawn, its changes and continuities or how Nigeria and ECOWAS have gone about effectuating various policies. Leaders, policy makers and researchers will find this work relevant for further instruction on policy formulation that takes into consideration, the interplay between intra and interstate mode and the subregional versus the globalised outlook.

I. CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

II. i Regional Integration

The United Nations arrangement does not preclude regional arrangement towards the objective of international peace and security; as such either explicitly or implicitly Chapter VIII of the United Nations Charter (Art.52-54) provides for regional mechanisms towards the realization of international peace and security, and the rights to enforcement (UN, 2023). Regional integration appears more intensely required now than the immediate post-colonial and Cold War era, when Nigeria realized the immediacy and the inseparable connection between its own security, its own unity, peaceful relations and the development of its neighbours. The want of space limited our extrapolation of the dynamics of the ceasure or mutation of colonization within the context of southern or northern perspectives (Warren, 1980; Strachey, 1959 in Jinadu, 2010). It is noteworthy that the period of annexation of African territories evolved with the emergence of independent states assisted by the World War II and the advent of the UN on the world scene, characterized by

bloc or ideological divide, which yielded the prospects of power negotiation by African states (Sesay & Omotosho, 2011; Kwanashie, 2010; Jinadu, 2010).

Without prejudice to Aniche's (2020) position that the ability of countries of the West African subregion for a renaissance in nationalism, African regionalism can purportedly be perceived as a collective means towards self-reliance or strategic economic transformation and development framework (Sesay and Omotosho, 2011). Whether it can be said in the African context that regionalism is a continuation of nationalism by other means then is a question for another day (Sesa & Omotosho, 2011). Regional Integration can also be seen as a process of the shifting by political actors, of loyalties, hopes and expectations, and political activities towards a centre with new jurisdiction over national states. It is the creation of the sense of community; described as the tendency towards the voluntary creation of large political units, each of which self-consciously eschews the use of force in the relations between the participating units and group integration (Ogbeidi, 2010). Likewise, other forms of integration can be seen as a sense of community within a territory, and widespread practices consistent enough for adoption among community members (Ogbeidi, 2010). The vagaries of coercion, its impact on the sovereignty of member states, and institutional unification among states are resolved within the sovereignty and its limits permitted by the Article 54 of the UN Charter.

Regionalism or integration seeks to industrialise West African economic base; it is also a channel for attracting foreign investments, especially the Foreign Direct Investment and Aids or to accelerate economic development or a Free Trade Zone within the sub region. It creates cooperation and competition, and provided for the participating states the option of promoting the best areas of specialization, leaving to the other states those areas in which they have relative benefit. It creates a common market and the guarantee of a freedom of unrestricted movement of goods, services and capital. There is predictable expansion in economic cooperation activities in the sub region which removes restrictions to the movement of labour. Despite limitations, the triad of ECOWAS Commission, ECOWAS Court of Justice and the ECOWAS Parliament and their reforms are geared towards achieving regional economic cooperation in West Africa through improved institutional arrangements. Nigeria gains more reputation as the indispensable power in this subregion and therefore in Africa when the community plans and policies thrives.

II. ii Hegemony

Hegemony has been conceptualised as power and preponderance by Nolte, (2010; Frazier & Stewart-ingersoll, 2010; Bach, 2007; Schirm, 2006 cited in Oladimeji, T. & Ahmad, M. Z., 2016). Power, within their perception also refers to numerical strength, economic prosperity measured as level of Gross Domestic Product, and military capability transformed into the ability to project such privileges. Whether acknowledgement or recognition by others is the determinant or the requirement for a hegemonic status is undefined by Prys, (2010 in Oladimeji & Ahmad, 2016) in his argument that self-perception, regional perception, provision of public good or projection to other states are the indicators of a hegemon whether regional or global.

Nigeria may not necessarily be considered as hegemon within the subregion, not because it does not possess the power or potentials, nor because its role is not acknowledged by other states, but primarily for two reasons. The one being that Nigeria has always acted with trepidation in its relationship with other (smaller countries), based on the principle of equality, absence of expansionist motives, non-interference in the domestic affairs of other states and the belief in a gradual process of African unification. This was basically meant to assuage the fears naturally

posed by the domineering posture of Nigeria. The other reason was that Nigeria has not transformed its potentials to power, assumed leadership on ideological and trending culture of democracy, respect for human rights and good governance. Eurocentric or West-centered perspectives dominated the paling world and unifying markets; from this view, hegemony became synonymous with globalization, problematised a inequality, unevenness and injustice embodied in the New World Order (Jinadu, 2010).

