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Actes du 3eme Colloque Scientifique International des
Laboratoires LAReLSo et LaRMA - (FLSL- UYOB)

tenue les 30 et 31 Mars 2026 à Kabala



Thème : Résolution des crises en Afrique et reconstruction
nationale par les sciences et la recherche scientifique à l'ère
de l'Alliance des États du Sahel (AES)



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LAReLSo et LaRMA de l'Université Yambo Ouologuem de Bamako,
sise à Kabala sur le thème : " RESOLUTION DES CRISES EN
AFRIQUE ET RECONSTRUCTION NATIONALE PAR LES
SCIENCES ET LA RECHERCHE SCIENTIFIQUE A L'ERE DE
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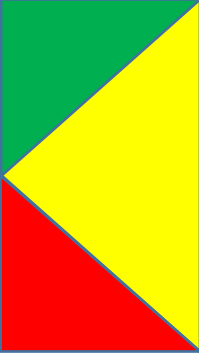
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The journal publishes only quality articles that have not been published or submitted for publication in any other journals. Each article is subjected to a double blind reading. The quality and originality of the articles are the only criteria for publication.



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*Actes du 3eme Colloque
Scientifique International des
Laboratoires LAReLSo et
LaRMA de l'Université des
Lettres et Sciences Humaines de
Bamako, sise à Kabala*

*Sur le thème : Résolution des
crises en Afrique et
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les sciences et la recherche
scientifique à l'ère de
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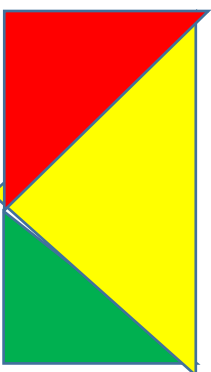
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Argumentaire de l'appel à communication du 3eme Colloque Scientifique International des Laboratoires LAReLSo et LaRMA (UYOB-FLSL)

I-CONTEXTE ET JUSTIFICATION

L'Afrique, depuis son accession à la souveraineté politique dans les années soixante, demeure en proie à des crises multidimensionnelles, mêlant insécurité armée, fractures sociales, fragilité étatique, corruption, *Africaphobie*¹ et chocs économiques, qui compromettent durablement ses trajectoires de développement et entravent l'affirmation d'une véritable indépendance sur tous les plans. C'est dans ce contexte que des leaders patriotes et visionnaires, notamment au sein de l'Alliance des États du Sahel, s'attachent à rompre les chaînes de l'impérialisme, du néocolonialisme, du sous-développement et de la dépendance à l'Occident. Cependant, il convient de noter que les premiers leaders africains révolutionnaires tels que Modibo KEITA, Julius NYERERE, Kwame KRUMMAH, Thomas SANKARA, Mohammad GADAFI et d'autres ont vu leurs luttes avortées en mi-chemin car elles n'étaient pas assez adossées à la science et à la recherche scientifique. De même plusieurs crises assaillent l'Afrique de nos jours, surtout sur le plan sécuritaire, mais la réponse semble être toujours soit militaire, soit faire recours à des personnes non universitaires, voire des non experts dans le domaine de la recherche scientifique. Le Mali, le Burkina Faso et le Niger ne font malheureusement pas exception. Pour pallier cette situation, une place de choix devrait être accordée aux sciences et la recherche scientifique d'où l'impérieuse nécessité de l'implication du monde universitaire.

En effet, les sciences, qu'elles soient africaines ou importées, constituent sans nul doute le véritable creuset de connaissances, de savoir-faire et de technicité permettant de poser des diagnostics fins, des outils de prévention et des évaluations d'impact indispensables pour concevoir des politiques publiques ou stratégies adaptées aux spécificités locales sahéliennes et africaines. Les approches scientifiques permettent également de dépasser les réponses purement militaires en intégrant prévention, résilience sociale, relance économique et réconciliation, et en rendant les interventions plus légitimes et efficaces. Pour corroborer ce qui précède, Aristote dans le *Traité d'Organon* écrit : « La connaissance scientifique se définit comme la connaissance des causes, son approche formelle vise à distinguer le démontrable (théorèmes) et l'indémontrable (axiomes), ce qui relève de l'enchaînement causal et ce qui relève des principes premiers. » (Vrin, 1979, p.89). En termes explicites, la recherche scientifique favorise l'appréhension objective et la découverte réelle des causes d'un problème ou d'une problématique tout en évitant de s'agripper à des causes qui ne découlent pas d'une connaissance scientifique véritablement avérée. Il est également saillant de faire remarquer que la recherche est un effort pour trouver quelque chose ou un effort de l'esprit vers la connaissance (Le Grain, M., 1994, p. 945). De même, D. Bruno (1994, p. 85), soulignera que la recherche est un exercice systématique et méthodique portant sur l'étude d'un problème ou d'une question et mettant en cause des faits qui doivent être vérifiables en vue d'atteindre une fin : la résolution d'un problème ou la réponse à une question ou d'une hypothèse préalable, la recherche exige

¹ Terme utilisé par l'écrivain malien Aboubacar Sidiki COULIBALY (2024, p.95) dans son roman socio-historique, *Le monde Africain doit se réveiller*, Bamako : Alqalam, pour signifier le rejet et le dégoût pour tout ce qui est africain ou renvoie à l'Homme africain ou à l'Afrique

ipso facto un travail d'interprétation. La science, quant à elle, renvoie à l'ensemble des connaissances humaines acquises par la spécialisation (études) ou par l'expérience (pratiques). Son fondement est la raison et l'objectivité.

En sus, l'émergence de l'Alliance des États du Sahel (AES) crée un nouvel espoir pour toute l'Afrique et constitue un espace stratégique sous régional requérant des réponses harmonisées mais devraient être fondées sur des savoirs locaux et scientifiques pour ménager la sécurité, la gouvernance et la reconstruction nationale. C'est pour cette raison que COULIBALY (2024, p.94) écrit : « La seule science qui libère l'Homme véritablement quel que soit le degré de l'aliénation est la science de soi-même. » Nous comprenons ainsi la prééminence des connaissances, des valeurs et savoir-faire endogènes dans la résolution des conflits et la reconstruction nationale à l'ère de la reconfiguration de l'Afrique et de la multipolarisation du monde.

Ce troisième colloque international offrira une tribune idéale pour interroger, analyser et préconiser, dans toute leur étendue, les outils pertinents de décolonisation, les mécanismes de résolution des crises et les dynamiques de reconstruction des États africains par la science et la recherche scientifique, dans un contexte marqué par les enjeux du néocolonialisme et de la menace terroriste. Il convient d'ores et déjà d'affirmer que science et recherche scientifique sont indissociables et qu'elles doivent exercer pleinement leur vocation pour résoudre les grandes problématiques de la cité et favoriser son développement.

Comme Objectif, ce colloque scientifique international vise à créer un cadre de rencontres et d'échanges entre chercheurs nationaux et internationaux sur la problématique de la décolonisation véritable, la résolution des crises par la science et la recherche scientifique au Sahel et en Afrique de façon générale. Il ambitionne également de proposer, à partir des résultats scientifiques issus des travaux menés par les chercheurs et enseignants-chercheurs du Sahel, de l'Afrique et, plus largement, de la communauté scientifique internationale, des pistes de solutions endogènes aux défis sécuritaires et de développement qui fragilisent ces régions sur tous les plans. A cet effet, les axes suivants sont retenus pour les propositions de communication :

II-AXES DE COMMUNICATION

- **Axe 1 : Diagnostic scientifique des crises africaines et reconstruction nationale**

Mettre en lumière la capacité des disciplines scientifiques à analyser finement les causes multidimensionnelles des crises (insécurité armée, fragilité étatique, ruptures sociales, *Africaphobie*, chocs économiques), en mobilisant tant les méthodologies quantitatives que qualitatives pour établir un état des lieux rigoureux.

- **Axe 2 : Littérature, Langue et valorisation des valeurs et savoirs endogènes**

Promouvoir les recherches conduites en terre africaine et la redécouverte des savoir-faire traditionnels comme fondements d'une science authentiquement africaine, apte à proposer des solutions adaptées aux réalités culturelles, sociales et environnementales du Sahel et du continent.

- **Axe 3 : Gouvernance, sécurité et développement fondés sur la recherche**
Souligner l'importance d'intégrer systématiquement les résultats scientifiques dans l'élaboration et l'évaluation des politiques publiques, afin de dépasser les réponses purement militaires et d'instaurer des dispositifs de prévention, de résilience civile et de relance économique légitimes et durablement efficaces.
- **Axe 4 – Libre**
Cet axe est libre et prend en compte tous les autres volets connexes.

III-Calendrier

- Lancement de l'appel : **22 Novembre 2025**
- Date limite de soumissions **des abstracts/résumés : 10 Mars 2026**,
- Les Notifications d'acceptation : **15 mars 2025**
- Date de déroulement du 2^{ème} Colloque Scientifique International : **30 et 31 mars 2026 à l'Université Yambo OUOLOGUEM de Bamako-Kabala-Mali.**

IV-Informations générales sur le colloque

- Les propositions de communication (**New Times Roman, police 12,interligne simple**), assorties d'un résumé de **300 mots** et de **5 mots clés** maximum en **français ou en anglais ou en arabe** sont recevables aux adresses électroniques suivantes : Labolarelso010@gmail.com ou larmaulshbmali@gmail.com jusqu'au **10 Mars 2026**.
Date de notification des résumés acceptés : 15 Mars 2026.Le colloque se déroulera du **30 au 31 mars 2026** à la cité universitaire de Kabala – à l'Université Yambo OUOLOGUEM de Bamako.
- Les auteurs y indiqueront les noms et prénoms du ou des contributeurs, l'institution/laboratoire d'attache, le grade ou la qualité, l'axe d'étude choisi, l'adresse électronique et les mots-clés au-dessous du résumé. Les langues d'écriture des communications ou articles sont le français, l'anglais et l'arabe. **Les auteurs des propositions des résumés retenus seront invités à payer 25.000FCFA comme frais de participation par communicant.** Les meilleurs textes après évaluation seront publiés dans un numéro spécial de la *Revue Kuru kan Fuga* ou la *Revue LaRMA*.

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Decolonial Governance and Postcolonial Promises and Futures in West Africa

Saliou DIONE
 African and et Postcolonial Studies
 Department of Anglophone Studies
 Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences
 Cheikh Anta Diop University, Dakar (Senegal)
 saliou.dione@ucad.edu.sn

ABSTRACT:

The 1960s were marked by a wave of independence in West Africa, as the region freed itself from long-standing European colonial rule. Pro-democratic reforms also swept across the region in the 1990s, dismantling the authoritarian regimes and one-party systems that had dominated the African continent since the official end of colonization. However, the newly independently balkanized West African countries still face numerous challenges in building strong nation-states and ensuring a decolonial system of governance where independence does not simply mean a change of leaders while domination and exploitation by former colonial powers remain deeply anchored. This is reflected in their inability to end poverty, unemployment, and oppression, to provide their citizens with basic services such as healthcare, housing, and education, and to guarantee their security. Drawing on Frantz Fanon's postcolonial nationalism, Achille Mbembe's *necropolitics*, and Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni's decolonial theory of the postcolonial nation-state trap, which question power dynamics in the modern world, this article analyzes the historical and political trajectories of nation-state construction, the articulation of democracy as a model of governance, and the security challenges in the making of postcolonial promises and futures in West Africa.

Keywords: West Africa, democracy, coloniality, decoloniality, governance, nation-states, futures.

