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ABOUT THE JOURNAL

The Brazilian Journal of African Studies is a biannual publication, in digital format, dedicated to the research, reflection and propagation of original scientific articles with emphasis on the analysis of International Relations, Organizations and Integration, Security and Defense, Political Systems, History, Geography, Economic Development, Social Structures and their Transformations and Schools of Thought. RBEA is essentially academic, linked to the Brazilian Centre for African Studies (CEBRAFRICA) of the Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS).

The RBEA has as target audience researchers, professors and students interested in the specificities of the African continent and its international insertion. Alongside such perspective, the Journal intends to expand the debate about the Brazilian projection world widely, the Brazilian cooperation efforts (including in the Defense field) with the African countries in the South Atlantic perimeter and the construction of a regional identity in face of a scenario of geopolitical transformations.

INDEXES



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CONTENTS

EDITOR'S NOTE	6
<i>Analúcia Danilevicz Pereira</i>	
PAN-AFRICAN-FOREIGN POLICY THEORY: A CONCEPTUAL SIGNIFICANCE OF FOREIGN POLICY ANALYSIS WITHIN POLICY AGENDA SETTING FOR AFRICA	10
<i>Chris Landsberg</i>	
<i>Sandile Moloï</i>	
<i>Oscar van Heerden</i>	
USSR-AFRICA RELATIONS IN THE 1970s AND 1980s: AN ANALYTICAL PROPOSAL OF MOTIVATIONS, CONDITIONING ELEMENTS AND IMPACTS	32
<i>Paulo G. Fagundes Visentini</i>	
MAPPING ALGERIA'S FOREIGN POLICY IN AFRICA THROUGH COMPLEX NETWORK ANALYSIS: SECURITY AND ENERGY DYNAMICS (2019–2025)	48
<i>Mourad Benguita</i>	
FRANÇAFRIQUE, NEOCOLONIALISM AND THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF COUPS D'ÉTAT IN THE FRANC ZONE (2020–2023)	76
<i>Mussa Jau</i>	
<i>Karine de Souza Silva</i>	
THE INTERNATIONAL POLITICS OF RENEWABLE ENERGY AND REGENERATION IN THE CONTEXT OF CLIMATE ADAPTATION AND MITIGATION: PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES FOR AFRICA	94
<i>Kenneth Chukwuemeka Nwoko</i>	
OBSTRUCTED PATHS TO JUSTICE: LAND GRABBING AND THE CRISIS OF RECONCILIATION IN CENTRAL NIGERIA'S POSTCOLONIAL CONFLICTS	116
<i>Glória Longbaam-Alli</i>	
BORDERS WITHOUT BELONGING: STATELESSNESS, DISPLACEMENT, AND HUMAN INSECURITY IN POST-HANDOVER BAKASSI	144
<i>Seun Bamidele</i>	

EDITOR'S NOTE

Analúcia Danilevicz Pereira

June/2025

In the History of Modern Africa, African conflicts are linked to external interventions, whether direct or indirect. With the end of the Cold War, foreign intervention took on new characteristics: the weakened state and its external supporters no longer monopolized the means of coercion. In many cases, opportunists, warlords, or paramilitary groups, devoid of ideology or political agenda, filled the power vacuum. In others, multinational forces (such as the UN) intervened with the intention of monitoring and securing peace agreements, or facilitating humanitarian assistance operations. However, there were many cases in which external interest groups exploited the vulnerability of African states to further their own objectives and profit from natural resources. Funding sources also diversified with the end of the Cold War. New wars were largely financed by the exploration of natural resources, plundering of local populations, arms smuggling, money laundering, and drug trafficking. On the other hand, stabilization and development conditions have led to new military interventions (as in Libya) or Color Revolutions (as in the Maghreb).

However, the eradication of neocolonialism, the stabilization of conflicts, and food and energy security as conditions for development are advocated by major African countries within the African Union, based on the principle of “African problems, African solutions”. Multilateral forums are therefore fundamental to the diplomacy of African countries. Africa is increasingly featured in the discussions of major countries and organizations due to its growing importance in global affairs. According to the United Nations, it is expected that more than half of global population growth by 2050 will occur on this continent, with its population projected to approximate that of Asia by the end of the century. This will open up new market and labor opportunities, alongside resources that have long attracted international interest, leading to humanitarian and development challenges.

The impact of climate change is particularly pronounced on the continent. Currently, Africa's extremely young population has formed the basis of growing intra-African and European migration flows, generating international tensions. Simultaneously, the demand for strategic natural resources on the continent grows, and interactions with old and rising powers inevitably multiply. In this context, leaders are forced to seek alternative political forms, becoming more assertive in strengthening the state and diplomacy. At the same time, regional rivalries, typical of the maturation of nation-states, as in Europe in previous centuries, intensify. Surprisingly, this process forces extracontinental powers to adapt to the new dynamics and African priorities.

Considering the new geopolitical reality of the African continent and its challenges in a scenario of unstable multipolarity, this issue features contributions from scholars from South Africa, Algeria, Brazil, and Nigeria who address this issue from different perspectives. Chris Landsberg, Sandile Moloi, and Oscar van Heerden, in the article "*Pan-African-Foreign Policy Theory: a conceptual significance of Foreign Policy analysis within policy agenda setting for Africa*", analyze Pan-Africanist Foreign Policy Theory, defined as one of the central theories formulated within the discipline of International Relations and which, according to the authors, is aligned with African continentalism and its most important organization—the African Union.

Paulo G. Fagundes Visentini, in "*USSR-Africa relations in the 1970s and 1980s: an analytical proposal of motivations, conditioning elements and impacts*", discusses the Soviet Union's (USSR) relations with its former African allies, focusing on reciprocal motivations, conditioning factors, and the impacts and legacies arising from such relations. For the author, African nations were not "pawns" of the Cold War in their cooperation with Moscow, nor did the USSR have a systemic project of "exporting the revolution" or a geopolitical *Grand Design* for Africa. Subsequently, Mourad Benguita analyzes in the text "*Mapping Algeria's foreign policy in Africa through complex network analysis: security and energy dynamics (2019–2025)*" the evolution of Algeria's foreign policy in Africa between 2019 and 2025 from the perspective of Complex Network Analysis (CNA). According to the author, although Algeria has traditionally maintained selective bilateral ties with African countries, recent developments reveal a shift toward denser, more diverse, and strategically integrated partnerships, particularly in the areas of energy diplomacy and security cooperation.

In "*Françafrique, neocolonialism and the political economy of coups d'état in the franc zone (2020–2023)*", Karine de Souza Silva and Mussa Jau assess the instrumentalization of the CFA Franc for France's neocolonial dominance in

Africa and its future in the current Franco-African political climate, following the series of coups d'état in the Franc Zone between 2020 and 2023. Kenneth Chukwuemeka Nwoko examines international policies surrounding renewable energy and regeneration in Africa, considering the continent's prospects and challenges regarding climate change adaptation and mitigation in the article "*The international politics of renewable energy and regeneration in the context of climate adaptation and mitigation: prospects and challenges for Africa*".

Finally, the last two articles analyze domestic issues in Nigeria with regional impacts. In "*Obstructed paths to justice: land grabbing and the crisis of reconciliation in Central Nigeria's postcolonial conflicts*", Gloria Longbaam-Alli examines the effects of land grabbing on peacebuilding efforts. The author argues that the political economy of land ownership presents specific challenges to conflict resolution that existing hybrid management strategies fail to adequately address. Furthermore, she argues that resource grabbing is related to the recurrence of conflicts in postcolonial African contexts. And Seun Bamidele, in "*Borders without belonging: statelessness, displacement, and human insecurity in post-handover Bakassi*", investigates the persistent human security crisis in the Bakassi Peninsula following the 2002 International Court of Justice (ICJ) decision that transferred sovereignty over the region from Nigeria to Cameroon. According to the author, although the decision resolved the legal dispute between the two countries, it generated a prolonged humanitarian emergency for thousands of Nigerians who remained stateless, undocumented, and marginalized in their ancestral land.

The BJAS, however, is a bilingual electronic publication (Portuguese and English). Thus, we welcome contributions from colleagues in Brazil and abroad, with whom we seek to establish connections to deepen knowledge and build a Southern perspective on the African continent and its relations.

We would like to thank Assistant Editor Rafaela Pinto Serpa and Editorial Assistant Augusto Lorenzo Esposito, as well as the CEBRAFRICA team who worked on the translation and review of the articles: Augusto Camatti, Gabriela Gampe Bonness, Gabriele Lima de Souza, Giuseppe Camargo Pulice, Isabella Cruzichi, Ítalo Daniel Fonseca, Kauane Santos de Oliveira, Letícia Soares Rosa, Luiza Gabriel de Souza, Maria Eduarda Lameira Nascimento, Maria Manoela Ribeiro Spolavori, Mariana Realí Vitola, Matheus Severiano Marques Xavier, Pedro Henrique Galante Zandoná, Rebeca Martins de Lima, and Vinicius Zanchin Baldissera. We would also like to thank Nicoli Waschburger Mendonça.

PAN-AFRICAN-FOREIGN POLICY THEORY: A CONCEPTUAL SIGNIFICANCE OF FOREIGN POLICY ANALYSIS WITHIN POLICY AGENDA SETTING FOR AFRICA

Chris Landsberg¹

Sandile Moloi²

Oscar van Heerden³



Introduction

This article claims that Pan-Africanism Foreign Policy Theory is about Africa's states' foreign policy. This claim and theory have not been developed before. The closest argument to our Pan-Africanism Foreign Policy Theory is the writing in 2009 by McDougal (2009), which contends that, as the continental states and its premier integration bodies seek to craft a new-Pan-Africanism, African foreign policies should be based on three aspects: cultural and political unity; Afro-centric development, and the African conceptualisation of Ubuntu. We lay further claim that Pan-Africanism is rarely analysed by reviewing the goals pursued by states, specifically those of security, prosperity, and world reorganisation. This paper aims to make a constructive contribution to the overall literature by examining Pan-Afri-

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canism as African foreign policy, given that little has been written about it from this viewpoint.

It has been close to 60 years since the formation of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) (Agupusi 2021). The *raison d'être* of this former continental body, and its foreign policy *leitmotif*, was to achieve — among many other things — the decolonisation of the African continent, unity, development, economic prosperity, peace, and security (Mathew 2011). The decolonial mission culminated with the 1994 democratic elections in South Africa (Abegunrin 2009). Paradoxically, the 1994 period was also clouded by the genocides in Rwanda and the escalating violence in Somalia, as well as in many other parts of Africa (Adebajo 2010). Moreover, in most parts of Africa, development remained stagnant (Mathews 2018).

By the turn of the century, and following the end of apartheid in South Africa, a new generation of African leaders were determined to change the conditions of the African continent by calling for an African Renaissance, which was spearheaded by the former South African President Thabo Mbeki in collaboration with former Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo, and former Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika, to name but a few (Mathews 2018). Landsberg (2016), has defined the African Renaissance as a Pan-African foreign policy doctrine, focusing on economics, politics, culture, power and influence, as well as African identity. The African Renaissance called on leaders to take ownership of their own affairs and chart their own path of development that would uphold human rights, good governance, the promotion of democratic governance, and peace and security (Landsberg 2016).

The generation of African leaders that spearheaded the transformation of the OAU into the African Union (AU) had also laid a foundation for the African Renaissance (Murithi 2008). Whereas the OAU core mission was defined to address areas such as governance, peace and socio-political development it however succeeded more in political liberation. It is for this reason that at the 50th anniversary celebration of the OAU/AU in 2013, African leaders mapped out Africa's 50-year plan under the heading 'Agenda 2063, the Africa we want.' Agenda 2063 was adopted in September 2014 as "Africa's blueprint and master plan for transforming Africa into the global powerhouse of the future" (African Union Commission 2015). As a master plan, Agenda 2063 is predicated on Pan-Africanism and the African Renaissance as its philosophical underpinnings; however, it contains no concrete foreign policy goals and targets that would turn it into a real strategy.

The African Renaissance is also referred to as the "New Pan-Africanism" and builds more on the AU's approach of Pan-Africanism than the

Grand Pan-Africanism espoused by Mathews (2011). The Grand versus new Pan-Africanism debate gained critical mass after the transformation of the OAU to the AU in 2002. As the world prepared to enter the 21st century, African leaders realised that the continent needed new ideas, policies, and institutions that would tackle the challenges that lay ahead (Agupusi 2021). Welfare and economic considerations form key underpinning roles in Pan-Africanism as a foreign policy. At the centre of African development was a call for “African solutions to African problems”. All of these challenges required policies and strategies. However, without an adequate ideology guiding them, and without common agency, states remained at risk of not achieving their stated and desired outcomes.

Indeed, there is a problem of a common African continental agency, and the continent remains highly atomised with clashing priorities, and, at times, African leaders still view the continent through traditional realist lenses. Also, notwithstanding the constant meddling of foreign powers in the affairs of individual African States which in turn negatively affects the overall African Agenda. However, the flipside of realism is pan-African Economic Convergence theory (Nagar 2021), the coming together of Africa's states to trade through the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), and Pan-African Security Convergence Theory (Nagar 2021), the coming together of Africa's states to create a peace and security architecture through the formation of the African Standby Force (ASF). Thus, the extent to which Africa's 55 member states are guarding over their realist interests of mineral and agricultural economic wealth and securing their state apparatuses with and among Africa's states, it is these actions that will evolve more favourable conditions and a willingness to protect interests and trade more among themselves. It is also this action that will evolve and develop economic convergence – since states have a fundamental interest as realists to guard over economic and military resources with a view to build economic wealth, peace and security. Moreover, the extent to which the African continent becomes a realist continent, and placing realism at its core of operationalisation and existence — meaning a continental approach that guards over its resources and economic and human capital development wealth (Nagar [the AU@20]) — and conduct trade and security initiatives that benefit the continental agenda more – it is such actions that require a fundamental coherent foreign policy approach. Therefore, at the heart of this paper, centres the development of the Pan-Africanism Foreign Policy Theory. Foreign policy approaches are the elements that allow for the evolution of Pan-Africanism — the actions of states.

Grand Pan-Africanism is the “belief that existing states ought to emerge into a single state. With this grand scheme, Pan-Africanists believe there are sufficient common cultural characteristics among the hundreds of African societies to justify creating one huge African state to replace the existing ones” (Mutiso and Rohio 1984, 78). Here, the idea of political unity is one that has long influenced pan-African thought, and by extension a continental foreign policy. Building on this, McDougall (2009, 65) calls for an Afrocentric methodology, which will prevent African states from uncritically accepting and adjusting “completely to the conditions and agenda of multilateral economic institutions such as the IMF, World Bank, World Trade Organization and the Paris Club”.

Conceptualising Pan-Africanism Foreign Policy Theory

In order to develop a methodological framework for African diplomacy and foreign policy, it is important to unpack the meanings of Pan-Africanism and of foreign policy separately. The imperatives of unity, solidarity, autonomy and development as goals, have long ranked as apex priorities in Pan-African meta-discourse frameworks of African diplomacy and foreign policy. Over the decades, Africans have pursued the avowed foreign policy goals of independence, autonomy, security, and welfare or prosperity in the form of development, trying to transform the world in order to address African concerns and priorities. They have tried to build alliances and form strings of coalitions and attachments in seeking to enhance prestige and status by campaigning for the reform of global political and economic institutions, so that Africa’s voice and participation could be strengthened. There have thus long been explicit foreign policy goals embedded in Pan-Africanism. Generally, foreign policy begins where domestic policy ends and is not only derived from domestic or public policy but is also derived from a country’s national interest. However, Pan-Africanism Foreign Policy Theory underscores that Africa’s domestic policy is now at the behest of Africa’s 55 member states and further aligned to the AU Agenda 2063 which is setting the rules of the game in building a continental hub of Pan-Africanism of economic prosperity and security. Thus socio-economic, political and security issues confronting Africa’s political unities are now shaping the national priorities of the 55 African states through a foreign policy lens. Hence, in building a national identity, and in strengthening national policy, this strengthening is dependent on the foreign policy of the African neighbour. These elements and crucial understanding are thus enunciated within our claim of what

Pan-Africanism Foreign Policy Theory is and how this theory is evolving in practice — namely the AfCFTA; the AU's Peace and Security Architecture; and the African Court notably its Judicial Systems.

Frankel (1970), juxtaposes that national interests can be categorised into levels: aspirational, operational, explanatory and polemical. There is no clear definition of the last evocative concept despite the interest it has generated over the years. Suffice it to say, there are different definitions attached to national interest, and there is no agreement on definition. For the purposes of this paper, national interests will be defined by using Ziring et al. (1995) concept, as the conception of the most vital needs of a state. These in turn have been defined predominantly as the state's strategies, or planned course of action, followed by those of the decision-makers of a state toward other states and entities in the international environment (Jackson and Sørensen 2007). It is generally accepted that these national interests can be pursued by states through both hard power and soft power means.

Pan-Africanism is an idea, a movement, a philosophy and an ideology. But Pan-Africanism is also a policy discourse, and this includes narratives of African foreign policy analysis. It is intended to be African political thought that can serve as a countervailing force for hegemonic Western thought and culture. As Thompson (1963, 38) has put it, Pan-Africanism "...was concerned not only with protest but also with fashioning of a coherent philosophy..." that would resemble a cohesive (foreign) policy agenda that would resemble a set of goals, a strategy and plans of action, and plans for implementation.

According to Thompson (1963), Pan-African nationalism was intended to challenge the results of imperialism and imperial domination, including slavery, colonialism and racism. As such, it speaks directly to the goals of independence and territorial integrity; vital objectives in foreign policy agendas pursued by states. Esedebe (1994, 5) defines Pan-Africanism as:

a political and cultural phenomenon that regards Africa, and its diasporas as a unit. It seeks to regenerate and unify Africa and promote a feeling of oneness among people of the African world. The idea of cultural unity is thus one that has long been embraced in Pan-African discourse.

Horace Campbell (1993, 678) has the following to say on the matter:

...the Pan-African movement has been the principal agency for the self-definition of the African peoples in the 20th Century. The conception of self has been manifested both at the subjective level in the race consciousness of the African peoples in Africa and outside and at the objective level in the organizational forms which aspired to give expression to the ideas of African identity and African liberation.

The independence of African peoples and states to pursue their politics and social lives free from colonial interference and colonial domination, are registered here as key foreign policy aims pursued by Africans. The unity of Africans who had been partitioned, and who became highly atomised through the conquering of their territories by racist foreigners and white colonisers, became a cardinal objective of Africans before, and after, decolonisation.

Africa has been at the periphery of the periphery at global politics with little or no voice in world affairs. Nkrumah and other Pan-Africanists have been calling for a Pan-African driven foreign policy to challenge neo-colonial policies, and perhaps, change the continent's status quo. According to Nkrumah (1963), with a united voice, Africa could not only transcend the colonial confines but also compete with the global superpowers. Unlike other scholars, however, Nkrumah not only theorised the concept of Pan-African but also explained its practicality to emancipate the continent from colonial yoke and contempt. In Nkrumah's view (1963), Africa should only send one representative with a single foreign policy to the United Nations (UN) to exert its weight in the global affairs, instead of presenting a myriad of fragmented and colonially manipulated drafts to the UN's General Assembly (UNGA) or Security Council (UNSC). It is because of this fragmentation that outsiders, according to Mazrui (2004), do not take Africa's voice seriously, and Africans themselves are yet to attain self-confidence in global diplomacy arenas.

The Rise, Fall, and Rise of Pan-African Foreign Policy Theory

It is important to not only focus on the evolution of Pan-Africanism ideologically, institutionally, and geographically, but also to look at how it can be viewed as a foreign policy instrument. It is therefore important to demonstrate that Pan-Africanism Foreign Policy Theory has been able to guide the continent historically, and in practice: Pan-Africanism Foreign Policy Theory can be viewed as an idea that emerged outside the African

continent, concerning Africans on the continent and those in the diaspora. The first coordinated efforts to discuss several problems facing people of African descent and Africans on the continent, was facilitated by Henry Sylvester Williams (Murithi 2008; Mathews 2018). Concerned with the way Africans in the diaspora and Africa were being treated by Europeans, Williams decided to form the African Association in 1897 (Abegunrin 2016), and in 1900 the association hosted the first Pan-African Conference in London. This gathering was attended by Western educated Africans from the diaspora, and people from Africa (Sherwood 2012). At this conference, a decision was taken to change the African Association to the Pan-African Association; the gathering was therefore deliberately broadened.

Bankie (2013) argues that after the first Pan-African Conference in London, Du Bois hosted four more Pan-African Congresses, also known as the Du Boisian Congresses, between 1919 and 1927. The first was held in Paris in 1919, the second in Paris, London, and Brussels (1921), the third in Lisbon and London (1923), and the final was hosted in New York. The first two congresses were huge successes but the last two proved to be failures and a counter notion to a Pan-African initiative evolved (Sherwood 2012).

The very last Pan-African Conference hosted in the diaspora, was held in Manchester in October 1945, and was facilitated by George Padmore. Among many other notable Pan-Africanists who attended the conference were: Kwame Nkrumah, Jomo Kenyatta, and South Africa's Peter Abrahams (Mathews 2018). The Congress' declaration to the colonial people, emphasised the urgency of creating a united front in the struggle against colonialism. Thus, Pan-Africanism shifted from being exclusively an interest of the Western educated elite and started to involve continental Africans who called for self-government or independence for colonial peoples. Defeating racism and ending Western fermented racial discrimination, became a major foreign policy agenda for Pan-Africanists (Abegunrin 2016).

It was Nkrumah who helped to bring the idea of Pan-Africanism to Africa. He became a key voice in the Pan-African movement and emphasised the need for unity in Africa. Nkrumah held the view that without unity, Africa could not achieve its main objective of liberating itself from colonial rule, the apex political and foreign policy goal of the Pan-African movement. One of the first steps Nkrumah took towards fostering unity on the continent was to call for the formation of the West African National Secretariat on 14th December, 1945. On 1 February 1946, the West African National Secretariat hosted a conference in London (Sherwood 2012). At this conference, a resolution was called upon and addressed to the UN to help and support "West

Africans achieve independence”, and further requested the United Nations “to take necessary steps to bring about the complete liquidation of the colonial system” (Sherwood 2012, 111).

The quest for unity was taken to new heights, when Ghana gained its independence in 1957, and the Pan-Africa seed of an independent Africa was germinated. This was the beginning of the shift that saw Pan-Africanism move from the African diaspora to Africa (Legum 1962). The first two Pan-African Conferences to be held on African soil, were hosted in Accra, Ghana, by Nkrumah in April and December 1958 (Legum 1962). These two meetings inspired the formation of the OAU in May 1963. The Pan-African Congress hosted in Dar Es Salaam, in June 1974, covered several important topics that resonated as important foreign policy goals, including self-governance, national liberation, technology, economy, education, and culture (Levy 2007). While the debates that arose between the Monrovia and Casablanca groups on African unity were put to rest by the formation of the OAU, the aspiration of unity was not: the Monrovia group argued for a gradual integration of Africa, while the Casablanca group, led by Nkrumah, argued for an immediate integration (Sherwood 2012).

Pan-African Foreign Policy Trajectories

Pan-Africanism, from its conception, was never thought of as a foreign policy doctrine or foreign policy guide, so to speak. However, the hostile environment towards Africans, especially from the Western countries, dictated that Africans take up actions to emancipate themselves from the shackles of slavery, colonialism, imperialism, and apartheid. The notion of Pan-Africanism pre-dates the word *Pan-Africanism*, which was coined by Henry Sylvester Williams (Ackah 1999; Mathews 2018). Africans from the continent and the diaspora have engaged in poly-lateral diplomatic and foreign policy strategies to make the case for African liberation and independence. The primary reasons for the emergence of Pan-Africanism were to respond to the slave trade, racism, the partition of Africa and colonialism among other injustices carried out on Africans, both within Africa and in the diaspora (Bankie 2013). This response originated mainly in the African diaspora rather than in Africa itself and Africa became a “heaven on earth” for early Pan-Africanists. The early Pan-Africanists, such as Martin R. Delaney and Blyden, advocated for the return to Africa by people of African descent, living in the diasporas.

Paradoxically, Africa was viewed by the African diaspora community as a place of refuge, while Africans in the motherland viewed their home as a place of servitude. This is encapsulated in the famous words of Sol Plaatje when he reacted to the Land Act of 1913, “Awaking on Friday morning, June 20, 1913, the South African Native found himself, not actually a slave, but a pariah in the land of his birth” (Plaatje 2007, 21). In South Africa, the Land Act of 1913 was the culmination of the colonial project, which was followed by the institutionalisation of the racial laws in the form of Apartheid. Nonetheless, the sentiments of dispossession and being treated like pariahs, started with the partition of Africa at the 1885 Berlin Conference, which essentially meant that Africans were no longer in charge of their own affairs in their land of birth (Adebajo 2010). Moreover, Africans who found themselves scattered across the world, were directly and indirectly the result of slavery and colonialism. And so, after five Pan African conferences taking place between 1919 and 1945, Africans on the continent were eventually being handed the torch of liberation by African Americans and Afro — Caribbeans like Henry Sylvester Williams and WEB Du Bois.

As already outlined, African unity formed a cornerstone of Pan-Africanism from its inception, and it has been pursued throughout its history. In the early recorded history of Pan-Africanism, two schools of thought emerged that set out to articulate the African unity agenda. One was led by Edward Blyden and held the view that it is important for Africans in the diasporas to migrate back to their motherland, Africa. Blyden, however, was against the idea that all Africans do so. The author held the view that only those with skills to help Africa develop should return⁴. Martin R. Delaney, who was a leading proponent of a second school of thought, argued that all Africans in the diasporas should return to Africa irrespective of their knowledge or skill. During the 20th century, the idea of returning to Africa was embraced by Marcus Garvey who became a key proponent of the “Back to Africa Movement”. Although not calling for a wholesale return, W.E.B. Du Bois also promoted the idea of returning to Africa (Ackah 1999).

The people of African descent and Africans on the continent have suffered all kinds of injustices, from slavery to alienation, and colonialism. It was important therefore, for Pan-Africanism to express universal black pride and achievement. Among many, the main proponents of this project were Claude, Marcus Garvey, Malcolm X, and South Africa’s Steve Biko under the banner of the Black Consciousness Movement. At different times and in varying contexts, these protagonists advocated for the revival of black pride,

4 Editor’s note: About Blyden’s thought, see Adelaja (1971) and Bellingsley (1970).

but their common focus was to showcase Africa's achievements. Their endeavours were aimed at creating a paradigm-shift, moving Africa away from being seen and regarded as a "Dark Continent" (Bankie 2013, 2), and towards a Pan-African driven foreign policy, to address black pride and redeem the standing of the continent after years of subjugation. In this regard, more recent scholarly pursuits by Howard French (*Born in Blackness*) also indicate the contribution slavery made to the modernisation of world affairs through the creation of trading routes, stoke-exchanges and so forth.

Pan-Africanism has been an essential tool in uniting Africans in the diaspora and on the continent in the pursuit of respect, equality, and freedom for Africans, in Africa and in the diasporas. Pan-Africanism has been a force that has helped liberate Africa from colonial rule and minority domination (Bankie 2013).

Pan-Africanism Foreign Policy Theory: The New Pan-Africanism/African Renaissance and the quest for cultural and political unity, development, and values

Pan-Africanism did not only harbour avowed political goals such as unity, solidarity, anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism, it also aspired to economic goals, notably development and economic emancipation (Amin 2014). This is particularly the case in later decades, especially since the 1980s when Pan-Africanists posed the question of "economic liberation" on the table. According to McDougall (2009), Africa should embrace three major foreign policy imperatives: cultural and political unity; Afro-centric development; and the African conceptualisation of Ubuntu.