II. iii Globalisation

The West African subregion was characteristic of conflicts and wars leading to the rise and fall of empires in the period before the development of trading activities with the Europeans. Vertical attachment of economies of West Africa to the Western economies began as early as the precolonial times through the establishment of charters and treaties. Trade in food crops, slaves and later, in cash crops further bonded the African and European economies (Kwanashie, 2010). Technological advancement from the mid-20th Century or the post-independence period lubricated the wheels of capitalism, imperialism or mercantilism, fortified by special trade agreements and defense pacts. Thence entered the phase of the Cold War, which in the first instance polarized the global space, and according to Kwanashie (2010), provided opportunities for African states to negotiate to power and relevance; but that the elite class was either not courageous, or chose to play the yeoman's job for the West. Yet, flagrantly, the 'Scramble for Africa' which historically heralded European mercantilism, finalised its system of dominance on Africa, Asia and the Latin America between 1860s and 1900, and has transmuted till the present time in form of Globalisation.

How much integration thrives in ECOWAS is a function of two variables: the one being how much the southern states can leverage the opportunities in the polarized space, and the other being how much Nigeria being the dominant force can be committed to the integrative programme. Invariably, the level of commitment of Nigeria is contingent upon how Nigeria is able to utilize its potentials, adopt recurring trends and make itself an indispensable model, and how Nigeria perceives the paybacks of West African regional integration. It is not surprising that even scholars and policy makers do not actually perceive what Nigeria benefits from integration with countries that appear weak economically and predominantly francophone in sociopolitical terms? Historically, conscious of its petrifying size and resource endowment, and the paranoia this elicits among its neighbours, Nigeria during the nationalist activities leading to independence chose to be conservative, liberal and gradualist in its approach, which earned it leadership of the Monrovia Group (Aluko, 1981).

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The neo-Marxist Dependency theory is used to explain the structural and institutional architecture of the north-south or the centre-periphery relations, suggestive of West Africa's colonial experience, and how it has continued to bear on the institutions and economy in a bid to attain regional integration. The foremost proponents of neo-Marxist Dependency theory are Prebisch (1950) and Baran (1957); later popularized by Andre Gunder Frank (1967), dos Santos (1970), Walter Rodney, (1972) and Samir Amin (1974). The basic tenet of Dependency is the belief that activities in the economy of some countries (the periphery) is determined by the change and development of the other (the centre) (Kvangraven, 2023, 2020). In this setting, structural and institutional imbalance elicits uneven development exemplified in the current globalization structure.

Among other beliefs are that Dependency corresponds to both the international community and the internal structures of production and social and political structures. There exists tilted terms of trade and oligopolistic market structure at the centre in contrast with competition at the periphery. Wages do not really respond to contractions at the centre as much as it does at the periphery. Primary commodity production and export; technological and industrial dependence; financial and cultural dependence are remarkable attributes of Dependency, which are a common place in West Africa. Also striking is Frank's (1972) belief that class struggles arise from predatory needs of the metropolis, this is exemplified in the stranglehold of power by the elite class in West Africa, purportedly to do the bidding of the metropolis.

Critics of the dependency theory argued that despite the evolving character of the international system, Dependency remain static without giving room for the breakthroughs recorded by the rising powers on the international stage. However, it can be said that such advancements have not actually affected West Africa, therefore the theory still remains relevant. Nigeria and African security and development crises has been situated within the character of the international system, subdivided into the dominant and the dependent, the centre and the periphery or the metropolitan and satellite group of states by Romaniuk (2017). He believes in the externality of forces that determine economic activity in the State, including the activities of the multi-national corporations and the international commodity markets. This Dependency view of inequality like Gunder Frank, cited in Ferraro, (2008) is reinforced through international historical dynamics of exchange between the metropolis and the satellite states.

Technology, accumulation, controls and movement of capital, services and the loss of control of such services by the states according to Edigin, (2008) is the Fourth era of Globalisation. With this era comes economic and social infusion through a web of flow of stock and a heightened level of control by the rich and powerful. This wave of globalisation has further accentuated the hole of variation and unfair distribution of wealth to the detriment of (West) Africa, with its attending increase in poverty, apathy and insecurity particularly in Nigeria. Edigin, (2008) further sees the widening inequality as not due to globalism itself, rather due to the failure of states of the South to acculturate, through power acquisition, increased investment, technology and sustainable development. This phenomenon affects Nigeria's location and history, therefore what constitutes its hierarchy of interests remain mired in mystery, and a myth to be unraveled by further studies.