RÉSUMÉ :

Les années 1960 ont été marquées par une vague d'indépendance en Afrique de l'Ouest, la région se libérant de la longue domination coloniale européenne. Les réformes prodémocratiques ont également frappé la région comme un raz-de-marée dans les années 1990, balayant les régimes autoritaires et le système de parti unique qui dominaient le continent africain depuis la fin officielle du régime colonial. Cependant, les pays d'Afrique de l'Ouest nouvellement balkanisés et indépendants sont toujours confrontés à de nombreux défis pour construire des États-nations puissants, garantir un système de gouvernance décolonial où l'indépendance ne signifierait pas simplement un changement de dirigeants alors que la domination et l'exploitation par les anciennes puissances coloniales restent profondément ancrées. Cela se reflète dans leur incapacité à réduire la pauvreté, le chômage et l'oppression, à fournir à leurs citoyens des services de base, tels que la santé, le logement et l'éducation, et à assurer leur sécurité. En s'appuyant sur le nationalisme postcolonial de Frantz Fanon, de la *nécropolitique* d'Achille Mbembe et de la théorie décoloniale de l'État-nation post-colonial comme piège de Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni, qui interrogent les dynamiques de pouvoir dans le monde moderne, cet article analyse les trajectoires historiques et politiques de construction des États-nations, l'articulation de la démocratie comme modèle de gouvernance et les défis sécuritaires dans la fabrique des futurs et des promesses postcoloniaux en Afrique de l'Ouest.

Mots-clés : Afrique de l'Ouest, démocratie, colonialité, décolonialité, gouvernance, États-nations, futurs.

Introduction

One of the most common governance systems is democracy, whose main goal is to reach sustainable development through a participatory ruling system where the populations have a direct, active voice in public policy and decision-making with blending with standard institutional structures to shape laws, budgets, and local community project in peaceful, free, stable, and secure nation-states. That is why democracy has become one of the most widely debated concepts in the modern world, in view of its important place in global governance and its being 'universally institutionalized and accepted' as a determinant asset for the advancement of human rights and the rule of law at all levels. Global governance, which includes the systems of rules, norms, and institutions countries and groups of people use to manage shared problems within and across borders, is not universal. It entails cooperation between nations, global groups as well as private entities in managing issues relating to trade, health, geopolitics, geostrategy, economy, international relations, conflicts, security, etc.

However, the newly independently balkanized West African countries still face numerous problems in building powerful nation-states, whose independence would not merely mean a change of leaders while the domination and exploitation by the former colonial powers remain deeply anchored. This is reflected in these countries' failure to alleviate poverty, unemployment, and oppression, and to provide their citizens with such basic services as health, housing, employment, and education due to administrative inefficiency, political corruption, economic mismanagement, security challenges, and social decay. This requires what can be termed decolonial governance and postcolonial futures as a political system that focuses on breaking free from inherited state models, moving toward endogenous systems, and redefining democracy, independence, development, and sovereignty. To implement decolonial governance and achieve sustainable development and political instability in the West African region, the political leaders and scholars are facing their historical responsibility of adopting and adapting democracy to the present and past social and political standards and values of the African continent. In political governance, succession to power, political participation, and dialogue between the government and the opposition are crucial aspects that warrant further analysis. The root causes of historical and political coup trajectories in West African countries like Nigeria, Ghana, Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, Guinea-Bissau, Guinea Conakry, and the political transition that occurred in Senegal in 2000 reflected the citizens' and voters' desire to enjoy sovereignty and real independence, and to deepen their countries' democratic experiences. According to Abraham Lincoln, "*democracy is defined as the power of the people, by the people, and for the people. It is a system which allows popular participation and contestation for power*" (Gunnar & Peter, 1997, p. 28). Moreover, analysts such as Massa Coulibaly and Michael Bratton (2013) have argued that "*rebuilding an effective and accountable government will require visionary national leadership. But it will also require citizens who demand that the country return to a path of sustainable political development*" (Coulibaly & Bratton, 2013, p. 5). However, all indications suggest that, due to economic hardships, while West African citizens remain committed to democracy, considered the best system of government, their trust in institutions has been eroded.

A democratic governance system comes along with principles such as political pluralism, the proclamation of human rights, freedom of expression, and the respect of the opposition parties in the political systems. Its present anchorage in the political system in Africa in general and West African in particular has led to the production of many works and contemporary texts on democracy and governance, providing ideal frameworks for understanding and structuring a political science and sociology of political instability in Africa and West Africa. These works range from foundational theory, conditions for stability, and modern democratic backsliding. Akanmu G. Adebayo's *Managing Conflicts in Africa's Democratic Transitions* (2021) investigates the terrain of democratization, elections, and conflict management on the continent, examining the relationship between competitive elections and military coups as mechanisms of political transition and causes of violence. While connecting democratic transition with the problem of political instability rather than treating democratization as an automatically peaceful process, Adebayo also enacts the causes of election-related conflict, the credibility of electoral institutions, the role of civil society, regional organizations such as ECOWAS and the African Union and their approaches to conflict management. Both Gordon Moyo and Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, for their part, in "Global Politics and Recent Political Changes in West and Central Africa: A Decolonial Analysis," (2025) take stock of the recent unconstitutional changes of government through the 'coloniality of governance,' resting on a decolonial framework. They attribute these transformations, which include regional military interventions and anti-western sentiments, to a systemic rejection of enduring neo-colonial structures, western hegemony, and uneven global power dynamics. Taiwo O. Adefisoye's "Political Governance and Rural Development in West Africa: A Systematic Review," (2026) through a systemic-review approach, reflects on political governance in relation to rural development in West Africa, emphasizing that governance cannot be separated from development outcomes and institutional quality, political accountability, and policy implementation that shape the prospects of rural

communities. The approach has identified recurring governance challenges and areas that need investigating further to grasp why West Africa remains fragmented across countries, governance levels, and policy sectors. Nelson Agbor, in “Cameroon in Context: Rethinking Democracy in Central and West Africa,” (2026) analyzes Cameroon, within the broader discourse on democratic governance in Central and West Africa, questioning conventional assumptions about political transition, democratic consolidation, and state reform, and countering at the same time existing scholarship that often evaluates African democracies using normative models that focus on linear progression toward liberal democratic institutions. For him, such approaches tend to overlook the historical, social, and geopolitical conditions that shape governance outcomes across the region. In the article “Democratic Governance and Conflict Management in a Complex Multi-Cultural Society: The Nigeria Chronicle,” (2020) both Feyisara Olaitan Eunice and Francis Olusanmi Kenneth argue that good governance implies that governments are committed to creating a system grounded in justice, peace, human rights, human security, and civil liberties production that are essential prerequisites for the promotion of participation, transparency, responsiveness, consensus-oriented, equality and inclusiveness, effectiveness and efficiency with accountability. However, they have regretted that one of the means to good governance has always been adjudged to be the practice of democratic system of government, which means the government of the people and for the people, subjecting democracy to only free, fair, and peaceful elections.

This paper argues that the nexus between modern world system, political changes and instability, insecurity, and citizens’ increasing demand for sovereignty amidst struggles with the ‘coloniality of governance’ and West African states weaved in the euro-modern nation-states and democracy epistemology, raise claims for complete decolonization as the right way forward to security, real democracy, and economic development. This is because many people in Africa in general and West Africa in particular have a negative view of the western democracy model due to the existence of a wide gap between its theory and practice. The validity of this perception is grounded in West Africa having for a long time become one of the greatest epicenters of political instability and insecurity across Africa. Respectively, recent forms of instability and political turmoil have been recorded in some ECOWAS member countries like Mali (2020-2021), Burkina Faso (2022), Niger (2023), Guinea Conakry (2021), Nigeria, (2026) Senegal (2021-2024), Guinea-Bissau (2025), etc. The recent subregion-level’s political turmoil features a rise in democratic backsliding, military leadership, contested constitutional reforms, and severe economic distress sparking civil and political unrest across many countries.

Using Frantz Fanon’s analysis of postcolonial nationalism, Achille Mbembe’s *necropolitics*, and Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni’s decolonial theory of the postcolonial nation-state trap that argue that African states remain structurally and epistemically bound to a western model of organization, the articles is concerned with looking at the sovereign power and the power dynamics in the modern world, focusing on the continuous conflict and neocolonial subjugation in many West African countries. The post-colonial new waves of leaders who have emerged in the region have decided to face their historic responsibility between adapting inherited colonial structures and meeting postcolonial promises and futures.

To that end, this paper analyses the construction of post-colonial nation-states, the challenges of western-centric narratives of progress, centering on indigenous knowledge, sustainability, and postcolonial resistance to continued neo-colonial influence. This is reflected in the anti-imperialist and anti-colonialist discourses amidst popular demands for reforms and true independence against the unpalatable conditions noted throughout West Africa. Therefore, the first part centers on the historical and political trajectories of West African nation-state construction, torn between indigenous heritages and colonial structures. The second part examines democratic governance in West Africa. The third one historicizes and takes stock of the security and instability challenges with the Sahel as

a hotbed of tensions and risks. The fourth one lays emphasis on decoloniality and the construction of West African postcolonial promises and futures.

1. The Historical and Political Trajectories of the Construction of West African Nation-States: Between Indigenous Heritages and Colonial Structures

Delving into the historical and political trajectories of the construction of West African nation-states is informative about the complexity of the evolution of the countries of the region. They moved from fluid indigenous kingdoms and trans-Saharan trade networks through arbitrary colonial partition, to post-independence authoritarian consolidation, structural adjustment, and contemporary democratic or regional struggles associated with them. The construction of West African nation-states involves how they transition from the Otton Von Bismarck-convened 1884-188 Berlin Conference-established arbitrary colonial administrative borders into cohesive sovereign states. Unfortunately, the post-colonial nation-state building process faced and still faces deep hurdles, including democratic backsliding, regional fragmentation, and severe economic and insecurity challenges. Former colonial powers like Britain and France created multi-ethnic territories while ignoring the pre-existing specific political organization systems that were made of kingdoms, linguistic groups, and trade routes. These two countries purportedly decided to muffle the structuring-reality frameworks of the anthropological, sociological, and historical political organization systems that the split territories used to manage social order, share power, and make community decision, spanning sometimes from slam-kin-based groups to vast, centralized states. Therefore, after Ghana-led the sub-region's independence waves in 1957, followed by French colonies like Guinea Conakry (1958), Senegal (1960), Mali (1960), Niger (1960), etc., Guinea-Bissau secured its independence from Portugal in 1973. The independence of France's former colonies occurred following a constitutional referendum offering African territories self-rule within the French Community or immediate independence. Only Sekou Toure-led Guinea Conakry voted "no" and secured its independence while the remaining thirteen colonies gained full independence in 1960 through peaceful agreements, thus contributing to shifting drastically the sub-region's political landscape, and leaving the new leaders to build a national identity out of diverse populations.

Therefore, in view of the current political situation, the construction trajectories of nation-states in West Africa has become an ongoing process shaped by indigenous political traditions (centralized empires, kingdoms, and decentralized acephalous societies with fluid, overlapping jurisdiction, and trade networks). This is opposed to arbitrary colonial borders, fusing disparate communities into single administrative entities, anti-colonial nationalism, and contemporary struggles over democratic governance, security, and regional sovereignty. The new system prioritized resources extraction over cohesive national integration, relegating to the second background fragile institutional frameworks inherited from disguised independence. In fact, the elite-led nationalism prioritized capturing the colonial power-left administrative machinery rather than organic nation-state construction. Independence then created single-party states with leaders, known as fathers of independence, some of whom worked out to muffle ethnic rivalries and pleaded for 'artificial unity.' Civil nationalism, which tied state resources to personal and ethnic loyalties rather than 'artificial' national and universal citizenships, was replaced through patronage networks. The new situation required a new political and economic re-articulation that encountered major obstacles.