A major goal of foreign policy is to protect the states' parochial interests by creating a circle of friends and allies such as the Powerful Economies on the UNSC (P2 United States [US] and France), or to craft friendships and alliances (P2, China and Russia [previous Soviet Union bloc] against the P1, US). In the post-Cold War era, a confluence of factors and actors conspired to usher in a new Pan-Africanism; the fall of the Berlin Wall; the collapse of the Soviet Union; western triumphalism; Namibian independence; changes in the regional balance of forces; and of course, the end of apartheid in South Africa. A new crop of African leaders formed what Kenyan Scholar Gilbert Khadiagala (2010) called an "African Renaissance coalition" committed to African renewal in the political, economic, social and cultural terrains. During 2000's Thabo Mbeki, Olusegun Obasanjo, Meles Zenawi, John Kufor, Ben-

jamin Mkapa, Joachim Chissano, Abulaziz Bouteflika, and Abulaye Wade were attempting continental unity. They formed a close coalition of friendship and were committed to build a new “Union of African states” where African members could live by common norms, values and principles, and put in place common institutions, based on “shared values”. Not only were these leaders interested in sitting at the altar of global politics, but they also wanted to help shape the agenda: they wanted to put African issues firmly on the agenda as they pushed for a “new partnership” between Africa, the Group of Eight (G8) states, and other industrialised powers, as well as enhancing African agency by speaking with a common voice.

It was the renowned Senegalese philosopher, Cheikh Anta Diop (1989, n.p.) who said: “amid tremendous and invaluable diversity of African people, there is a set of cultural commonalities” and that these should be harnessed as strengths in foreign policy. According to McDougall (2009), cultural unity can serve as a guide for foreign policy decisions, and as a pretext for political unity. It can also be used in advancing economic and cultural self-determination. A common theme that emerged from the Pan-African Congresses (1900-1945), was that Africans had much in common as a people, regardless of their geographical location. Thus, it has been maintained that Africans must share a destiny, and that these cultural commonalities could become a springboard for African unity.

This speaks to both the goals of prestige and status, as Mbeki wished to portray South Africa as a pivotal state or an anchor state in Africa. Mbeki (2002) said that “Unity, Unity, Unity should be the imperative of our time!” in his opening remarks as a host of the first AU meeting in 2002, and further added:

By forming the Union, the peoples of our continent have made the unequivocal statement that Africa must unite! We as Africans have a common and a shared destiny! Together, we must redefine this destiny for a better life for all the people of this continent. The first task is to achieve unity, solidarity, cohesion, cooperation among peoples of Africa and African states. We must build all the institutions necessary to deepen political, economic and social integration of the African continent. We must deepen the culture of collective action in Africa and in our relations with the rest of the world (Mbeki 2002, n.p.).

The AU thus produced a new interventionist regime, moving from the politics of non-interference to a doctrine of “non-indifference”. The Constitutive Act of the AU (2002) contained four pretexts for intervention: genocide; gross violations of human rights; instability in one country that

threatens broader regional stability; and unconstitutional changes of government (Mathews 2018). In exchange for these adjustments, Africans expected the West and other powers to support the continent economically through trade, market access, investment and aid.

The Quest for Afro-centric development: Self-reliance and economic emancipation as pan-African foreign policy goals centred in Pan-Africanism Foreign Policy Theory

Whereas in classical foreign policy analysis (FPA) the goal of prosperity or welfare features prominently, McDougall (2009) correctly observes that in Africa, it is ‘development’, and changing the continent’s status from that of being underdeveloped that features as a foreign policy goal. In 1987, Molefi Asante, considered to be the doyen of Afro-centricity, called for an “Afro-centric development” model and noted that Africans should place “African ideas and ideals at the centre of any analysis that involves African culture and behaviour”. For Asante (1987), development not only had to be de-westernised but also Africanised: with Afro-centric development, African development would be decolonised, global African perspectives embraced, and the diasporas would be realised as Africa’s greatest asset.

Pan-African scholars have been preoccupied with theorising the roots of Africans’ economic *malaises* and finding practical solutions to them. Among the notable voices who have tried to address such issues included: Walter Rodney, Samir Amin, and Issa Shivji. Rodney (1982) argued that Africa’s problems are entrenched in its colonial history, and Amin (2014) has advocated for Africa to de-link itself from the exploitative global economy. Marxist theories have also been used to try to understand the economic challenges facing Africa and its diasporas through a Marxist lens, but central questions still remain unanswered: what is Africa’s role in the global political economy? How far has Africa gone in terms of economic development? How effective are Africa’s economic policies? How much security convergence has occurred among Africa’s states in building continental peace and security?

These questions warrant a study each of their own, and any attempt to address them here would not do justice. Nonetheless, it is worthwhile to state that there have been notable attempts – at the continental level as well as at the global level – by Pan-Africanists to seek economic understanding of what emancipation means to Africa. Again, the goals of economic or welfare and prosperity were the main strategic rationales for Africa. After attaining

Nkrumah's political and security kingdom, Africa had to achieve economic independence (Nagar 2021).

Marcus Garvey has famously said, "a race that is solely dependent upon another for economic existence sooner or later dies."⁵ One of the core missions of Pan-Africanism was – and remains – the quest for economic emancipation for Africa and its diaspora. The economic appetite of Europeans and Arabs, however, led to the enslavement of Africans, and subsequently to colonialism and imperialism. The scars of slavery, the scramble for Africa, colonialism and imperialism, are (still) visible in Africa's economy (Adebayo 2010).

Shivji (2009, 55) explains that Africa and the West have never had an equal relationship, but "rather a unilateral relationship of human and natural resources from the continent on a grand scale". It is thus of critical importance that the AU builds a realist continent, strongly focused on its own parochial interests while conducting multilateral and bilateral foreign policy relations with international powerful actors in the main. Africa must ensure that heads of states deconstruct their minds of colonial slavery and at this point of time in the history of Africa and 59 years ago that the AU and its heads of state create a solid realism framework — putting the Pan-African Foreign Policy agenda first. Even after independence, Africa continued to bear the burden of colonially structured, neo-liberal economic policies under the guise of the free market. Nkrumah (1963) argued that Africa's political independence is meaningless without security and economic emancipation.

With these historical inequalities and trade imbalances in mind, Nkrumah (1963) declared that the proclivity of turning to the colonialists for economic development is to betray the freedom of Africa. In this assessment, it was apparent that a radical and new economic planning was urgently required but could not be achieved without a political union. The crux of Nkrumah's argument was that dependence on foreign aid defeats the aim of political emancipation and serves as an extension of the settler's market with subsequent damage to self-reliance. Biney (2012; 2011) similarly argues that heavy chains are often attached to foreign aid, disguised "wolves in sheep's clothes", and individual countries that are too poor or powerless to resist, therefore, accept these conditions without evaluating the economic and environmental repercussions, thus perpetuating the slave-master rela-

5 Editor's Note: This quotation comes from Marcus Garvey's speech "The Negro as an Industrial Make-Shift," originally published in the *Negro World* (New York) in the early 1920s, and later included in *The Philosophy and Opinions of Marcus Garvey, or Africa for the Africans*, edited by Amy Jacques Garvey (1923).

tions, and further negatively impacting on neighbouring and regional trade. Therefore, devoiding the continent from the possibility of building value-added endogenous economic growth through solid trade commodities and comparative advantages — which Africa has an abundance of (Nagar 2022). Also, the roles played by the Bretton Woods institutions in this regard cannot be ignored. The continuous aim of wanting to ensure that African States find themselves in that poverty trap post colonialism. Similarly, Nkrumah (1963) pointed out that Africa should unite to increase its bargaining power on the global market and bilateral trade agreements as an issue that was as important then, as it is now.

The paradox is that Africa is not poor, but many of its inhabitants live below the poverty line. Nkrumah (1963) highlighted that rich countries are adamant to reduce the returns that African countries obtain from their primary resources. In this regard, the selectively funded projects by the colonial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank, are invariably in line with neo-colonialists' interests, and are deemed as modern economic slavery. These institutions were already penned by John Keynes at the behest of the US and during the critical period that the UN was aligning its peace and security agendas to economics (Peet 2009).

It is this continuation of economic enslavement that Nkrumah attempted to reverse, arguing that Africa is strategically placed to control its mineral resources and raw materials. In this analysis, Nkrumah (1963) recognised that trade policies had become skewed in favour of Western countries, and the possibility of mutual economic development was limited, pushing Africa to the periphery of the periphery, ebbing on the fringes of the global economy. Under Nkrumah's Pan-African political thought, economic dependence delayed industrial growth in the continent. For Ali Mazrui (2004, 57), Nkrumah was determined to construct a new economic and political philosophy beyond the realm of the colonial legacy through the spread of Pan-African ideology and insisted that Africa should not be dragged into the East-West ideological and economic rivalry, particularly during the Cold War. The aim, according to Mazrui (2004), was to prevent neo-colonialists and multinational corporations from pursuing their vested interests by exploiting the weaknesses of African states. Africa's political kingdom was to be utilised to achieve the other aspirations of the continent and "all else should be added to it".

The continent's strength, as Nkrumah (1967) argued, lies in a unified policy and action for economic liberation and progress, presenting a continental purpose to transcend the traps of colonialism. To accelerate his

vision for economic independence, Nkrumah (1963) relentlessly sought the establishment of a common African market and the opening of borders to break the barriers that former imperialists created for their own benefits; aiming to create an economically viable idea. However, Nkrumah's plans and agitation led to his exile and demise owing to the continent and powerful Western actors romanticising over empty western promises and ideals for Africa, which remained unimplemented. Thus, creating a tidal wave of poverty in the economic, education, health, agriculture, mineral resources, peace and security fields; and a dwindling and diminished national policy, which did not align to a Pan-Africanism Foreign Policy, as this theory explains and demonstrates.

After attaining Nkrumah's political kingdom, Africa would have to achieve economic independence. Nkrumah argued that in Africa's endeavours to develop, it should only work with the West if there were mutual benefits. However, if the West were to approach Africa in a "master-slave relations", Africa would be forced to look East. China-Africa relations have a long history stretching back to the struggle for independence and as such Africa is a very strategic partner to China. This relation has extended beyond economics to include peace and security. However, it is in the economic field that Africa and China are attempting a more beneficial relationship. Nonetheless, MacDougall (2009) cautions that without a proper guiding methodology, Africa is set to lose in such partnership.

Examples of attempts to place Afro-centric development at the heart of African analysis are the Lagos Plan of Action (LPA) of 1980; the Abuja Treaty of 1991; and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). The LPA places the idea of African self-determination on the agenda and Africa's development on a trajectory of self-reliant industrialisation within the global community.

The aim of the Abuja Treaty (1991) was to harmonise the Regional Economic Communities (RECs), paving the way for the African Economic Community (AEC). Its founding principles were those of subsidiarity, complementarity, locating economies of scale and comparative advantage by strengthening the eight recognised RECs; coordinating tariff and non-tariff systems; establishing an African Common Market and common protocols and policies among RECs; establishing an African Central Bank thus creating a continental monetary union which further reinforced a Pan-African Parliament, currently operational in South Africa (Lamberte 2004).

In April 1980, African leaders met in Lagos, Nigeria, to draw a collective response to the World Bank's Berg report. But, more importantly still,

it was Africa's collective attempt to achieve self-sufficiency. According to the Lagos Plan of Action (LPA), Africa's slow economic development was due to the Structural Adjustment Programmes of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund; the LPA set out to come up with an indigenous, self-reliant economic model.

The LPA argued that Africa could achieve its developmental goals, if only it would try to rely less on raw material extraction, focus on industrialising, implementation of global equality in trade relations, and increased development aid from the international community. Pan-Africanist scholars argued that there was an absence in the report of any blame on, or calls for reform of, the domestic governments of Africa. This differed significantly with the Berg report, which attributed Africa's slow growth to African leaders themselves. The LPA, however, viewed the international community as being less concerned with Africa's developmental project.

The first attempt to achieve economic emancipation was at the regional level. Continental efforts started in 1958 with the establishment of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA). In 1965, the OAU considered the continental body in a much more suited position than the UNECA to champion Africa's developmental path; causing conflict between the OAU and ECA (Adedeji 2009). The establishment of the ECA was a massive challenge, as Africa did not have significant numbers to vote for her own economic commission, let alone her own autonomous economic agenda.

The New Pan-Africanism and the African Renaissance Coalition

In the post-Cold War era, a confluence of factors — the fall of the Berlin Wall; the collapse of the Soviet Union; Western triumphalism; Namibian independence; and the end of apartheid in South Africa — conspired to usher in a new Pan-Africanism. A new crop of African leaders formed what Kenyan Scholar Gilbert Khadiagala has called an “African Renaissance coalition” committed to African renewal in the political, economic, social and cultural terrains. (Khadiagala 2010). They were committed to construct a new “Union of African states” where African members would live by common norms, values and principles, and common institutions would be put in place based on “shared values.”

Economic and developmental considerations came to occupy a place of ascendancy and *primus inter pares* in the emerging new Pan-Africanism, created in July 2002, when the OAU was replaced by the AU, its policies changed along with it and insurmountable challenges. These challenges included high levels of poverty, slow economic growth, underdevelopment, and the marginalisation of Africa. The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), and a new Afro-governance model, namely the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), are voluntary models to promote political, economic, corporate, and socio-economic good governance, were also pioneered by Presidents: Mbeki, Obasanjo and Bouteflika. This was a revival of Pan-Africanism which has not truly found a firm footing in Africa – with the continent being home to the most least development states in the world, and remain on the periphery of the periphery poverty-stricken, high unemployment and environmental challenges, poor health systems and terrorism, and scathing reports of insecurity and internally displaced persons. The hope and revival of Pan-Africanism is seen in the establishment of the African Continental Free Trade Area with over 40 African countries, out of 55, having signed the Free Trade Area Treaty — the largest in the world in terms of size of population, as well as building the AU's Security Architecture. Therefore, the Pan-Africanism Foreign Policy Theory coined in this paper was developed. The Theory fundamentally underscores that a strong Africa will only become evident as the continent builds a realist Africa, which inculcates realism much more robustly within bilateral and multilateral engagements.

Conclusion

The process of decolonisation and the complete emancipation of Africa have been central foreign policy goals of Africa, albeit these goals have often been contested, or inconsistent. But the theory of Pan-Africanism Foreign Policy clearly speaks to understanding Nkrumah's vision for a United States of Africa, which arguably presents the most sober Pan-Africanist visions and continental goals. Some scholars, however, have viewed this grand form of Pan-Africanism as impractical — mainly “to search” for Africa's own solution to its colonial legacy. The attainment of political freedom through grand Pan-Africanism, is often described as artificial in the sense that Africa still consists of satellite states, controlled and manipulated for the advantage of former colonial powers: these states typically talk the language of Pan-Africanism, but behave in contrarian spirit.

In his search for a final and total liberation of Africa from colonial rule and imperialist exploitation, Nkrumah called for a continental unity to restore the dignity of Africans and to safeguard the continent's territorial integrity from the clandestine forces of neo-colonialists. Under this Pan-African political philosophy, the current state of Africa has proven to be untenable, and its destiny might be that of a poor relation for centuries to come.

The borders established by the colonial powers and the abundant natural resources of the continent serve the economic interest of former oppressors. Africa's continental voice is often disregarded on the global political podium, and at times stage-managed, perpetuating the master-slave narrative, albeit in an age of formal independence of African states. For Nkrumah, those who argued that the time was not ripe for the formation of a United States of Africa, or the challenges were too enormous to overcome, did not realise the danger presented by neo-colonialists: Africa has tried desperately to steer its political and economic fate, redirecting the continent's future, rebuffing the false argument that Africans are incapable of running their own affairs, but constructing a common agency amongst the 55 states proved illusory at worst, difficult at best.

It has been argued here in this paper that it is important to unpack the origins of Pan-Africanism as we seek to develop methodological frameworks for African diplomacy and foreign policy analysis. It has also been asserted that Pan-Africanism Foreign Policy Theory is fundamental to understanding how to tackle Africa's malaises faced by its peoples: Africans both within the continent and in the diasporas; and has long contained key foreign policy dimensions and diplomatic features that have thus far been neglected in discourse and analysis. Thus, under the banner of Pan-Africanism Foreign Policy Theory, African states, states in the diasporas, and African and diasporic non-state actors, must pursue agendas of African peace and security, development, prosperity ideals, autonomy and self-determination, sovereignty and territorial integrity, and in particular, liberation and independence that resonate as classic foreign policy objectives pursued by states and non-state actors. This paper attempts to investigate the contending and contentious approaches to not only international relations theory but also in relation to the African continent. Ultimately, Pan-Africanism Foreign Policy Theory underscores that Africa's 55 member states of the African Union must subsume their national policy to align more to the ideals of foreign policy of Africa's 55 member states in the pursuit of Pan-Africanism Foreign Policy Theory, approaches, and implementation.

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ABSTRACT

In this paper we advance a new theory: Pan-Africanism Foreign Policy theory, which is defined as one of the pivotal theories created within the discipline of International Relations (IR). Pan-Africanism Foreign Policy theory is aligned to Africa's continentalism and most important body – the African Union (AU). Pan-Africanism Foreign Policy Theory – is best understood within African foreign policies. Critically, this article thus interrogates the role of Pan-Africanism Foreign Policy theory within a normative framework in shaping African states' national interests, toward achieving common interests, as well as providing a critique in understanding the AU's pursuit as an influential player and its role in global affairs: from a nascent foreign policy agenda approach, to building a more robust and progressive foreign policy model. This paper therefore investigates Pan-Africanism Foreign Policy Theory: viewed as the fundamental anchor that provides the ideological framework for the AU's (and its predecessor: the Organisation of African Unity ([OAU] of 1963) emerging foreign policy architecture, and dissect how this architectural implementation shapes the continental organisation's regional economic communities (RECs), its 55 member states, and its external bilateral and multilateral international relations in its foreign policy agenda setting.

KEYWORDS

Pan-Africanism Foreign Policy Theory. Pan-Africanism. Development. Afrocentrism.

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USSR-AFRICA RELATIONS IN THE 1970s AND 1980s: AN ANALYTICAL PROPOSAL OF MOTIVATIONS, CONDITIONING ELEMENTS AND IMPACTS

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Introduction

The actuality of the theme of USSR relations with African countries in the 1970s and 1980s is grounded in the revision of a dimension of the mainstream historiography of the Cold War and in the current Russia-Africa interaction, which has deeper roots, essential for its comprehension. The USSR-Africa relations constitute a historiographical gap, dominated by subtly instrumental works produced in the context of the late escalation of the Cold War on the continent. Within this framework, the present text is based on ongoing research. In two previous articles, here taken as a starting point, the focus was on the African Revolutions of the 1970s and 1980s, followed by the analysis of African Marxist Military Regimes during the same period. From this point forth, relevant matters emerged, such as the profile of the relations between the Second and Third Worlds, and the doubling of the number of self-proclaimed socialist states with a Marxist-Leninist orientation, all of which emerged in the periphery (rising from 14 to 30). Two-thirds of these new regimes were African.

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In this context, the present article examines the Soviet Union (USSR) relations with the African States that were its allies in the 1970s and 1980s. The analysis focuses on the reciprocal motivations, the conditioning elements and the resulting impacts and legacies. This process gained significance belatedly, within a short period of two decades (1969-89), targeting a limited number of countries, yet it was intense (sometimes motivated by Cuba) and had a considerable impact on the transformation of Africa. It is argued that African nations were not “pawns” of the Cold War in their cooperation with Moscow, nor that the USSR pursued a systemic project of “exporting the revolution” or a geopolitical Grand Design for Africa (Coker 1985).

The countries under focus are those that implemented socialist-oriented regimes through National Liberation Movements or Military Coups: Angola, Mozambique, Ethiopia, Somalia, Madagascar, People’s Republic of the Congo, Benin, Burkina Faso, and Seychelles. The USSR also actively supported the National Liberation Movements that fought against the racist regimes of Zimbabwe (Zimbabwe African People’s Union/ZAPU), Namibia (South West Africa People’s Organisation/SWAPO), and South Africa (African National Congress and South African Communist Party/ANC-SACP).

The article also seeks to identify the soviet perception of these countries, through the concepts of *Socialist-Oriented States* and *Non-Capitalist Way of Development*, formulated by the Academy of Sciences of the USSR. Likewise, it seeks to comprehend the perception and expectations of African actors regarding the socialist bloc and bilateral cooperation, concluding with a reevaluation of the effects of this relationship. Usually regarded as a “failure”, there are, however, elements in this process that suggest another result in the ulterior evolution of the analyzed nations, despite the immense human costs at the time. With few exceptions, they are currently modernized states with increasing state capacity and significant international protagonism.

By the mid-1970s, the Soviet state was militarily powerful, but it was facing relative economic stagnation and diplomatic pressure. How, then, was the paradox of the Soviet superpower projecting itself into Africa and the Third World possible precisely when it was facing difficulties? A plausible explanation is that the motivation stemmed from local factors, which were predominant during the crisis of the 1970s and the concurrent imbalance in the world order. The cautious and hesitant Soviet policy toward National Liberation Movements, in a short period of time, had to reposition itself in the face of African Revolutions and Military governments that adopted socialist regimes and sought diplomatic, military, and economic support within the Soviet sphere (Halliday 1999).

Precisely during its decline, the USSR and other socialist industrialized countries became involved in the Revolutions of the Third World (Geopolitical South), although relatively limited by the formal state diplomacy in force in the international system. The Italian literary scholar Franco Fortini, during the celebrations of the Bicentennial of the French Revolution, when the Eastern European regimes were collapsing in 1989, remarked that “every Revolution, before being swept away, flares up for a moment to illuminate the reasons for the one to come” (Fortini 1989, n.p., our translation)². With the reaction of the Reagan Era, the conditions of this relation became extremely difficult: the New Cold War, the deepening of regional conflicts in Africa, increasing economic problems, and, finally, the gradual withdrawal of Soviet support under Gorbachev and the USSR’s collapse itself, leaving its African allies in the lurch (Westad 2007).

In specific terms, the cases outlined in the abstract are analyzed, questioning and contextualizing arguments such as the support to the National Liberation Movements allegedly aimed at spreading a World Revolution, a superpower action with geopolitical purposes and economic interests in exploring resources from African allies. Subsequently, topics such as the role of Sino-Soviet rivalry and Sino-American convergence in Africa (with regional and global impacts), as well as the opportunity that emerged from the revolutions and military regimes converted to Marxism, will be examined (Gromiko 1983). Cuba’s active role and the discreet East German protagonism supported the Soviet logistical-military opportunism in offsetting setbacks such as the loss of the alliance with Egypt and the dispute with China. At this point, the aforementioned concepts developed by the Communist Party and the Academy of Sciences of the USSR to address this unexpected reality acquire significance: *States of Socialist Orientation* and the *Non-Capitalist Way of Development* (Agafónov 1984; Ivanov 1987).

In Moscow, there was an internal debate and a complex multi-level structure for the formulation and implementation of foreign policy. In the African case, the main protagonists of the soviet decision-making process were the International Department of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), the Central Committee, and the Military-Industrial Complex, among others. Finally, synthesizing and further deepening the findings of the two previous articles, the interests of African leaders, their perceptions, needs, difficulties, expectations, and frustrations are taken into consideration (Visentini 2012).

2 In the original: “cada Revolução, antes de ser varrida, acende-se por um instante para iluminar as razões daquela que virá” (Fortini 1989, n.p.).

Theoretical and methodological aspects

The theoretical framework is based primarily in the analyses developed in Fred Halliday's work *Revolution and world politics: The rise and fall of the sixth great power*³, as well as in *Rethinking International Relations* and other productions of the same author, identified in the bibliography. Regarding the case of Marxist Military Regimes, there are three works of major relevance, with theoretical approaches to the matter: Hughes (1992), Markakis (1986), and Ottaway (1982).

Academically, International Relations began as the study of war as a rational and deliberate act of aggression, and not as the internationalization of a social conflict. The Charter of the United Nations itself conceives the world order as if it were separate from the internal situation of states. Accordingly, Anglo-American Political Science considers the Revolution as a disruption of regular processes. Until the publication of Theda Skocpol's work (which, to a large extent, updates Barrington Moore Jr.'s *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*), Revolutions were regarded as internal phenomena. Jack Gladstone, in turn, emphasized that international factors, such as economic-fiscal pressures and politics of destabilizing alliances, weakened the state and triggered revolutions.

Realists and neorealists, such as Kenneth Waltz, by not connecting the internal and external dimensions, ignore the fact that most alliances aim to prevent revolutions within member states. It is worth noting that every revolution seeks to internationalize itself, just as counter-revolutions (in pursuit of homogeneity) do, though generally without success. Thus, the limits of the "export of the Revolution" (or of counter-revolution) give rise to truces, a reduction in ideological rhetoric, and a more diplomatic stance. Nevertheless, this does not mean that revolutions have been "socialized", because, according to Halliday, "as long as their post-revolutionary domestic orders remain intact, they continue to pose a challenge to the system of other states" (1999, 187, our translation)⁴.

To historic sociology, the "international" created the state, and not the contrary. Regarding the revolutionary processes here studied in their international dimension, it is important to highlight that wars produce revo-

3 Halliday, Fred. 1999. *Revolution and world politics: The rise and fall of the sixth great power*. London: Macmillan Press.

4 In the original: "enquanto suas ordens internas pós-revolucionárias permanecerem intactas, elas continuam a representar um desafio ao sistema de outros Estados" (Halliday 1999, 187).

lutions and vice versa. In the analyzed cases, for instance, it is evident that the revolutions of the 1970s led to conventional wars in the periphery (with the involvement of great powers), to which the international community was not prepared. Furthermore, in the regional plan, the greatest impact comes not so much from the deliberate action, but from the example set, which serves as a catalyst against the established order.

Even Marxism, which supposedly could explain the revolutions it produces, has explanatory limitations. One of them is its scarcity of tools to analyze the differences between various revolutions and the persistence of the national matter. One exception is found in Brucan (1974). Another limitation is that the emphasis on “infrastructural” elements leads to an analysis that privileges systemic capitalist relations on a global scale. Paradoxically, little attention is paid to the possibilities of revolutions. Wallerstein, for instance, places his emphasis on anti-systemic social movements, while Arrighi focuses on the economic cycles, without giving prominence to the *ruptures* of revolutions, nor adequately addressing states that have broken with the capitalist model. They conceive the international system as a global socio-economic system (capitalist) overlaid by secondary political structures.

Methodologically, Halliday proposes four instruments that will be used as research elements: a) **cause**: the extent to which the “international” produces the revolution; b) **foreign policy**: how Revolutionary States conduct their relations with other nations; c) **responses**: what is the reaction of other states; d) **formation**: how, over a longer period, international and world-system factors constrain the post-revolutionary internal development of states and shape their political, social and economic evolution.

The gradual Soviet involvement in revolutionized Africa

The broader objective of this analysis consists in contributing to the discussion of socialist and/or revolutionary foreign policy within the context of the History of International Relations, based on the case of interaction between a socialist superpower and self-proclaimed socialist African regimes. The temporal framework covers the 1970s and 1980s, identifying the political motivations, historical determinants, and impacts of the USSR’s relations with African states with which it had significant interactions, both as allies and adversaries. The countries under focus are Angola and Mozambique (both independent through the actions of National Liberation Movements), Ethiopia, Madagascar, the People’s Republic of Congo, Benin, Burkina Faso,

Seychelles, and Somalia (already independent from France, except for the last two, where military coups established socialist regimes). Additionally, the National Liberation Movements that fought against the racist regimes of Zimbabwe (ZAPU), Namibia (SWAPO), and South Africa (ANC/SACP) are considered (Shubin 2008).

The approach primarily focuses on the degree of Soviet involvement in each country. In Ethiopia and Somalia, where alliances shifted, the Soviet and Cuban presence was intense due to the Ogaden War and Ethiopian separatist conflicts. Similarly, in Angola, a civil war took place involving interventions from Zaire and South Africa, as well as the indirect involvement of the United States and China. This resulted in a conventional war in which Cuban forces supported the MPLA with combat troops and relied on Soviet weaponry, logistics, and advisors. In Mozambique, Cuban-Soviet support was limited, but East German assistance played an important role. However, racist South Africa and Rhodesia felt threatened and sought to militarily destabilize their new revolutionary neighbors. The response was the formation of the *Frontline States* (Tanzania, Zambia, Botswana, Angola, Mozambique, and, after 1980, Zimbabwe). To address this challenge, they received multiple forms of Soviet support, with the USSR providing military training to the Liberation Movements against the rival regimes. This support forged political and interpersonal ties with Moscow that persisted even after these movements came to power and the USSR no longer existed (Shubin 2008).