III. NIGERIA'S FOREIGN POLICY

Generally speaking, the foreign policy of States is shaped by several internal and external factors. Among these factors, Rosenau (cited in Chandra, 2006) advanced geography, history and culture, the level of economic development or national capacity, public opinion or the governmental structure and the values and talents of the leaders or decision makers as constituting great determinants. Nigeria's foreign policy in West Africa and indeed Africa by all standards thus, can be calibrated within the context of geographical contiguity or its Africanness and a shared history of colonisation. The period immediately after the Nigerian Civil War in 1970 marked the heights of integration initiatives in West Africa, spearheaded by Nigeria and Togo as earlier noted (Aluko, 1981). All related factors have a slab to contribute in what constitutes the foreign policy of Nigeria towards its West African neighbours, however, the intensity of these factors over time, whether they lost fervor, whether they retain the degree of impulse or whether they lost relevance given the tide of history, rendered some of the points obsolete and questions, for further analysis (Sinclair, 1983). On the flipside, its failure can equally be located within Rosenau's argument.

Of course, the impulse of every nation's foreign policy is its national interest, yet the task of calibrating the hierarchy of interests can be gleaned from leaders, policy makers and scholars' perception. Gambari's (2008) concept of 'Concentricism' or Concentric Circle approach, queried Nigeria's rabid commitment to a regional role in a global world without boundaries and limitations. This view no doubts reinforces Nigeria's multilateral leaning and is in tandem with the emerging trend of globalisation and the needs to make itself visible in the international space. However, as an advocate of 'Concentricism', Gambari contradicted his own concentric circle dictum in his argument that Nigeria should not become a global player in the face of daunting domestic challenges of poverty, insecurity and disunity at home. Advocating Nigeria's concentration on global issues suggests that Nigeria should dissipate its lean energy on remote courses that either do not have direct bearing on its polity or is not within its powers to control. On the flip side, should Nigeria become 'Isolationist' in defiance to mounding regional complications of poverty, terrorism, misgovernance, abuse of human rights within Africa and the immediate neighbourhood?

National interest according to Morgenthau, (cited in Eze, 2010) must be defined in terms of national security, while national security itself he says must be defined in terms of power or the integrity of national territory and institutions. This realist interpretation of national interest is akin to the Hobbesian Absolutist conception of the state, which renders national interest as an end itself. Though this study may not be interested in the delineation between ends and means within Wolfers' (2006) extrapolation, it remains vague whether Nigeria's objective of regional integration may be viewed as an end, as a means or as serving dual purpose. However, it is more of realist perception of the State which negates the internal conditions of the Third World, and therefore may be inadequate at explaining the factors responsible for the construction of Nigeria's foreign policy. In what appears to be a contradiction, Eze, (2010) adopted Rousseau and Lockean perspectives of national interest as the General Will and protection of the natural rights to life, liberty and property, by which national interest is taken as a means to an end. Eze, (2010) has differed in his view of Nigeria's national interest as more clearly understood within the context of the protection of the security and welfare of its citizens, contained in Chapter II of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999.

Additionally, national interest has been conceived by Sesay & Eyinla (2012), within the context of the protection of the regime in power or the interest of the decision makers; in another, a Marxist view as the protection of class interest exemplified in Nigeria's engagements for example in the Liberian crisis during the regime of General Ibrahim Babangida. This argument represents an unembellished observation of Nigeria's experiences, capable of further reference in international relations, however, natural law does not preclude self-preservation. Also, locating Nigeria's foreign policy within class interest would tend to classify Nigeria among the Classical modern States which are at advanced stages of national development and therefore ambiguous.

However, of concern is the extent to which some members of ECOWAS who enjoyed Nigeria's largesse prove their obstinacy towards Nigeria's eleemosynary and integrative initiatives. One of the several instances is when officials of Sierra Leone government in about the year 2007, demanded a \$300m financial assistance from then Nigerian government before dropping their ambition of contesting for a permanent seat of the UN Security Council of the UN with Nigeria (Ogunsanwo, 2010). Let us leave the matter of motive (intent to play a bargain or play spoiler game) and qualification for others times. These issues rout some scholars' argument that Nigeria failed to take advantage of its intervention in African states it had helped; obviously, any such

gestures would rather counter Nigeria's benign intentions, declarations and confirm the fears of its smaller neighbours. With all due sense of responsibility, a man will not trail another in the market place to tell others 'That beautiful cap on him is a gift from me,' no matter how expensive the cap; in same vein, no man receives more without appreciation (Banfa, 2019). Nigeria's commitment defies this logic, because the benefits of friendly relations with neighbours outweighs the gains of any immediate prize.