After the official end of European colonization in West Africa, the newly independent states faced so many challenges and obstacles, leading to what seems to be 'the failing' of the post-colonial nation-state building. This accounts for the inability of many countries to achieve material advancement, foster inclusive development, and establish stable governance due to inherited colonial structures, a mismatch between inherited state boundaries and ethnic realities, corruption, and continued foreign influence. In analyzing these countries' 'artificial' post-independent situation, one realizes how they struggled and are still struggling with the western-tailored governance system. This is reflected in their historical and political trajectories of nation-state building. The chronic political

instability in the Sahel region is informative about the fragility of the longtime-failed and prevailing governance system in West Africa which did not start when Britain's and France's former colonies decided transition to democracy in 1991, after years of experiences of military rule after coups in some countries. Since gaining independence in 1960, Mali has experienced four major military coups in 1968, 1991, 2012, and 2020, along with a political transition adjustment or power consolidation in 2021, which is reshaping its political and military landscape, and a rise in religious extremism. Niger, for its part, has recorded up to today five successful military coups in 1974, 1996, 1999, 2010, and 2023, combining experiences in both civilian governments and military regimes since it gained independence from France in 1960. The then Upper Volta, known today as Burkina Faso, has recorded serious political upheavals and numerous military interventions in 1966, 1974, 1980, 1982, 1983, 1987, 2014, marked by a military transition that toppled the long-time President Blaise Compaore, and twice in 2022 in January and September. In Ghana, the military interventions contributed to reshaping the Britian's formerly colonized country's political landscape after five coups, disrupting its first three republican eras before reaching today a worldwide-hailed stable constitutional democracy as of January 1993, marking the beginning of the Fourth Republic. Regarding Nigeria, records indicate five successful coups in 1976, 1986, 1990, 1995, and 1997, and several foiled ones since its independence from Britain in 1960. The military interventions, which occurred in January 1966, July 1966, 1975, 1983, 1985, 1993, undermined civilian rule until the return to multi-party democracy under the Fourth Republic in 1999. There is also the Nigerian Civil War, known as the Biafran War (July 6, 1967 to January 15, 1970), which was a secession war that broke out when the Igbo-populated oil-rich eastern region declared its independence, causing up to three million deaths. Among the causes, were the colonial borders with the British having put together different ethnic groups into one nation in 1914 without their consent, engendering ethnic tensions and perpetual political rivalries. Since its independence in 1958, in addition to failed coups and alleged plots (1985 and 2004), Guinea Conakry has known three successful military coups in 1984, 2008, and 2021 as a result of the deaths or the unconstitutional term extension of long-standing leaders. Guinea-Bissau, a former Portuguese colony that gained its independence in 1974, has counted at least four major successful military coups in 1980, 1999, 2003, 2012, and 2025, and many attempted takeovers so far in 1998, 2009, 2022, 2023, and 2025, accounting for the chronic political instability, the huge economic challenges and gaps over the recurring leadership tradition torn between the back-and-forth between civilian leaders and military rulers. Senegal, which is hailed as one of the most stable countries in West Africa, has never experienced a military coup since being independent from France in 1960, making it stand out as a stable exception in the region. Only one serious crisis at the highest level of government occurred in 1962, often described as an 'institutional coup' or 'accused of a putsch,' without intervention by the armed forces to overthrow the regime. It marked the end of the dual parliamentary system (of the Fourth Republic type and established since the creation of the Mali federation) and the beginning of a presidential system in which the UPS (the political party of Léopold Sédar Senghor) remained the sole party until 1976. The Senegalese army has remained strictly republican and subordinate to civilian power throughout the various democratic transitions that happened in 1980, 2000, 2012, and 2024.

The post-independence global historical context, which was marked by the Cold War period, ushered in the former colonial powers to seek to prevent the rise of communism in Africa by establishing either Francophile or Anglophile and docile regimes that allowed them to preserve their economic interests on the African continent. Therefore, the practice of democracy by contemporary West African post-colonial states impacts the daily lives of individuals, groups of individuals, and states, before, during and after electoral processes. The brand of democracy which is being implemented or experimented in the sub-region is fundamentally of western extraction and does not tally with the historical, sociological, and political realities of the area that still give prominence to communalism and sharing rather than to individualism, an ideology which largely sustains western democracy. Guy Martin has prompted the idea when writing that "*any effort to superimpose a specific*

narrow formula of democracy could lead to mere formal compliance, such as allowing multiparty without real democracy” (1993, p. 6). Akanmu G. Adebayo (2012)’s *Managing Conflicts in Africa’s Democratic Transitions* accounts for the complexities of Africa’s ongoing political transformations as countries move from authoritarian regimes to democratic governance through elections. While orderly transitions via ballot boxes are increasingly replacing military coups in West Africa, these transitions have often been accompanied by violence, deaths, and social disruptions, situating the sub-region as an area in ‘perpetual democratic transition’ with limited institutional capacity to consolidate governance and sustainably manage post-election conflicts. Formal independence or *in-dependence* has then produced a post-colonial neocolonized reality where Euro-American hegemony and global capital under the imperialism umbrella dictate West African political and economic trajectories against any politics of or attempt at self-determination as an expression of Anibal Quijano’s coloniality of power and Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni’s concept of postcolonial nation-state trap. These explain how global dominance survived the formal end of empires, showing that modern global structures continue to control societies through race, capitalism, and inherited European political and economic models. Looking at the state as a Leviathan proves that the inherited territorial state structures function as instruments of elite control rather than true ‘people state’ aimed at serving popular democratic needs.

Consequently, the trajectories of nation-state construction in West Africa have turned out to be complex processes where the state often precedes the nation. Stemming from the borders drawn during the colonial era, this journey is characterized by the difficult fusion of plural identities within the same sovereign institutional framework, oscillating between political centralization, democratic challenges and the quest for emancipation. The colonial legacies and borders drawn exogenously without initial correspondence with local historical, political, sociological, anthropological, cultural, and linguistic realities entail engaging in a progressive transformation of the borders into a shared identity and institutional landmark. The maintenance of the inherited centralized administrative framework metropolitan models in the first post-independence decades, in the 1960s and after, grapples with the desire for national unity often through the establishment of one-party regimes to counter regionalist and ethnic tendencies. The central role of education and regional planning policies in forging a common civic consciousness also bump into the diversity of trajectories of stability such as the choice of negritude and progressive institutional dialogue in Senegal amidst ruptures by repeated military coups in other West African countries with crises, transitions, and contemporary recompositions entailing periodic questioning of forms of centralized governance and rise of demands for integral sovereignty. Arguably, the idea of a state is weaved in the Euro-modern epistemology and ontology, and implanted through the post-1945 juridical decolonization, which created diverse states clamoring for complete decolonization, proxies for USA/Communists or former colonialists, deploying different aspects of coloniality of governance which tend to be the major factor behind violent political changes. This questions the naturalization of frowned upon Euro-modern coups and reasons behind the coups and their impacts. Although the main causes of coups are painted local, they have qualities of a global war spearheaded by the former colonial powers to better protect their interests and assert their hegemony. Therefore, several prominent West African and pan-Africanist leaders were assassinated in coups as they challenged foreign interference, economic control, military pacts, and neocolonial ties. Sylvanus Olympio, the first president of Togo, was killed in the 1963 military coup because he fiercely denounced French monetary control and planned to implement a national currency ridden of the French colonial CFA francs. Thomas Sankara from Burkina Faso also underwent the same fate during a Blaise Compaore-led coup following his policies aimed at developing national self-reliance, severing from the International Monetary Fund-backed Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs), voicing out French continued national influence and debt strategies as mechanisms of control and domination. Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde’s anti-colonial leader and independence fighter, Amilcar Cabral was assassinated in 1973 even before his country won the struggle for political sovereignty from Portugal as a way of crushing to the egg the PAIGC (African

Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde) liberation movement that was to carry out his anti-colonial vision of economic development.

There were then manœuvres of the colonial power to assert hegemony, weaken the newly independent states. Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni's decolonial theory of the postcolonial nation-state trap, which argues that African states remain structurally and epistemically bound to a western model of organization, trapping them in continuous conflict and neocolonial subjugation, is relevant. The key associated elements that include the colonial matrix of power, inherited arbitrary borders, and elite mimicry are still visible in state governance through the mechanisms and processes by which the states exercise authority and control within their territories. This echoes Fanon's reproaches of the 'national bourgeoisie' that inherited the power from the former colonized nations for not being creative enough to reverse the tendency. As a consequence, years after independence, many African political parties that claim an economic sovereignty during the conquest of power realize once at the head of the state that they are bound to *in-dependently* collaborate with the former colonial powers. Even if in the colonies, new flags were flitting and national anthems were calling for national unity and praises for the heroes of the independence, West African nations are imposed to adopt their former colonizers' models of nation-state and nationhood with similar political, cultural, and economic structures. This often leads to conflicts between these nation-state models and the existing local ones because of their huge mismatch, resulting in discrepancy between the reality and the needs of the local populations that have different historical and cultural traditions.

West Africa's governance vulnerabilities stem from arbitrary borders and extractive economic designs emanating from the Berlin Conference. This has fabricated a structural dependency whereby post-colonial economies remain shackled and oriented toward exporting low-value raw materials and importing high-value goods, thus perpetuating external debt and fiscal gaps, and producing a vicious circle of dependency. Added to these, are the continuous use of the former colonizers' currency, the Franc zone, by the former French-colonized states, as an instrument for France to continue asserting its dominance and post-colonial subjugation with the French Treasury keeping at its disposal the funds held in an operating account at the Bank of France, which correspond to half of the foreign exchange reserves of the eight countries of the West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU). Among France's strategies that highly contributed to marring independence were the establishment in its former colonies of '*the Françafrique*' as a French-style Commonwealth, operating via the CFA franc, networks and spheres of corruption, interference and influences that serve its economic and political interests. It denotes the ambiguous relationships between France's colonial heritage and contemporary influence. The actors involved in the *Françafrique* system are often the same from one affair to another. These include intermediaries, financiers, mercenaries, etc. In addition to these actors, political logic, economic interests, and ideological underpinnings also play an important role. *Françafrique*, as the expression of an ambiguous relationship between colonial legacy and contemporary influence that characterize the neocolonial model of interference and dependence of former colonies on France, then becomes the symbol of an opaque system of corruption, patronage, and political intervention. One of the architects of this relationship is undoubtedly Jacques Foccart, who was the advisor on African affairs to several Presidents of the Republic and Secretary-General for the Community and for African and Malagasy Affairs, a structure conceived by General Charles de Gaulle to organize France's relations with its former colonies. Like France, The United Kingdom set the Commonwealth to retain legal and political influence over certain smaller member states, particularly in Africa and the Caribbean. This political influence manifests as a dominance that primarily benefits larger nations like the UK and Canada, to the detriment of African countries. The balance of power is unequal, with assistance and missions strengthening the position of major powers, leaving African states in a position of dependency. The latter are economically dependent on the Commonwealth for their trade, particularly for imports and exports, which limits their autonomy. Their economies rely then heavily on this organization,

compelling them to remain within the system despite imbalances and pressures that can resemble a form of modern-day colonization or *soft recolonization*. In particular, the UK's relationship with Africa illustrates this dependency, where Africa member states lose more in aid each year than they receive, reinforcing British economic dominance. This economic and political dependence thus maintains an unequal power dynamic, perpetuating post-colonial relationships.