Francophone states, on the other hand, were less relevant to the Soviets and still maintained strong dependence on France, which suggested caution, as Paris had withdrawn from NATO and represented a counterbalance to Anglo-American influence on a global scale. Madagascar and Seychelles (the latter anglophone and non-militarized) were elements in the struggle against *Apartheid* and the U.S. militarization of the Indian Ocean, with the former receiving moderate support. The same applied to the small People's Republic of Congo (Brazzaville), which was rich in oil, had a strong national left, and was important for supporting Angola and its oil fields in Cabinda. Benin and Burkina Faso, while of lesser relevance, serve as examples of socially fragile countries with low strategic and economic importance, but that could not be politically ignored. In all cases, there was Cuban presence and agency, training of cadres by all socialist countries, and development and security cooperation projects (Silveiro González 2018).

The starting point must be the historical analysis of the Soviet foreign policy in its overall decision-making process, the role of the colonial world,

and, in particular, the little-known Africa during the Stalin and Khrushchev eras. The latter began to recognize the relevance of decolonization, but achieved disappointing results in his voluntarist African initiatives, such as in Nkrumah's Ghana, Sékou Touré's Guinea, and Lumumba's Congo. The USSR lacked Africanists and in-depth knowledge of the continent, and did not perceive significant strategic relevance in Africa. Its relations with the National Liberation Movements were also limited, rhetorical, and superficial. The primary objective was the defense of the USSR, whether as the "Homeland of Socialism" or as the Russian state, which required maintaining a *détente* with the United States and its NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization). Accordingly, it sought to avoid counterproductive "revolutionary adventures" in adversary geopolitical areas. In the same vein, it was necessary to exploit France's rivalry with the Anglo-Americans within NATO and the rearmament of West Germany, which included refraining from directly confronting French colonialism and neocolonialism in Africa.

What, then, prompted the USSR to re-engage in Africa? Despite previous setbacks, at the beginning of the 1970s the situation changed in a rapid, intense, and unexpected way. As a **challenge**, a 180-degree shift took place in Sadat's Egypt, which expelled Soviet advisors and moved closer to Israel and the United States (resulting in a loss of position in the Middle East), as well as the challenging competition with China (allied with the U.S. since 1971) in Africa. As an **opportunity**, the Carnation Revolution in Portugal impacted Angola and Mozambique, and the Ethiopian Revolution brought down a solid ally of the United States in the region, while it was also being defeated in Vietnam. Brezhnev's USSR saw *détente*'s shift and had to react, compensating for losses and seizing opportunities, although its diplomacy was mostly reactive.

To this end, the USSR had to rely on Cuba, which possessed a strong presence, initiative and connections in Africa (Leogrande 1980). Since the 4th Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement (Algiers, 1973), Fidel Castro engaged with the African situation and established strategic cooperation with the USSR. Several Eastern European countries also had interests on the continent, and the National Liberation Movements sought avidly for external support. The process became more acute as Angola's independence began to evolve into a Civil War with interventions from South Africa and Congo/Zaire, with North-American and Chinese support. The same occurred with the inversion of alliances in the Horn of Africa, as Soviet support shifted from Somalia to revolutionary Ethiopia (Cardoso 2020).

What was the intensity of the interaction and the objectives of the USSR in Africa during these two decades? The conjuncture showed that Cuba and several African leaders took initiatives that presented the Kremlin with *faits accomplis*, compelling it to become involved economically, diplomatically and militarily. Angola and Southern Africa became the stage for an internationalized Civil War, as did the Horn of Africa (Telepneva 2014; Halliday 1983). Moscow's diplomatic-military involvement, although intense, was differentiated and cautious, developing a diplomacy that sought to align with the Organization of African Unity (OAU), regarding the maintenance of borders and opposition to the racist regimes condemned by the UN and the OAU. Despite contributing by sending equipment, weapons, advisors and intelligence information, combat troops were almost exclusively Cuban.

Concerning the diplomatic-military aspects, Soviet assistance was decisive for the survival of the new regimes, but economic cooperation proved insufficient and inadequate. With Gorbachev's rise to power in Moscow, the focus shifted toward gradual Soviet disengagement. But a rather interesting factor that delayed the withdrawal intended by *Perestroika* was that, during this cooperation, bonds of camaraderie and personal friendship were forged among mid-level African and Soviet cadres in military, party and intelligence spheres, creating mechanisms of resistance to the leaders' decisions. They relied on Cuban support and enabled belated victories, such as the Battle of Cuito Cuanavale in Angola (1988), that contributed decisively to Namibia's independence when negotiations had stagnated.

The African Revolutions' perceptions about Soviet socialism

Basically, there were five aspects that African countries found appealing in the Soviet Marxist experience: 1) a revolutionary doctrine for conquest and maintenance of power; 2) an economic development strategy alternative to liberal capitalism; 3) a policy for nation (either unitary or federal) and state building; 4) an ideology of state and social control; and 5) a source of international support in the military, diplomatic and economic spheres (Fontaine 1982; Patman 1990; Ottaway 1982).

It is necessary to detail this relevant matter: why did the revolutionary African leaders who came to power in the 1970s adopt Marxist-Leninist references and seek support in the Soviet camp? Marxism — and later the practice of Marxism-Leninism — represented a doctrine that offered a range

of appealing solutions to the major challenges faced by countries that chose the path of revolutionary rupture in the attempt to construct a post-capitalist society, according to Clapham (1996). Ethiopia, for example, was an ancient empire with feudal structures, dominated by the Orthodox Church, and which had gone through an expansion period that led it to control a vast territory with significant ethnic diversity.

In this regard, the first appeal that Marxism offered was obviously that of a *revolutionary doctrine for the conquest and maintenance of power*. Unlike most colonial or semi-colonial states — which carried out the revolutions primarily through nationalist and anti-colonial ideologies, seeking liberation above all — the revolutionaries who embraced Marxism (with more or less sincerity) considered it a radical and progressive alternative to the existing status quo. This applied both to the organization of political and/or armed movements aimed at seizing power and mobilizing popular support, as well as to the post-seizure scenario within a confusing balance of forces. In the case of the *African Marxist Military Regimes* that conquered power through a *Coup d'État*, “the usurpation of power requires legitimacy through a credible alternative to the fallen regime. (...) Radical soldiers shared the illusion that socialism could be reached quickly and by a decree” (Markakis 1986, 4, our translation)⁵. Furthermore, it was necessary to occupy the political space of the radical civilian left, an ally that challenged the new holders of power.

Secondly, Marxism also offered them a *doctrine of development*. This doctrine advocated the destruction of the oligarchic power that controlled the country until then — seen as an obstacle to the well-being of the people — and its replacement with a more efficient state combined with a free peasantry. This development strategy sought alternative paradigms to the neocolonial form of liberalism and to the purely moralistic and voluntarist experience of “African Socialism”, and was therefore based on Marxist development premises, grounded in a structure of central planning, socialist distribution, and, when viable, industrialization.

A third and fourth appeal of Marxism-Leninism for revolutionary governments was *nation-building*, whether *unitary* or *multiethnic*, and *state-building*. How could they deal with the internal divisions stemming from low levels of development, historical legacies, and manipulations of colonizers or external actors? It was necessary to forge a nation under new foundations. Certainly, the USSR, which combined an effective central government with

5 In the original: “a usurpação do poder requer legitimidade através de uma alternativa crível ao regime derrubado. (...) Os soldados radicais compartilhavam a ilusão de que o socialismo poderia ser alcançado rapidamente e por decreto” (Markakis 1986, 4).

respect for the cultural identities of several nationalities and a considerable degree of autonomy, consisted of an attractive model. In a dialectical relation with this factor, the new governments emerging from colonialism or neocolonialism faced administrative structures internally limited and addicted by external domination, whether in its direct or indirect form. It was essential to organize an apparatus capable of handling the massive transformations and conflicts that were approaching, a new type of state. Thus, Marxism-Leninism was also an *ideology of state control*.

Finally, the fifth appeal of Marxism-Leninism for revolutionary governments was its use as a source of *international support* in the context of the Cold War. The USSR, China and the socialist community in general thus represented the only consistent source of military supplies, legitimacy, and political and economic support. The necessity to secure external support was a necessary condition to the survival of many Marxist regimes. However, Soviet support, besides creating dependency ties, was generally concentrated in the military sphere, leaving much to be desired in the economic and financial fields. Regarding this point, Arnold Hughes (1992) argues that it equally represented a *guarantee of national sovereignty*.

Hughes also adds three additional elements that have a connection to African political culture. Marxism was perceived as *a superior ideology*, as an alternative to Western capitalism and to African Socialism, both considered in the 1970s as inoperative projects for the continent. Through Marxism, ruling groups felt part of the global socialist modernity, as it brought a sense of security through an ideological discourse that enabled them to identify problems and formulate policies and strategies to solve them.

For several radical African leaders, Marxism, besides being a rational strategy, also possessed the qualities of a “*political amulet*”, with “an almost magical charm to ward off the political diseases of neocolonialism and underdevelopment” (Hughes 1992, n.p., our translation)⁶. According to Zolberg (apud Hughes 1992, 13, our translation), *Planning* was not only an objective instrument, “but also a *symbol* of rationality, control, and order. Political ideology becomes an enchantment that genuinely transforms reality, and even if nothing happens, it changes how men perceive it”⁷. For him, the “amulet” would enable the intelligent elites to control the future.

6 In the original: “um charme quase mágico para prevenir as doenças políticas como o neocolonialismo e o subdesenvolvimento” (Hughes 1992, s.p.).

7 In the original: “mas também símbolo de racionalidade, controle e ordem. A ideologia política se torna um encantamento que, genuinamente, transforma a realidade, e mesmo que nada aconteça, mudando a visão dos homens sobre isso” (Zolberg apud Hughes 1992, 13).

Finally, particularly for the middle classes, the Marxist regime represented a possibility for social *self-promotion*. The state constituted the main provider of formal employment, and the socializing development model greatly expanded jobs in this sector. But it was not solely about economic gains, since broad segments of youth and the middle class believed that the Marxist option offered the hope of a better future. By removing a large part of the elite linked to the former colonizer, the regime opened space for social and political ascension of new actors.

Marxist-oriented socialism succeeded, during the 20th century, in driving a series of victorious revolutions in successive waves. The first wave took place in the aftermath of World War I, with the triumph of the Russian Revolution and the construction of socialism in the USSR. The revolution in Mongolia, due to particular circumstances, is considered part of this period. The second wave was a result of the anti-fascist movements and the outcomes of World War II, institutionalized at the Yalta Conference. It affected Eastern Europe both through the “top-down revolutions” supported by Moscow, which formed the People’s Democracies, and also by the autonomous national revolutions of Yugoslavia and Albania. It is important to highlight that there is a recent historiography that recognizes the existence of autochthonous revolutionary roots even in countries that were part of the Warsaw Pact and depended on Soviet international support.

The third wave, which developed in parallel with the previous one, had as its epicenter the Chinese Revolution, which began in the 1920s and was characterized by the peasant question. After a quarter of a century of guerillas and wars, the world’s most populous nation became a socialist regime. The Korean Revolution and the first stage of the Vietnamese Revolution are part of this phase. These Marxist revolutions and the regimes forged in the first half of the 20th century occurred “on the periphery of the center”. This was because the industrial capitalist powers that dominated the system’s core entered into open conflict (the imperialist race, World War I, and World War II) while struggling to redefine the international system and the hegemonic position within it. Thus, it became possible for two revolutions and their corresponding regimes, the Soviet and the Chinese, to triumph and shape a new world order. Both were located in the periphery of the geopolitical space — which was deeply affected by the massive confrontation and transformation.

Finally, in the fourth and last wave — within which the phenomenon addressed in this study is situated — the decolonization movement and Third World nationalism protagonized the triumph of several socialist-oriented revolutions, such as the Cuban, Vietnamese, Afghan, South Yemeni, and

the African ones of the 1970s. These occurred in the second half of the 20th century “at the center of the periphery”, that is, in the southern region of the planet that was still non-industrialized, where the expansion of the *uneven and combined development of capitalism* was taking place (Westad 2007). Among the referred revolutions, despite their limited resources, two became paradigmatic and had systemic effects worldwide: the Cuban and the Vietnamese. Evidently, they were linked and depended on the two great foundational revolutions (the USSR’s and China’s), but developed their own dynamic. Therefore, the comprehension of the USSR-African states relations during the 1970s and 1980s is essential to examine the motivations, conditions, and impacts of these processes.

Motivations, conditioning elements, and impacts: preliminary results

Regarding the motivations, initially, it is observed that the original and late African Revolutions, both the ones resulting from guerrillas of the National Liberation Movements as the ones implemented by military *Coups d’État* without a Marxist link, had *fundamentally autochthonous origins*. The international alignment with the soviet field resulted from necessities that emerged gradually, where ideology was adjusted according to the circumstances. It is important to note that the USSR was, back then, the only Permanent Member of the Security Council integrally favorable to the revolutionary regimes and to the Liberation Movements against South Africa.

The Soviet motivation to support such regimes was based, conjuncturally, in tactic-opportunist factors, explored to respond to unexpected situations of the 1970s crisis, without a prior guiding Grand Strategy, whether a global geopolitical one or one “exporter of the Revolution”. The negative outcomes for Moscow in the international scenario and the almost simultaneous eruption of several revolutions required a Soviet response, so as not to lose its prestige in the Third World and counter the Chinese accusation of “social-imperialism”. The decision-making process was far from being consensual, but it occurred in support of internationally recognized states, which suffered external aggression. Above all, the Soviet Union suffered from political-ideological competition with the People’s Republic of China (Permanent Member of the Security Council of the United Nations since 1971) regarding legitimacy among Third World countries. As a result, in Africa, they supported rival movements and countries.

The Soviet support to the National Liberation Movements opposed to the anglophone racist regimes of Southern Africa, unlike that offered to Revolutionary Regimes, was one of “subversion” of the status quo. However, this occurred against the racist regimes of South Africa and Rhodesia, states under wide international condemnation, even by Western countries. There was sort of an undeclared war between the USSR and the *Apartheid* regime, which went far beyond the partial Euro-American diplomatic sanctions. The training of revolutionary cadres was the strongest point, as well as the support in weaponry to the Frontline States that were destabilized by the racist regimes.

The timing of the process of connecting the USSR with the allied African Revolutionary States happened under unfavorable conditions for both sides. What the Soviets could offer was little in view of what the USSR possessed, and insufficient to the necessities of African allies. The degree of extroversion of the Soviet economy was very limited and concentrated on COMECON (Council for Mutual Economic Assistance), in addition to the expense of supporting Cuba, Vietnam, Nicaragua, Ethiopia, South Yemen, and Afghanistan. The African revolutionary states, which admired the model and realizations of the Soviet economy, had the expectation of receiving economic assistance. To these limitations, it must be considered that there were numerous revolutions, which happened in a short period of time, that would need to be helped, something unfeasible.

For this reason, many of them applied for membership in COMECON, but that was also unfeasible, due to the precariousness and economic disorganization of these countries, where not even the regimes were consolidated and faced armed opposition. Based on this and on the previous African experiences, the concepts of Non-Capitalist Way of Development and Socialist-Oriented States were forged. They argued that these were regimes in transition, which should create a mixed economy, with state, cooperative, and private sectors, without a complete rupture from the global capitalist economy. In parallel, they should build the new state and organize and mobilize society, particularly women, young people, and workers.

The shipment of weapons and agricultural and industrial machinery was, to a limited extent, compensated by concessions for mining and fishing. Still, very little was materialized, since internal insecurity and logistical problems made cooperation unfeasible. Even so, there are authors, such as Campbell (1986), who argue that the USSR's interest in Africa was to search for a supply of minerals and energy. If this affirmation were correct, it would have been a bad deal, because African states have accumulated an enormous

debt to Moscow, which practically could not be paid. Such an argument, as well as the idea that the Kremlin wished to “export the revolution” to Africa, is typical of the New Cold War narratives.

The “revolutionary decade” of the 1970s was succeeded by the “conservative decade” of the 1980s. Contrary to the dominant argument, which affirms that the USSR-Africa cooperation was a failure, there were constructive factors as a legacy. Despite the suffering caused by wars, they facilitated the rise of the Liberation Movements in Southern Africa with the end of *Apartheid*, Ethiopia’s modernization, and the survival and/or modernization of African states. The training of African professionals, such as administrators, doctors, industrial and agricultural technicians, teachers, and military personnel, among others, was intense and had lasting effects. Today, in many countries, they come back to power in progressive governments.

In short, the USSR was important to this group of African states in the following aspects: a) it was the only Permanent Member of the Security Council of the UN that, at the time of the Sino-American alliance, assertively positioned itself by their side; b) besides being a nuclear power, it caused surprise for its logistical capacity in sending massive military support to distant Angola and Ethiopia; c) it possessed a solid technological-industrial base, the only one independent from capitalist powers; d) and it had an economic and state organizational model that was appealing to the young African nations, which searched for alternatives to the neocolonial system.

Therefore, it is necessary to proceed to an objective evaluation of the impact of armed conflicts that occurred within the framework of Soviet-African cooperation. The terrible humanitarian cost is widely explored in the historical literature: dead, wounded, mutilated, refugees, orphans, and material destruction. On the other hand, the newly independent societies suddenly had to deal with wars involving advanced weaponry and organization, demanding organizational effort, which had repercussions on the formation of cadres and political-administrative structures. As in the case of European states, war led to an increase in state capacity.

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ABSTRACT

The article analyzes the Soviet Union (USSR) relations with African states that were its allies. The period studied covers the 1970s and the 1980s, focusing on reciprocal motivations, conditioning elements and the resulting impacts and legacies of this relationship. This process gained relevance belatedly, over a short period of two decades (1969-89), targeted a few countries, but was intense (often motivated by Cuba) and had a relevant impact on the transformation of Africa. The article seeks to demonstrate that African nations were not “pawns” of the Cold War in their cooperation with Moscow, nor did the USSR have a systemic project of “exporting the revolution” or a geopolitical Grand Design for Africa.

KEYWORDS

Soviet Diplomacy. USSR-Africa Relations. African Socialist Regimes.

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MAPPING ALGERIA'S FOREIGN POLICY IN AFRICA THROUGH COMPLEX NETWORK ANALYSIS: SECURITY AND ENERGY DYNAMICS (2019–2025)

Mourad Benguita¹



Introduction

In recent years, Africa has emerged as a pivotal space of geopolitical realignment, strategic competition, and region-wide integration experiments. The continent's growing significance is fueled by its energy potential, evolving security configurations, and the multiplication of cross-border infrastructure and connectivity initiatives. As states navigate this increasingly interdependent environment, foreign policies have shifted from traditional bilateralism to more fluid and multi-layered forms of engagement, including overlapping alliances, regional corridors, and transnational institutional frameworks.

Within this continental transformation, Algeria has embarked on a recalibrated foreign policy, particularly since 2019. Internally, the Hirak protest movement and the subsequent reconfiguration of the political order ushered in demands for a more assertive and diversified external policy posture. Externally, Algeria has faced growing competition over African influence, particularly from regional rivals like Morocco, which has reasserted itself diplomatically across the continent, and from global powers, both traditional (France and the EU) and emerging (China, Russia, Turkey and Gulf states). This dual pressure has compelled Algeria to adopt a more proactive and systemic approach to its African policy.

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This strategic reorientation is particularly visible in two interconnected domains: energy diplomacy — via gas pipelines, electricity exports, and renewable cooperation — and security engagement, especially in North Africa and the Sahel. While the country has historically pursued bilateral ties with its African neighbors, the post-2019 period has seen a notable expansion, densification, and diversification of Algeria's engagements, signaling a shift from reactive diplomacy to structured regional activism.

Yet, this strategic shift remains under-explored in academic discourse, where prevailing approaches often fail to capture the structural and networked logic underpinning Algeria's contemporary regional behavior. Indeed, much of the existing literature continues to interpret Algerian-African relations through traditional lenses — emphasizing historical legacies, anti-colonial solidarities, or isolated strategic interests. While valuable, such perspectives often overlook the dynamic institutional, infrastructural, and network-based mechanisms now shaping Algeria's engagements across the continent.

This article proposes a different reading. It asks: To what extent can Algeria's foreign policy in Africa between 2019 and 2025 be understood as a strategic and networked engagement, particularly in the fields of energy and security?

Building on this question, the article advances the hypothesis that: Algeria is no longer merely engaging Africa through episodic or bilateral initiatives, but is increasingly embedding its regional diplomacy within multi-nodal, institutionalized, and infrastructurally-supported networks — positioning itself as a central node in emerging African architectures.

Accordingly, the main objective of this article is to reinterpret Algeria's African engagements through the lens of Complex Network Analysis (CNA). Rather than focusing solely on state intentions or diplomatic discourse, the study adopts a structural perspective that emphasizes connectivity patterns, intensity of cooperation, and the spatial distribution of regional roles.

Methodologically, the article employs a mixed qualitative-quantitative approach. It draws upon official Algerian and African data, international reports, and institutional records to construct a weighted network of Algeria's partnerships in energy and security. The network was analyzed using Gephi, an open-source software for network visualization and statistical computation. Through this tool, key network indicators — such as degree centrality, betweenness, closeness, and modularity — were calculated to assess Algeria's evolving centrality and connectivity in the African regional system.

By moving beyond conventional bilateral analyses, this network-based approach offers deeper insights into the structural logic, regional positioning,

and strategic reach of Algeria's foreign policy across the continent in the post-2019 period.

Complex Network Analysis and Its Applications in Foreign Policy Analysis

In an increasingly interdependent world marked by overlapping crises, shifting alliances, and multi-scalar interactions, classical models of foreign policy analysis have struggled to grasp the full complexity of international behavior. Conventional frameworks — whether rooted in realism, liberalism, or constructivism — tend to prioritize dyadic relationships, institutional memberships, or normative alignments, often neglecting the structural patterns that emerge when multiple actors, layers, and linkages are considered simultaneously.

To overcome these limitations, scholars have increasingly turned to Network Analysis, an interdisciplinary methodology that maps and interprets relationships between actors (nodes) based on their position, connectivity, and function within a broader structure. This section explores the conceptual foundations, methodological tools, and empirical applications of Complex Network Analysis (CNA) in the study of foreign policy, with a particular focus on its relevance for understanding the emerging architecture of regional and transregional alignments.

From Graph Theory to Social Network Analysis

The intellectual origins of network analysis lie in graph theory, a branch of mathematics concerned with the formal properties of nodes (vertices) and edges (links) (Harary 1969). Initially applied in discrete mathematics and computer science, graph theory provided the foundational language for modeling connections, flows, and structural configurations.

In the mid-20th century, these principles were adapted to study human interactions, giving rise to Social Network Analysis (SNA) — an approach that prioritizes relational data over actor-specific attributes. Unlike traditional social science models that analyze states or individuals as autonomous units, SNA examines how embeddedness in networks shapes behavior, constraints, and opportunities (Wasserman and Faust 1994).

SNA became especially relevant in sociology and organizational studies, but its adoption in international relations remained limited until the

1990s. The diffusion of digital tools, the growing availability of relational datasets (e.g., trade flows, diplomatic visits, treaty networks), and the rise of interdisciplinary research gradually expanded SNA into IR theory, giving birth to a growing field of relational and structural foreign policy analysis (Hafner-Burton, Kahler, and Montgomery 2009).

Complex Network Analysis: Concepts and Metrics

While SNA offers a robust foundation for mapping and interpreting relational structures, it often assumes flat networks with uniform link values and simple topologies. By contrast, CNA builds on the principles of SNA but incorporates the insights of statistical physics, computer science, and systems theory to account for the heterogeneity, non-linearity, and multi-layered nature of real-world networks (Barabási 2016).

Structural Properties

Complex networks are characterized by several distinct features:

- Degree centrality: Number of direct connections an actor maintains.
- Betweenness centrality: Frequency with which an actor lies on the shortest path between other pairs of actors.
- Closeness centrality: Proximity of an actor to all others in the network.
- Eigenvector centrality: Influence based on both direct and indirect connections.
- Density: Ratio of actual connections to all possible connections.
- Modularity: The extent to which the network clusters into distinct communities or blocs (Newman 2010).

These indicators allow researchers to move beyond binary relational mappings and explore the relative power, strategic positioning, and clustering behavior of foreign policy actors within dynamic systems (Kivelä et al. 2014).

Multiplex and Weighted Networks

One of the core innovations of CNA is its ability to handle multiplex networks — where nodes are connected by different types of ties (e.g., diplomatic, economic, military) — as well as weighted networks, where the strength or frequency of ties varies. This makes CNA particularly suited to the analysis of foreign policy, where actors engage simultaneously through

various channels and intensities (Maoz 2010). For example, a bilateral relationship may involve arms trade (military layer), energy cooperation (economic layer), and regular summits (diplomatic layer). CNA allows these ties to be analyzed in parallel, highlighting not only connectivity but the strategic density of the relationship.

Applications in Foreign Policy Analysis

Network-based approaches have been increasingly applied to foreign policy analysis across several domains:

1. Alliance and Security Networks: Traditional alliance studies often focus on formal treaties, but CNA enables scholars to explore informal security ties, joint exercises, intelligence cooperation, and arms flows. Maoz (2010) uses network models to study the evolution of global alliances and their effects on conflict dynamics. CNA has also been applied to regional security architectures, such as NATO, ECOWAS, and the GCC, revealing hidden hubs and brokers (Maoz 2010).

2. Economic and Energy Interdependence: CNA has proven particularly effective in analyzing global value chains, trade dependencies, and energy infrastructure. Goldthau (2012) and Græger (2016) use network approaches to examine how pipelines, grids, and trade networks reshape geopolitical bargaining power. Weighted and directional network models can reveal asymmetries that are obscured in traditional statistical analysis (Goldthau 2012; Græger 2016).

3. Diplomatic and Institutional Networks: Diplomatic influence is increasingly exercised through multilateral platforms, regional organizations, and transnational summits. CNA helps map patterns of co-membership, agenda-setting power, and institutional centrality. Hafner-Burton and Montgomery (2006) demonstrate how human rights practices and norms diffuse through transnational networks (Hafner-Burton and Montgomery 2006).

4. Soft Power and Norm Diffusion: Beyond material capabilities, CNA is used to trace the flow of ideas, norms, and soft power instruments such as education, cultural exchange, and media outreach. Kaczmarek and Lloyd (2022) argue that in the digital era, foreign policy has become more relational and performative, requiring new tools to understand visibility, influence, and audience reception (Kaczmarek and Lloyd 2022).

Strengths and Limits of Complex Network Analysis

The appeal of CNA lies in its ability to capture both structure and process, both macro-patterns and micro-interactions. It enables:

- Visualization of dynamic systems;
- Quantification of strategic position;
- Identification of hubs, brokers, and outliers;
- Integration of qualitative and quantitative data (Hafner-Burton, Kahler, and Montgomery 2009; Dür and Elsig 2011).

However, CNA also presents limitations:

- Requires high-quality relational data, often unavailable for opaque regimes;
- Risk of over-reliance on visual outputs at the expense of contextual depth;
- Needs to be complemented by case studies and grounded knowledge (Maoz 2010; Carpenter 2011).

As such, CNA is best understood as a complementary approach that enriches — rather than replaces — traditional foreign policy analysis (Katzenstein 1976; Hafner-Burton and Montgomery 2006).

Toward a Network-Centric Understanding of Algerian Foreign Policy

This article applies CNA to the study of Algeria's foreign policy in Africa, particularly in the fields of energy cooperation and security engagement. Algeria's regional diplomacy cannot be fully understood through bilateral snapshots or treaty analysis alone. Instead, a network-centric approach reveals its strategic position as a broker, connector, and orchestrator within regional subsystems.