IV. NIGERIA AND ECOWAS INTERVENTIONS

The ECOWAS region has witnessed various forms of development, including demographic increase, economic expansion, institutional transformation and on the cheeky side, poverty, protracted security challenges, economic and political instability; all manifesting in form of ethnic/extreme nationalism, proliferation of small arms and light weapons, terrorism and insurgency, corruption, political dictatorship and unconstitutional change of government. Within the post-independence period, up to the 1990s, Nigeria and indeed West Africa witnessed civil wars including Nigeria 1967-1970; Liberia 1989 and 1999 and Sierra Leone in 1999. The wave of a protracted external security threat was fanned by the activities of the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad geared towards establishing an Islamic State in northern Mali (Bala & Tar, 2021). In what can be referred to as a ripple of the post-Ghaddafi Libyan crisis, valuable arms were made available for the Tuareg protest against their exclusion from the government, army and civil service (Bala & Tar, 2021). The emerging movements soon yielded splinter groups: the Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb Salafi became a splinter group of the MNLA, while the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO) became a splinter group of the AQIM. The counterinsurgency pressure of government and French military resulted in disintegration and their devolution into insurgency in Algeria, Mauritania, and Nigeria (Bala & Tar, (2021).

In Nigeria, terrorism and insurgency is historically traced to the 1981 Maitaseni group, and of late the Boko Haram and ISWAP activities in the Fourth Republic, precisely post 1999. Following the confirmation of a link between Boko Haram and the AQIM, the United States designated the Boko Haram as a Foreign Terrorist Organisation. In 1999, ECOWAS adopted a Protocol Relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security as a departure from the ground norm of nonintervention (Bala & Tar, (2021). The collective efforts of West Africa are great pointers to the prospects of integration.

The Organisation of African Unity (OAU), now African Union (AU) at its 28th Ordinary Session in Dakar, Senegal passed a Resolution on Strengthening of Cooperation and Coordination (AHG/Res.213(XXVIII)). The OAU also declared a Code of Conduct for Inter-African Relations (AHG/Del.2XXX), geared towards fighting extremism and terrorism. In 2002, the AU adopted a Plan of Action on Prevention and Combating Terrorism. The African Centre for the Study and Research on Prevention and Combating Terrorism was established as a unit of the Peace and Security Council. The United Nations Organisation (UNO) adopted the Resolution 2085 of 2012 under the aegis of Chapter VII of the UN Charter, which led to the emergence of the famous Africa-led International Support Mission in Mali (AFISMA). Beside financial contribution by leading states of Africa, Nigeria contributed troops and backup for the operation. In January 2014 Cameroun, Chad, Niger and Nigeria revisited the 1998 mandate at the 14th Summit in Chad, and relocated the headquarters of the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) from Baga to Ndjamen in Chad in the wake of the 2012 Boko Haram attack on the headquarters (Bala & Tar, (2021).

Various forms of intervention including the signing of peace accords followed most crises in West Africa, for example the warring parties in Sierra Leone, signed a Peace Accord in the year 1999. There was an International Peace Academy seminar organized at Abuja in September, 2001 under the aegis of ECOWAS. The Guinea-Liberia row also saw Nigeria involved in regional crisis management including the 2002 spill over conflict from Darfur, Sudan. ECOMIL was sent by Nigeria during the renewed war in Liberia in 2003. Nigeria spent \$8billion to fund ECOMOG operations, lost over 500 soldiers and spent over ₦135million on wounded Nigerian soldiers in Liberia. Nigeria under President Obasanjo granted asylum to Charles Taylor despite the atrocities he had committed against Nigerians during the Liberian war. A tripartite agreement had been signed in 2005 between the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the Nigerian and Liberian Governments in Abuja in respect of the movement and repatriation of Liberian refugees. Nigeria and Liberian governments signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in 2007 to set up the Armed Forces of Liberia with 220 personnel from Nigeria. In similar intervention, the ECOMARINE and ECOAIR regional initiatives brought Nigeria's resolve to bear. In the ICT, Nigeria sponsored the INTELCOM 1 & 2 under the West African Telecommunications Regulatory Commission (The Guardian, 2003; Tar & Ukhani, 2018).

Intervention in ECOWAS subregion took various dimensions, whether intra or inter-state in the form of diplomatic conciliation, peace keeping, peace enforcement and sanctions as witnessed during the recent coup in Niger. West Africa is a subregion patented for incessant military coups; it has evolved in ripples of highs and lows over the years, in the immediate post-independence years and through, most recently, a new form of nationalism against purported collaboration between the elites and the metropolitan states. It appears this new gale of military coups in the subregion has varying underlying motives with various degrees of intensity. Extrapolating this wave and those of the immediate post-independence period is recommended for further studies.