West African nation-states still fail to achieve total independence and sovereignty because the shadow of the colonial power hangs over them. Consequently, the foundations of the colonial state that have not been deconstructed by the first leaders right after independence are detrimental to national unity and beyond to African unity that is an important stage in the decolonization process of African nations. In fact, in “*The Pitfall of Nation Consciousness*” (Fanon, 1963, p. 147) in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963), Fanon's similar diagnosis points at the weakness of postcolonial nationalism which he accounts for the lack of clairvoyance among some African political elite. Despite their position in the post-colonial leading class, they have failed to lead the masses to total emancipation from colonial domination. The unprepared national middle class, upon seizing power, reduces post-independence consciousness to an empty shell by mimicking ‘colonial masters,’ with the ruling elite failing to develop a genuine national economy, instead fostering tribalism, corruption, and deepening class divides through the poison of self-hatred and nation-state trap. In many countries with communist leanings, the single party was the ultimate political form of totalitarianism that communist elites used as a tool to control society. In West Africa, the immediate sources of both military and single-party regimes are to be found in colonialism. One of the deep-rooted mechanisms of colonial powers was the self-hatred they instilled in the indigenous population at all costs. Unfortunately, granting independence did not dry up this poison. On the contrary, African ruling classes very quickly seized upon this nebulous resource in order to continue, for their own benefit and the interest of the former colonizers, the process of self-colonization initiated with the chieftaincy system during the time of foreign occupation. Then, France's and the UK's interests are favored through their multinational companies and banks operating on the African continent. The Bretton Woods Institutions, which are the World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), first established at a meeting of 43 countries in Bretton Woods, New Hampshire, in the United States in July 1944 to help rebuild the shattered postwar economy and to promote international economic cooperation, falls within this same framework. The precariousness brought about in the lives of West African people by the imperialists, exacerbated by the Arab Spring and the destabilization of Libya, and the assassination in Sirte of Pan-Africanist Muammar Gaddafi, the ‘Guide of the Revolution’ and leader of Libya from 1969 to 2011, accompanied with mixed feelings of disgust and disappointment, are increasingly acute. This results in the myth of independence in the post-colonial era, which urges [us] to de-think and re-think of the myriad concerns, whose diagnosis shows Africa's environment in which the colonized people faced and still face multifaceted governance challenges to take up in the social, economic, political, and cultural realms. The precarious conditions people are living in and struggling against have also a lot to do with legitimation as theorized in Dione and Diop (2018)'s “The Rhetoric of Irony in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Devil on the Cross* (1987) and *Matigari* (1980).” As for them, the politics of legitimation seeks from the governed, the masses to normalize and consent to the laws [of subjugation] enforced by leaders. Submission to the unjust is required of their people [since] the elites adopt the same political tactics in that they expect people to accept their fate, formalizers of their woeful conditions. This is one of the reasons why the concept of disenchantment and its underpinnings permeate reflection, reconsideration, and re-orientation. Among the motives of post-colonial trajectories, stand out the goal to awaken about the ‘calamities’ such as western imperialism, capitalism, liberalism, globalism, neocolonialism, neoexploitation, corruption, authoritarianism, injustice, political interference, dependence, oppression, among other mechanisms that undermine West Africa's progress. The historical and political trajectories of nation-state construction should not then build any marginal bridge separating (hi)story, historicity, epistemology, ontology, politics, and existence that have shaped the dramatic situation of the sub-region. Their

quintessences rest on what Simona Klimkova shrewdly typifies as “*advocate of revision, recovery, and mobilization*” (2015, p. 2). This philosophy of reconstruction through deconstruction for social, political, economic, and cultural rejuvenation is abundantly necessary as looking into coloniality helps problematize the euphoria following Africa’s independence in general from European colonization that has been allegorically theorized by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o as there was no night so long that it did not end with dawn. Closely looked into, both ‘night and dawn’ set the motion of his political, ideological, and philosophical analysis of the continent’s post-colonial situation as a rhetorical representation of ‘obscurity’ versus light.

2. Democratic Governance in West Africa as an Ongoing Process: Between Democratic Consolidation and Political Instability

Over the past two decades, the African continent has undergone unprecedented changes in the internal life of its states and their relationship. The early 1990s witnessed the spread of western capitalist democratic ideals across Black Africa. It happened at a moment when the World Bank and International Monetary Fund-backed Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs), the fall of the Berlin Wall, the end of the covert rivalry between superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union, and the dislocation of the former Soviet Union, the Cold War. These historical events dominated both the economic and political debates around the world, with the West sponsoring the new form of governance known as democracy. Grassroots social movements, civil society groups initiated sovereign national conferences, spearheaded by Benin in 1990 to rewrite constitutions and limit the length of presidential terms. This system of governance came along with principles such as political pluralism, the proclamation of human rights, freedom of expression, and a multi-party system with the respect of the opposition. Regional bodies like the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) decided to tie regional stability and cooperation to political reform in its member states. That new political deal required a new political re-articulation since democratic transitions and setbacks have exposed the limitations of post-colonial state models, resulting in military interventions and popular disillusionments in West Africa.

According to Abraham Lincoln, “*democracy is defined as the power of the people, by the people, and for the people. It is a system which allows popular participation and contestation for power*” (1997, p. 28). However, some people in Africa have a negative view of the western-modeled democracy because of the existence of a wide gap between its theory and practice. Though it is a representative political system grounded in liberal values, featuring regular free and fair elections, universal suffrage, the rule of law, separation of powers as well as the protection of individual civil liberties and minority rights, it is yet to make development a reality. As an imported political model, many believe that a good and an all-inclusive governance system should take into account the country’s realities, its history, historicity, values, mindset, and traditions. The model of democracy built up in the confrontation of the majority versus the minority and in which the winner has to rule alone the country has only led to political perversities in many countries like Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, Ghana, Nigeria, Guinea-Bissau, Guinea Conakry, Senegal, etc. Since many people in these West African nations think that there is no universal democracy but a plurality of democracies, there is then need to re-imagine, reinvent and to readapt the governance system to their realities, beliefs, and principles. This will allow to move away from political turmoil, wars, and ethnic tensions. The idea is echoed in Achille Mbembe’s *On The Postcolony* (2001) when tackling the ‘failing’ of post-colonial nation-states. Mbembe unearths how post-colonial African states reproduce the colonizer-colonized power relations and dynamics, denoting what he describes as the “*banality of power*” (Mbembe, 2001, p. 102), a concept that refers to how power is exercised in these states by a group of people entitled to serve the population, but rather serve their own interests. Mbembe’s concept of *banality of power* reflects the hegemonic aspect of coloniality that is reproduced by post-colonial West African states. In the postcolony, the commandment seeks to institutionalize itself, to achieve legitimation and hegemony in the form of a ‘fetish.’

Therefore, understanding the underlying problems post-colonial states are facing, requires examining how the world of meanings produced is ordered; along with the types of institutions, the knowledges, norms, and practices structuring this new ‘common sense,’ the light that the use of visual imagery and discourse throws on the nature of domination and subordination (Mbembe, 2001, p. 104). This proves that coloniality uses both discourse and practices to assert a hegemony over the colonized subjects, political tactics and strategies that are appropriated and reproduced by the state and the ruling class. To make them effective, the discourse is replaced by a new one aimed at supposedly restoring the dignity and pride of post-colonial people while, unfortunately, maintaining the colonial practices. The post-colonial ruling class calls for national pride and unity while maintaining domination over the masses. Whereas Mbembe considers that the post-colonial elite has seized the power, Fanon argues that the colonial power uses pressure and coercion to maintain the control of the post-colonial state. Thus, that situation makes independence an illusion, questioning what western-modeled democracy has brought to West African nations. The ways the former colonial powers have activated these levers that range from ethnic groups, race, religion, social status, to economic power prove that they still strategize to maintain the domination *status quo* and protect their interests, in a diplomatic language, which is nothing but ‘a new form of colonization’ or a ‘*soft recolonization*’ through their own political governance model rooted in their own thinking, values, and realities.

Consequently, authoritarian incumbents in democratizing countries choose electoral rules to retain power while accommodating opposition demands for increased participation and representation. There are a political logic of this institutional choice and its consequences. A ‘whole system’ approach that emphasizes the intricate but often hidden relationships between elections and the rules governing them at multiple levels, presidential, legislative and local, are employed. This allows the leaders to prove success based on disguised performance at all levels, with the only objective of accessing to power by any means necessary. Prior to any elections, multiple-level electoral reforms are initiated to preserve the ruling party in power while expanding opportunities for, but also fragmenting, the opposition. In the long run, they encourage splits within the ruling party and help the opposition develop increased ability to coalesce around a single opposition candidate, resulting in the defeat or reelection of ‘the authoritarian incumbent’ and a democratic transfer of power through what is called competitive elections, often leading to post-electoral violence and tensions with claims of vote rigging or unfair elections. Good governance connotes that government is committed to creating a system founded on justice, peace, protection of human security and civil liberties that promote participation, transparency, responsiveness, consensus oriented, equality and inclusiveness, effectiveness and efficiency with accountability. However, one of the means to good governance has always been adjudged to be the practice of democratic system of government, which means the government of the people and for the people constituted through peaceful, free, and fair elections. Notwithstanding, the democratic system of government could equally generate conflicts depending on the manners of governance because good governance premise on peaceful management of conflict that can bring a desirable positive change to enhance development. Conflicts in governance are generated with opposing interest that are not properly managed and lead to confrontational and economic downfall. Examples include Nigeria, Mali, Niger, Ghana, Burkina Faso, Guinea-Bissau, Guinea Conakry where governance induced conflict in democratic system as a result of social, economic, political inequality and marginalization across states. Multi-culture, state creation, indigenes/settler’s dichotomy, central character principles, corruption, poverty, political and economic exclusion, bad governance and many more have been reflected in these countries’ respective democratic systems since the inception of democracy in the 1990s.

In fact, to guarantee the defense of inalienable rights while also fulfilling duties, the crisis can only be complex. The problem facing West African democracies across various sectors has often been analyzed in terms of a crisis of representation, or more broadly, a crisis of legitimacy. Simone Goyard-

Fabre anticipates this problem by suggesting that almost all democracies endemically experience crises of legitimation. The increased interest in the principles that underpin good governance, which refers to the conscious management of the structures of a given regime with the objective of promoting the legitimacy of the public sphere, accountable for the quality of governance, and capable of stimulating social energy with stable rules, is not only part of this debate but also sheds light on the responsibility of a lack of transparency and a general lack of democracy on populations' well-being. Therefore, democracy is only measured through elections and representations, ignoring its impact(s) on the legal, social, and economic well-being of citizens as also decisive elements in assessing democracies. Good political governance requires then that the management of society, touching on the basic institutions of democracy and the rules upon which it rests, be imbued with democratic values that centralize human being, which can be theorized as *the democracy of well-being* which is different from *electoral democracy*. These values must be embraced by those who govern and by society as a whole. The state of democracy thus should combine the democratic inclinations of institutions, the people who lead them, and society's propensity to make demands in this direction, among other factors. Faced with these tensions born from socio-economic disparities and cultural diversities poorly integrated into the republican pact, countries like Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger search for a new balance between internal democratization, decentralization, and dynamics of three-partite integration under the Alliance of Sahel States (AES) as a mutual defense and political union created on September 16, 2023, through the Liptako-Gourma Charter and led by military leaders of these countries, thus challenging the western-modeled democratic principles rooted in elections and power transfer.