The following section operationalizes the CNA framework through empirical case studies, network visualizations, and weighted indicators, offering a structural reading of Algerian agency in a complex and evolving geopolitical environment.

Algeria's Security Network in Africa (2019-2025)

Security has long been a cornerstone of Algeria's regional engagement, especially in the Sahel and North Africa. Rooted in its doctrine of non-intervention and historical role as a supporter of anti-colonial movements, Algeria's security policy emphasizes regional ownership, border stability, and the prevention of external military entanglements. Since 2019, this orientation has translated into increased activism in regional security frameworks, bilateral military cooperation, and intelligence-sharing platforms. This chapter analyzes the security layer of Algeria's multiplex network in Africa, focusing on its structure, key nodes, and strategic functions.

Algeria's Security Doctrine and Strategic Principles

Algeria's evolving security doctrine in Africa is structured around three interrelated strategic logics that reflect both its institutional constraints and regional ambitions. First is the cooperative security strategy, which has emerged as the most pragmatic and viable option given Algeria's longstanding aversion to unilateral military interventions. This approach emphasizes the importance of building joint frameworks — especially with Sahelian countries — to combat terrorism and transnational organized crime, while fostering conditions for regional stability and development. Algeria's advocacy for cooperative arrangements stems from its self-perception as a pivotal state in the Maghreb and North Africa, surrounded by fragile neighbors whose instability poses spillover risks (Zoubir 2022). Second, Algeria adheres to a doctrine of selective intervention, whereby its security engagement is triggered primarily when core national interests or sovereignty are directly threatened. This reflects a reactive posture that privileges defensive calculations over proactive projection. Third, Algeria increasingly exhibits what has been termed the “state that cannot be ignored” posture, signaling its desire to consolidate a central role in African security affairs. This ambition has become more apparent in recent years, as Algeria reasserts its presence across sub-Saharan Africa through renewed partnerships and visible diplomatic-military outreach — especially in response to mounting threats and shifting geopolitical rivalries in its immediate neighborhood (Omran and Chenane 2022).

This overarching strategic vision is further underpinned by three core principles that have long guided Algeria's foreign and defense policy:

- **Sovereignty and Non-Intervention:** Algeria firmly opposes foreign military presence in the region—particularly in the Sahel—and continues

to advocate for African-led solutions to regional conflicts and crises. This principle reinforces its preference for sovereignty-centered diplomacy and a rejection of external interference (Chikhaoui 2022);

- **Collective Security and Dialogue:** Through platforms such as the Nouakchott Process and the African Union's Peace and Security Council, Algeria champions cooperative security arrangements and multilateral dialogue as mechanisms to address cross-border threats (Benantar 2022);

- **Border Control and Counterterrorism:** Given its vast and porous southern frontiers shared with unstable neighbors, Algeria prioritizes territorial integrity, border control, and regional counterterrorism coordination as essential pillars of its national security (Benantar 2016).

Mapping Algeria's Security Network and Interpretation

This section analyzes the architecture and operational dynamics of Algeria's security engagements across Africa from 2019 to 2025. Relying on Social Network Analysis (SNA) tools and a combination of visual and quantitative indicators, the analysis sheds light on the extent, structure, and strategic implications of Algeria's military-diplomatic footprint on the continent. It draws on official data, military records, and international assessments to provide a multilayered interpretation of Algeria's evolving security posture.

Matrix Overview of Security Engagements

Using SNA, this subsection maps Algeria's key security ties with selected African partners. The revised dataset highlights four main forms of interaction: high-level bilateral military visits, military training in Algeria, border security coordination, and multilateral cooperation. The following matrix offers a synthesized overview of Algeria's security engagements with selected African states. It categorizes the interactions into four key dimensions. This categorization allows for a comparative perspective across countries and interaction types.

Table 1: Matrix of Algeria's Bilateral and Multilateral Security Engagements in Africa (2019–2025)

Target country	High military visits	Military training in Algeria	Border security coordination	Multilateral cooperation
Mauritania	3	Yes	Yes	Yes (NA Regional Capability)
Mali	1	Yes	Yes	Yes (CEMOC, NA Reg. Cap.)
Niger	3	Yes	Yes	Yes (CEMOC)
Tunisia	3	Yes	Yes	Yes (NA Regional Capability)
Libya	2	Limited	No	Yes (NA Regional Capability)
Egypt	1	Limited	No	Yes (NA Regional Capability)
Sudan	1	Yes	No	No
South Africa	1	Limited	No	No
Rwanda	2	Limited	No	No
Sierra Leone	1	No	No	No
Uganda	1	Limited	No	No
Angola	1	Limited	No	No
Tanzania	1	No	No	No
Cameroon	1	No	No	No

Source: Compiled by the author based on official data from the Algerian Ministry of National Defence (2019–2025).

Quantitative Indicators of Network Centrality

To assess Algeria's role and connectivity, we computed three main SNA metrics using Gephi. The following table presents the quantitative centrality scores for Algeria and its African security partners.

Table 2: Quantitative Metrics of Algeria's African Security Relations: SNA-Based Assessment (2019–2025)

Country/Entity	Degree centrality	Betweenness centrality	Closeness centrality
Algeria	1.000	1.000	1.000
All other nodes	0.067	0.000	0.517

Source: Author's computation using Gephi, based on bilateral and multilateral security data from the Algerian Ministry of National Defence (2019–2025).

- **Degree Centrality:** The analysis reveals that Algeria maintains direct ties with all fourteen nodes in the network, underscoring its structural centrality within the African security architecture. This high degree of connectivity reflects the expansive scope of Algeria's security engagement during the reference period, extending beyond its immediate neighborhood to encompass diverse sub-regional contexts;

- **Closeness Centrality:** Algeria exhibits the shortest average geodesic distance to all other nodes in the network, indicating a high level of accessibility and communicative efficiency. This metric highlights Algeria's ability to engage swiftly and effectively with a wide array of actors, especially in the Maghreb and Sahel—namely Mali, Niger, Tunisia, Mauritania, and Libya;

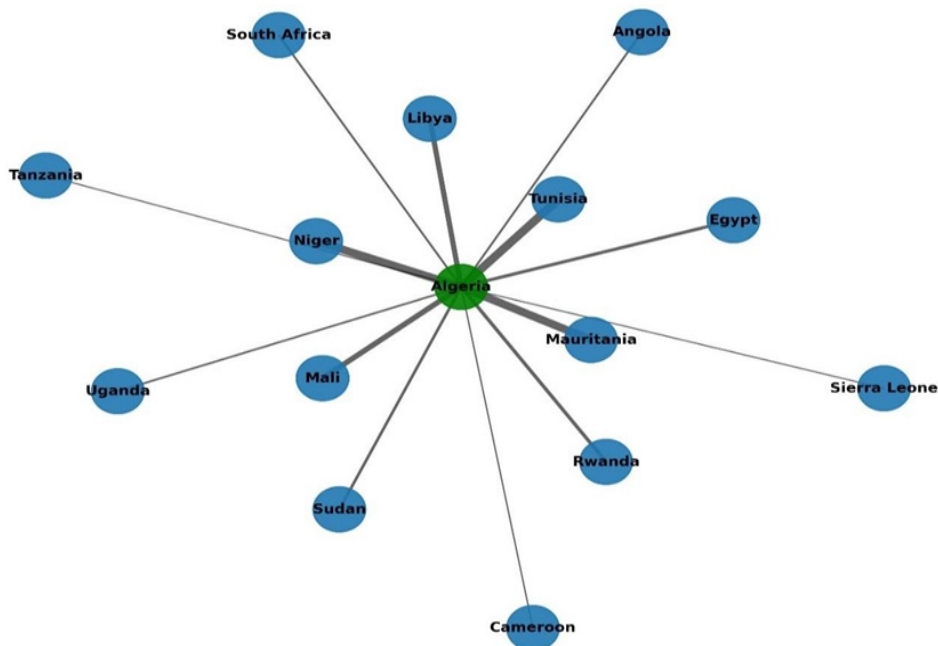
- **Betweenness Centrality:** Algeria occupies all intermediary positions on the shortest paths connecting other nodes, consolidating its role as a critical broker. This bridging function reflects Algeria's operational relevance in facilitating inter-state security flows and its normative aspiration to act as a continental security provider.

These metrics confirm the star-shaped structure of Algeria's security network—Algeria acts as the dominant hub while the rest are peripheral nodes. The absence of interconnectivity among partner states reveals the bilateral nature of Algeria's approach.

Visual Configuration and Interpretation

Building on the metrics above, the network graph below illustrates the qualitative intensity of Algeria's military engagements across Africa between 2019 and 2025. Each edge represents an engagement in one of the four categories above. The structure of the network underscores Algeria's evolving role as a central hub of military and security dynamism in North Africa and the Sahel.

Figure 1: Weighted Visualization of Algeria's Security Network in Africa (2019–2025), based on intensity of bilateral and multilateral engagements.



Source: Author's visualization using Gephi, based on data from Table 1.

This transformation stems from the mounting complexity of regional threats—including persistent instability in Libya, the collapse of governance in Mali, and transnational violence spillovers in Niger. In response, Algerian policymakers have adopted a more agile and multidimensional approach to security cooperation, emphasizing proactive defense diplomacy, institutional capacity building, and cross-border coordination (Zoubir 2022).

Rather than operating within symmetrical regional clusters, Algeria has increasingly positioned itself as a node of concentrated security outreach. This shift is further supported by Algeria's expanded training and aid programs to neighboring states amounting to over US\$ 100 million in support

for Mali, Chad, Niger, Libya, and Mauritania prior to 2019 as well as technical assistance to elite forces in Niger and joint coordination with Niamey (Abdelkader 2019). These efforts are a direct response to intensifying terrorist activity, the entrenchment of transnational organized crime networks, and the growing presence of external powers — such as Russia, Turkey, the UAE, and Israel — in Algeria's immediate neighborhood.

Significantly, the network also reveals a notable geographic expansion in Algeria's defense outreach beyond its traditional Maghreb and Sahel focus. Of particular relevance are its engagements with Rwanda — amid tensions with UAE-backed Democratic Republic of Congo — and Sudan's military in its war against UAE-supported Rapid Support Forces (RSF)². Algeria's outreach to Cameroon, Tanzania, Uganda, and Sierra Leone further underscores its intent to shape security geometries beyond its borders. Equally important is Algeria's intensifying cooperation with Mauritania, which has become pivotal in Algeria's broader strategy to counterbalance Moroccan influence in Northwest Africa. This evolving relationship includes expanded training cooperation and strategic consultations, making Mauritania central to Algeria's redefined security perimeter (Laredj 2024).

Collectively, these developments signal a recalibration of Algeria's security doctrine, wherein bilateral military cooperation has become a key tool for projecting influence, responding to regional volatility, and building durable partnerships (Benantar 2022).

Challenges to the Security Network

Despite active diplomacy, Algeria's security network faces several structural constraints:

- Asymmetric dependencies, with partners like Mali leaning on Russia or Alliance of Sahel States (AES) for security support (Marangio 2025);
- Competing regional visions, especially from Morocco and external actors like France, the US, or Russia (Zoubir 2025);
- Institutional rigidity, as Algeria remains cautious about formal alliances and joint military interventions (Benantar 2016).

² Rapid Support Forces (RSF): A Sudanese paramilitary group formed in 2013 from Janjaweed militias. Led by Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo (Hemeti), it grew powerful and later clashed with the national army in the 2023 civil war.

Implications for Foreign Policy

The security network illustrates Algeria's strategy of positioning itself as a regional stabilizer and mediator. Its high connectivity in the security domain enhances its diplomatic leverage, but its aversion to military coalitions may limit deeper integration into regional defense architectures. The star-like network configuration also reflects Algeria's preference for bilateral engagements, allowing it to maintain strategic autonomy and control the terms of engagement. However, this also means the network is fragile in terms of regional cooperation beyond Algeria's central role.

Algeria's security network in Africa constitutes a foundational layer of its multiplex foreign policy. It reflects a pragmatic balancing act between asserting regional influence and preserving strategic autonomy. The Social Network Analysis reveals a highly centralized structure revolving around Algeria as a security hub. Future research could explore the evolution of these ties into more institutionalized or multilateral forms.

The Architecture of Algeria's Energy Network in Africa (2019–2025)

Algeria's growing energy outreach in Africa reflects a strategic effort to consolidate its regional role through diversified forms of cooperation. From gas and electricity to renewables and institutional frameworks, the country has engaged multiple African partners in what appears to be a gradual construction of a continent-wide energy network. This chapter examines the evolving structure of that network between 2019 and 2025, focusing on the scope, depth, and distribution of Algeria's bilateral energy ties across the continent. By analyzing these connections through a network-based approach, the chapter offers insight into Algeria's positioning within Africa's emerging energy geography.

Algeria's African Energy Strategy: Pillars and Modalities of Engagement

Algeria's African energy strategy is structured around three core pillars that shape its long-term vision for continental engagement (Bouzidi 2025):

- **Market Access:** By leveraging its strategic geographic position between Europe and Africa, the country seeks to serve as a vital conduit connecting regional producers and international energy markets;

- **Shared Infrastructure:** Through the advancement of transnational projects—such as gas pipelines and renewable energy corridors—it aims to foster deeper continental energy integration and interconnectivity;

- **Capacity Building:** A strong emphasis is placed on training, technology transfer, and institutional cooperation, ensuring that human capital development becomes an integral part of energy partnerships.

Building on these pillars, Algeria's energy diplomacy in Africa unfolds through a set of interrelated and adaptive modalities. These reflect a combination of strategic state planning and responsiveness to the continent's evolving needs, and can be broadly categorized into four main forms:

- **Hydrocarbon Cooperation (Oil and Gas):** Through its national energy company Sonatrach³, Algeria engages in strategic cooperation in upstream and midstream activities, including exploration, pipeline transit, and petroleum product distribution (Ministry of Energy and Mines 2023);

- **Electricity Interconnection and Support:** Algeria plays a growing role as a provider and coordinator of electricity infrastructure, offering technical assistance, electricity export, and support for regional interconnection projects through its national electricity company Sonalgaz⁴ (Mokhtar Benasla et al. 2023);

- **Renewable Energy Cooperation:** Algeria promotes collaboration on renewable energy development, especially in solar and hybrid systems, in alignment with its broader energy transition strategy (Saada 2025);

- **Institutional and Legal Frameworks:** Energy cooperation is often structured through memoranda of understanding, bilateral committees, and multilateral mechanisms that provide regulatory and political backing to technical initiatives. These frameworks offer durable platforms for long-term coordination (Aziouez 2024).

³ Sonatrach is Algeria's national oil and gas company, established in 1963. It is the largest company in Africa, operating across exploration, production, refining, and transport. Sonatrach plays a key role in Algeria's economy and energy diplomacy, especially in Africa and Europe.

⁴ Sonelgaz is Algeria's state-owned electricity and natural gas utility company, founded in 1969. It is responsible for the generation, transmission, and distribution of electricity and gas across the country. Sonelgaz also plays a growing role in regional energy integration, especially through cross-border electricity projects with neighboring African countries.

These modalities illustrate Algeria's shift from being merely a supplier to acting as a regional integrator and infrastructure hub, especially within North and West Africa.

Weighted Structure of Algeria's Energy Ties in Africa (2019–2025)

Between 2019 and 2025, Algeria has broadened its energy partnerships across Africa, engaging in projects that range from electricity interconnections and gas transit to renewable energy cooperation. These ties differ in depth and scope, reflecting both geographic proximity and strategic priorities. To capture this variation, a weighted framework is used to classify bilateral relations, offering a structured overview of Algeria's evolving energy diplomacy on the continent.

Typology of Bilateral Energy Links

Between 2019 and 2025, Algeria has significantly expanded its bilateral energy relations with a range of African countries. These ties vary widely in scope, institutionalization, and strategic depth. While some partnerships are confined to thematic or technical cooperation (e.g., renewable energy dialogues, training programs), others encompass complex, multi-sectoral engagements such as transnational gas pipelines, electricity interconnections, and joint institutional frameworks.

To systematically capture this variation, this study employs a weighted network approach, assigning a strength score from 1 to 5 for each bilateral relationship. This score reflects three main dimensions:

- Depth (e.g., long-term agreements vs. one-off exchanges);
- Diversity (gas, electricity, renewables, logistics);
- Strategic relevance (regional projects, multilateral forums, corridor integration).

A score of 1 denotes emerging, low-intensity cooperation, while 5 represents highly institutionalized, multi-dimensional partnerships. The following table presents Algeria's 13 most salient African energy relationships, highlighting their core components, institutional actors, and assigned tie strength:

Table 3: Algeria's Energy Network in Africa (2019–2025): Weighted Bilateral Ties.

Country	Type of interaction	Algerian institution (s)	Partner institution / Framework	Remarks	Bilateral energy tie strength (1–5)
Tunisia	Electricity interconnection, gas transit, Southern Hydrogen Corridor, bilateral energy committee, trilateral grid project	Sonatrach, Sonelgaz	STEG, Joint Energy-Mining Committee	Strongest partner; part of Algeria–Tunisia–Libya interconnection	5
Libya	Gas cooperation, exploration, trilateral electricity project	Sonatrach, Sonelgaz	NOC, GECOL	Resumption of upstream activity; part of trilateral grid plan	4
Mauritania	Electricity export, renewable energy cooperation, infrastructure links	Sonelgaz, Ministry of Energy	SOMELEC, Joint Commission	Integrated into energy–logistics corridor	3
Nigeria	Gas pipeline diplomacy (TSGP), tripartite agreement, energy coordination	Sonatrach, Ministry of Energy	NNPC, TSGP Tripartite Committee	TSGP project via Niger to Europe	3
Mali	Electricity support in the north, hybrid energy projects	Sonelgaz, Ministry of Energy	Ministry of Energy (Mali)	Targeted support for local grids	2
Niger	Gas transit (TSGP), electricity dialogue, tripartite committee	Sonatrach, Sonelgaz	Ministry of Energy (Niger)	Strategic transit hub	3
South Africa	BRICS energy coordination, renewable energy dialogue	Ministry of Energy	DMRE, BRICS Energy Platform	Thematic and multilateral cooperation	2
Chad	Electricity support, hybrid projects	Sonelgaz	Ministry of Energy (Chad)	Part of Sahel energy engagement	1
Ethiopia	Renewable energy MoU, technical cooperation	Ministry of Energy	Ministry of Water and Energy	Early-stage engagement	1

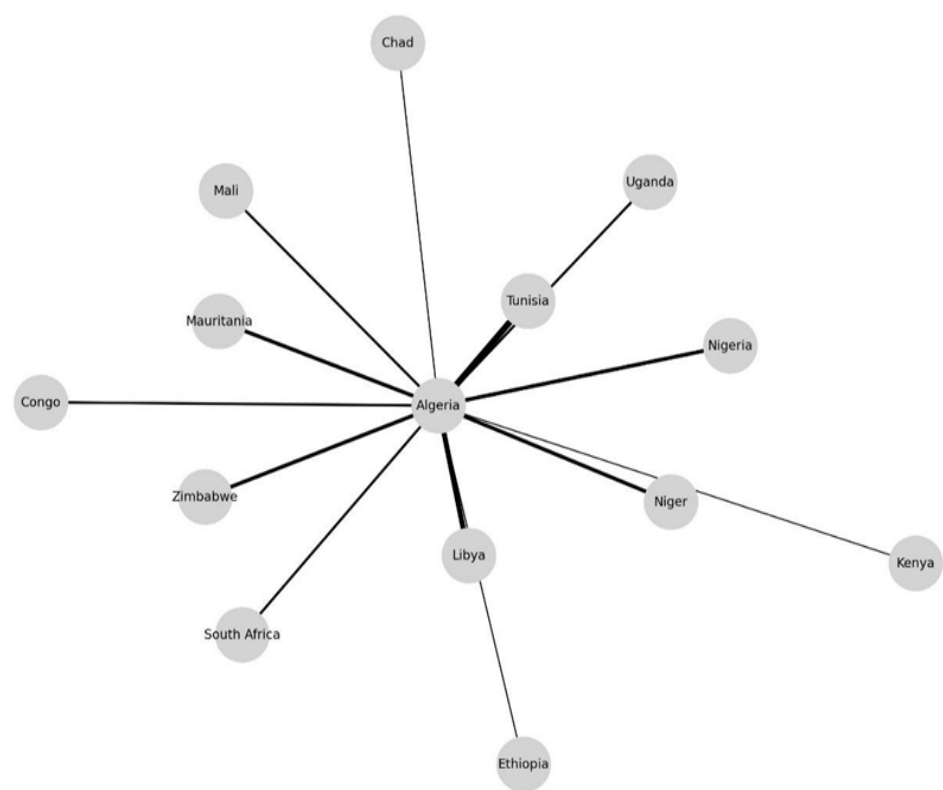
Kenya	Solar energy dialogue, expertise sharing	Ministry of Energy,	Ministry of Energy (Kenya)	Exchange within Algerian-African forums	1
Zimbabwe	Comprehensive energy MoU: electricity, petroleum distribution, renewables	Ministry of Energy, Sonatrach	Ministry of Energy (Zimbabwe)	Legal, distribution, engineering, and renewables	3
Uganda	Oil and gas exploration cooperation	Sonatrach	Ministry of Energy (Uganda)	Technical support for hydrocarbon development	2
Congo	Oil refining, distribution, upstream cooperation	Sonatrach	Ministry of Energy (Congo)	Infrastructure-oriented cooperation	2

Source: Author’s compilation based on data from the Algerian Ministry of Energy and Mines, Sonatrach, and APS (2019–2025).

Visualizing the Network Structure

To complement the typological overview, Figure 2 offers a visual rendering of Algeria’s energy ties across the African continent. Each node represents a country, with edge thickness indicating the weighted strength of the bilateral relationship (1–5). This network visualization highlights the asymmetry and centralization of Algeria’s regional energy diplomacy.

Figure 2: Algeria’s Energy Network in Africa (2019–2025)



Source: Author’s visualization generated with Gephi, based on data from Table 3.

Interpreting Network Indicators

Using indicators adapted from Social Network Analysis (SNA), this section interprets Algeria’s energy relations along three analytical axes:

1. Weighted Degree Centrality: This reflects the total strength of Algeria’s bilateral connections. Tunisia emerges as the most central partner (5/5), followed by Libya (4), and a second tier composed of Nigeria, Niger, Mauritania, and Zimbabwe (3 each). These countries form the core cluster of Algeria’s energy diplomacy, characterized by strategic interdependence and institutionalized frameworks.

2. Bilateral Density of Relations: Density is calculated as the ratio of actual engagement components to the maximum (5). For example:

- **Tunisia** = 1.0 (fully diversified and institutionalized)
- **Uganda** = 0.4, **Mali** = 0.4, **Congo** = 0.4 (moderate density)
- **Chad, Ethiopia, Kenya** = 0.2 (low-density, thematic cooperation)

This indicator helps distinguish depth beyond surface-level interaction.

3. Regional Clustering and Role Differentiation: The spatial distribution of the network reveals a Maghreb core (Tunisia, Libya, Mauritania), a Sahelian corridor (Mali, Niger, Chad), and an emerging Sub-Saharan reach (Zimbabwe, Uganda, Congo). The trilateral electricity grid with Tunisia and Libya exemplifies Algeria's transition from bilateralism to regional system-building, signaling a strategic shift toward regional orchestration.

Strategic Implications and Network Logic

The weighted and hierarchized nature of Algeria's energy network in Africa reflects more than mere geography or legacy ties, it embodies a purposeful strategy of infrastructural projection, institutional framing, and geopolitical diversification. Rather than constructing a flat, symmetric network, Algeria has shaped a hub-and-spoke architecture, where it occupies the central coordinating node. This structural asymmetry is not a weakness but a source of strategic advantage, enabling Algeria to:

- Set the agenda in emerging regional energy regimes;
- Balance bilateral commitments with multilateral ambitions (e.g., TSGP, BRICS energy forum);
- Reduce vulnerability by avoiding overdependence on a single route or partner (Profazio 2025).

By drawing on concepts from network theory—such as centrality, density, and brokerage—Algeria's energy diplomacy can be understood as a form of strategic network governance, wherein infrastructure becomes both a tool of power projection and a platform for resilience. In this sense, Algeria is not only supplying energy but designing the architecture of energy cooperation itself. This transformation positions it as both a node of influence and a regional orchestrator, actively shaping the contours of Africa's energy future.

Strategic Implications and Geopolitical Reach

Algeria's expanding energy engagements across Africa carry profound strategic implications that transcend the mere export of hydrocarbons or electricity. As demonstrated by the weighted and asymmetric structure of its energy network, Algeria is leveraging infrastructure, institutional coordination, and targeted partnerships to assert itself as a regional energy orchestrator.

Firstly, Algeria's leadership in the Trans-Saharan Gas Pipeline (TSGP) project with Nigeria and Niger consolidates its role as a continental energy gateway to Europe. This infrastructural corridor allows Algeria to align African supply with European demand, reinforcing its dual identity as both an African and Mediterranean energy actor (Voytyuk 2023). The strategic relevance of the TSGP lies not only in its economic potential, but also in its geopolitical function as a platform for interregional integration. Secondly, Algeria's involvement in regional electricity interconnection projects — especially the trilateral Algeria–Tunisia–Libya initiative — signals a shift from bilateral to systemic approaches. These projects embed Algeria into the core of a continental energy space, where it contributes to legal harmonization, market compatibility, and coordinated planning. Rather than being a supplier alone, Algeria increasingly acts as a system builder, fostering a regional energy architecture.

Thirdly, the deliberate diversification of energy partners — from immediate Maghreb neighbors to more distant Sub-Saharan states such as Zimbabwe, Uganda, and Congo — reflects a strategy of geopolitical balancing. By avoiding over-reliance on any single region or corridor, Algeria enhances its strategic resilience, insulating its regional posture from localized instability or diplomatic volatility (Khennas 2024).

Moreover, Algeria's energy diplomacy extends beyond hardware and supply chains. Through soft power instruments — including training programs, technical assistance, and joint ventures — Algeria cultivates durable political capital and shapes the normative landscape of energy governance. These low-visibility components reinforce its network from within, ensuring long-term influence across different tiers of cooperation (Aps 2025).

Taken together, Algeria's African energy strategy reflects a transition from reactive bilateralism to proactive, multi-tiered engagement. Its ability to align infrastructure, markets, and institutions around key corridors is redefining its regional posture. In doing so, Algeria emerges not only as a

supplier or transit country, but as a geopolitical broker capable of structuring energy flows and regulatory convergence across diverse African subregions.

Network Overlap: Towards a Composite Reading of Algerian Influence

Algeria's regional footprint cannot be fully understood by looking at energy relations in isolation. In several African partnerships, energy cooperation is intertwined with parallel security arrangements, creating areas where multiple forms of engagement converge. These zones of overlap highlight cases in which infrastructure, institutional mechanisms, and security coordination intersect, offering a composite view of Algeria's multidomain presence. This section outlines the most salient examples of such overlaps.