Remarkably, the latest wave of crisis and intervention is the overthrow of the government of President Mohamed Bazoum of Niger Republic on July 26, 2023 in a *coup de état* by his own presidential guard led by Abdourahamane Tchiani (*Al Jazeera*, 2023; *Vanguard*, 2023). ECOWAS Heads of State and Government immediately held an emergency session in Nigeria on July 30, 2023 and imposed sanctions on the new regime in Niger; and further urged the coup leaders to release and restore Mohamed Bazoum as the legitimate president of the Republic of Niger (Shaibu, 2023). Among the sanctions, were the closure of land and air borders, suspension of commercial and financial transactions, freezing of Niger assets in ECOWAS Central Banks, suspension of financial assistance with all financial institutions especially the EBID and the imposition of travel ban, freeze on assets of all military officials, ECOWAS even threatened military action and declared a 'no fly zone' on all commercial flights (Okafor, 2023; *Vanguard*, 2023).

The citizens rather displayed loyalty to the junta; indicative of their disgust with the democratic structure and its romance with the French. The people became more resolute following the presence of Russia and its promise to assist states of the region struggling for freedom from the West. It is an example of failure of ECOWAS crisis management mechanism, as the Sahelian states are making true their threat to withdraw from the union. Similar circumstances played out in the Burkina Faso *coup d'état* of 30 September, 2022 which removed interim President, Paul Henri Sandaogo Damiba over his alleged inability to deal with the country's Islamist insurgency. Damiba himself had come to power in a *coup d'état* just eight months earlier in January 2022

(Ruth, 2022). Captain Ibrahim Traore took over as interim leader. The coup was initially welcomed by many in Burkina Faso, as the previous government had been deeply unpopular due to its failure to deal with the insurgency. However, the new regime was also unable to defeat the rebels, and even lost more territory to Jihadists and other militants; this led to the September 2022 coup (Okpanachi & Amana, 2024).

In Mali, President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita was removed from power by a group of military officers in August 2020, following months of unrest in Mali. President Keita later announced his resignation that he did not want to see any bloodshed. He was criticized for failing law and order and mismanagement of his country's economy. Nine months later, on 24 May, 2021, the Malian army led by Vice President Assimi Goita captured President Bali N'daw. They announced that the President had been stripped of his powers and that new elections would be held in 2022 (Hassan & Felix, 2022). However, on 7 June, 2022, the military announced the transition to democracy will be delayed for another two years; the promise is yet to be fulfilled as at the time of writing this paper.

Military coups and military rule are a common experience in Chad, with the most recent one during the death of the Chadian President, Idriss Deby on April 20, 2021, during a frontline battle against a rebel group. The military which expectedly took over the reins of government anointed his son Mohamal, who himself was a military commander. This latest experience adds to its history of military coups since 1975, 1990, 2004, 2006 and 2013 (Okpanachi & Amana, 2024).

In what seems to be a more assuring intervention in the Gambia, following the refusal of former president Yahya Jammeh to step down for the ascension of Adama Barrow the winner of the national election, Adama Barrow was sworn in at the Gambian Embassy in Dakar Senegal and following a threat of military intervention by ECOWAS, Jammeh abdicated and the ECOWAS mission which ended in December 2021 was named ECOWAS Mission in Gambia (ECOMIG) (Shuaibu, 2023). Among some of these illustrations are the resolution of conflicts in Cote d'Ivoire in 2010, Gambia, 2017, Mali in 2012 and 2020-21 (Okpanachi & Amana, 2024).

Another instance of a successful ECOWAS intervention in memory, was the setting up in the year 1990 of a military intervention unit called ECOMOG consisting of contingents drawn from six member countries including Nigeria, Ghana, The Gambia, Guinea, Sierra Leone and Mali. The war led by Charles Taylor was brought to an end in 1996. In 1997, the ECOWAS deployed a military unit to Sierra Leone in respect of the coup that gulped the elected government of Ahmed Tejan Kabbah, however, the junta was removed in 1998. Following an attempted coup in Guinea-Bissau, in the year 1998, hostilities broke out, forces from Senegal and Guinea supported by the government and the national armed forces were on the side of the coup plotters. The government of national unity achieved through the ensuing armistice was unsuccessful and the war lasted until the foreign forces were replaced by the ECOMOG troops (Okpanachi & Amana, 2024).