However, West African nations like Ghana, Nigeria, and Senegal have shown trends of rejection of anti-democratic forms of government, a trend confirmed by the peaceful transitions of power over decades. This denotes the existence of significant proportions of people who support democracy and believe that it is the best form of government despite being imperfect. At the same time, and one might be tempted to argue 'quite logically,' the proportions of people who affirm that elections are the best way to choose leaders remain significant. Consistently, it emerges that citizens remain deeply attached to democracy. The experience of Senegal's democratic exceptionality stems from the powerful leadership and guidance of then President Leopold Sedar Senghor, who adopted in 1976 a new constitution that transformed the *de facto* one-party state into a tripartite political system. Initially engineered by President Senghor, this system inaugurated a process of peaceful democratization that President Abdou Diouf, President Senghor's constitutional successor, brought to conclusion in 1981. Indeed, the government would recognize and legalize all political parties, provided that such parties would reject affiliation to "*race, ethnic group, sex, religion, sect, language or region.*" *In addition, parties were bound to respect the Constitution, the principles of national sovereignty and democracy*" (Fatton, 1981, p. 1142). Senegal transformed its authoritarian one-party state into a full-fledged bourgeois liberal democracy under the leadership of Presidents Leopold Sedar Senghor and Abdou Diouf. The significance of such a transformation derives from the fact that it crystallized in a dependent and materially 'backward' society as stated by R. O'Brien (1979) and Dos Santos (1973) on the verge of economic collapse, and in the prevailing African and Third World contexts of developmental dictatorships and one-party states according to Sklar (1983). The idea underscores how economic and social changes are deeply important when they happen in poor and dependent countries, with shift shaping local class structures and long-term development in ways that differ greatly from wealthy nations. Analyzing the political and social causes and consequences of this process, which places the Senegalese experience in a theoretical perspective, unearths at the same time the limitations of the dominant explanatory paradigms of the making and breakdown marked by the existence of what can be termed 'bourgeois democracy.' A deep analysis of the state of democracy in Senegal also shows that there are other non-state actors, the *marabouts* or religious leaders and customary chiefs, who play important roles in making the country's democracy viable and vital. As people who are well respected and very much listened to, when the country is on the brink of collapse,

they make their voices heard by advocating dialogue and reminding political actors that the country's interest must take precedence over everything else. Despite the outcomes, social conditions, or institutional forms shaped and limited by unyielding power dynamics and physical or economic realities, political and material constraints to governing power structures and real-country resource limits, Senegal is still cited as an example of democracy in Africa. This is not for the actions taken by politicians but rather by citizens, who seem to be more proactive than them, and the actors who act in the shadows.

Yet, though Senegal has long been a haven of stability and democracy in Africa, it did experience some political turbulences under Presidents Abdou Diouf, Abdoulaye Wade, and Macky Sall. Like in many nations in West Africa, the country has also recorded anti-democratic and repressive moves, leading to institutional crises. Compared to other countries in West Africa, Senegal has indeed been considered to be an example of democracy since independence in 1960 though the political system only became democratic around 2000 (Ngom, 2025). In fact, democratization is then an ongoing process along with sometimes serious setbacks. The country's democratic resilience is rooted in its social, cultural, and religious norms such as dialogue and tolerance that are widely shared in addition to the autonomy of key institutions such as the judiciary.

The claims for more sovereignty that are being echoed from the continent and the diaspora evidence a 'failure' in the process of building strong post-colonial nation-states. As a matter of fact, generally, African nations suffer from the residues of the colonial system that are deeply rooted in the former colonies. The [in]visible presence of ancient European colonial powers in the economic and political affairs of their former colonies severely undermines their economic, political, cultural, and military sovereignty. Due to internal governance issues, legacies of colonial structures, and persistent ethnic and religious conflicts, there are both a crisis of governance and a failure to provide for their citizens' socio-economic needs. The imposition of foreign nation-state models that do not align with the needs of local societies also contributes to these challenges. Modern democratic backsliding, marked by slow, state-led erosion of democratic institutions, the rule of law, and civil liberties from within, prompted the military takeovers and sudden coups noted recently in Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, Guinea-Bissau, and Guinea Conakry. Moreover, analysts such as Massa Coulibaly (2013) and Michael Bratton (2013) have argued that *"rebuilding an effective and accountable government will require visionary national leadership. But it will also require citizens who demand that the country return to a path of sustainable political development"* (Coulibaly & Bratton, 2013, p. 5). This proves that African democracy should be solidly rooted in the traditional values of the continent in general since people's way of life was already based on sharing and consensus. They shared everything they had, even the power. With this discrepancy found in democracy where the elected person holds all the powers and rules alone without sharing even when there is a difference of one vote, most people are confused as to the real meaning and content of this new form of democracy. Its reduction to elections, elections certified as having been *peaceful, free, and fair* by election observers, mostly foreigners from the European Union, who promptly depart and abandon the people to their misery under the leadership of 'democratic dictators,' has even made the situation worse, provoking regime changes through coups as what happened in West Africa. Then, what is being implemented across Africa is a *'western-tropicalized democratic utopia.'*

The western adopted system of democracy mainly focuses on the appearance and not on the substance. Even if some leaders have been chosen through what is called *'regular elections,'* they have not been opened and honest as true African-inspired democracy required. Analyzing the different forms of contestations that often took place after presidential, legislative, and local elections in West Africa since the advent of democracy proves that the democratization process has been corrupted by rigged elections and the *'winner-take-all politics'* which is opposed to the African culture of sharing, democracy, and realities as a whole. The current unstable political situation in Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso are to be attributed for the most part to the failure of independence and

western-modeled democracy that have contributed to marginalizing segments of their populations, leading to uprising and secession claims, and paving the way for terrorist groups in the region. This compels Marwane Ben Yahmed to ask whether Africa has a problem with democracy. This is the same process that continues today, marked by a derivative of the single-party system, administrative multi-party politics that is yet to break with the logic of self-hatred necessary for any self-colonization dynamic. For him, the contemporary crises in Africa have nothing to do with democracy in its substantive form. What is broken is the self-colonization paradigm. What is no longer acceptable is that the rulers' desire to administer their citizens as if they were colonized subjects, and their countries as occupied territories. Consequently, while there is a strong citizen demand for democracy, frustrations with institutional failure have grown and fueled rampaging populism and military coups in West Africa. For Oumar Don Collin (2026), *"Africa was not given democracy; it was given a system designed to fail"* (Colli, 2026, p. 1). Then, Africa's democratic decline is not a failure of culture or capacity, *"it is rather the logical outcome of a system designed from the beginning to extract, not liberate"* (Idem). Western democracy, as an imported governing system, has highly contributed to reinforcing the class of predators whose interests are in contrast to the needs and expectations of the masses they govern with disparities between the social body, the electorate, and the political body. Therefore, democracy, rooted in direct universal suffrage in West Africa, though there are pluralities of democracies in the West with multifaceted systems (Great Britain, USA, Norway, Germany, etc.), with citizens lacking the required intellectual tool and civil consciousness, has become a *neocolonial trap*, igniting unrest, divisions, and tensions. This prompts Cameroonian historian Achille Mbembe to argue that trying to explain the current dynamics on the continent in terms of a crisis of democracy is a 'misinterpretation.' For him, one cannot account for what is happening on the continent citing 'lack of democracy' as the root cause *"because democracy simply does not exist there. What is collapsing before our eyes, [he argues], are the institutional arrangements inherited from colonization and disguised in the 1990s by a 'façade makeover'"* (Mbembe, 2026).

3. Historicizing and Taking Stock of the Security and Instability Challenges in West Africa: The Sahel as a Hotbed of Tensions and Risks

Today, West Africa is struggling with a complex security crisis brought about by the expanding violent extremism from the Sahel region toward coastal states, resulting in recurring military coups and deepening socioeconomic vulnerabilities. The porosity of borders, stemming from an arbitrary colonial border crossing areas that are sometime constituted of desert and vast territorial areas hard to access, making physical control and surveillance difficult, has become serious security, economic, and social challenges for the region. The geographical configuration of the zone renders it complicated to cover immense spaces that lack resources, infrastructures, technological equipment, in addition to administrative weaknesses, lack of effective state governance and, resulting in insecurity and terrorism with the poorly controlled areas serving as fallback bases, transit zones, illicit trafficking, and sanctuaries for armed groups and terrorist networks. Therefore, the Sahel-Saharan region has become an easy prey for the smuggling of firearms, drugs, fuels, cigarettes, etc., creating a cross-border criminal economy, human trafficking, smuggling, and money laundering networks. Among the consequences, are losses of revenues with untaxed informal trade, the permeability paving the way for the survival of illegal small local traders, community tensions and local conflicts, forced population displacements, uncontrolled movement of populations. Moreover, the convergence of transborder and transnational crimes, poverty, weak governance systems, climate change, drought, etc., are among the main causes. Despite substantial national budget allocations nationwide to curb the security crises, the security threats continue to strain the region's social fabric and economic stability, undermining its long-time efforts to make decolonial governance a reality and meet postcolonial promises of progress and development.

Thus, at least six countries can be cited as examples of nations that are facing severe security crises in the West African region. Nigeria, after the Biafran War, also known as the Nigerian Civil

War, spanning from July 6, 1967 to January 15, 1970, has been facing another crisis since 2002. This is a complex and multi-layered insecurity crisis led by Boko Haram and ISWAP insurgencies in the northeast, widespread armed banditry and kidnapping in the northwest, and persistent farmer-herder tensions in the central region. The Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) is a Salafi-Jihadist insurgent group that has acted as subsidiary of the Islamic State within the Sahel since 2015, operating primarily within the Sahel after splitting from Boko Haram in 2016. Boko Haram was created in 2002 in Maiduguri, in the Borno State, in northeastern Nigeria, by its leader Mohammed Yusuf who operated first as a local religious group preaching and fighting against western education and government corruption. The group's early clashes (2003-2009) then started with sporadic, localized confrontations with security forces before they sharply escalated in July 2009 into a major coordinated uprising to later on turn into a violent radical insurgency undertaking widespread attacks, bombings, and kidnappings of villagers, travelers, and schoolchildren for ransom payment. Boko Haram and Jihadist insurgency still carry on with their sporadic attacks, associated with criminal gangs in the northwest and north-central areas despite military interventions. There are also recurrent farmer-herder clashes occasioned by land, water resources, and grazing route disputes, fueling lethal communal violence between local farming groups and nomadic herders. Secessionist tensions and militancy groups also agitate in the southeastern region resorting to criminal violence and requiring the intervention of security forces. Those Nigeria's regions are marked by high levels of unemployment, poverty, low access to education opportunities, economic hardship, weak border controls, making youth easy preys for criminal recruitment and activities, and paving the way for small arms proliferation and cross-border movements of illicit groups from the Sahel region. Under the different Presidents that succeeded in Nigeria since the advent of Boko Haram in 2002, from Abdulsalam Abubakar, Olusegun Obasanjo, Umaru Musa Yar'Adua, Goodluck Jonathan, Muhammadu Buhari, Bola Ahmed Tinubu, Nigeria has rested on a coalition of West African national militaries, regional task forces, local civilian defense groups, and international partners to erase Boko Haram, whose activities centers on the Lake Chad Basin region, covering part of Nigeria, Niger, Chad, and Cameroon. The offensive launched by the Nigerian government, alongside with these bordering countries, has enabled the country to recapture many areas that were formerly controlled by Boko Haram.