Zones of Network Overlap

A composite reading of Algeria's African presence reveals several strategic areas where energy and security engagements converge, forming zones of network overlap. These overlapping zones not only reflect intensified bilateral cooperation, but also signal Algeria's attempt to exercise compound influence through multi-domain engagement. This section identifies five key cases that exemplify this phenomenon:

1. Tunisia: Tunisia stands out as Algeria's most integrated partner. It is simultaneously a recipient of Algerian electricity exports, a transit country for gas pipelines, and a participant in the tripartite electrical interconnection (Algeria–Tunisia–Libya). On the security front, Tunisia has engaged in counterterrorism coordination and border security mechanisms with Algeria, supported by regular meetings of the Joint Energy and Mines Committee (Ghebouli 2024);

2. Niger: Algeria's relationship with Niger is anchored in both energy and security. The country is a stakeholder in the Trans-Saharan Gas Pipeline (TSGP), while also receiving electricity infrastructure support. Simultaneously, Niger is central to Algeria's Sahel security doctrine, featuring in joint military dialogues, anti-terrorism coordination, and capacity-building programs (Marangio 2025);

3. Libya: Libya is both an energy partner—linked via interconnection projects and shared hydrocarbon interests—and a security concern, due to instability and porous borders. Algeria's dual involvement positions it as a sta-

bilizer and infrastructure anchor in post-conflict reconstruction efforts. The energy-security nexus here underpins Algeria's leverage in shaping Libya's regional reintegration (Ahram 2021; Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2023);

4. Mauritania: Mauritania has become increasingly central to Algeria's Africa-facing strategy. Energy ties include Sonatrach-led exploration agreements and electricity distribution support (Aps 2025), while on the security side, Algeria and Mauritania have expanded cross-border patrols and intelligence sharing (Laredj 2024). The interlacing of soft and hard power tools reinforces Algeria's role in the western Sahel;

5. Nigeria: Although geographically distant, Nigeria features prominently in Algeria's strategic calculus. Energy cooperation is symbolized by the TSGP, while security dialogues—both bilateral and through multilateral forums—have intensified (Algeria Invest 2023). This relationship demonstrates Algeria's effort to scale its influence beyond North and Sahelian Africa into the Gulf of Guinea.

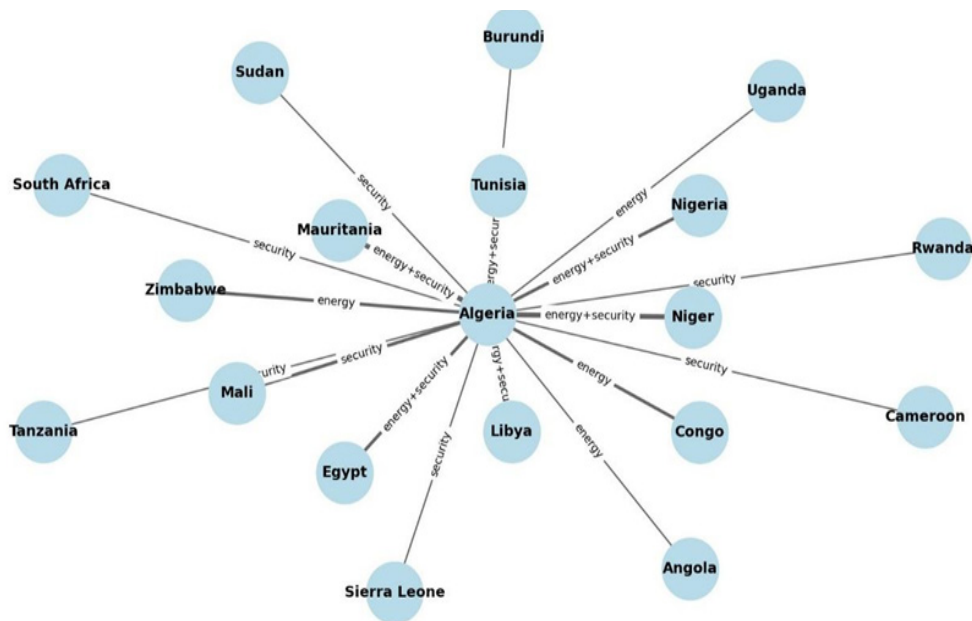
Together, these cases illustrate how Algeria's power projection is increasingly realized through overlapping networks, where infrastructure, military coordination, and institutional mechanisms converge to produce layered regional authority.

Visualizing the Composite Network

To complement the case-based analysis presented above, the following network map offers a visual synthesis of Algeria's multidomain footprint in Africa from 2019 to 2025. It integrates both energy and security ties, revealing not only zones of intense bilateral overlap but also peripheral connections that illustrate Algeria's broader geostrategic web.

Each node represents a country with which Algeria maintains sectoral cooperation, while edges reflect the nature and depth of those ties. The thickness of each edge corresponds to the intensity of overlap — ranging from minimal engagement (e.g., technical assistance) to strategic integration (e.g., joint infrastructure and defense coordination).

Figure 3: Algeria's Composite Energy–Security Network in Africa (2019–2025)



Source: Compiled and visualized by the author using Gephi, based on the preceding dataset.

This composite network allows for a more holistic understanding of Algeria's African presence, demonstrating that its influence is embedded in multiple, interlinked systems. The visualization also sets the stage for identifying broader patterns of leverage and regional positioning, as explored in the following section.

Patterns of Influence and Strategic Leverage

The zones of overlap identified above are not isolated phenomena; they reveal recurring patterns in Algeria's broader approach to African engagement. These patterns reflect a calculated effort to maximize strategic leverage by investing in interconnected policy domains, reinforcing influence through network densification and cross-sectoral interdependence.

1. Vertical Consolidation of Influence: in many overlapping zones, Algeria combines physical infrastructure (e.g., pipelines, power lines) with institutional mechanisms (e.g., joint commissions, training programs). This vertical integration deepens dependency and allows Algeria to act simultaneously as energy supplier, infrastructure financier, and security guarantor;

2. Regional Balancing through Multidimensional Presence: Algeria avoids concentration in a single subregion. Its presence in the Maghreb, Sahel, and parts of West Africa reflects a strategy of hedging and geopolitical balancing. This geographical diversification enhances Algeria's resilience against local disruptions and allows it to mediate in regional disputes;

3. Influence through Infrastructural Intermediation: Rather than simply exporting resources, Algeria increasingly positions itself as an interconnector—linking energy markets (e.g., Europe and sub-Saharan Africa), facilitating transborder power exchange, and enabling regional public goods. This intermediary role enhances its geopolitical capital;

4. Strategic Ambiguity and Diplomatic Autonomy: Algeria's networked strategy enables it to retain autonomy in its foreign policy. By maintaining bilateral ties across rival blocs and avoiding deep alignment with any external power, it secures room for maneuver while amplifying its role as a neutral facilitator.

In sum, Algeria's influence stems not from dominance in any single domain, but from its ability to weave connections across domains, shaping the rules, flows, and interactions that govern African regionalism. This multi-network logic of leverage reflects an emerging model of non-hegemonic but system-shaping regional leadership.

Conclusion

This study set out to explore Algeria's evolving role in Africa by examining its bilateral relations through the lens of strategic partnership, sectoral connectivity, and network analysis. Drawing upon empirical evidence from 2019 to 2025, it demonstrated how Algeria is gradually transitioning from a reactive, security-centered actor to a proactive regional stakeholder with multidimensional influence.

Through its expanding energy diplomacy, cross-border infrastructure initiatives, and layered security cooperation, Algeria has cultivated a strategic presence across the Maghreb, Sahel, and West Africa. The convergence of these engagements in zones of overlap reveals a deeper logic of regional

integration — one rooted not in hegemonic dominance, but in structural positioning across interdependent systems.

The network-based framework adopted in this research allowed for a nuanced understanding of Algeria's influence. Instead of viewing power through conventional metrics (military, GDP, or alliances), the study highlighted relational centrality, cross-sectoral leverage, and infrastructural entanglement as key indicators of Algeria's strategic depth.

Yet, challenges remain. Structural constraints — including domestic economic pressures, regional instability, and external competition — may limit Algeria's long-term capacity to consolidate its gains. Furthermore, sustaining influence across such complex networks will require not only material investments, but also consistent diplomatic vision and institutional innovation.

In conclusion, Algeria's African engagement reflects a transition toward a strategic partnership paradigm — one that blends security, energy, and infrastructure into a cohesive platform of influence. While the path forward is contingent on multiple variables, Algeria's current trajectory suggests a credible, adaptive, and increasingly system-shaping regional role.

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the evolution of Algeria's foreign policy in Africa between 2019 and 2025 through the lens of complex network analysis (CNA). While Algeria has traditionally maintained selective bilateral ties with African countries, recent developments reveal a shift toward denser, more diversified, and strategically embedded partnerships—particularly in the domains of energy diplomacy and security cooperation. Existing literature often treats Algeria's African engagement as reactive or ideologically motivated. This study challenges that narrative by posing the following question: To what extent has Algeria adopted a coherent, networked foreign policy strategy across the continent? The central hypothesis holds that Algeria is repositioning itself as a regional orchestrator by constructing multi-nodal, institutionally framed, and infrastructurally grounded networks, which enhance its strategic autonomy and regional influence. To test this hypothesis, the study adopts a mixed-method approach combining qualitative content analysis with quantitative network analysis. Empirical data were collected from official sources and mapped using Gephi, an open-source software for visualizing and analyzing networks. Weighted ties were assigned based on the depth, diversity, and institutionalization of bilateral and multilateral engagements. The results reveal a hierarchized and regionally clustered structure: Algeria maintains high-density ties with Maghreb neighbors such as Tunisia and Libya, strategic infrastructural partnerships with countries like Nigeria and Niger, and emerging linkages with Sub-Saharan states including Zimbabwe and Uganda. Network indicators such as degree centrality and modularity confirm Algeria's role as a central node in Africa's energy and security architectures. The findings suggest a deliberate transition from bilateralism to structural regionalism, positioning Algeria as a strategic broker in an increasingly networked continental system.

KEYWORDS

Algerian. Africa. Security. Energy.

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FRANÇAFRIQUE, NEOCOLONIALISM AND THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF COUPS D'ÉTAT IN THE FRANC ZONE (2020-2023)

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Karine de Souza Silva²



Introduction

In recent years, Francophone African countries have been the scene of coups d'état launched by the military class dissatisfied with the regimes in power between 2020 and 2023. With the events that occurred in Mali, Burkina Faso, Gabon, Niger and Guinea-Conakry, it was possible to observe some similarities in the justifications invoked by the protagonists of the coups, such as: economic depression, insecurity or the lack of progress in the fight against terrorism, corruption and, last but not least, the fight against economic imperialism and French neocolonialism on the continent.

The population appears to be aligned with the ideals of the current military regimes and demonstrates its discontent with France's track record of diplomatic, military, and economic activity on the continent. Consequently, incisive demonstrations were organized in front of French embassies in practically all affected territories — in which the population demanded the expulsion of the French diplomatic corps, the withdrawal of African countries

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from the Franc Zone³, and consequently the deinstitutionalization of the CFA Franc⁴, delimited here as the object of the research.

It is important to emphasize that coups have been a highly contested phenomenon in the African political landscape. On the one hand, deposed rulers and their allies tend to characterize coup protagonists as rebels and violators of the constitution. On the other, the perpetrators present themselves as patriots seeking popular sovereignty, deposing rulers who are servants of neocolonialism (Marsteintredet and Malamud 2019).

It is important to note that, behind the coups d'état in the Franc Zone, there is a narrative that they represent a struggle against neocolonialism. Therefore, this article argues that these coups represent the end of *Françafrique*, that is, the fall of economic imperialism that contributed to the peripheralization of most sub-Saharan African countries. The need to exit the monetary union is linked to the anachronistic terms of the agreements that established the French colonial currency, the CFA Franc. Understanding the origins of the political instability that arose in this region requires a historical review and a sophisticated analysis of Franco-African relations, which begin with the outbreak of independence among French-speaking nations and extend to the unfolding of the complex economic cooperation agreements signed during the colonial period and maintained today.

This article discusses the role of the CFA franc and its future within the current Franco-African political context. This analysis is important because it highlights a crucial historical element: the CFA franc, which has been little explored in research on conflicts in Africa. Indeed, as Diallo (2018) points out, the CFA franc is a forgotten pillar of colonization. However, in this approach, we will explore how economic issues are as important as political ones in understanding the military uprising in these countries.

To this end, we conducted qualitative research, interpreting current political phenomena emerging within the France-Africa “symbiosis,” such as

3 The Franc Zone was created by France in 1939, before the Franco-African countries gained their independence (Verschave 1998). The primary objective was to strengthen trade between French colonies through a common market. However, in 1945, the French Empire decided to create a single currency for its colonies, transforming the Franc Zone into a monetary union. It is a monetary system that currently encompasses 14 African countries, not only French-speaking ones, but also other countries, such as Equatorial Guinea (a former Spanish colony), which joined in 1985, and Guinea-Bissau (a former Portuguese colony), which joined in 1997.

4 In the report made by BBC News (2024), it is possible to observe the population's dissatisfaction with the performance of former democratically elected regimes, at the same time as their feeling of dissatisfaction with France's presence on the continent is expressed. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rwtgJwrZuE4&t=491s>, accessed on 09/02/2024.

coups d'état and their relationship with anti-(neo)colonial struggles. Inferences were made using the hypothetical-deductive method proposed by Popper (1975), combining it with discourse analysis techniques and bibliographic research in primary and secondary sources, such as books, articles, theses, documentaries, newspapers, and interviews.

As usual, the article contains four sections in addition to the introduction and conclusion. The first section briefly conceptualized neocolonialism; the second explored the independence of Franco-African countries and the establishment of *Françafrique*; the third section analyzed Franco-African economic relations; and the fourth section analyzed the outbreak of coups d'état in the region and the rejection of French neocolonialism.

A brief conceptualization of neocolonialism

It is common among researchers of African politics to use the term “independence” to refer to “decolonized” African countries. The term itself is not incorrect, but it does not define the status of African states within the modern world-system, since most, if not all, of these states systematically depend on the West to ensure the challenges of internal governance.

We would argue that “decolonization” brought self-determination to African countries, not necessarily independence. Indeed, no country in the global South should be seen as “independent,” especially when it is not self-sufficient in the economic, political, and security sectors. Self-determination means free will, that is, a people have the freedom to define the political status of their country and be autonomous, without being subject to the imposition of any external force. In short, not all decolonized countries are independent, so many of them remain dependent and subservient to their former metropolis. The terms of the agreements governing economic cooperation between France and its former colonies demonstrate this (Pigeaud and Sylla 2018).

To this day, the Francophone countries of Africa suffer symbolic and material domination from Paris — conceived as neocolonialism, that is, the new form of colonization. This colonization is sometimes mild, sometimes not. African countries are legally independent, yet their economic and political systems remain governed by an invisible hand from the former metropolis. In fact, neocolonialism, as Uzoigwe (2019) attests, is a practice of granting independence to a country in order to transform it into a client. And, in this context, it is relevant to emphasize the complicit agency of internal sectors with imperial practices, as Fanon (1968) rightly emphasized.

Similarly, Nkrumah (2011), one of the main creators of this concept, drew attention to the persistence of colonialism even after the formal independence of African countries. For this author, neocolonialism represents the last stage of imperialism, which is not configured in neo-imperialism and, perhaps, is the most dangerous phase of imperialism, given its *modus operandi* difficult to decipher and combat.

According to Amin (1973), neocolonialism refers to a system of economic, political, and cultural influence implemented since colonization and which has manifested negatively in colonized countries during the post-colonial period. One of the indisputable examples of neocolonialism is the French colonial currency, the CFA Franc, created during colonial rule and which still persists in use, despite numerous complaints about its disadvantages for the economies of the Free Trade Zone.

It is important to emphasize that the neocolonialism being discussed in the African context, and which concerns us in this article, is the one that began in the second half of the 20th century. It is a system of political domination that uses economic, financial, and political agencies as a means of coercion to perpetuate itself (Lopes 2011). Thus, in the case of a sociopolitical crisis that unfolds into a popular uprising in colonial territories, local governments are replaced by other, equally subservient governments of the metropolis, either through military intervention or through the financing of fraudulent elections (Nkrumah 1967).

In the case of the Franc Zone, sectors that declare themselves anti-(neo)colonial have mobilized narratives according to which coups d'état are revolutionary movements aimed at breaking the remaining paternal ties with the colonizer, thus forming a truly sovereign and independent state. It is worth noting that, in Francophone Africa, as we demonstrate in the subsequent section, neocolonialism has its own specific name: *La Françafrique*.

From colonialism to neocolonialism: the creation of the *Françafrique* network

After decolonization, France became by far one of the former colonial powers that exerted the greatest cultural, political, economic, and military influence in Africa, especially in the French-speaking areas, despite the formal independence of its former colonies. This is due to the strategy promoted by France at the height of international pressure for decolonization between 1945 and 1980.

In this context, France, aware of the invincibility of anti-colonial movements, chose to negotiate recognition of the independence of its zone of influence through “peaceful” means. However, this sovereignty came with cooperation agreements in several areas, notably cultural, military, and economic. In the cultural sphere, the terms of these agreements obliged the colonized countries to adopt French as their official language. In the military sphere, the former colonies agreed to terms that provided for the free movement of French officers and the installation of French military bases in their territories, with the prerogative of French troops to intervene in the event of threats to French interests. Finally, in the economic sphere, the Franco-African countries agreed to join the Franc Zone and, consequently, to the use of the CFA Franc, the French colonial currency (Ligot 1964).

Thus, the agreements in question enabled France’s continued presence on the continent, exerting, to a certain extent, the same influence it had during colonization, despite some merely bureaucratic restrictions. This model of decolonization, amicable as it was, earned the French empire deep sympathy from African leaders, to the point that Félix Houphouët-Boigny, the first president of Côte d’Ivoire, used the term “*Françafrique*” for the first time in 1975, to demonstrate gratitude and the good relations he intended to maintain with the French state even after independence (Sena 2012; Verschave 1998; Verschave 2004).

The *Françafrique* cell was founded by Charles de Gaulle and Jacques Foccart in 1958, with the aim of maintaining influence on the continent during the post-colonial period (Verschave 1998)⁵. According to Chazan (1992), from the 1960s onward — the period following independence — the *Françafrique* relationship, after exhaustive investigation, was proven to be based on corruption and clientelism through development cooperation. For Verschave (1998), it is a network of raw material capture, integrating alienated African leaders and French rulers who struggle to maintain control of the former colonies, as a strategy to gain access to the inputs necessary to fuel Paris’s economic structure.

Since the beginning of the 20th century, France has adopted a strategy of political and educational subordination, granting scholarships to selected African leaders with the intention of becoming future allies. One example was the leader and first president of Senegal, Sédar Senghor, who was awarded

⁵ At that time, in the European context, the idea prevailed that for a country to be considered a world power, it needed to be self-sufficient in natural resources (Marques 2017). And France was (and still is) dependent on the natural resources of its former colonies. For example, Algeria is recognized by the French government as its main source of oil and gas (Verschave 1998).

a scholarship to a French educational institution in 1928 (Sena 2012). He later became a Senegalese deputy in the French National Assembly. Similarly, Omar Bongo of Gabon also received military training at a French institution and was a member of the French Secret Service. He later became president of his country for 42 years, or rather, until his death.

In the context of the Cold War, when one part of Africa embraced Soviet socialism and another embraced capitalism, France entered the post-independence conflict, employing a strategy of providing economic, military, and political “support” to help its native allies come to power; those already there received special aid to be reelected and continue to govern with “security” (Sirag 2014; Anani 2023). This argument corroborates Verschave’s (2004) observation, when the author states that France’s African policy is extremely hostile to democracy, given its arbitrary positions and interventions in favor of leaders seen as “friends of France”. In other words, only those rulers who support the aggressive presence of the former metropolis and turn a blind eye to the paternalistic and exploitative relationship of *Françafrique* come to power and remain in power.

Thus, the benefited African leaders, in turn, facilitate France’s access to natural resources and prioritize French companies in contracts for services of high economic relevance, a fact that leads the European country to increasingly crystallize its influence in the region and widen its large advantage over its competitors in the African market. Verschave (2004) accurately addresses the role of African leaders in France’s dominance on the continent. It is therefore clear that political instability in these countries partly derives from the clientelistic relationship between the French state and some African leaders, as they create a network of resource control for relative gains that guarantee only the maintenance of the metropolis’ *status quo* and the perks of a restricted group of native puppets.

Currently, among self-proclaimed anti-imperialist sectors, the term *Françafrique* is used to characterize France’s neocolonial domination of its former colonies. Thus, the lexicon of *Françafrique* has been articulated to question the independence of the region’s countries.

Faced with these tensions, France has promised to end the asymmetries of *Françafrique* (Oliveira and Lima 2022), but the mechanisms of colonial domination have not been readjusted to date. Arbitrary interventions, or those lacking any plausible justification, have not ceased, so Paris has continued to use the legal backing of military agreements to coerce and defend its geopolitical and economic interests on the continent. The interventions in Libya and Mali in 2011, and in Côte d’Ivoire in 2013, speak volumes about France’s

“realpolitik” on the continent and the inconsistencies between discourse and practice. Regarding economic agreements, the deterioration of the terms of trade and the injustices within the Franco-African monetary union have not been remedied, as we will examine in detail in the following stages of this text.

It is clear, therefore, that France exerts enormous influence on the African continent, controlling its former colonies even after those nations' independence. However, the secret of this influence lies in the agreements made with Franco-African countries and the support of some African leaders co-opted and kept close to the neocolonial aspirations of *Françafrique*.

The traps of the Franc Zone

The Franc Zone was created in 1939 before the Franco-African countries gained their independence. The primary objective was to boost trade between French colonies through a common market. In 1945, France created a single currency for its colonies, the CFA Franc. Thus, the Franc Zone became a Monetary and Economic Union.

It is a monetary system that currently encompasses not only the Franco-African countries, but also other countries, such as Equatorial Guinea (a former Spanish colony), which joined in 1985, and Guinea-Bissau (a former Portuguese colony), which joined the system in 1997. It can be said that the Franc Zone was one of the greatest strategies of control and domination among the colonial powers, whose anachronistic terms have not been changed since its creation, even after many studies have proven its shortcomings for the integrated economies (Pigeaud and Sylla 2018).

The French state claims that the creation of a single currency for its colonies was intended to protect them from a sharp devaluation of the French franc after World War II, but its effectiveness illustrates otherwise (Ligot 1964). The truth is that, at worst, the terms that united these economies need to be changed and adapted to contemporary times, since, instead of boosting local socioeconomic development, they are exacerbating their dependence on the metropolis.

For your information, the currency in question is produced in Paris, with the Central Bank of France as the only institution authorized to print and convert it into the euro. Furthermore, its exchange rate has not changed since 1999, meaning that 1 euro corresponds to 0.0015 CFA francs (Marques 2017). This limits the commercial activities of countries that use CFA francs, given the impossibility of printing the currency in banks other than

the Central Bank of France, a fact that highlights these countries' dependence on the French institution. Furthermore, the currency in question is highly devalued in the international market, so exchange rate fluctuations favor other currencies, such as the euro and the dollar, for example.

It is immediately clear how detrimental this cooperation is to Franco-African companies and how France can control these countries' trade with it, potentially using it to gain geopolitical advantages in the African market. Sena (2012) confirms the previous argument when he states that, in 1994, the African countries of the Franc Zone suffered an economic crisis provoked by France itself due to the 50% devaluation of the local currency. This illustrates the vulnerability and lack of sovereignty of African countries in relation to France. It is clear, therefore, that with this system, French companies are able to obtain commodities at an affordable price, since their state has the power to manipulate the Franc Zone's economic system to its advantage and devalue the local currency to achieve a greater surplus.

Furthermore, the data show that the CFA franc has reduced the competitiveness of its users in the international market. According to Nubukpo (2016), the Franc Zone lost approximately 40% of its competitiveness in the trade of cotton and other raw materials with other countries using stronger currencies. They are also targets of deteriorating terms of trade because they buy foreign products at exorbitant prices in stronger currencies and sell their raw materials in devalued local currency. In other words, foreign countries buy African products at low prices because they buy in CFA francs, and export their products to the continent at high prices because they sell in dollars or euros, these currencies being more valued than the CFA franc in the international arena.

In fact, the French currency failed to even satisfactorily drive trade between the Franc Zone countries, something expected of monetary integration: facilitating trade between member countries. For example, in 2014, trade between the union countries fluctuated between 2% and 3%, a trend well below expectations, especially when compared with other regions, such as the Eurozone, where 60% of trade occurred within its internal borders alone (Marques 2017).

The disadvantages faced by African countries partially justify the hindrance to economic development. This is due to outdated terms that have not been updated to mitigate contemporary challenges. For example, when producing money, the Central Bank of France requires its clients to leave 50% of their foreign exchange surpluses in a French operating account; that is, only half of the money produced for the Franc Zone is permitted to circulate

(Kormaz 2019). However, this portion is insufficient to secure the African market, and, furthermore, the common currency pact makes it difficult for African countries to obtain credit from banks and investments from large corporations.

Banks are generally reluctant to grant credit to countries that lack full control over their capital because half of their revenues are managed by foreign institutions. Marques (2017) states that the credits offered by members of the Franc Zone correspond to 20% of the GDP (Gross Domestic Product) of all countries in this organization, while in the Eurozone, credits are equivalent to 100% of the region's GDP.

Furthermore, the lack of sufficient capital in the African market would result in citizens' low purchasing power, making it unattractive for large investments; without investment from large companies, socio-economic development becomes increasingly stunted. Thus, French companies are the only ones able to make a safe investment in this region, with a clear advantage over other international companies.

There is no doubt that the privileged relationship between France and its former colonies has given French companies an advantage over other competing firms, such as those from the United States (US) and China, for example, in the race for the African market. Franco-African leaders prioritize French national/multinational companies such as Total, Areva, Bolloré, Bouygues, and TotalEnergies, in cases of contracts of high economic relevance (Ligot 1964; Diallo 2018), thus leading the former metropolis to widen its advantage over its rivals. For example, the oil company Total, created in 1924 during the colonial period, is present in 36 African countries with billion-dollar contracts for the extraction of energy resources. It is one of the companies with the most gas stations on the continent. This is due to the continuation of the colonial pact that obliged Francophone countries to negotiate their natural resources primarily with French corporations.

However, French influence on the continent appears to have suffered some setbacks, losing ground to its Chinese competitor after internal backlash against unfair contracts. For example, in 2019, the French company Bolloré lost a contract to build railways connecting Ivory Coast and Benin to a Chinese company (Kormaz 2019). Furthermore, African leaders who took power after the coups (2020–2023) argue that they will end France's privileges and open up more space for other powers, including Russia, China, and the United States.

Among French-speaking countries, Niger is France's main trading partner. Indeed, the European country's energy security is highly dependent

on Niger's uranium, which is why the country is home to several French mining companies. The coup leader, Mohamed Bazoum, demolished the French military base established in Niger since colonial times and claims he will withdraw the country from the Franc Zone and expel French companies operating there. Similarly, the other states affected by the coups, Mali and Burkina Faso, have threatened to leave the Franc Zone.

These decisions will certainly impact the French treasury, not only because of the profits the CFA franc brings to French operating accounts, but also because of the tariff barriers that Franco-African countries may impose on French companies as they bargain for access to natural resources. This will result in a partial loss of French influence and the rise of its competitors in the African market, such as China, which has been gaining prominence in this regard.

From the historical description of the terms that established the CFA Franc, it is clear that it was created to maintain the dependencies of former French colonies in the post-colonial period. Thus, renouncing the CFA Franc would mean dismantling one of the strongholds of *Françafrique*. However, given France's influence over some African rulers, the Franc Zone's eviction will only be possible, first, with their removal, and, second, with the creation of a single currency that represents Pan-Africanist values and values Africa's development based on its principles and terms.

Narratives of coups d'état and their relations to the Franc Zone

A coup d'état is defined as the unconstitutional seizure of political power, that is, without a fair and transparent election in which the people choose their ruler (Luttwak 1969; Mwai 2023). This illegal act is vehemently condemned by the international community, based on democratic principles. In the African context, justifications for launching coups d'état also link them to class struggles between the native bourgeoisie that formed during colonialism and the disenfranchised natives of colonization — revolutionaries who never bowed to the dictates of the lords and their indigenous subjects (Fanon 1968; Nkrumah 1967; Marx and Engels 2012; Nkrumah 2018). Thus, at least in some cases, coups began to be tolerated by the population, as they aligned with the history of colonization and the process of anti-colonial struggles.

The colonists not only divided the territories, but also created, through the old tactic known as “divide and rule,” social classes within colonial African

society (Nkrumah 2018). A group of African leaders was co-opted to form the native colonialist bourgeoisie, granted certain privileges, such as literacy, for example, which set them apart from the majority of the non-alienated colonized (Fanon 1968; Verschave 1998). This bourgeoisie underwent a process of co-optation, decorated, and trained to eventually take the place of the colonists and govern the rest of the colonized. Thus, for reasons of survival or greed, they became conservative and reactionary to any anti-colonial revolution articulated by the working class/underprivileged under colonialism.