Hostilities broke out in Cote D'Ivoire in 2003 amongst the government and rebel groups, it took ECOWAS intercession and the backing of the UN and French troops to enforce peace. The Liberian crisis which reoccurred in 1999 lasted till 2003, leading to the removal of Charles Taylor through a 3,500 strong troop deployed by Nigeria and the UN as ECOWAS Mission in Liberia (ECOMIL) and United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNIMIL) (Okpanachi & Amana, 2024). ECOWAS deployed the African International Support Mission in Mali (AFISMA) during the Mali conflict which sprang out of a military coup that resulted in crisis and engulfed the north of the country through activities of armed rebel groups. Nigeria contributed the largest percentage of the

UN Security Council backed mission troops which had a one-year command, including troops from Gabon, Ivory Coast, Niger and Burkina Faso; it was taken over by the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) (Okpanachi & Amana, 2024).

V. ECOWAS REFORM AND PROSPECTS

VII.i ECOWAS Commission

The Economic Community of West African States has undergone processes of evolution from the pristine institutional framework to new a structure in line with emerging global/internal trends and exigencies. The ECOWAS Treaty was earlier revised in 1993 with a view to achieving as a priority, the attainment of economic integration in all aspects of social life for the well-being of the citizens. ECOWAS Treaty was also revised in 2006, transforming ECOWAS Executive Secretariat into a Commission, with Commissioners in charge of respective departmental programs. The Treaty was further revised in June 2007 with the ambition to transform ECOWAS to a community of 'ECOWAS of the Peoples: Peace and Prosperity for All' otherwise known as Vision 2020 (Maame, 2023; ECOWAP, 2021). The Vision 2020 itself underwent a painstaking analysis, leading to the emergence of another document referred to as Vision 2050 whose instrument finds expression in the United Nations Vision 2030 for Sustainable Development, and the African Union's 2063 Agenda (Maame, 2023).

Towards achieving peace, security and stability, the elements within the Vision 2020 have enabled ECOWAS to develop instruments and mechanisms to overcome political crises, resolve conflicts and consolidate peace and democracy. Among the institutional mechanisms for the restructuring and transformation of ECOWAS outside the conference of Heads of State, were the Council of Ministers, the Commission, the Parliament, the Court of Justice are the ECOWAS Bank for Investment and Development (EBID) West African Health Organisation (WAHO) and the Intergovernmental Action Group Against Money Laundering (GIABA). Other regimes are the ECOWAS Regional Electricity Regulatory Authority (ARREC), the West African Power Pool (WAPP), the West African Monetary Agency (WAMA), and the West African Monetary Institute (WAMI). Projects and instruments were set up in order to further integration in West Africa include the ECOWAS Passport, ECOWAS Identity Card, Residence planned ECOVISA, Trade Fair; FODETE ECOWAS to finance the Transport and Energy sector; Project Preparation and Development Unit (PPDU); West African Common Industrial Policy (WACIP); ECOWAS Regional Authority (ERA); ECOWAS Investment Policy (ECOWIP); ECOWAS Investment Code (ECOWIC); ECOWAS Standard Harmonisation Program (ECOSHAM); ECOBIZ World; West African Common Market Integration Council (WACMIC) West African Health Organisation (WAHO) amongst others.

There have been infrastructural developments along various corridors including Lagos-Abidjan-Dakar Road; Dakar-Bamako rail road, which was to be finalised upon entry into force of the Common External Tariff on 1 January, 2015. Intra-regional trade accounted for 12% in 2019, though it was quite lower than those of regional trade in ASEAN, NAFTA and the EU (Maame, 2023, ECOWAS, 2021). The efforts of ECOWAS have however not yielded enough visibility in its mandate of promoting cooperation and integration, promoting economic and political stability and increased economic opportunities and well-being in the poor region of multidimensional inequalities, including gender, food insecurity, low level of human capital development (Maame, 2023). Democratic regimes like the ECOWAS Protocol on Good Governance and Democracy (2000) amongst others have failed to assuage signals and of course incidences of weakening

democratic governance in the countries of the subregion. Constitutional conjunction based on the principles of separation of powers, popular participation, democratic control, zero tolerance for takeover of political power through unconstitutional means, freedom of the press and freedom of expression are nearly absent (Maame, 2023). Rather, the people have witnessed fragile democracy controversial electoral processes which resulted to serious political and institutional crises.

In a paradox of the UN Security Council system where the number of council members was increased from ten to fifteen in 1965 for the purpose of effectiveness and efficiency, on 19 June, 2021 at the 59th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government in Accra, Ghana, the number of ECOWAS Commissioners was reduced from fifteen to seven supposedly for the sake of effectiveness and streamlined costs (Maame, 2023; <https://www.afdb.org>). This restructuring bears a negative effect on the performance of the Commission in view of increasing regional problems and responsibilities of the Commission.