As for Mali, it has been struggling to end a severe security crisis that is a multi-front war in which are involved Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslim (JNIM), an al-Qaeda-linked jihadists (JNIM), long-time northern separatist groups like the Azawad Liberation Front, and the government forces. The two major jihadist coalitions and allied insurgent groups control territories, enforce blockades, and initiate coordinated attacks aimed at hitting militaries and civilian targets in the central, northern, and southern regions. Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslim (JNIM), the dominant al-Qaeda-affiliated militant coalition in the Sahel, which is led regionally and locally by sub-groups like Macina Liberation Front, has spread into southern and western Mali, launching coordinated nationwide assaults and offensives toward the capital, Bamako. Islamic State in the Greater Sahel/Sahel Province (ISSP/IS-SP), an affiliate of the Islamic State group that is active in the tri-border Liptako-Gourma region (historic cross-border region of West Africa and the Sahel, shared between Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger), wages war against state forces through attacks and territorial seizures. The Azawad Liberation Front (FLA), which is a coalition of Tuareg-led separatist and insurgent faction with a separatist political agenda, operates in northern Mali, embarking on tactical, coordinated joint offensives alongside JNIM, targeting the Malian central government and military installation. The ongoing severe security crisis resulted in the varied and multifaceted instability and coups that the country has experienced, compelling the authority under the leadership of Assimi Goïta, one of the initiators of the 2020 and 2021 coups against civilian President Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta, to shift from ECOWAS and French military support to Russian mercenaries allies, known first as Wagner Group, a Russian state-funded private military company, and withdrawing from the regional organization ECOWAS that is seen as a hindrance to Mali's new security and political

agenda. Unfortunately, despite all these new security politics and withdrawal from the sub-regional organization, widespread violence, civilian displacement, supply blockades, and deteriorating humanitarian conditions still persist nationwide.

Niger is also in the same insecurity dynamics with a complex, severe, and multi-dimensional security crisis brought about by cross-border jihadist insurgencies, violent extremist groups like ISIS and al-Qaeda, and political instability following the recent military coup that toppled civilian President Mouhamed Bazoum in 2023. Assaults and violence have spilled over from rural border areas into major urban centers, turning the country into security hotspots and threats. The Tillabery region, a bordering zone with both Burkina Faso and Mali, has become the epicenter of violence with armed attacks against civilians, military installations, healthcare infrastructures, and so on. Niger's Diffa region, located in the Lake Chad Basin, is plagued by acute cross-border incursions and extremist activities connected to regional militant groups. While the Tahoua and Dosso region are grappling with high intercommunal tensions, banditry, and increasing jihadist influence, the capital city Niamey is facing high-profile security breaches and attacks targeting strategic military and aviation infrastructure.

Burkina Faso is also going through a major security and humanitarian crisis, marked by the rise of jihadist attacks, massive population displacements and a deterioration of essential services. Militant Islamist groups, such as the Macina Liberation Front, Ansaroul Islam and Katiba Hanifa, undertake attacks against armed forces and civilians after the succession of Blaise Compaore, Roch Marc Christian Kaboré, was toppled in 2022 over his handling of the country's security crisis, compelling even the country to later on withdraw from the ECOWAS considered as a hindrance to the management of the country's security situation. But since the September 2022 Ibrahim Traoré-led military coup, the security crisis is yet to be curbed with rising violence and civilian casualties along with an economy that is struggling to take off.

Guinea-Bissau is, for its part, confronted with a deep-rooted insecurity problem stemming from repetitive military takeovers. The most recent took place in November 2025, chronicling the political instability and international drug trafficking networks that have invested the country. Guinea-Bissau has experienced everlasting transitional military leadership, preventing the country from securing institutional stability, recording suspension of constitutional order, and regional isolation. The country has become a drug epicenter where drug cartels prosper to smuggle illicit products into West Africa, urging General Horta Inta-A to commit to fighting against corruption and drug trafficking after deposing President Umaro Sissoco Embalò. The goal is to refurbish the country's narco-state image.

Senegal, which is known as one of the most stable and peaceful countries in West Africa, has been struggling with an internal conflict, known as the Casamance conflict. This "*neither war nor peace*," (Ngom & Sene, 2009, p. 3) which marks the crisis in Casamance from the early 1980s until now, constitutes one of the significant episodes in the country's history since independence in 1960, also affecting The Gambia and the neighboring country, Guinea-Bissau. The Casamance conflict in the southern part is an ongoing low-level conflict with distinct regional identity having highly contributed to separatist arguments that distinguish the region and its people from the North. It opposes the independence rebel forces of the Father Augustin Diamacoune Senghor-led Movement of Democratic Forces of Casamance (MFDC). This MFDC is not to be confused with the original MFDC (1949-1954) founded while Senegal was still under French colonial rule by schoolteachers Emile Badiane and Ibou Diallo as a regional political movement. Casamance was more watered, more luxuriant than the areas subject to the Sahelian climate, making the region benefit from fertile lands and its own resources, notably rice growing, to such an extent that it was sometimes referred to as Senegal's 'granary' with also tourism that was already developing successfully there. Since independence in 1960, the populations of Casamance or at least a fraction of them had dreamed of their own autonomy. The geographic position of the region with the Gambian enclave within the

national territory made them feel their ‘marginal position’ all the more acutely. Feeling ‘isolated’, ‘neglected’, and ‘ostracized’ by the central power and other populations with whom they had never shared real ties for the most part, the separatists took it for granted that they did not benefit sufficiently from the wealth of their region and that the ‘northerners’ of Dakar, the capital, derived most of the benefits from the region’s products, fueling a sentiment of frustration among the secessionists. The first serious incident of 1982 triggered an internal conflict which has become a test for both the region and the central power for over forty years. All the state leaders who came to power since the conflict broke out, from Presidents Abdou Diouf, Abdoulaye Wade, Macky Sall, and Bassirou Diomaye Diakhary Faye, have been investing in and working on the reconstruction and the restoration of the region as part and parcel of Senegal as a nation.

In fact, the security crises hitting many nations in West Africa driven first by porous and fragile borders, violent extremist spillover from the Sahel, transnational organized crimes, domestic separatists’ agendas constitute vulnerabilities disrupting local cross-border economies, the free movement of people and goods, facilitating illicit trafficking as well as straining relations between central governments and marginalized and remoted border communities. In regard to the rampaging political and institutional instability, leading to armed forces seizing power control and suspending constitutional order and rule of law, and thus installing transitional military leadership under the pretext of fighting against insurgents, remain real concerns in West Africa. Frequent coups, attempted overthrows, and crackdown on opposition leaders and citizens hinder the establishment of real and sustainable ‘democratic institutions,’ undermining public safety and people’s freedoms. Groups Like Jama’at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM), ISWAP, and Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS), Boko Haram, the jihadist groups affiliated to al-Qaeda use remote border areas to launch attacks and move between states, thus increasing their extremist activities as it is the case in northern border areas in West African coastal countries like Ghana, Cote d’Ivoire, Benin, and Togo. For example, the Boko Haram leadership has international connections to al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, Al-Shabaab, the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO), Mokhtar Belmokhtar’s factions, and other militant groups outside of Nigeria. The instability then paves the way for criminal groups to smuggle weapons, narcotics, fuel, and counterfeit goods across national limits and share logistics and control taxation routes, turning remote borderland into entrenched shadow economies and ‘no-man’s land.’

Consequently, many displaced citizens live in precarious conditions away from their farmlands and homes, impacting agricultural production and trade. The local populations who rely on informal cross-border trade and traditional markets see their livelihoods interrupted by security restrictions and sporadic violence and their living conditions deteriorating. The internally displaced populations face restricted access to drinkable water, food, healthcare, and education. The security problems generated tensions among ECOWAS member countries and Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso after the military leaders refused to comply with the regional organization’s stance on unconstitutional change of government which it adopted as the Abuja Declaration on Political Principles in 1991 and the Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance in 2001, aimed, among others, at deterring unconstitutional change of government, particularly via military coups, in West Africa (Okoli, Owonikoko & Okafor, 2026, p. 17). The failure for Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso to organize elections in the deadlines set by the organization and peacefully hand over the power to a newly elected leadership led to ECOWAS’ sanctions, creating regional diplomatic rifts and tensions between the two sides, and precipitating their withdrawal from the organization and establishing on September 16, 2023 in Niamey, Niger, what they called the Alliance of Sahel States (AES) for collective defense, economic cooperation, and regional sovereignty. The AES acts as a mutual defense pact between Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger, following the coup in Niger and ECOWAS’ threats of military intervention in the country. On July 6, 2024, the alliance was turned into a confederation with formalized institutional and strategic cooperation between the three Sahelian nations. They formally withdrew from ECOWAS on January 29, 2025 and severed ties with their former colonial power, France, putting an

end to their military cooperation, thus ambitioning to assert their independence from western influence. The tripartite intergovernmental organization, which marks a significant step toward beefing up security and cooperation, aims at addressing the mutual threats posed by the armed rebellions and external aggressions in the Sahelian region, and countering any attack on the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the three member countries.

Despite the coups and the presence of Russia's Wagner-turned Africa Corps, a new Russian paramilitary formation that is fully subordinate to the Ministry of Defense, the violence in the Sahel has caused and is still causing massive displacements of people, with extreme food insecurity, demographic pressure and overwhelming health and education infrastructure gaps in the host areas like Djibo, Barsalogho, Ouahigouya, etc. The insecurity has also impacted a lot the economies of Mali, Burkina, and Niger, with the plummeting of foreign investments, limiting their security forces' ability to securely control their territories because of lack of means to buy sophisticated weapons to face the jihadists and the secessionists. The crisis is causing internally and externally displaced people, children and parents, fleeing the insecurity situation and forced to live in the streets, making them vulnerable and deprived of the basic needs.

However, despite their limited financial resources, the governments of the Sahelian conflict-torn states are making huge efforts to address the crisis, using internally and comprehensive-approach strategies, including economic development and infrastructure rehabilitation. They have initiated 'sovereignist politics' to recapture and re-own their countries' natural resources and exploit them for the benefit of their populations. To that end, they decided to put an end to any colonization-inherited agreements, known as 'the colonial pact.' Imposed by European powers on their colonies between the 17th and 18th centuries, this created ties of dependence through monetary cooperation, military cooperation, and primacy in natural resource exploitation. They expect this new politics, in the long run, to enable them to definitely cut the dependence tie with their former colonized country-turned neocolonialist, France. In fact, Mali, Burkina, and Niger possess a rich subsoil and diverse resources. They have minerals and significant agricultural sectors, thanks to their rivers, and considerable energy potentials. Their mineral resources include gold, of which they are among the continent's leading producers. Their subsoils also contain significant deposits of iron and bauxite that remain to be exploited on a large scale. They also own phosphates and salt deposits. Water and agriculture are enormous assets, with the Niger River flowing through the three countries and used for fishing, irrigation, transportation, agriculture, and electricity production. For livestock farming, the vast savannah areas provide sustenance for numerous herds of cows, sheep, and goats. In Niger, gold is found mainly in the south and west. There are also iron and bauxite deposits, with significant iron and bauxite deposits yet to be exploited on a large scale. Phosphates and salt are also abundant, with deposits such as the Tilemsi phosphates and the Taoudeni rock salt. The country also possesses manganese, copper, nickel, and limestone. Niger alone is a major global producer of high-grade uranium ores, historically providing about 5% of world mining output. Uranium mining in Niger by the French Atomic Energy Commission (CEA) began in 1968 in Arlit, then in Akokan in the 1970s. Today, it is mined by the French company Orano, the Chinese company CNNC, the Niger Mining Heritage Company, and the South Korean company KEPCO. Following the July 2023 military coup, Niger's military leader nationalized key French-operated mines like Somaïr, resulting in a deep geopolitical standoff, stranded yellowcake stockpiles, and an international legal dispute. For several decades, France remained the only foreign power to mine uranium in Niger. From the mid-2000s onward, the situation evolved, and new players emerged in this increasingly strategic sector: China, Canada, and, indirectly, the United States and, more recently, Iran, making the country a zone of geopolitical and geostrategic rivalries and influences.