In a sense, Africa was divided between reactionary natives fighting to maintain colonialism and revolutionary natives who valued the continent's liberation from colonial rule. These divisions hampered the struggle for independence and contributed to the failure of Pan-Africanism, the movement that emerged during the 19th century in the United States to unify the African peoples of the continent and the diaspora against racism and in favor of anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism. Nevertheless, resistance to full autonomy continued in some African countries, mainly Portuguese- and English-speaking ones, and independence was achieved at the cost of the revolutionary nationalists' blood and sweat. In the Franc Zone, as seen throughout this discussion, anti-colonial movements were very tolerant, which is why their independence was not solidified.

Thus, in the post-independence period, coups emerged as consequences of class struggle, in which nationalists aimed to oust politicians serving neocolonialism. There are also situations in which alienated reactionaries usurp power to implement the ideals of the neocolonial masters who finance their rise to power. Thus, against the backdrop of the coups that occurred in the Franc Zone between 2020 and 2023, diverse interests stand out, among which are anti-(neo)colonial motivations against the elites and Franco-African policies that have remained active since colonization. As abhorrent and undemocratic as any type of coup may be, it is clear that in Africa there is, in some cases, an anti-colonial insurgency component.

For example, the 2023 coup d'état in Gabon is evidence of the fall of the Bongo family dynasty. The then-deposed president, Ali Bongo, who held power for 14 years, is the eldest son of Omar Bongo, a former French Secret Service officer who ruled Gabon for 42 years. In other words, the country was ruled by the same family (father and son) for 56 years. Indeed, this coup reveals a struggle for national sovereignty, which could also affect the country's redemocratization process if the perpetrators decide to hand over power to the people through the organization of fair and transparent elections. In this sense, the authors Suma and Caomique (2024), in the

work entitled “*Golpes em África: desfrancização e redemocratização no Sahel*”, argue that these insurrections give rise to decolonizing strategies that could pave the way for a process of re-democratization in countries with weakened democratic situations.

Author Chinweizu (1975), in his work entitled “The West And The Rest Us: White Predators, Black Slavers And The African Elite” attests to how France contributes to political and economic instability in Africa. International politics expert Simon Pascal Alain Handy argued in an interview with France 24 that the recent coups d’état in the Sahel region should be seen as a means of liberating these nations from the legacies of colonialism (Handy 2023).

As mentioned, France’s presence on the continent was established through the *Françafrique* network, designed to control the exploitation of natural resources and financial capital in Africa. Cooperation agreements with its former colonies are cited as the origins of the subaltern economic conditions and incessant political instability in the Franco-African context (Pigeaud and Sylla 2018; Sirag 2014; Sylla 2024). Thus, the expulsion of French troops and diplomatic corps, as well as the manifesto for exiting the Franc Zone in Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso, have been interpreted as signs of a collective rejection of France and a quest for economic sovereignty based on the collapse of what we consider the foundation of French neocolonialism: the CFA Franc.

Indeed, the debates surrounding exit from the Franc Zone and the possibility of creating an alternative currency are as old as the CFA Franc itself. Indeed, there were African leaders who never agreed with the terms of Franco-African economic integration proposed by the metropolis at the time. Since then, the French currency has become a focal point of internal conflicts among African countries, and between some of them and France. After its establishment, both activists who opposed monetary integration and countries that considered leaving it suffered reprisals, not only from France but also from African leaders aligned with the ideals of French imperialism.

The first country to reject partial independence from the French colonial empire was Guinea-Conakry in 1958, when its leaders, through a referendum, declared “*non à la colonisation*”. Subsequently, the African country declared its withdrawal from the Franc Zone and immediately announced the creation of an independent currency called the “Guinean Franc”. This decision led France to isolate its former colony and sought to destabilize it by producing counterfeit Guinean Franc banknotes and secretly distributing them to the population, thus condemning the country to uncontrollable infla-

tion and an unprecedented socioeconomic crisis. In short, Guinea-Conakry managed to overcome the crisis and remains outside the integration process with no prospect of rejoining.

In 1963, Mali's then-president decided to abandon the Franc Zone to create the "Malian Franc", three years after his country gained independence. As a result, the country suffered economic and political isolation from its West African neighbors and, of course, from France. Similarly, Togolese President Sylvanus Olimpios devised an ambitious project for monetary emancipation that proposed the creation of a currency for his country. However, the currency never became institutionalized, as Sylvanus was assassinated that same year by a group of French-trained militias — among whose members was the autocratic Etienne Gnassingbe Eyadema, who would later become president of Togo in 1967, a position he held for 38 years, until his death (Louati 2023).

At the regional level, economic integration organizations and monetary union initiatives were created among African countries, especially those in West Africa, a region dominated by former French colonies. Notable among these initiatives is the West African Monetary Union (WAEMU), which includes French-speaking countries such as Benin, Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, Senegal, and Togo. WAEMU is a monetary union within the regional integration organization ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States), created in 1975 and currently comprising 15 African countries. It is important to note that, since 2000, ECOWAS has also included the West African Monetary Zone (WAMZ) for countries⁶ not part of WAEMU (Mendes 2014). In other words, plans to replace the CFA franc were already in place, but the political and institutional arrangements to implement this ambition were lacking.

However, the idea of creating a single currency for the continent was first floated in 1983 in Guinea-Conakry, during the summit of heads of state (Mendes 2014). It was also on this occasion that the ECOWAS Monetary Cooperation Program was created. However, there have been many obstacles to its progress, as monetary cooperation among West African states lagged far behind in terms of macroeconomic policy convergence, thus leading to the postponement of the implementation of a single currency until 2004, 2009, 2015, and 2020. This is due to the lack of commitment of African states, as the 2016 ECOWAS report shows:

6 Ghana, Gambia, Guinea, Liberia, Nigeria and Sierra Leone.

[...] only one country (Liberia) has managed to meet the established criteria. With the exception of the budget deficit/GDP ratio, most WAEMU countries respect the 5 convergence criteria, except Togo which follows 4 criteria, with the public debt/GDP ratio above the limit. Ghana, Sierra Leone and The Gambia are the furthest behind in terms of convergence, all with only 2 criteria met. When it comes to complying with fiscal discipline, the difficulties of ECOWAS member states are noteworthy, particularly the budget deficit limit set at 3% of GDP. In 2016, only 3 countries (Guinea-Conakry, Liberia and Nigeria) managed to stay within the limits. There is also persistent inflation in Nigeria, Ghana and Sierra Leone, with rates of approximately 15.7%, 17.5% and 10.8% respectively (Djalo 2019, n.p., our translation)⁷.

The current Franco-African political situation has once again brought up debates about monetary independence in Africa. Reports of economic depression led ECOWAS to announce, in 2021, the new convergence pact for the single African currency project — the ECO — which is scheduled to launch in 2027.

It can be inferred that France's growing unpopularity in the region and the insurgents' rhetoric about the need to "decolonize" monetary policies and institutions may hasten the convergence of African monetary cooperation toward the establishment of an independent currency, likely the ECO. In other words, the series of coups d'état that occurred in the Franc Zone heralds the beginning of the end of the era of French colonial currency.

Conclusion

Decolonization conjures up a controversial sociopolitical context, where ruptures blend with continuities, suggesting a redefinition of the independence of colonized countries. In the case of Francophone Africa,

⁷ In the original: "[...] apenas um país (a Libéria) conseguiu respeitar os critérios estabelecidos. Com a exceção do rácio do défice orçamental/PIB, a maioria dos países da UEMOA respeitam os 5 critérios de convergência, exceto o Togo que segue 4 critérios, com o rácio da dívida pública/PIB acima do limite. O Gana, a Serra Leoa e a Gâmbia são os mais atrasados em termos de convergência, todos com apenas 2 critérios respeitados. Nota-se as dificuldades dos Estados membros da CEDEAO no que diz respeito ao cumprimento da disciplina fiscal, nomeadamente o limite do défice orçamental fixado a 3% do PIB. Em 2016 apenas 3 países (Guiné-Conakry, Libéria e Nigéria) conseguiram manter-se nos limites. Nota-se igualmente, a persistência da inflação na Nigéria, Gana e Serra Leoa com índices aproximadamente de 15,7%, 17,5% e 10,8% respectivamente" (Djalo 2019, s.p.).

it was clear that French colonization solidified the structures of economic domination, leaving African states increasingly dependent.

In a way, this generated economic depression, popular uprisings, and a certain aversion to rulers who maintained close ties with the European power. Therefore, behind some of the recent coups d'état in Francophone Africa, there are interests in removing these rulers, but there are also fundamental rejections of French neocolonial policies and the Franc Zone, as well as desires to establish an independent currency, since the end of French neocolonialism in Africa cannot be discussed without the effective deinstitutionalization of its key instrument: the CFA Franc.

Nevertheless, it is also necessary to recognize the ambiguity and risks of these uprisings, because, despite the emancipatory rhetoric disseminated by the insurgents, coups are always attacks on democracy. Furthermore, it cannot be overlooked that neocolonial dynamics have flirted with other international powers, such as China and Russia, which, after the spread of “anti-French policies” in the region, have emerged as key players in the continent’s geopolitical landscape. This suspicion leads us to suggest future research that engages with the challenges of post-coup governance and the transformations of the systemic order within the Franco-African political and economic context.

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the instrumentalization of the CFA Franc for France's neo-colonial domination in Africa and its future in the current Franco-African political conjuncture, following the series of coups d'état that took place in the Franc Zone between 2020 and 2023. In order to bring clarity to the impacts of the events in question, we turned to historical narratives, starting with the process of decolonization to the unfolding of the complex economic agreements signed between France and its former African colonies. From there, we explored what might have been the origins of the coups, their consequences for the French colonial currency, and we also highlighted the narrative that they constitute an uprising against the economic imperialism of the European power on the African continent. The study articulates anti- and post-colonial theories and methodologies, and develops qualitative analyses.

KEYWORDS

Coups d'état. Franc Zone. CFA Franc.

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THE INTERNATIONAL POLITICS OF RENEWABLE ENERGY AND REGENERATION IN THE CONTEXT OF CLIMATE ADAPTATION AND MITIGATION: PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES FOR AFRICA

Kenneth Chukwuemeka Nwoko¹



Introduction

Africa is at a critical intersection in the broader global struggle against climate change, as well as in efforts to adapt to its impact. On the one hand, the continent has contributed least to greenhouse gas emissions and carbon pollution relative to its size and population. On the other hand, it stands at the forefront of the devastating impacts of climate change: from the intensifying desertification of the Sahel and Southern Africa to droughts and extreme weather in East Africa, as well as rising sea levels undermining coastal cities such as Lagos and Accra. These woes are compounded by a host of pressures that threaten local ecosystems and the ability of communities to adapt to the changing environment, including land grabs, and extractive and colonial resource exploitation. Unfortunately, the current approaches to the international politics surrounding climate change do not equitably address the needs of African nation-states or the continent's people (Grimaldi 2018).

Taking the ideas of regeneration and renewability as a starting point, energy production and consumption represents one of the most significant global political challenges, as well as opportunities. For African nation-states, questions about how to address energy poverty — a condition that afflicts 600 million people on the continent — while rapidly industrialising are para-

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mount. Nevertheless, the international politics of renewable energy is crucial beyond Africa's borders, with geopolitical implications fermenting across the globe. Renewable energy resources and technologies could reshape power in Africa. Where colonialism and postcolonial approaches to extraction emplaced power in largely exogenous metropolitan cities, the continent possesses significant renewable energy resources — onshore wind, offshore wind, solar, hydropower, and geothermal — that, if developed in sovereignty and directed towards the needs of local populations, could address energy poverty and foster local industrialisation. However, addressing climate change and, more broadly, moving towards sustainable production and consumption requires excavation beyond Africa's borders. Thus, there is a need to investigate the international politics of renewable energy, with Africa at the centre. To do this, three research questions are posed: 1) What are the essential policies and regulatory frameworks for enabling renewable energy initiatives in Africa? 2) What are the prospects concerning renewable energy implementation and regeneration in Africa, and what barriers are encountered? 3) What should be considered in the international politics of renewable energy initiatives, especially regarding developing and emerging countries, particularly in Africa?

This article employs a qualitative approach, utilising primary sources that include oral and telephone interviews with selected respondents. These interviewees comprise researchers from the University of Lagos and the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs in Lagos. The article also incorporates newspaper reports, particularly online articles, along with information from the websites of international news agencies such as Reuters and Moroccan World News, as well as reports from international organisations and agencies like the World Bank, IEA, and World Economic Forum. This data is further enriched by observations drawn from the author's extensive residence in Africa as a development expert and researcher. Additionally, secondary sources including relevant journal articles, books, and online reports were consulted. The collected data were examined using content analysis.

The Global Context of Renewable Energy and Climate Change, Agreements and Commitments

Global awareness regarding the impact of climate change and the need to adapt to this existential threat is rising due to its global consequences on humanity and Earth. With this awareness, renewable energy is increasingly recognised as a pivotal and a priori solution to mitigate the impact of

climate change by drastically reducing the current status quo of greenhouse gas emissions (Karim et al. 2018). Energy, being the backbone of almost all anthropogenic activities, is the largest contributor to greenhouse gas emissions. It is believed, therefore, that transitioning to clean and renewable energy sources could radically reduce greenhouse gas emissions from the energy sector. Several international agreements have been enacted to combat climate change, with the latest and most prominent being the Paris Agreement in 2016 where global cooperation and commitment in promoting renewable energy technologies were framed (Falkner 2016).

The global policies and commitments, treaties, treaty groups, and partnership efforts that shape renewable energy policies at a global level essentially revolve around international agreements. Since the dawn of the new millennium, the world has come together in a number of high-level gatherings of heads of state, forums, and negotiations to address the growing challenges of climate change. In this regard, several important international treaties, initiatives, and partnerships have been established, with the Kyoto Protocol and the Paris Agreement as mentioned earlier being the two most significant legally binding treaties on greenhouse gas emissions reduction and climate actions involving the participation of most countries, including African nations (Madubuegwu et al. 2021). While the Kyoto Protocol largely focuses on regulating developed countries to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions, the central tenet of the Paris Agreement is the bottom-up nationally determined pledges approach, where both developing and developed countries are expected to take action towards reducing greenhouse gas emissions according to their national capabilities and circumstances (Karim et al. 2018).

Besides these legal treaties, a number of international organisations significantly champion and advance the global renewable energy agenda, such as the United Nations (UN) and its associated international bodies like the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA), alongside long-established organisations like the World Bank. Since the establishment of the UN, numerous important global summits related to the environment and energy have been organised, leading to significant global frameworks that shape the future of world energy in the development and transition to renewable energy systems, such as the Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) (Bolarinwa 2024). Starting from the 2015 Paris summit, the global community has committed to pursuing a range of high-level global goals on climate mitigation and adaptation strategies and actions, including the transition to net-zero energy systems by mid-century globally — with only

the poorer African nations being burdened with more ambitious obligations (Yakubu 2025).

The Kyoto Protocol and the Paris Agreement impose obligations regarding greenhouse gas emissions accounting, compliance, and climate action, exerting systematic influence or pressure over countries' energy policies and transitions from fossil fuel reliance to renewable energy systems (Mor et al. 2023). This is particularly true for African nations, and among these agreements, the Paris Agreement has a more systematic influence on African countries' energy policies and choices regarding renewable energy systems (Madubuegwu et al. 2021; Bolarinwa 2024). Nonetheless, it is important to note that international commitments generally come with contentious issues, particularly concerning compliance and accountability. A notable contentious question is who is to blame for the failure to adhere to international treaties, especially in the context of developing nations. Despite the widespread ratification of international treaty agreements, most developing countries have historically struggled to meet their obligations. This is partly due to the incompatibility between the obligations specified in the treaties and the domestic socio-political circumstances of these nations (Ojo 2021). Much of this tension arises from the perception among decision-makers in developing countries that the treaties represent alien impositions (Mravcová, 2025). On the other hand, the global justice debates emphasise the moral obligations of the relatively more prosperous industrialised nations to assist developing countries in meeting their treaty obligations, arguing that it is inequitable to hold these nations to standards they are unable to achieve (Newell et al. 2021). However, it has also been observed that the establishment of institutions or frameworks to help developing countries meet their international obligations tends to neglect questions of accountability and compliance (Aworawo 2024). In fact, there has been persistently little discussion of what might happen if a developing country either does not seek assistance or refuses offered help. Moreover, the compliance mechanisms and accountability systems of the treaty regimes do not take into consideration the inability of developing countries to comply with their treaty obligations due to resource constraints and systemic inequities in the global political economy (Mor et al. 2023).

Thus, between these two extremes — the compliance challenge of developing countries and the climate justice perspective on this challenge — little framework or consideration exists for addressing the concerns of the treaty regimes themselves. Despite the well-acknowledged systemic inequities in the global political economy, the feasibility of developing countries complying with the imposed obligations under international treaties is rarely

questioned. Overall, the international treaties, aside from their contested political legitimacy regarding equity considerations, fail to demand that these nations address the most punitive burdens of compliance within the global polity (Mor et al. 2023). This clearly implies the need for a systematic review and stronger treaty frameworks to assist African nations in transitioning towards renewable energy systems.

Renewable Energy Technologies and Their Potential in Africa

The urgent need for climate change adaptation and mitigation requires a global shift towards renewable energy sources. This desired shift towards renewable energy sources goes beyond economic growth imperatives. Operationally, renewable energy technologies can be deployed centrally or installed close to the point of energy consumption. The former option requires a substantial capital outlay and the establishment of a large energy distribution network. These infrastructure requirements make resolving energy poverty highly complex in many rural communities in Africa (Awo-rawo 2024). Therefore, the latter option is more feasible, as renewable energy technologies (RETs) can be harnessed individually or through small clusters to meet local energy needs. Additionally, energy generated locally reduces reliance on expensive fossil fuels that are not readily available and decreases expenditure on energy transportation. It also provides a more sustainable path towards economic growth and industrialisation, as it can create local employment opportunities and mitigate environmental concerns associated with energy sourcing.

In terms of renewable energy potential in Africa, the continent has abundant resources of renewable energy, which, if harnessed, could satisfy the continent's energy needs while simultaneously addressing climate change concerns. Solar energy, for instance, is captured through photovoltaic and solar thermal technologies. Photovoltaic technologies may be deployed at various scales, from large plants to rooftop installations in urban areas, down to individual household systems. Trough and power tower technologies are examples of solar thermal power plants, which are usually deployed at a larger scale. The results of solar irradiation mapping carried out for Africa clearly illustrate that the continent is geographically advantaged for harnessing solar energy (Quansah et al. 2016). More than 80% of the continent offers excellent, very high potential, and a lot of conceivable areas for solar energy

harvesting (Alam 2024). Indeed, Africa receives, on average, the highest levels of solar radiation on the planet, which bodes well for the continent's ambitions to make the sun its main source of energy by leading the world in solar technologies. Africa's geographical advantage of vast expanses of land near the equator, with high levels of sunlight, presents an immense solar resource potential. The continent holds about 39% of the world's solar potential, and in North Africa alone, the solar resource is greater than the total annual energy supply needs of the entire continent (Grimaldi 2018). Moreover, technological advancements and a declining cost trend for solar energy are making the uptake of solar technologies increasingly competitive. In addition, solar technologies come in various forms, including fixed, tilted, or tracking photovoltaic (PV) and concentrated solar power (CSP) systems. Also known as solar thermal electric systems, CSP systems combine solar energy, mirrors, and steam generators to produce electricity.

Numerous ongoing solar energy projects are scattered across African nations, from South Africa's 200 MW concentrated solar power plant to the 140 MW photovoltaic solar facility in Burkina Faso (Mas'ud et al. 2016). Likewise, Rwanda's photovoltaic solar farms and Ethiopia's massive 100 MW solar photovoltaic power plant in the Somali Regional State are pioneering project implementations of solar energy on the continent. Solar energy is crucial for Africa and presents numerous opportunities, advantages, and benefits, including cheap, decentralised energy access, job creation, a smaller sunk cost than conventional energy systems, and, above all, cleaner, greener energy to combat climate change. Similarly, solar energy is essential in Africa's quest to industrialise, transform, and modernise its economies. The continent's energy future must be based on renewables, with solar energy as a flagship technology, given that close to 600 million Africans live in energy poverty and are without electricity. However, the solar energy sector in Africa is burdened by numerous challenges, including high costs of solar technologies, limited local manufacturing and human skills and capacity, and a lack of proper infrastructure, among others. Hence, the need for policies and recommendations to foster the adoption, promotion, and deployment of solar energy is paramount. Solving the energy dilemma in Africa can be achieved through a rigorous, comprehensive approach to utilising renewable energy resources, with solar technologies as a centrepiece.

Similarly, wind energy is an important component of renewable energy, playing a crucial role in achieving energy security in Africa. The continent is endowed with vast renewable energy resources, including hydro, solar, wind, biomass, and geothermal. Wind energy is one of these resources — it is local, abundant, and cheaper than fossil fuels. With its lower carbon

intensity, wind energy is particularly suited to Africa, the continent most vulnerable to climate change (Abbas et al. 2020). The wind energy resource of Africa is estimated at 81,312 TWh per year, with a vast geographical distribution of potential across the continent (Abbas et al. 2020). Fifty-seven per cent of the resource potential is concentrated in three countries: Libya, Algeria, and Ethiopia. Libya holds the largest wind energy resource potential in Africa, followed by Algeria, Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, Morocco, Egypt, and Tunisia. These countries are leading the way in wind capacity installation across the continent. There has been political acceptance of renewable energy sources, particularly wind, in Africa, marked by the establishment of the African Renewable Initiative (AREI) in 2015. The drivers of wind energy development in Africa include South Africa, which aims to achieve 6,360 MW of wind power by 2030, with 69% of this coming from Independent Power Producers (IPPs) as part of the Renewable Energy Independent Power Producer Procurement Programme (REIPPPP). Morocco also plays a significant role as a driver of wind energy on the African continent. Wind energy can be exploited using onshore or offshore wind turbines. Onshore wind turbines could be viable in Southern Africa, where the coasts and escarpment create a wide range of sites to harness wind energy. There are also several inland areas with good wind potential (Grimaldi 2018). Offshore wind turbines are not currently feasible due to the high costs associated with their installation. However, the feasibility of wind energy exploitation along the coasts requires an expedient assessment in future studies.

Furthermore, Africa's rivers provide the continent with the means to satisfy both its current and anticipated future hydropower energy requirements. Hydropower is the second most significant renewable energy source globally. With its vast water resources, Africa has the potential to generate electricity from hydropower without relying on fossil fuels. There are already existing and operational hydropower projects across the continent, contributing to the national electricity grid in several African countries. Ethiopia is a leader in hydropower generation potential in Africa. The recently completed 640-megawatt (MW) Tekeze Hydropower Project has increased Ethiopia's overall hydropower generation capacity to over 1,600 MW (Adera and Alfredsen 2020). Ongoing hydropower projects include the Grand Millennium Dam, which is expected to generate about 5,250 MW upon completion (Taliotis et al. 2014). Similarly, Tanzania has completed the 184 MW Mtera Dam and is currently constructing another 75 MW dam on the Kihansi River (Domasa 2017). Across Africa, there is an aggregate potential hydropower generation capability of over 100,000 MW; however, only 30% of this potential has been developed thus far. Given the increasing scarcity of energy, it is now time

for Africa to seriously consider its vast hydropower potential and invest in the regeneration of dams on its water bodies and rivers (Mukheibir 2007).

In addition to being renewable, hydropower electricity generation is also very reliable. Even Africa's continental climate, which varies from desert to semi-arid savanna to tropical rainforest regions, would not disrupt the existence of such water bodies. Dammed water can even store local energy for several years during times of extreme drought. With an output of about 0.6 MW for every one million cubic metres of dammed water, tropical Africa can produce a significant energy source solely from the newly devised 100 billion cubic metre Lamu water dam in Kenya (Andeso 2025). Larger multi-country dams, such as those on the Congo River, could potentially generate up to 100,000 MW of power. The main drawback of hydropower is its tendency to generate large-scale, high-capacity energy. Whether large or medium-sized, hydropower-generating dams typically exceed the feasible limit of 1 MW and require the construction of annual civil engineering dams on rivers, which profoundly affects the river's natural ecosystem. In-stream hydropower plants could be deployed, especially in southern African countries where extensive river networks offer opportunities for small to medium devices to be developed at decentralised sites (Sanusi 2022).

Biomass energy can provide African countries with a renewable energy resource that is highly compatible with their energy needs. It comprises various biomass sources, ranging from woody biomass (such as firewood and charcoal) to agricultural residues (including cereal straws, cotton stalks, and maize cobs), dedicated biomass energy crops (e.g., *Jatropha* and *Azolla*), fast-growing tree species (e.g., eucalyptus and acacia), and municipal solid waste (organic waste). Africa is endowed with abundant biomass energy resources. A recent estimate indicates that 370 million tonnes of biomass residues are produced annually in Africa, of which 51.3% originates from agriculture, 32.5% from forests, and 16.2% from agroforestry (Röder et al. 2022). Biomass energy sources are often derived from waste materials generated by agriculture, animal husbandry, and daily activities. Therefore, the use of biomass energy can simultaneously offer solutions to the waste management problems frequently faced by African cities and rural areas.

Biomass energy can either be solid or gasified before utilisation. It is generally considered to be organic waste materials generated from agricultural activities, animal excreta, or plants growing naturally in an ecosystem. Therefore, biomass energy systems are usually designed at a local community scale, as the energy waste materials are typically generated locally. As a result, either on-site operations or energy transportation to a central plant would

be necessary. Locally deployed systems also provide dual economic growth opportunities, as they reduce reliance on energy transportation while creating jobs for the local community in the biomass energy conversion process. Biomass energy system applications range from simple combustion stoves to sophisticated power plant designs.

A good deal of successful biomass energy projects exist across Africa's diverse regions, demonstrating the technology's capacity to stimulate local economies. For example, in the Republic of Mali, biomass fuel briquettes were successfully produced from agricultural residues and marketed for household cooking. The briquettes were found to be more cost-effective than imported LPG (liquified petroleum gas) and charcoal fuels, providing income-generating work for many women who previously had no employment opportunities. In Uganda, a model was developed and widely promoted for converting residues from banana peeling into biomass briquettes for cleaner and more efficient cooking (Gumisirizaa et al. 2019).

Biomass energy has greater potential to deliver energy access to rural off-grid communities than other renewable energy technologies, such as solar PV or wind. Rural populations account for 58% of biomass energy use across Africa, often employing traditional biomass energy sources (e.g., fuel wood and charcoal) for cooking and heating (Akubue 2000; Grover et al. 1994; Hall and Patricia 1983). African countries also possess rich biomass energy resources that remain unexploited and are often suitable for small-scale energy technology applications. However, biomass energy development faces multiple challenges (Ebhodaghe et al. 2023). The first challenge is sustainability. The widespread use of firewood has already led to serious deforestation and forest degradation problems in many African cities. Biomass energy often competes with food production; converting agricultural land into biomass energy plantations reduces food supply and increases food prices. An integrated approach that considers food security, energy security, and ecosystem integrity is essential for biomass energy planning.

Second, biomass energy systems are usually small-scale, requiring extensive land and labour investments, often rendering them socially and economically less attractive than competing large-scale systems. Without strong policies to support biomass energy development, the opportunity for biomass energy to contribute to Africa's climate change mitigation and energy access efforts could be rapidly lost.

Challenges and Opportunities in Implementing Renewable Energy Projects in Africa

As the continent with the lowest access to energy (IRENA and AfDB 2022; Baskaran and Coste 2024) and the fastest population growth, substantial energy investment is necessary for Africa to transition to a low-carbon growth strategy (Savvidou et al. 2021). However, only USD 20-25 billion in public finance (less than 1% of the global total) is currently provided to African energy systems annually (Savvidou et al. 2021). Furthermore, the energy funding has been primarily for fossil fuel development (>70%), leading to significant multidimensional risk exposure (insecurity, uncertainty, volatility) and unsustainable, catastrophically harmful outcomes (since 2020, more than 500 million people have been newly exposed to poverty, hunger, health crises, and forced displacement), with legally unaccountable finance often failing to align with the priorities of recipient nations.