VII.ii ECOWAS Parliament

The ECOWAS Parliament or Community Parliament was established under Article 6 & 13 in the 1993 Treaty, whose Protocol A/PS/8/94 came into effect on March 14, 2002. It is a forum for dialogue, consultation and consensus of representatives of the people with the aim of promoting integration (parl.ecowas.int, 2020; *Eureka Journals*, 2019). During its session in Dakar, Senegal on 21 December, 2001 the Authority of Heads of State and Governments decided that the Parliament should seat in Abuja. Comprising of 115 seats, with each member entitled to 5, and the remaining 40 shared among the more populated. In clear terms, Nigeria has 35, Ghana has 8, Cote D'Ivoire 7, Burkina Faso, Guinea, Mali, Niger and Senegal have 6 each, while the others have 5 each. The first legislature was inaugurated in Bamako, Mali on 16 October, 2005. The first Ordinary Session held at Abuja in January, 2001 (parl.ecowas.int, 2020; *Eureka Journals*, 2019).

In 2006, a Supplementary Protocol targeted the Life of the legislature and Term of Office, to change from 5 to 4 years. With the Fifth Legislature inaugurated on 9th March, 2020 (1st 2001-2005; 2nd 2006-2010; 3rd 2011-2015 and 4th 2016-2020) (parl.ecowas.int; <https://www.afdb.org>), the parliament holds 2 sessions in May and September. Extra Ordinary Sessions are held at the instance of the Chairman, Authority of Heads of State and Government on the request of the Speaker or a 2/3s majority written request to the Speaker. The legislature is limited to the role of consultation and an advisory institution, to complement the roles of other community institutions.

The parliament has no permanent members, and are not directly elected by the communities, but rather members of the legislature of the member countries. Towards reforming this system, President Tinubu declared his support for direct elections into the ECOWAS Parliament at the inauguration of the sixth parliament on 4 April, 2024 (Angbulu, 2024; parl.ecowas.int) probably to entrust sovereignty to its citizens.

VII.iii ECOWAS Court

The ECOWAS Court was set up to interpret economic treaties in 1991 under Article 15 of the Revised Treaty of ECOWAS 1999 (Art.15). In the year 2005, the Supplementary Protocol Amendment gave Human Rights Interpretation Mandate to the ECOWAS Court; in this regard, 90% of cases at the court bordered on human rights (Manasseh, 2022 in Maame, 2023). The ECOWAS Court was empowered as the court of first instance for citizens without the proviso of having to exhaust all local remedies (Maame, 2022). The court takes human rights cases of international character, that should not have been presented before any international court. The

court derives its powers from international instruments to which members are parties, and the human rights so breached must be clearly stated.

Only one case was lodged between 2001 and 2004, however, between 2005 and 2008 after the human rights mandate, 14 judgements were delivered, 4 cases were argued and 12 cases were being heard (Anene-Maidoh, 2008 in Maame, 2023). As of November, 2021, a total of 559 cases were lodged with 130 rulings given, 301 judgements delivered (Amooko, 2021). The ECOWAS Court also takes itinerant movement of cases for adjudication from its headquarters in Abuja to other member states from time to time, supposedly for ease of access. The COVID-19 Pandemic also informed the introduction of electronic management of cases; the court is however limited by the inadequate number of judges (5 relative to East African Court of Justice with 11 and 10 of the South African Court (<http://www.courtecowas.org/member-of-the-court>)). As of May 2022, there was as high as 70% of noncompliance with the decisions of the court, this is because the court has no legally binding effect or hegemonic powers on the national courts or any formal relations as a court of cessation. The court has a feature of a Monist Judicial Status of the first and last resort in the community law. Despite the new mandate, the court structure remains stagnant and the qualification of judges does not specify expertise in International Human Rights Law rather, International Law.

Other limitations of the ECOWAS judicial system include the reduction in the tenure of judges from 5 years renewable term to 4 years non-renewable term ([courtecowas.org/member-of-the-court](http://www.courtecowas.org/member-of-the-court)). The non exhaustion of local remedies clause opens the court to a barrage of human rights cases which the available judges obviously cannot cope with. While the provisions on non-exhaustion of local remedies grants access to community members, it limits access by way of removing the cost of obtaining justice from their reach, especially because there is no legal aid provision (Eborah, 2010, cited in Maame, 2023). The level of awareness of the existence and jurisdiction of the court puts the court out of reach of citizens. It is supposedly for the elites and the urban settlers.