Therefore, faced with all these huge challenges, Mali, Burkina, and Niger should not stand alone though the regional diplomatic rifts and tension between the two political blocs (AES and ECOWAS) that used to form one entity highly contributed to weakening the required coordinated

cross-border counterterrorism initiatives. The regional integration's move by the ECOWAS member countries to foster collective strength, cross-border trade, trade freedoms, and joint peacekeeping efforts have been undermined by the withdrawal of Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso, creating profound geopolitical divisions and weakening the whole region since 'united West African stand, divided it falls' to paraphrase Kwame Nkrumah as a reminder of the importance of unity and collaboration among African nations.

West Africa is then at a turning point in its history with the prevailing new geopolitical deal embodied by the two political blocs, ECOWAS and AES. Faced with growing regional challenges and despite the political separation, they should sustain the culture and history that unite them as people having once belonging to the great West African Empires of Ghana and Mali by making the values of unity, brotherhood, sisterhood, resilience, and solidarity prevail beyond political discrepancies. The creation of AES, rather than being looked at as a hindrance to unity, should be turned into a significant step toward a new political and economic dynamic for the region to unite against violent extremism and flourish. The two blocs should work toward laying the foundation for a harmonious collaboration where security, economic, and political cooperation overcome divisions and past conflicts. Far from being an enemy force, AES should be considered a strategic opportunity since states from both sides share a similar destiny and the same historical and contemporary challenges: slavery, colonization, coloniality, neocolonization, globalization, climate change, insecurity, development problems, etc. All in all, ECOWAS should engage in new reforms, reassess regional and global contexts in all their complexity and diversity, and draw up new perspectives by integrating AES as a legitimate and contributing stakeholder through the creation of frameworks for dialogue. To that end, ECOWAS-AES summits would be good strategic initiatives to address regional priorities, like trans-border security, common currency, education, health, infrastructure, trade, global geopolitics and geostrategy, prevent diplomatic tensions, and strengthen cultural and economic cooperation. Neither Russian Wagner-baptized Africa corps, nor France, the European Union, the United States will resolve the security crisis out of kindness, selflessly or for free. Because these are African problems that must find African solutions.

4. Decoloniality and the Construction of West African Postcolonial Promises and Futures

The post-colonial European-modeled nation-states, which have been practiced in Africa in general and West Africa in particular since independence are yet to be productive. They have rather produced political instability, ethnic tensions, economic disparities, dependence, insecurity, sub-regional divisions, etc. These nation-state models, grounded in self-hatred and colonial-modeled bourgeoisie and elite reproduction with a post-colonial ruling and middle class whose economic foundations, cultural values, and political behaviors are framed by former imperial powers, function as apparatuses allowing these groups to maintain their wealth, privileges. They also enable them to secure high status across generations through tailored political institutions, formation of political parties, education systems, economic and social networks. The main goals are to sustain official impunity, state patronage, resource sharing, and to align democracy with elections, casting ballots and access to power. Therefore, citizens' basic needs such as health, education, employment, security, housing, and well-being have become secondary. Despite the promises of democracy, whose advent in West Africa dated back to the 1990s with a wave of national conference, civil protest, and economic pressures having engendered the collapse of one-party states and military dictatorships, and resulting in multiparty constitutions and seemingly regular elections across the sub-region, shifted national and regional incentives towards political and economic liberalization. This governance system has proven incapable of addressing the three major historical crises that hinder the continent's development and prevent it from becoming a geopolitical force: the crisis of wealth production, the crisis of the redistribution of the means of subsistence, and the crisis of citizen representation. Despite the evolution and democratic milestones noted in Ghana, Nigeria, and Senegal, with their reputations for stable governance through consecutive peaceful transfers of powers between rival political parties,

vibrant pluralistic tradition marked by sustained periods of electoral competitions, West African nations are yet to create the conditions for wealth production necessary to meet the basic needs of their citizens, thus to comply with the postcolonial promises and futures.

Therefore, linking nation-states construction and democracy, which are models grounded in coloniality, become imperative to grasp the current economic, political, geopolitical, geostrategic, insecurity situations in West Africa. The two systems are then reflections of the colonial matrix of power (Qujano, 2000), as a global system of structural domination and military influence, privileging westernized bourgeoisie and post-colonial elite class by sustaining interlocking controls over the economy, political authority, knowledge production long after colonization *arti-officially* (artificially and officially) ended. With the persistent and unmatched hegemonic influences up to today, true decolonization remains an ongoing process. That dominance faces today active challenges from rising intellectuals and youths from Africa and its diaspora. The region's countries are grappling with complex, enduring, and escalating crises that are affecting their citizens' aspirations to development and economic self-determination. Current insecurity problems, engendered by political and economic instability, make it harder for them to meet their basic needs, correlating with the ongoing impacts of colonial power, epistemic subjugation, and structural dependency post-colonial West African nations are striving to curb.

In fact, the deconstruction of the post-colonial nation-states, the challenges of western-centric narratives of progress, centering on indigenous knowledge, sustainability, and postcolonial resistance to continued neocolonial influences through the anti-imperialist and anti-colonialist discourses and practices amidst popular demands for reforms and true independence throughout Africa, have given rise to new requirements against the unpalatable conditions. To that end, the new waves of postcolonial leaders who have emerged in Senegal, Mali, Ghana, Burkina Faso, and Niger, Nigeria, etc., have decided to face their historic responsibilities of adapting politics and governance to the present and past social and political standards and values of the continent. The aim is to re-imagine and re-invent leadership, development, society, and identity so as to materialize the postcolonial promises and shape decolonized futures, focusing on practical and structural changes that address the legacies of exploitation, promote equity, and foster political and economic self-determination as active, imaginative, and contested processes of creating alternative ways of being and becoming against systemic coloniality. These nations evolve in regional (ECOWAS), and semi-regional (AES) structures that allow them to navigate within the global system and renegotiate sovereignty and sub-regional integration amidst their citizens' and young leaders' questioning of their nations' partnerships and economic dependencies. The emerging grassroots social cohesion dynamics aim at building bottom-up civil identity, tackling head-on historical and present-day political grievances ignored or left unaddressed by centralized governments. As a consequence, ECOWAS is presently navigating a dual role, operating both as an architecture of regional security and integration, and a historically internalized neoliberal administrative rationalities over grassroots popular welfare.

Government reforms are undoubtedly West African nations' biggest and most complex undertaking amidst internal conflict and political and economic tensions and instability that often involve the former colonial powers, France and Britain. These necessarily require both re-imagining and re-inventing the existing governance structures. The relevance of this lies in modern backsliding driven by elected leaders who use legal changes, manipulate elections, and weaken checks and balances to concentrate power, thus inciting West African citizens' expressing the need to re-invent an African-modeled democracy grounded in their history, culture, and traditions as former entities having shared the same geographical area and belonged to great indigenous political and economic entities. In fact, principals such as equal treatment of human beings, corruption, know no color and they are not new to West Africans if one delves into the sub-region's past history, memory, and politics. Even if those societies were built through warlike acts, their leaders who crafted in 1235 the world's first oldest Constitution, *The Kurukan Fuga Charter*, under the leadership of Sundjata Keita,

granted the right to live and to own properties to all human beings, relating democracy with ownership and properties as opposed to the western-modeled democracy that rather produces middle-class assimilation. The Charter was based on the equality of all individuals living in the Mali Empire which existed between c. 1226 to 1670. The Empire was founded by Sundjata Keita (c. 1214 – c. 1255) and became renowned for the wealth of its rulers, especially Mansa Musa. More recent examples of governance systems also include the Lebu Republic and the Torodo Revolution in Senegal. The Lebu, who settled on the Cape Verde peninsula since the 15th century, established ‘the Lebu Republic’ after gaining their independence in 1770 from the Kingdom of Cayor, ruled by Amary Ngone Ndella Fall. They organized their society around autonomous political, religious, and land-owning institutions, allowing them to manage their territory according to principles of consensus, spirituality, and solidarity. The Torodo Revolution of 1776 in Futa Toro was a major Islamic and social movement that abolished enslavement and established a theocratic state based on justice and endogenous democracy. The Torodo forces overthrew the Denianke dynasty, abolished the caste system, and outlawed the slave trade within the territory. The Revolution is notable for its relatively peaceful nature, favoring social consensus and gradual reform over violence. It was led by Ceerno Sileymaan Baal, a Torodo Muslim warlord and scholar, accompanied by other religious leaders and scholars such as Abdoul Kader Kane. It is considered to predate the French (1789-1799) and American (1775-1783) revolutions and constitutes an example of endogenous social and religious reform in West Africa, illustrating the capacity of African societies to establish models of governance, justice, and human rights before the arrival of colonial powers. It was acknowledged as a pioneering example of democratic and humanist reforms, even cited by Haitian revolutionaries like Pétion in 1970. Thus, democracy is not new to West Africa. What the region needs now is a *democracy of contribution* or *democracy of complementarity* grounded in African history, tradition, cultures, values, and not a *western-tropicalized democratic utopia*. This idea is also echoed in Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o’s theory of the body, particularly developed in his later works like *Something Torn and New: An African Renaissance* (2009) and *Wizard of the Crow* (2006), which posit that the body is the primary site of colonial injury and postcolonial struggle, representing both physical existence and cultural memory. Ngũgĩ treats the body as a ‘resource’ that was dis-membered by colonialism and must be ‘re-membered’, that is a site of imperialism to be reconnected, with its language, culture, and land to achieve true liberation. Colonialism attacked both the physical body, through colonial violence, forced labor, and the mind through education and language imposition. Therefore, while political independence frees the body, it is yet to free the mind and the ‘body-resource,’ referring to the exploitation of land and natural resources, hence the need for the use of the body as a site of resistance and re-membering, and a way of ending the ‘dictator’s body’ which represents the corrupt, parasitic growth of the ruling elite, sustained by ‘eating,’ that is monopolization of natural resources to paraphrase Kenyan renowned postcolonial theorist, Ngũgĩ.