Africa is endowed with vast renewable energy resources, with an estimated economically exploitable potential of 350,000 TWh/y for hydro, 4,400 GW for wind, and 5,000-10,000 GW for solar energy (Nyika and Dinka 2024). Nonetheless, critical barriers to implementing renewable energy projects across Africa — totalling 17 for large-scale and 12 for off-grid renewable energy projects — have been identified (Mahrous 2016). Improved energy access is pivotal for Africa's sustainable development, requiring the deployment of an additional 600 gigawatts (GW) of energy supply across 55 countries by 2030. Consequently, an investment of USD 924 billion in renewable energy infrastructure must be facilitated, with 95% of this needed to undertake priority projects in countries with the most adequate frameworks. Therefore, understanding the opportunities and challenges in renewable energy projects is crucial for energy planners, policymakers, and local investors.

For large-scale renewable energy projects, the most critical barriers are identified as inadequate grid infrastructure, limited availability of financing, an unstable and unfriendly policy environment, and a lack of bankable power purchase agreements. Similarly, for off-grid renewable energy projects, the most critical barriers include difficult terrain and accessibility, limited availability of financing, an unstable and unfriendly policy environment, and a lack of proper needs assessment studies. Finally, investment in renewable energy infrastructure is essential for successfully implementing both large-scale and off-grid renewable energy projects. This requires adequate investment in the transmission network to take advantage of large-scale renewable energy resources that are remotely located from demand centres, as well as

the development of a sound regulatory framework to attract local and international investors, which is imperative to avoid situations where countries have inadequate frameworks. Investing in the development of innovative financing and technology transfer partnerships with donor countries could provide a way to address many of the barriers facing off-grid renewable energy projects.

Infrastructure and Investment

The advancement of renewable energy projects significantly relies on infrastructure and investment. The current energy infrastructure in Africa, the most inadequate continent regarding energy access, hinders the deployment of renewable technologies. Even with a set of policies guaranteeing broad technical and financial support, past experiences indicate that significant capital investment is required to build energy generation and distribution networks (Mahrous 2016). Estimates suggest that Africa will need US\$55 billion per year in investment for energy development and access by 2030 (IEA 2024). Without massive public funding at the continental level to address various broader socio-economic problems, the private sector must finance the projects. However, the private sector is unlikely to engage in renewable energy investment when political instability threatens the security of its investments. Furthermore, potential investors require clear, predictable policy frameworks that guarantee transparent regulations and returns. Consequently, while African governments must take the lead in mobilising investment, they must ensure that political will aligns with sound economic policy. The provision of public infrastructure is essential for creating an environment in which private investment can flourish. Nonetheless, a central role for the public sector does not preclude a crucial role for the private sector in financing projects. Upon completing public infrastructure, the private sector can become involved in its operation, often more efficiently than the public sector. Attracting private investment often requires public funding to kick-start the project. International funding organisations consider investing in public infrastructure in anticipation of a shift to private operation. However, even without public infrastructure, several privately funded alternative energy projects have been realised in Africa. Climate finance has focused on energy infrastructure in the past few years, which is crucial for Africa and, in this context, will be interested in renewable projects. Nonetheless, several limitations abound (Fulga and Yao 2024). Renewable energy generation projects cannot be realised without addressing barriers such as limited access to public funding necessary for the planning stages; political instability and corruption threatening the return on investment; a poorly educated workforce

jeopardising successful project implementation; and a rudimentary regulatory framework that fails to guarantee profitability (Pillay et al. 2025). Thus, while opportunities for renewable energy investment in Africa do exist, it is essential to understand the needs and concerns of potential investors to tackle the crucial barriers to investment.

Policy and Regulatory Frameworks

Robust policy and regulatory frameworks are vital for enabling renewable energy in Africa. An effective investment policy, along with a regulatory and institutional framework, must be in place to promote investment in energy resources and ensure their sustainable development. Renewable energy (RE) regulations should be pro-poor, pro-gender, pro-job creation, and pro-local socio-economic development (Abbas et al. 2020). Policies that establish strategic targets, incentives, and an overall direction for the development and deployment of renewable energy resources are central to the successful implementation of national renewable energy (RE) programmes.

Countries that have adopted progressive regulatory frameworks provide best practices in this area, having successfully addressed challenges encountered elsewhere. Encouraging investments and enabling the private sector is key; thus, the importance of credible and enforceable regulations cannot be overstated. Fragmentation of policies across constitutional levels can pose a challenge to the renewable energy (RE) sector, as can the poorly formulated policies (Pillay et al. 2025). Additionally, a lack of clear guidelines on the coordination of functions among the various governmental institutions involved in policy implementation can create further challenges. Comprehensively formulated policies that address challenges align with regional and international commitments, and clearly designate one governmental institution to take the lead in policy implementation, can help overcome these issues. It is also essential to establish policies that clearly define the roles of stakeholders and encourage their active participation in the energy planning and policymaking processes. Proactive policies can drive the renewable energy agenda in Africa.

Technology Transfer and Capacity Building

Technology transfer and capacity building, which involve effectively advancing and implementing renewable energy projects through shared knowledge and skills, are critical for Africa. While there are expectations for developing nations to leapfrog to clean energy pathways, it is vital to examine and clarify what technology transfer and capacity building mean in this context (Hostettler 2015). At its core, technology transfer refers to the process of transferring knowledge, skills, and technologies from developed (donor) nations to developing (recipient) nations, with capacity building seen as the enhancement of local expertise to operate, maintain, and replicate the transferred technologies (Platonova and Leone 2012). A key aspect central to the equity debate in renewable energy initiatives is the availability and accessibility of the resources needed to develop and implement effective solutions. Understanding the purpose, processes, and issues surrounding technology transfer and capacity building in the context of renewable energy is, therefore, crucial for identifying the prospects and challenges Africa faces in capitalising on international partnerships for such transfers. In renewable energy initiatives, technology transfer is not solely about the transfer of machinery; it involves stakeholder engagement throughout the project lifecycle, from planning to implementation and operation, with local stakeholders required to have prior knowledge and experience in the technology to engage effectively. Most renewable energy technologies require input from local stakeholders trained to operate and maintain the systems post-implementation; hence, planning for technology transfer and capacity building is essential to building local expertise.

This necessitates the availability of resources needed to design and successfully implement capacity building programmes, which can hinder the realisation of the envisaged transfer in many cases. In other circumstances, resources may be available, but donor expectations are not met because the prior understanding of and approach to technology transfer do not align with those of the recipient. This highlights the need for a better understanding of the processes, challenges, and issues surrounding technology transfer and capacity building in developing nations.

Several projects have been implemented in Africa to provide communities with improved renewable energy technologies for water services and address capacity needs; however, these have not always been wholly successful in transferring the technology and developing the necessary capacity. In many cases, it falls upon the communities to identify and mobilise the resources

required to develop capacity, and the approaches tend to be broad and generalised rather than tailored to the specific needs of users and communities. This raises questions about how to ensure the successful transfer of technology and the capacity to utilise and maintain it. Accumulating evidence of the successes and failures of past activities is vital to a better understanding of the issues involved. Ultimately, energy and human capacity development go hand in hand, and without skilled personnel, the resources could be of little or no benefit. Therefore, in the context of abundant resources, ensuring adequate training and education opportunities to foster a skilled workforce is imperative if the renewable energy sector is to grow and provide the anticipated services.

Best Practices: Lessons from Morocco and Kenya

In a continent where the renewable energy sector is grossly under-researched, sharing knowledge is critical to its success. Whether through the support of economic institutions or partnerships with countries that have successfully implemented renewable strategies, best practices should serve as examples for other nations looking to do the same. With an overwhelming majority of Africa's population unconnected to a power grid, an innovative off-grid approach is needed, and learning from past successes and failures is incredibly important. However, caution must also come with the consideration of unique geographies, governmental structures, and economies across the continent, as what works in one country may not work in another (Grimaldi 2018).

Morocco's Renewable Energy Initiatives

Morocco is emerging as a leader in renewable energy development in Africa. With aggressive goals, substantial investment, and the potential to serve as a model for other African countries, Morocco showcases the promise of renewable energy for economic development and sustainability. Currently, the country continues to pursue its goal of producing 42% of its energy from renewable sources (Mayraz 2020). This goal is to be achieved by implementing new, large-scale renewable power projects, mainly in the form of wind and solar energy. The country has undertaken the most comprehensive national policies concerning renewable energy, investing heavily in the solar sector. Nowhere is this clearer than in the Noor Solar Complex, which is currently the largest concentrated solar power complex in the world (World Energy

2023), projected to generate more than 580 megawatts of power, enough to provide energy for 1.1 million people (World Bank Group 2017). Coupled with a reduction in fossil fuel subsidies, the establishment of a national renewable energy agency, and the introduction of feed-in tariffs, Morocco's drive towards renewable energy is unparalleled in Africa. Presently, there are four major solar power plants in planning or under construction in Morocco (Kawach 2023). In addition to solar energy, there are several large wind farms under construction or in the planning stages. These projects are largely supported by foreign investments (Sellers et al. 2015).

Wind power generation is currently being pursued in Morocco. Conditions in the country are suitable for wind power generation, with estimates suggesting that over 5,000 MW could be economically harnessed (Choukri et al. 2017). Seventeen regions of Morocco have been identified as suitable for wind generation. Several large wind farms are under construction or in the planning stages as part of the ten-year Integrated Wind Energy Project (Rahhou 2023). This project aims to increase wind energy capacity from 280 MW in 2010 to 2,000 MW by 2020. Tarfaya I is currently the largest wind power plant in Africa, boasting a capacity of 300 MW; it was inaugurated in 2014. Other large wind farms are also planned or under construction, and, similar to the solar projects, many of these initiatives have been pursued through public-private partnerships.

Furthermore, Morocco's pursuit of renewable energy highlights the significance of both foreign investment and public-private partnerships in expanding renewable energy capacity. Both solar and wind energy projects involve a mix of public and private investment, with a substantial amount of foreign investment. For both solar and wind energy projects, numerous initiatives were developed through public-private partnerships, and the government has recognised the essential role of private investment in achieving energy goals. These public-private partnerships are viewed as a means to enhance renewable energy capacity, as the government would not be able to finance all projects independently. In fact, during the first round of bidding for solar energy projects, all selected bidders were foreign companies. However, challenges exist within these partnerships. Many developers express concerns that the government exerts excessive control over tariff determinations, which are crucial to project profitability, while the government contends that developers are often reluctant to assume public responsibilities (El Hafdaoui et al. 2025).

Morocco's renewable energy initiatives illuminate how countries can leverage renewable energy for economic development and sustainability.

Policymakers in nations with similar developmental and energy capacities to Morocco should acknowledge that renewable energy projects can yield significant economic and environmental advantages. Countries that possess sufficient renewable resources, such as wind or solar, but are still developing should consider that these projects can act as a catalyst for broader economic development. Indeed, akin to Morocco's experience, the success of renewable energy projects heavily relies on the government's commitment to policy and regulation, as demonstrated by Kenya.

Kenya's Geothermal Power Projects

As countries around the world strive for greater reliance on renewable energy, Kenya stands as proof that commonly overlooked resources can be harnessed with appropriate investments. After a former British colonial officer and geologist discovered hot springs in the Great Rift Valley in 1923, which led to two failed geothermal power plants in the 1950s, geothermal energy remained completely underutilised until new development began in 1986. Today, thanks to numerous investments and expanding exploration, geothermal power provides 51 per cent of all electricity generated in Kenya (Richter 2015), making it the most successful example of utilising geothermal resources in Africa.

The development of geothermal power has fundamentally shaped Kenya's burgeoning renewable energy sector, supported by robust energy policy and pioneering leadership from the state-run Kenya Electricity Generating Company (KenGen), Africa's largest power producer (Maguire 2023). Contracted by the government to explore and harness geothermal resources along the geologically active East African Rift Valley, KenGen's discoveries led to the approval of power production from geothermal energy in 1985. Subsequent privatisation laws in 1997 encouraged independent power producers (IPPs) to enter the geothermal sector, with mixed results for public policy objectives (Mori and Le 2017). Geothermal power is currently projected to be a cornerstone of Kenya's ambition to achieve 100 per cent installed electricity generation capacity from renewables by 2030 (Maguire 2023).

Conclusion

This essay has examined the international politics surrounding renewable energy and regeneration in Africa, considering the continent's prospects and challenges regarding climate adaptation and mitigation. The

study acknowledges that Africa is currently experiencing environmental crises and degradation due to climate change but contributes the least to it. It argues that renewable energy is a viable solution for Africa to meet its energy needs while reducing carbon footprints. The study emphasises the international aspects and implications of Africa's energy transition, focusing on the geopolitical context concerning climate change adaptation and mitigation. An analysis of the politics of energy regeneration in the context of renewable energy development in Africa highlights both prospects and challenges.

The study contends that African nations need international partnerships to support them in their transition to renewable energy. Consequently, the continuous need for investment in necessary infrastructure, technology transfer, and capacity building is underscored to maintain the momentum of renewable energy development. Similarly, the imperative for stronger policy frameworks to enhance access to renewable energy, particularly in rural areas and remote localities, were emphasised. In this regard, the importance of community engagement in initiating and driving local renewable projects is highlighted as a hopeful outlook for Africa's renewable energy landscape is envisioned, driven by its adaptability and resilience in the face of adversities (Grimaldi 2018).

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ABSTRACT

This essay examines the international politics surrounding renewable energy and regeneration in Africa, considering the continent's prospects and challenges regarding climate adaptation and mitigation. It acknowledges that Africa is currently experiencing environmental crises and degradation due to climate change while contributing the least to it. The essay argues that renewable energy is a viable solution for Africa to meet its energy needs while reducing carbon footprints. It emphasises the international aspects and implications of Africa's energy transition, focusing on the geopolitical context concerning climate change adaptation and mitigation. In doing so, the current challenges that African countries face in harnessing renewable resources are critically examined. First, the urgency of transitioning to greener energy solutions is discussed, arguing that such a transition is essential not only for the environment but also for local economic development prospects. Second, Africa's renewable resources are interrogated, outlining how, in a different geopolitical context, they could reshape power on the continent and beyond.

KEYWORDS

Renewable energy. Mitigation. Regeneration. Climate Adaptation. Africa.

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OBSTRUCTED PATHS TO JUSTICE: LAND GRABBING AND THE CRISIS OF RECONCILIATION IN CENTRAL NIGERIA'S POSTCOLONIAL CONFLICTS

Gloria Longbaam-Alli^{1 2}



Introduction

Proudly referred to as the “Food Basket of the Nation,” Central Nigeria was once regarded as a tranquil region, largely insulated from the ethno-religious conflicts prevalent in Northern Nigeria. Historical and colonial legacies from the pre-colonial era allowed farming communities in Plateau and Benue to coexist alongside Fulani pastoralists. When conflicts arose, traditional conflict resolution systems were employed. However, British indirect rule facilitated the political dominance of the Hausa-Fulani elite over minority groups in Central Nigeria. Land policies favoured “settlers,” such as the Hausa-Fulani, while marginalising “indigenes,” thus creating administrative hierarchies that fostered enduring resentment (Madueke 2018; Logams 2004; Ochonu 2014)

Post-independence, relations among minority groups that rallied under the “Middle-Belt” identity emerged as a form of resistance to Hausa-Fulani control. The foundations of identity politics established during the colonial period, along with the weaponisation of historical grievances, have

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been utilised over the years to justify violence and clashes involving herders and farmers. For instance, land conflicts between Fulani pastoralists and farming communities in Central Nigeria have recently intensified, resulting in cyclical violence and hindering reconciliation efforts. This study explores the critical role of unresolved land grabs in perpetuating farmer-herder clashes and obstructing sustainable peacebuilding in the region. Between 2010 and 2022, ethno-religious tensions, cultural disputes, and land conflicts between Fulani Muslim pastoralists or agro-pastoralist settlers and Indigenous Christian farmers have had a devastating impact, leading to numerous fatalities (Nigeria Watch 2021).

Recent research links these conflicts to factors such as patrimonial state policies, climate change, terrorism, cattle rustling, and population growth (Ajala 2020; Benjaminsen and Ba 2021; Ejiofor 2022; Lenshie et al. 2021; Olaniyan and Yahaya 2016; Olumba 2022; Olumba et al. 2022). Consequently, a significant number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) have been residing in temporary camps for over three years, facing abysmal living conditions and losing hope of returning to their ancestral lands due to insecurity and a lack of government intervention (Longba'am 2022; Ukase and Jato 2022).

While previous studies have explored conflict management strategies involving collaborations between non-state actors and security forces (Lar 2018; Longba'am 2022), there is a need to address the impact of land grabs on peace, justice, and reconciliation, an underexplored area. This study fills this research gap by demonstrating how unresolved land dispossession injustices fuel cyclical communal conflicts and derail reconciliation in Central Nigeria. It critiques the shortcomings of existing conflict resolution attempts and proposes structural political solutions to address this fundamental barrier to peacebuilding. The study offers a unique perspective by examining the issue through the lens of the affected population rather than technical policies or elite disputes. It sheds light on the overlooked human costs and security implications of the ongoing tensions, which can be traced back to the colonial legacy.

Finally, this study makes a significant contribution by elucidating the critical role of land injustice in perpetuating conflicts and hindering reconciliation in Central Nigeria. It compels us to confront the real-world consequences of unaddressed land crises and kleptocratic governance, which endanger lives and impede social repair. As such, the study's findings hold practical relevance for developing context-specific strategies to address land conflicts and promote sustainable peacebuilding in the region and beyond.

Land grabs in Central Nigeria have significantly undermined conflict resolution efforts, necessitating a re-evaluation of conflict management approaches that recognise the political economy of land in the region and prioritise addressing land grabbing to ensure sustainable peace, justice, and reconciliation.

We will address the thesis statement by addressing these questions:

1. How do patterns of land grabbing shape the dynamics of conflict and prospects for peace in post-conflict societies?
2. What strategies do state and non-state actors employ to address land-related conflicts, and how effective are these interventions in achieving sustainable resolution?
3. To what extent do power relations between different actors influence justice and reconciliation outcomes in land dispute resolution processes?

Literature Review

Land grabbing, best defined as the acquisition of large land areas by powerful actors, is a global issue observed across different regions, including Africa, Europe, and Latin America (Borras and Franco 2011; Bunkus and Theesfeld 2018; Rulli et al. 2013). Various motivations, such as agricultural investments, food security concerns, agribusiness expansion, and speculation, drive this phenomenon (Lahiff 2014; Sosa Varrotti et al. 2022; White et al. 2012). However, land grabbing often leads to negative consequences, including social impacts, injustice, conflict, and displacement of small landholders.

The impact of land grabbing is particularly severe in post-conflict regions, hindering recovery and reconciliation efforts. Restoring land and property rights systems is crucial for returning displaced populations, reviving agriculture, and ensuring food security (Unruh and Shalaby 2022). However, the complexities of land tenure policies and confusion surrounding land ownership in post-conflict regions contribute to insecurity and vulnerability (Castro and Kuntz 2022). This insecurity affects individuals, communities, and conservation efforts in areas where land tenure is uncertain (Robinson et al. 2017).

From an African continental perspective, studies conducted in Cameroon argue that land grabbing marginalises land users and leads to conflicts within and between communities and companies (Ndi and Batterbury 2017). In post-conflict Côte d'Ivoire, land disputes hinder sustainable returns and

peace despite government attempts to formalise land rights (Pritchard 2016). In the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), land conflicts arise from violence and ethnic divisions, with rights granted to the “strongest” individuals, often employing the army, state agents, and chiefs (Mudinga et al. 2014). Land grabbing in the DRC is deeply rooted in broader political competition.

From the Nigerian perspective, historical antecedents and the exclusion of local communities are cited as causes of land-related conflicts. Olayinka Akanle (2017) and Nnabuihe et al. (2020) work links land grabs to tin mining during the colonial period. It explains how the British colonial authorities altered the customary tenure systems through the Land Acquisition Ordinance of 1900. The British colonial notion of land ownership significantly differed from the African family land system, thereby changing the African system and forming the roots of post-colonial land grab problems in Jos, Plateau.

Land grabbing poses a significant threat to communities and livelihoods, creating conflicts that can only be resolved through inclusive processes. Accountability mechanisms and activism can aid in addressing this issue, but factors such as political competition, authoritarianism, and ethnic tensions also influence the outcomes. Research, knowledge co-production, and developing new models are crucial for addressing the land grabbing phenomenon.

Theoretical Framework

Ethno-religious conflicts present ongoing challenges in regions characterised by political instability and weak governance. In these areas, the nexus between opportunistic land grabbing and institutional capacity generates complex conflict dynamics. This study examines two complementary theoretical frameworks: opportunistic land grabbing theory, which illustrates how actors exploit vulnerable situations to seize land through coercive means, and institutional theory, which examines how governance structures impact conflict management processes. Both frameworks exemplify how power imbalances and institutional legitimacy influence the effectiveness of conflict resolution.

The researcher draws on the opportunistic land grabbing theory, which focuses on the actions of individuals or groups who exploit circumstances to acquire land for their gain. This theory is particularly relevant in situations of conflict and displacement, where influential individuals or

organisations may use violence or coercion to seize land and its resources (Dell'Angelo et al. 2021; Jurkevics 2022; Twomey 2014). Various needs, including agricultural and developmental requirements and opportunistic motives, drive land grabbing. The theory emphasises the involvement of governments, corporations, and investors in exploiting circumstances to acquire land for purposes that go beyond immediate agricultural production.

In conflict resolution, institutional theory examines how formal and informal institutions impact the management and resolution of conflicts. This perspective analyses how institutional structures, norms, and practices influence the behaviour and interactions of individuals and groups involved in the conflict. Institutions are crucial in providing frameworks for negotiation, cooperation, and peaceful resolution, whether formal entities like courts or informal mechanisms such as community-based mediation. Institutional theory emphasises the dual aspects of normative and structural influence and highlights the significance of adaptability over time. The theory also suggests that the power and effectiveness of institutions rely on their perceived legitimacy. Trust and compliance are more likely when all parties consider conflict resolution institutions legitimate. Recognising the legitimacy of the process increases the probability of adherence to institutional decisions or agreements.

The researcher draws insights from opportunistic land grabbing and institutional theories to analyse how the influence and motives of land-grabbers affect conflict resolution in Plateau State. For example, literature on opportunistic land grabbing shows how powerful actors exploit unclear land tenure systems, conflict-related displacement and imbalances to acquire land (Borras and Franco 2011; Fonsah 2015; White et al. 2012). Similarly, the literature on institutional theory argues that weak governance facilitates unchecked land grabbing, while legitimate institutions contribute to nonviolent solutions (Mora 2022; Mudinga et al. 2014). These arguments emphasise how norms and structures influence conflict outcomes. These theories provide a foundation for exploring the drivers and effects of opportunistic land grabbing and institutional factors in Plateau state and their impact on conflict resolution.

Methodology

The study employed a qualitative historical research design to analyse how land grabs in Central Nigeria hinder conflict resolution efforts. This approach facilitated the examination of colonial records, landscape changes, media coverage, and oral interviews, allowing for precise cause-and-effect analysis between land grabs and conflict resolution. Two primary data collection methods were utilised. Archival research investigated land grab issues in official documentation, while oral histories were gathered through semi-structured interviews with 20 key informants from Plateau and Benue States between 2019 and 2023.

Interviews were conducted in English, Hausa, and Tiv, with a research assistant aiding in interpreting questions for Tiv-speaking respondents. Most interviews were recorded digitally, with notes taken from those who opted not to be recorded. The interviews followed a flexible guide, enabling participants to discuss topics beyond the initial focus. This approach explored intergroup relations, the political economy of land, land displacement impacts on internally displaced persons, and barriers to sustainable peace.

The thematic analysis focused on patterns, trends, and causality over time. A three-stage process — primary coding, pattern recognition, and contextual analysis — mirrored traditional historical analysis. Themes emerged that reflected both long-term historical processes and immediate causes of land grabbing and conflict, informed by temporal sequences, causal relationships, and the interplay of agency and structure. The analytical framework contextualises land grabbing as a contemporary issue rooted in historical patterns. The study reveals how past events shape current conflict resolution efforts by examining themes through a historical lens. The researcher acknowledged Denzin's emphasis on data triangulation to enhance reliability (Denzin 2012).

To protect confidentiality and participant privacy due to the sensitive nature of the data, interviewees were chosen based on their experience and conflict management skills, with sample size determined by data saturation.

Historical Context of Land Ownership and Use in Central Nigeria

Case 1- Plateau State

The political economy of land in Central Nigeria illustrates how colonial institutional manipulation established systematic frameworks for opportunistic land appropriation, which continue to influence contemporary conflicts. In Plateau State, the Mineral Acts of 1903 and the British Land Proclamation Acts of 1904 and 1910, enacted by Lord Lugard, exemplify a central tenet of institutional theory: that changes in formal rules fundamentally alter power relations and patterns of resource access.

These Acts transferred indigenous land rights to the British Crown, granting colonial authorities exclusive powers over land allocation for economic gain. The economic motivation became evident with the commencement of expatriate tin mining in 1904. The British government profits from this industry, with revenue increasing from 10,486 tons, valued at £1,435,157 in 1938, to 11,942 tons in 1952-53 — illustrating the opportunistic land grabbing theory's central theory that powerful actors prioritise their selfish gains over indigenous rights or sustainable development (Azgaku and Osuala 2015).

A direct consequence of the Colonial Acts and Ordinances was the forced relocation of Berom farmers from their ancestral lands ('JOS PROF 220/51 Notes on Procedure, Jos Division' 1946). C.W. Rowling, the acting Resident of Plateau Province, stated:

It is among the Bi Rom³ that by far the largest portion of [Nigerian] land has been alienated [for mining]. Some village communities have been forced to hire fatherland from neighbouring communities... No improvement of agricultural methods have been introduced to check the progressive deterioration of the situation. The above conditions have already produced in some areas changes in the tribal system of land tenure and changes are still taking place (Rowling 1935, n.p.).

This land displacement exemplifies the principles of institutional theory, which posits that changes in formal laws can disrupt informal governance

³ In this paper, I have chosen to maintain the colonial spelling, "Bi Rom," when quoting archival sources, but for the remainder of my paper, I will use the post-colonial spelling, "Berom." This approach ensures consistency and clarity, allowing me to respect historical accuracy while acknowledging the term's contemporary and widely accepted spelling.

systems. The alienation from their land transformed social relations within the Berom community. Moreover, the displacement impacted traditional economic relationships, altered social hierarchies, and weakened community autonomy, compelling members to rely on neighbouring communities for access to land. Poor soil conditions and deteriorating environmental circumstances, resulting from continuous farming in their newly allocated areas, further exacerbated food insecurity. These changes underscore how opportunistic land grabbing can lead to instability in traditional institutions, with consequences that extend far beyond immediate economic effects.

The British government's approach to land policies was inconsistent, implementing nationalisation, privatisation, and commercialisation at different times. District Officer Rowling emphasised the need to compensate farmers affected by the colonial government's actions, which had impacted their livelihoods and access to land, instead of monetary compensation. However, the colonial government mandated a £2 per acre payment to all affected areas (Rowling 1935). The distribution of this compensation was delayed until 1941 due to mounting resistance from the Berom community regarding the land issue. This resistance sparked a more forceful, widespread, and organised movement (Mangvwat 2013).

The increasing migration of pastoralists in Plateau State led to tensions and conflicts with farmers. In 1947, Rowling observed unease and friction between these groups in the Bukuru district. Land issues intensified due to overgrazing and land seizures by Hausa and Fulani pastoralists as cultivated crops encroached on previously untouched hunting and communal areas (Rowling 1935). Considering the cautious relationship between the Berom people and the nomadic Fulani — stemming from the jihadi conquests attempted by Usman Dan Fodio in the pre-colonial era, which resulted in land disputes and disrupted social structures — the “sub-colonialism” experienced by the Berom and other ethnic groups in central Nigeria under the policies of indirect rule led them to perceive that the British altered their traditional political system. This alteration conferred excessive control over land and administrative, judicial, and protective authority to Hausa chiefs appointed by colonial officers instead of local districts (Plotnicov 1972).