Like the League of Nations which lacked enforcement mechanism for its own decisions, only six states indicated existence of authority to receive and implement decisions including Nigeria, Guinea, Ghana, Burkina Faso, Mali and Togo. The Supplementary Action on Sanctions on members enacted by the Council of Ministers in 2011 was a mere scratch on the surface it lacked precision on the nature of sanctions to be imposed on erring members. Despite these limitations, the court is a symbol of hope of integration and development having recorded laurels, including the Colombia University United States Award of Global Freedom of Expression in March 2022, in acknowledgement of its decision in the Amnesty International & Ors V Togolese Republic. The Togolese Government was found liable for shutting down internet services in 2017 as a result of a protest, by declaring it as a democratic right (columbia.edu/prizewinners2022). ECOWAS Court also won an Award of Medal of Merit in Leadership from the African Bar Association and has been found remarkable for the itinerant movement of the court from state to state to make justice at the court proximate to the citizens.

Highlighting ECOWAS achievements, Egobiambu, (2024) noted that ECOWAS supported 6 members to ratify WTO Fisheries Subsidy Agreement; 13 others to ratify the AFCFTA Agreement. It also supported the ECOWAS Interconnected System for Management of Goods in Transit (SIGMAT) now operational in 12 states; and allocated 9 million Dollars to assist internally displaced persons, refugees, asylum seekers, known as persons of concern. The Standby force to

Fight against terrorism was supported with 4 million Dollars under ECOWAS Counter Terrorism Humanitarian Response. Support was made for the West African Network of National Academics of Sciences; and for women with obstetrics fistula, women in Agribusiness, gender equality and green economy. Election Observer Missions were sent to Senegal and Togo to enhance electoral and governance issues and Agreement for national unity was facilitated in Siera Leone. Academic Mobility Scheme to help equip youths with skills; the ECOWAS Regional Electricity Access Project (ECOREAP) and the Implementation of a Regional Off Grid Electricity Access Project (ROGEAP) were facilitated by ECOWAS within the recent past.

VI. CONCLUSION

The heightening impulse of integration in West Africa condenses optional perspectives to integration; particularly the growing poverty, terrorism and insecurity; the paling democratic culture and the renewed domination referred to as Globalisation. Nigeria is profoundly devoted to the integration and development of West Africa, and Africa generally. The framework for Nigeria's (regional) policy revolves around African independence, freedom from the Apartheid regimes in southern Africa through Multilateralism, regional cooperation, and global peace and security. Within the nationalist activities and the contest for prominence between Ghana and other radicals on one side and Nigeria on the other, and the paranoia which Nigeria's overwhelming size and eleemosynary gestures elicit underpin the policy of Gradualism in African unity and in particular, West African integration.

In conclusion, Nigeria from inception is fondly multilateralist in its foreign policy. However, its regional bent can be regarded as contingent upon experiences ranging from colonialism and the ensuing nationalist agitation, to the Civil War experience and the oil fortunes of the '70s. Globalisation and attendant poverty, inequality, insecurity, misgovernance and denial of rights have generated extreme nationalism manifesting as military coups. Reforms in regional integration no doubt, hold high hope of an integrated and prosperous West Africa, however, more effort is required of Nigeria, first to adapt to true democratic principles in line with best practices, upon which the continued dominance of states is contingent. More needs to be done to acquaint Nigerians, especially leaders, policy makers and scholars with the premium attention the beneficial relationship between Nigeria and her neighbours requires.

VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

- Nigeria should not be less committed to the subregion and its development if it is to make herself more relevant or indispensable in global governance and in her bid to represent Africa on an expanded UN Security Council, without necessarily agitating. This feat is supported by the bloc voice of numeracy an integrated West Africa will offer.
- There are prospects for the reinvention of ECOWAS and placing the region on the World map, however, this feat can only be achievable with a disconnect in the colonial ties, and in their place, an increased intra-regional cooperation.
- More succinctly, entrenching democratic principles, especially the rights of citizens to participate in leadership recruitment, and how they are governed will create an atmosphere of confraternity, adequate to thaw the ice of ethnicity and neocolonialism or globalisation. Returning sovereignty to the people of West Africa to enable them take responsibility for the failure or otherwise of their government, liberate them from states which are ambushed by the elites struggling for survival in which self-production is a goal.

- The dominance by states must be reduced through citizens mobilisation for direct legislation and cultural interface, especially based on democracy; and citizens awareness must be created towards the availability of alternative instruments for addressing public good through ECOWAS institutions.

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