The design and implementation of an African-centric development scheme based on the system of *democracy of contribution* or *democracy of complementarity*, as opposed to the western-tailored system of hatred, tensions, conflict, divisions, competition, and individualistic leadership may, however, take a long to bear fruit but are necessary if they are based on inclusion and dialogue as cornerstones to secure the postcolonial promises and build radiant futures for African and Western African citizens. The democratic reforms should include the prohibition of political transhumance, which refers to the phenomenon where politicians switch allegiance from one party to another, often aligning with the ruling party, if they are solely motivated by personal interests. This will allow the voters or the citizens to be able to hold the person they elect. For this, they should be granted tools, means, and mechanisms to fulfill this responsibility. In a democratic society, the culture should be based on merit, personal effort, respect for honest work, and commitment to the collective goal that improves the country’s economic growth and social well-being instead of wealth and political party membership status as it is the case in many West African countries where politics has become a means of wealth and social mobility. One can undoubtedly state that “*if the experience of national democracy*

fails, [West Africa] will lapse into anarchy, disorder and chaos” (1985). Moreover, the government should adopt a new form of governance that can re-establish bonds of trust and build new relationships with communities, reaffirming the state’s legitimacy by delivering on its commitment through delegitimization and leadership agency. Decolonization in West Africa should be turned into a total divorce for an equality-based partnership, privileging the masses and dismantling the former colonial power, education system, its language, institutions, and even its way of thinking as governing tools. In this perspective, the post-colonial state should stop being the replica of the colonial system, which is in contradiction with Fanon’s view of decolonization. For him, “national liberation, national renaissance, the restoration of nationhood to the people, commonwealth: whatever may be the headings used or the new formulas introduced, decolonization is always a violent phenomenon [...]” (Fanon, 1963, p. 31). The absolute substitution that Fanon advocates should be a reality, without being merely a replacement of the actors, while the practices remain the same.

Indeed, the new leaders who hold power in West Africa are engaged in this process. For example, Senegal’s President Diomaye Diakhar Faye is working toward judicial reforms, reorganizing the governance system, and improving transparency, and strategizing to better recapture the country’s oil and gas. In addition to the announcement made for a plan to renegotiate some mining and oil contracts to maximize national revenues, following the steps of his predecessors, Presidents Abdoulaye Wade and Macky Sall, the government aims for a new defense doctrine, including a higher reduction in the foreign military presence. After President Macky Sall’s Senegal Emerging strategic plan aimed at changing the face of the country, President Bassirou Diomaye Diakhar and his Ousmane Sonko-led government have initiated ‘the Senegal Vision 2025’ which seeks to build a sovereign, just, and prosperous nation through profound economic transformation. The successes of West African countries will depend on their leaders’ ability to stabilize public funds, manage debt, localize or Africanize governance since the political landscape in the sub-region still remains attached to democracy though facing frustrations and economic difficulties. Political stability will then highly depend on the balance between ambitious reforms and tangible results for citizens’ daily lives. The new African-modeled institutional development requires a complex architecture whose concern is to guarantee the defense of inalienable rights while also fulfilling duties. The complexity of the problem facing democracies across various sectors has often been analyzed in terms of a crisis of representation, or more broadly, a crisis of legitimacy. Political scientist Simone Goyard-Fabre anticipates this problem by suggesting that almost all democracies endemically experience crises of legitimacy. The increased interest in the principles that underpin good governance, which refers to the “conscious management of the structures of a given regime with the objective of promoting the legitimacy of the public sphere, accountable for the quality of governance, and capable of stimulating social energy with stable rules,” (Goyard-Fabre, 1999, p. 7) not only contributes to this debate but also sheds light on the responsibility of a lack of transparency and a general lack of democracy on the well-being of populations. Social and economic dimensions, as well as legal ones, constitute decisive elements in assessing democracies, which is not the case in the western-imported democracy model. Good political governance requires that the management of society, touching on the basic institutions of democracy and the rules upon which it rests, be imbued with democratic values, sources of the history, and culture of the area. These values must be embraced by those who govern and by society as a whole. The state of democracy thus combines the democratic inclinations of institutions, the people who lead them, and society’s propensity to make demands in this direction, among other factors. Good governance, as a means of exercising democracy, brings the question of institutions and their effectiveness in West Africa if one considers the current situation. It is by conceptualizing an African development model and examining collective aspirations regarding the forms or modes of government and the selection of true Pan-Africanist leaders, and by measuring the gap between past needs and actual situations, that West African nations will find the light at the end of the tunnel. This idea challenges those who win legitimate elections and are sworn-in, and then start changing the rules so as to stay in power, proving that modern authoritarian propaganda does not look like past’s

authoritarian propaganda with emerging populism and nihilism, tainted with manipulations and lies, as political strategies to access to power.

Yet, an assessment of the political situation in West Africa proves that remarkable ruptures, including military transitions and smooth, fair, free, and peaceful election, are operating from a decolonial perspective. Leaders initiate de-linking and undoing strategies, embracing governance shifts that redefine and de-think colonial legacies like foreign military bases, military agreements and forthcoming Eco, the West Africa currency. Therefore, countries of West Africa have made of their agency and consciousness, demonstrating that they have overcome their status as passive victims to become true actors in reshaping their destinies and futures. Many countries like Senegal, Mali, Niger, Burkina, Ghana, etc., are shifting away from western-modeled development to embark on modes grounded on indigenous philosophies of communal complementarity and true political and economic self-determination as required by the sub-region's youths rather than pursuing with failing western liberal models. Academics in these countries are also sustaining their states in the move through addressing paradigms like sovereignty, marked by localized autonomy against the colonial matrix of power, unearthing eurocentric models, and operating geopolitical and geostrategic ruptures, reframing foreign policy trajectories beyond traditional colonial spheres of influence and domination.

Conclusion

West African contemporary economic and political landscape has been facing many delicate challenges since independence in the 1960s. Many nations have been wrestling with economic deadlocks and political upheavals, ranging from state of nation-states, of democracy, and security amidst decolonial governance, promises and futures. They have been struggling with their roles as active or/and passive actors in global regional and global governance in which the political and social milieu is the prevailing setting (Schade, 1890, p. 1). Evidentially, these problems serve as contexts, pretexts, and weighing tools to reflect on the western nation-state models that were replicated in Africa in general and West Africa in particular to see their roles in assuring the economic development of and meeting the needs of the populations.

The article has then served as a signpost of commitment to interrogate the historical and political trajectories of the construction of West African nation-states that is torn between indigenous heritages and colonial structures. In post-independence West Africa, many societies found themselves torn between politico-social and existential challenges which, all together and essentially, have brought the ever-topical issue of their development to the core. This questions whether the western governance model fits local and nationwide needs to focus on self-reliance, local manufacturing, and regional trade to build sustainable growth or imperative to tailor the political, economic, social, and environmental governance system to local needs, regional strengths, and homegrown solutions rather than replicating outside models that are yet to bear the long-time expected fruits, that are the promises of independence.

Besides delving into holisticness and thematic concerns about West Africa, the paper has brought to light the state of democracy in Africa which it has analyzed as an imported system that is rooted in western model of self-hatred, competition, and egoism, and mainly concerned with election and not with the development and well-being of people. Rather, it has pleaded for a localized democracy system, sourcing it from the historical, moral, and values of sharing, love which has for a long time shaped West Africa, bringing to the fore what it has theorized as *democracy of complementarity* or *democracy of contribution* that are more inclusive and can help avoid military coups and post-electoral conflicts. Contemporary West African societies are still suffering from the poisonous seeds of post-colonial disillusionment sown by those described as 'chatterers-of-hope elite,' leaders who have proven to have pulled the wool over their people and come to legitimize Sammy Beban Chumbow's hyperbolic terms referring to them as "political mosquitoes" (Nsammy, 1995, p. 6) that have profited from the western models of nation-states and democracy to access to power and milk

out their countries. Indeed, the two systems, which are reflections of the political dominance having produced the African bourgeoisie and the elite that are perpetuating the colonial matrix of power, in return, empower leaders with regard to their masses and impact their social and economic lives. For Walt Rodney (1972), it is “*a crowing vice*” (Rodney, 1973, p. 13). This mischievous vice further lengthens the relational margin of power between rulers and oppressed, which is seemingly the reason why “*leaders may be motivated to maintain or increase the power gap between themselves and followers, thereby protecting their privileged position*” (Maner & Mead, 2010, p. 3). Coloniality has produced citizens who have gone through bitter oppression on the part of those types of leaders who are pure symbols of irresponsible and authoritarian elites addicted to their instinctive lust for blind power.

Within the framework of political governance, succession to power, political participation, and dialogue between the government and the opposition are crucial aspects in a form of *democracy of contribution* or *democracy of complementarity* far from the universal democracy model rooted in western values that has been reproduced in Africa. The western democracy model is deeply grounded in western political thought, which often conflates specific liberal-capitalist tradition that the West seeks to set as global norms. Consequently, this has created tensions with political altercations and security challenges in many West African countries, and Mali, Niger, and Burkina have not been spared from that. The political alternations noted in Senegal, Ghana, Nigeria also reflect their peoples’ desire to re-adapt and endogenize the system for a better trust in the institutions that have eroded recently, especially through voter turn-out in elections, whose decision not to cast their ballots for any candidate, often representing ‘*the silent majority*’, is not often taken into consideration in democracy effectiveness analysis as indicators in governance, economic, and public satisfaction. There are actors who play with the rules of democracy as a system to change the rules of the game for their own legitimacy and remain in power with sometimes the accomplice of Western powers, thus “*aiding and abetting the decline of democracy in Africa*” (Brian Paul, 2016). Therefore, the future of political governance in West Africa should undoubtedly gear toward deep structural reforms focusing on re-adapting western nation-states models, democracy, transparency, and economic and social justice.

West Africa is also experiencing a new political trend with emerging leaders grounding their political discourse in a ‘*utopian sovereigntist ideal*,’ attempting at building political models disconnected from real roots or ideological foundation, but rather on a mirage built up on a messianic vision using Pan-Africanist leaders like Cheikh Anta Diop, Thomas Sankara, Kwame Nkrumah, etc., as bearers of their legacies. This has provoked growing levels of polarization, which are deepening divisions driven by political, ethnic, religious, ideological, and socio-economic differences. While diversity of opinion is essential to democracy, increasing hostility, misinformation, declining trust in institutions, and divisive narratives are increasing social divisions and undermining peaceful coexistence. The media and digital platforms play a significant role in (re)shaping public discourses. They can promote informed dialogue and democratic participation, but they can also amplify polarizing content and misinformation. Understanding the causes, impacts, and possible solutions to polarization is therefore critical to building more inclusive, resilient, and cohesive West African societies ridden of current insecurity challenges.

As a body gathering all the countries in West Africa, except now Mali, Niger, and Burkina that withdrew to form the Alliance of Sahel States (AES), The ECOWAS country-membership across national borders should work to provide insights into a bottom-up governance of the sub-regional organization that offer common people’s feeling to belong to a Pan-African regional body that impacts on their lives. For this to materialize, it should act beyond a top-down states-level formation, highlighting on regional economic imbalances between strong economies and weaker economies within ECOWAS state-members and ECOWAS’ response or lack of adequate attentiveness to high-youth unemployment resulting in mass migration crises in multiple unwelcoming geographic

directions across the Sahel-Sahara, across the Mediterranean Sea in search of Europe. The regional organization should also rethink youth and the people, especially in adequately searching for sustainable human capacity-building and economic solutions to youth mass migration to post-apartheid South Africa, where xenophobia against Black African migrants persists, across-borders to life-threatening crossing of the Sahara-Mediterranean Sea, and trans-border insecurity. The ECOWAS of the people should shed light on what democracy should look like after the obvious failure of military regimes to deliver on the promise of security for the people against terrorism and salvaging economic prosperity from the corrupt model characterizing civilian mismanagement and misgovernance. What will ethical accountability look like at the governance level within the judiciary, the legislative, and the fiscal within ECOWAS member states are also concerns to take into consideration. Despite their withdrawal, ECOWAS should continue cooperating with the Alliance of Sahel States (AES)'s countries for the benefits of the populations who, in actual fact, form one people who shares the same history, culture, and values and similar political and economic interests and challenges.

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