The colonial administration's failure to effectively manage narratives of marginalisation and address the concerns of minorities, such as the Berom, contributed to escalating tensions between pastoralists and farmers, which occasionally resulted in violence. This violence included attacks on Fulani cattle and disputes over encroachments into sacred and hunting grounds (JOS PROF 1930). For example, in Rim district, the remains of a missing Fulani

were discovered, and Atiri of Jol, a non-Muslim, was accused of murdering him, allegedly in retaliation for cattle damaging his crops. Mr C. R. Walker, who was appointed on March 6, 1930, presided over the trial, ultimately finding Atiri guilty of manslaughter and sentencing him to four years in prison with hard labour (JOS PROF 1930). Over time, many Fulani in Central Nigeria shifted to settler herding, acquiring land from local populations and cultivating crops.

Nigeria's 1978 Land Use Act transformed the country's land tenure system, intensifying rather than resolving land conflicts in Central Nigeria. Following independence, this legislation nationalised land ownership by abolishing freehold interests and indigenous tenure systems, granting state governors authority to issue statutory rights of occupancy for up to 99 years. The Act produced three critical consequences that catalysed contemporary farmer-pastoralist conflicts. First, it concentrated excessive land control with state governors, creating opportunities for political manipulation and elite favouritism in allocation decisions. Second, it dismantled customary tenure rights that had previously provided frameworks for resolving disputes between agricultural and pastoral communities. Third, it imposed Western land ownership concepts contradicting indigenous land access norms, leaving farmers and pastoralists without adequate legal protections for their traditional land-use rights.

Rather than establishing mechanisms for collaborative governance, the legislation incentivised zero-sum competition between communities while insufficient political representation exacerbated these tensions (Krätli and Toulmin 2020). Consequently, the Act created a legal vacuum that transformed previously manageable community disputes into violent confrontations characterised by land speculation and forced evictions.

The establishment of Jos North Local Government Area in 1991 marked a pivotal escalation in land-related tensions between Fulani pastoralists and indigenous farming communities in Plateau State. Although conflicts between these groups were rarely documented between 1961 and 2000, this period witnessed significant instances of contested land acquisition, particularly involving lease extensions without adequate compensation. The most contentious case emerged when Major General Ibrahim Babangida created Jos North LGA in 1991, a decision that indigenous Berom communities perceived as state-sanctioned land appropriation driven by ethno-religious favouritism.

The Berom viewed this administrative restructuring as fulfilling a historical agenda dating back to Usman Dan Fodio's unsuccessful 1804 jihad,

arguing that it provided the Jasawa people — supported by Hausa and Fulani interests — with territorial legitimacy in the region. The Berom Educational and Cultural Organisation (BECO) condemned the decision as a deliberate strategy to displace indigenous populations from their ancestral lands while advancing the Islamization of predominantly non-Muslim communities (Egwu 2004; Bingel 2023⁴). This administrative intervention thus transformed relatively isolated land disputes into a systematic pattern of contestation that would define subsequent farmer-pastoralist relations in the region.

Their allegations were justified, as the Jasawa Youth Association wrote to President Babangida in 1991, thanking him for addressing their concerns about the division of Jos into two local government areas: Jos North and Jos South (Egwu 2004). The importance of Jos North rests on the narratives of the Berom, which trace their traditional histories and institutions to the contested area. Reverend Father Paul Pam states that Jot Bato-Jos North is the head of the Berom Nation, suggesting that without it, Berom identity would be lost, akin to a man unable to survive without his head (Se Tok 2023).

The contestation of Jos North highlighted the deep-rooted grievances between indigenes and Hausa settlers in Central Nigeria, particularly Plateau State. This issue arose from the settlers' claims of social, educational, and political marginalisation, arguing that despite their contributions to Plateau State's economy, the indigenous population has marginalised them in state affairs (Danfulani U. H and Danfulani W.A 2018). Inter-group relations became sour between the Hausa-Fulani and the Berom after the creation of the Jos-North local government. By 2001, these tensions had escalated into violence that spread to towns and villages across the state. The notable consequence of the 2001 crisis was religion-based residential segregation. Allegations of displacement and occupation also became prevalent, with communities presenting evidence of land grabbing. Mr. Mang highlights Mahanga village in Barkin Ladi to illustrate this point.

4 Interview with Baba Thomas Bingel, 12 September 2023.

Fulani pastoralists began to move and settle in droves in that area in 2008. These Fulani were arming themselves, unbeknownst to the state and its communities. They built their communities by not allowing Berom farmers, who owned land in this area, to farm. If a farmer tries to cultivate his land farm, he is either killed or maimed; crops are destroyed in other cases. As a result, it became a contentious issue, and the state at the time, under Governor Jang, brought the issues to the forefront, but the governor was warned not to act, as it would only make a bad situation worse.⁵

He goes on to explain:

By 2015, when ‘Governor’ Lalong came, Mahanga had been established, and there was a military in Mahanga; there was still a military base protecting the Fulani. Unfortunately, it was from Mahanga that Berom villages were being attacked at various moments because Fulani would leave without the knowledge of the security agents, attack villages, and return home.⁶

By 2022, five groups—Emancipation Center for Crisis Victims in Nigeria (ECCVN), Atakar Development Association (ADA), Berom Educational and Cultural Organization (BECO), Irigwe Development Association (IDA), and Ron Kunlere Development Association (RKDA) — submitted a petition titled “A Petition Against Land grabbing by Fulani Invaders on Native Communities in Parts of Barkin Ladi, Bassa, Bokkos, and Riyom LGAs of Plateau State” to inform the Plateau State government that over 102 communities had been forcibly displaced by land grabbers and the government has been unable to reinstate the displaced people to their homesteads (Busari, 2021; Disturbing Occupation of 151 Villages by Armed Herders in Plateau State n.d.).

The study noted competing narratives to the increasing land grabs, the Berom attributes current conflicts to systematic land grabbing facilitated by political manipulation and ethnic bias. For example, in Barkin Ladi, the Fulani community began unauthorised construction on any available land, claiming divine ownership and seeking approval from their Ardos without the consent of the actual landowners. This situation is further complicated for the Berom, who accuse the Ardos of signing change of ownership forms for non-indigenous individuals, known as settlers, who buy and sell land. This creates the impression that the Ardos wield authority over the district, effectively acting as the de facto head of the Berom community. Similarly, Da

⁵ Interview with Henry Gyang Mang, January 2021.

⁶ Interview with Henry Gyang Mang, January 2021.

Edward Pwajok, the *Gwom Rwei* (traditional leader) of Barkin Ladi, contends that the growing numbers and perceived wealth of the Fulani have led to orchestrated attacks on the Berom, aimed at acquiring their ancestral land.⁷

Bingel posits that while the Fulani were victims in the 2001 Jos conflicts, being attacked alongside the Hausa, they also exploited the situation to seize land from the Berom and other indigenous groups in Barkin Ladi, Riyom and Bassa. For instance, the Vanguard Newspaper reports that herds-men have attacked over 54 communities in Riyom and Barkin Ladi, displacing residents and renaming the areas. Rotchun is now Rafin Acha, Dankum is Mahanga, Hywa is Lugere, and Fass is Tafawa (Danfulani U. H and Danfulani W.A, 2018). Additionally, efforts to reclaim these lands encounter opposition from influential federal politicians (Mang 2021).

Fulani pastoralists offer a counterargument: land disputes in central Nigeria stem from broken land transactions, animosity, and ethnic profiling. They argued that they were unfairly connected to conflicts involving the Hausa (Jasawa), who were blamed for the 2001 crisis. They noted the detrimental impacts of ethnic and religious profiling that ensued, portraying the Hausa-Fulani community as jihadist descendants aiming for regional dominance. This stigma has hindered their livelihoods. As tensions grew, landowners in several Central Nigerian states ceased selling land to the Hausa and Fulani communities.

Therefore, apart from the animosities arising from the incessant conflicts between pastoralists and farmers, the *Ardo* of Ropp (Fulani leader in Barkin Ladi) explains that land dynamics in various parts of Plateau State arise from the Berom community's efforts to oust the Fulani, who previously acquired land from them. The *Ardo* further explains that this shift is driven by the Berom's increasing demand for land due to population growth, affecting their agricultural, residential, and grazing needs.⁸

Case 2 - Benue State

Long-standing tensions and violent conflicts between the Tiv and their neighbours in Taraba and Nasarawa states stem from disputes over land and resources in the Benue River valley. The Tiv, Jukun, and Nasarawa residents depend on subsistence farming and cattle herding. Competing claims over land boundaries and inheritance rights, intensified by drought, exacerbate conflicts. Disagreements often escalate into violence, typically tri-

7 Interview with Da Edward Pwajok. March 2019.

8 Interview with Alhaji Abubakar, 19 November 2019.

gged by encroachments on what one group considers ancestral lands (The Tragedy in Benue – Zaki Biam Through the Eyes of People There 2017). Cattle rustling stems from territorial tension. Despite efforts through customary and state legal systems, resolving long-standing land claims between the Tiv and their neighbours remains difficult, fuelling ongoing conflicts between these ethnic communities (Alubo 2006).

The most recent cycle of conflict involves clashes between pastoralists and farmers. This pattern of attacking farming communities and displacing people from their ancestral land, observed in Plateau State, has also been seen in Benue State. Mr Moar, an internally displaced person from Benue State, explained that before 2011, pastoralists and farmers had a cordial relationship, with pastoralists using sticks to control their cattle.⁹ However, things changed in 2011 when pastoralists who migrated seasonally into the area began carrying guns. Additionally, farmers are shot when they attempt to cultivate their land or drive off cattle, which destroys their crops. As of 2025, at least 12 local government areas are under siege by marauders. The displaced individuals are unable to return home and rely on assistance from charitable organisations, non-governmental organisations, or international donors for their survival (Shobayo 2024).

Reverend Father Solomon supports Mr Moar's account, having been displaced three times due to attacks by pastoralists. He firmly believes that their intent is to seize the land, as the Fulani he once knew are different from those he encounters today. He elaborates further:

The Fulani used to come with their wives, children, and sticks when there were forests and wild animals around. However, now that there are no forests or wild animals, these people come as herdsmen, but they do not bring their wives or children; instead, they come armed with AK-47s, indicating a shift in their agenda. They arrive in the village, attack and displace people, and take over land. They invite their relatives; before you know it, they have set up their tents. Security agents do not attempt to send them away because the pastoralists' weapons are sometimes superior. We know they have an agenda; they are not simply coming to graze; they intend to occupy our land.¹⁰

Institutional failures have led to ongoing conflicts and land grabbing. Moar and Solomon's narratives reveal that various, often competing, institutional frameworks influence the relationship between pastoralists and

⁹ Interview with Mr. Moar, 17 April 2021.

¹⁰ Interview with Reverend Fr. Mfa, Solomon, 19 April 2021.

farming communities. For instance, traditional authorities may grant grazing rights to pastoralists. At the same time, state institutions allocate the same land for commercial farming, resulting in confusion that opportunistic actors exploit.¹¹

Institutional theory underscores how the “governance and security vacuum” identified by Kwaja and Smith (2020) enables land grabbing. As formal institutions weaken due to insurgency or conflict, alternative arrangements arise. The researchers point out that criminal networks establish parallel governance systems that challenge state and traditional authorities (Kwaja and Smith 2020). In parts of the Sahel, jihadist groups have implemented their own land management systems, illustrating what North (1990) terms “institutional layering,” where multiple, often conflicting, frameworks govern the same resources.

Moar and Solomon’s emphasis on the cross-border dimension introduces additional institutional complexity. Traditional institutional arrangements for managing herder-farmer relationships function within territorial boundaries. However, cross-border movements create scenarios where traditional, state and international frameworks intersect and conflict. For example, traditional grazing agreements between communities in northern Nigeria and Niger may conflict with national border control policies, leading to gaps that criminal networks can exploit.

Impact of Land Grabs on Local Communities and Social Structures

The most obvious impact of land grabs on Central Nigeria is long-term displacement and its effects on the people’s cultural, economic and social structure. In IDP camps, individuals often express dissatisfaction with their living conditions and long to return to their homes, where they can support themselves and work towards restoring their lost cultural, social, and economic values. For instance, Mr Moar, the chairman of the Daudu Camp in Makurdi, disclosed:

¹¹ Interview with Jemkur, Joseph, 12 October 2023.

The government is colluding with the military at the federal level to protect Fulani pastoralists who have currently set up camps on our land. However, our state governor is also doing nothing to alleviate this situation. Since we were displaced from our homes, the government has not organised a dialogue between the disputing parties to solve the problem.¹²

In Plateau State, the plight of the IDPs was not different. Da Edward Pwajok, the traditional chief of Barkin Ladi, explained as follows:

Despite some level of respite after years of clashes between pastoralists and farmers, most Berom farmers cannot return home either because the military cannot assure the people of their continuous safety when they return home or because pastoralists have taken over their land. The only option for displaced persons is to continue squatting with relatives or to remain in IDP camps.¹³

Da Pwajok's assertion reflects a common sentiment among respondents who feel powerless against the government's inability to address land grab issues. The Fulani community contends that President Buhari's role as Grand Patron has ironically undermined their interests. They express frustration over being labelled as bandits, terrorists, kidnappers, and land grabbers in media narratives. They also highlight their victimisation, particularly during the Jos crises and the enforcement of anti-grazing laws in Benue State, which they perceive as efforts at ethnic cleansing and marginalisation by state governments that threaten their livelihoods (Plateau Peace Dialogue 2021).

Land grabbing and related conflicts have affected farm production and food security through interconnected mechanisms. Farmer-Herder conflicts and attacks in Plateau state have forced many to abandon their farmlands, thus disrupting food supply chains from a region considered the food basket of Nigeria. In Benue State, violence in Agatu, Guma and Logo LGAs displaced farmers, leading to fallow farmlands and a 30-40% decline in staple crop production. The State, which contributes 30% of Nigeria's yam output, has depleted its food reserves (Gbaoron 2025; Haaga et al. 2025; WanaData 2022).

¹² Interview with Mr. Moar, 17 April 2021.

¹³ Interview with Da Edward Pwajok. March 2019.

Hybrid Conflict Management Approaches

Contemporary ethno-religious conflicts necessitate comprehensive management strategies that extend beyond traditional state-centred approaches. Hybrid conflict management recognises the complex interplay among governmental institutions, non-state actors, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in addressing entrenched communal tensions. This section examines the unique contributions of these stakeholders in terms of capabilities, resources, and legitimacy in conflict resolution, particularly in contexts characterised by limited state capacity or where communities demonstrate greater trust in alternative actors.

Strategies employed by State Actors

Initially meant to resolve conflicts between pastoralists and farmers, Nigeria's 1978 Land Use Act nationalised land ownership and promoted ranch establishment and animal production by creating Nigerian Ranches Limited (NRL), a government entity tasked with acquiring and developing ranches. The Act also established a Ranch Development Fund to support ranch acquisition, development, and loans for livestock production. Additionally, the government created a Ranch Development Board to manage NRL and oversee livestock production activities. The primary goal was to reduce land disputes by designating grazing areas for pastoralists. However, the Act's limited implementation failed to prevent clashes between pastoralists and farmers or to resolve land contestation issues (Egbuta 2018; Vanger and Nwosu 2020).

Since 2014, conflicts between farmers and pastoralists, alongside land grabs, have intensified. In 2016, Hon. Sadiq Ibrahim introduced the National Grazing Reserve (Establishment) Bill in the Senate to address these conflicts more inclusively and equitably (ACLED 2024; Africa Center for Strategic Studies 2023). The bill mandated that state governors consult local communities and recognised landowners when designating grazing areas and routes. It emphasised the importance of fair compensation and obtaining consent before acquiring grazing reserves. However, the 2016 bill and subsequent proposals, such as cattle colonies, ranches, and the Ruga Policy introduced in 2018, faced significant backlash.

The federal government's 2019 National Livestock Transformation Plan (NLTP) represents a fundamental departure from previous grazing policies through its comprehensive approach to livestock production, marketing, processing, health, grazing, and community development. This initiative

significantly shifts away from earlier policies by adopting a participatory framework that engages communities in ranch planning and negotiates land acquisition through informed consent and fair compensation mechanisms. The NLTP prioritises designated ranch lands over open grazing systems, directly targeting conflict reduction between pastoralists and farmers. Beyond addressing immediate land disputes, the plan tackles underlying socio-economic factors contributing to land conflicts through complementary rural development projects.

The emphasis on private or cooperative ranches empowers local stakeholders more effectively than previous state-reserve models, while the plan's flexible, state-specific design demonstrates greater responsiveness to diverse regional needs compared to earlier uniform policy proposals. This community-centred planning approach, combined with structured ranching systems, positions the NLTP as a potentially more successful framework for reducing land grabbing than its predecessors. However, the plan's promise remains largely theoretical, as implementation has stalled since President Tinubu assumed office in 2023, leaving communities without the anticipated relief from ongoing land conflicts.

State-level opposition to federal cattle ranching policies has emerged as a defining feature of land governance disputes in Central Nigeria, reflecting deeper concerns about executive bias and inadequate justice mechanisms. The Benue State government and various socio-political groups have criticised President Buhari's cattle ranch policy as evidence of federal favouritism toward pastoralist interests. Governor Ortom demonstrated this resistance in 2017 by enacting an Anti-Open Grazing law that imposes penalties for land grabbing (Benue State of Nigeria 2017). Similarly, escalating demands for restitution of forcibly acquired lands prompted the Plateau State House of Assembly to pass comprehensive anti-land-grabbing legislation in 2020, with Part III specifically addressing prohibited land seizures, violent occupation, armed grabbing penalties, and illegal property occupation (Plateau State Anti-Grabbing and Related Offences Bill 2020).

However, these legislative measures have proven inadequate in addressing historical injustices, as the Plateau State government remains indecisive about actions concerning lands seized before 2020. This failure to facilitate the return of displaced persons to their ancestral territories has generated significant community frustration, with critics like Bingel analogising the situation to a judge who, despite clear evidence of wrongdoing, implores victims to "allow peace to reign" without enforcing justice or returning stolen property. While state-level legislation demonstrates institutional

recognition of land grabbing problems, the absence of retroactive enforcement mechanisms perpetuates displacement and undermines community confidence in legal remedies.

Strategies Employed by Non-State Actors

Traditional institutions have played a significant role in addressing land grab issues in Central Nigeria. Traditional conflict-resolution mechanisms rely on mediation, negotiation, and compensation.¹⁴ These communal strategies are more effective and trusted than state mechanisms because they are inclusive and fair. In disputes between farmers and pastoralists, the village chief and Ardo often lead in settling disagreements related to wandering livestock, damaged crops, poisoned or stolen cattle and land grab issues. The continuity of pre-colonial and colonial dispute resolution methods in the post-colonial period is evident. However, their efficacy has diminished due to the 1976 local government reforms that stripped executive and judicial powers from traditional chiefs (Pwajok 2019).

The lack of clarity regarding the official roles of traditional leaders in conflict resolution, as discussed in the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) in Benue State, highlights challenges within local government structures.¹⁵ Removing judicial powers from chiefs has led to defiance from parties seeking resolution through local authorities or law enforcement, with reported dissatisfaction stemming from perceived corruption within the police force.¹⁶ The Focus Group Discussion (FGD) in Benue State highlighted the ambiguity of traditional leaders' roles in conflict resolution within official local government structures.¹⁷ Blench supports this ambiguity regarding traditional rulers in preventing and mediating conflicts in North-Central Nigeria. His research confirms that traditional rulers play an important role in dialogue; however, their influence does not prevent youths from conflicting sides from resorting to violence, including killing, maiming, and property destruction. During the colonial period, the Berom chiefs of Plateau State wielded limited power with minimal political organisation, resulting in disputes between individuals and groups, often ending in armed clashes (Blench et al. 2006).

¹⁴ Interview with Da Edward Pwajok, March 2019.

¹⁵ Focus group discussion, in Benue State, personal communication of the author, 17 April 2021.

¹⁶ Interview with Z.Z. Alumaga, 11 February 2020.

¹⁷ Focus group discussion, in Benue State, personal communication of the author, 17 April 2021.

Non-Governmental Organisations

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) such as the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD), Mercy Corps, and Search for Common Ground tackle the root causes of land grabbing in Central Nigeria, including opportunistic motives and institutional deficiencies. There is an urgent need for legitimate and equitable institutions to deter such behaviours among the elite. Additionally, fostering dialogue and mediation is crucial to countering actions that often lead to violence.

Jemkur¹⁸ asserts that the intercommunal dialogue processes organised by HD in Plateau and Southern Kaduna have significantly reduced conflicts among communities. These initiatives resulted in key declarations, including the Plateau State Declaration of Commitment to Peace (2014), the Southern Plateau Peace Declaration (2016), and the Kafanchan Peace Declaration (2016). Edward Pwajok, the district head of Barkin Ladi, confirmed the success of these dialogues. Notably, mediators from the eight ethnic groups involved in the 2014 Plateau dialogue have been trained to mediate in Southern Kaduna and Nasarawa states.

However, Jemkur identifies substantial challenges in addressing land grabbing in Nigeria. Issues include deep-rooted distrust stemming from past violence, wealth and power imbalances that enable land grabbers to displace vulnerable farmers and pastoralists, and the complexities introduced by porous borders and herder mobility. Climate pressures and population growth exacerbate resource strain, leading to further conflicts. Insecure conditions threaten the safety of mediators and hinder progress. Limited funding restricts engagement and follow-up on agreements, while political resistance from state actors and elites benefiting from land grabbing persists. Moreover, the weak rule of law fails to deter powerful land grabbers, and ongoing community trauma fosters scepticism. Overcoming these obstacles to build trust, enforce agreements, and implement reforms remains a critical challenge. Sustainable solutions require addressing the root causes of the land grabbing crisis through political will and targeted policies to empower and protect vulnerable populations.

The Centrality of Land to Conflict Resolution

This study's examination of colonial policies in central Nigeria reveals that the absence of transparent systems for resolving conflicting claims over

¹⁸ Interview with Jemkur, Joseph, 12 October 2023.

resources, such as farmland, water, and minerals, along with disputes over ownership and use rights, compels individuals to use force to assert their perceived land rights. Interviews with farmers and pastoralists indicate a profound distrust of state security agencies, which has hindered dialogue and mediation. When property rights are not enforced impartially, unresolved disputes threaten livelihoods and security, destabilising regions and fuelling violence.

Additionally, several interviewees agreed that opportunistic individuals among farmers and pastoralists exploit the political and ethnic tensions surrounding land claims, worsening community divisions. The widespread availability of small arms further increases the likelihood of land-related conflicts. Addressing these disputes and mitigating escalation risks is essential to preventing tensions from erupting into violence. In the next section, we will analyse perceptions of land grabbing and its effects on sustainable peace to clarify these arguments.

Land grabs in Central Nigeria have created complex dynamics of mediation and negotiation. Many farmers report being forcibly displaced by pastoralists, while the government seems unresponsive to their grievances. Its policy on cattle ranches and colonies faces widespread rejection from Nigerians, who criticise the federal government for potentially harbouring a hidden agenda aimed at land acquisition for the Fulani community. Prof. Nwabueze's concerns about the legal and political implications of cattle colonies resonate with many affected by farmer-herder conflicts and land grabbing issues. Consequently, these individuals are hesitant to trust the government with land that could be expropriated in the future.

Mr. Aaron Maren, a representative of the Plateau Initiative for Development and Advancement of Natives (PIDAN), argues that if the ranching system were accessible to all, it could benefit both pastoralists and farmers interested in animal husbandry. However, the federal government's failure to raise public awareness about this program has led to scepticism regarding its sincerity and the interests it aims to protect. Maren expressed this concern:

From the beginning, it appears that the programme was preparing Fulani to occupy or take over territory that was not theirs. It afforded Fulani pastoralists more advantages, which is why we (PIDAN) insist that ranches and grazing colonies should be community-based. Let indigenes be involved. We have lived with some Fulani for a long time, and there are peaceful Fulani; not every Fulani is dangerous. I have been a boy herder for seven years. That is why I see insincerity when they talk about cattle colonies, ranches, or *Ruga*, especially when the government wants to get involved. Therefore, indigenes must be involved, and bringing the Fulani to take over our land is wrong.¹⁹

Maren's statement echoes with people who feel excluded from the government bailout for livestock producers. Rooted in frustration and reality, narratives of injustice from Central Nigeria explain why some groups distance themselves from state-initiated conflict management strategies. Since 1994, various panel and peace committee recommendations have remained unimplemented (Oosterom et al. 2021). The lack of trust in government and efforts to achieve justice have hindered reconciliation and sustainable peace.

B.T. Bingel puts it this way:

Conflicts persist without restitution, as the lack of recourse for seized land breeds resentment and fuels ongoing clashes, hindering reconciliation. No amount of dialogue or mediation can overcome distrust when unlawful land occupants evade meaningful redress. Until appropriate actions restore land access or compensate victims, agreements urging communities to "forgive and forget" yield only fragile peace.²⁰

Interviewees' accounts of land grabs reveal challenges to institutional credibility. Corruption in security agencies intensifies grievances among pastoralists and farmers, highlighting systemic issues in resolving land disputes. Concerns arise that the government avoids labelling wrongdoers as criminals due to religious and ethnic favouritism, particularly when one group is depicted as barbaric and violent. When parties see the Nigerian government as a biased mediator, convincing the affected that justice is fairly administered becomes difficult.

Land seizures worsen the power imbalance between pastoralists and farmers. Disputing parties often pursue competitive zero-sum resolutions, tied to retributive justice. In Plateau and Benue States, this reliance on retri-

¹⁹ Interview with Mr. Aaron Maren, 18 September 2020.

²⁰ Interview with Baba Thomas Bingel, 12 September 2023.

butive justice has impaired efforts to mitigate land grabs among farmers and herders (Plateau Peacebuilding Agency 2019). Injustice and resentment from those whose lands have been illegally occupied have led some to violence in their quest for justice.

Conclusion

Land conflicts in Central Nigeria represent systematic institutional failures that perpetuate displacement and inhibit sustainable peace, rather than spontaneous ethnic disputes. The colonial foundation of systematic land appropriation, particularly through tin mining policies and administrative restructuring, established precedents that enable opportunistic actors to exploit governance weaknesses for territorial gain. Contemporary farmer-herder conflicts in Plateau and Benue States demonstrate how these historical patterns have evolved into coordinated land grabbing strategies that employ violence, administrative manipulation, and security capture to achieve a permanent displacement of indigenous communities.

The indigene-settler dilemma reflects deeper structural problems within Nigeria's institutional framework, where competing authorities create opportunities for exploitation while undermining collaborative governance. The 1978 Land Use Act exemplifies this institutional dysfunction by concentrating land authority with political elites while eliminating traditional conflict resolution systems, transforming manageable community disputes into violent competitions for territorial control. Current conflict management strategies yield mixed results because they address symptoms rather than the underlying institutional weaknesses that incentivise zero-sum competition over collaborative resource sharing.

Hybrid conflict management approaches arise from institutional gaps where formal governance structures fail to provide adequate protection or dispute resolution mechanisms for affected communities. These local adaptations showcase both community resilience and the inadequacy of existing frameworks to address systematic appropriation. However, without comprehensive institutional reform that addresses historical injustices and contemporary governance failures, these hybrid approaches remain insufficient to prevent ongoing displacement and violence.

Sustainable peace in Central Nigeria requires institutional transformation that eliminates incentives for opportunistic land appropriation while establishing collaborative governance mechanisms that protect indigenous

rights and ensure equitable resource access. Security interventions alone are inadequate, as they may temporarily reduce violence while allowing continued appropriation through administrative means. Effective resolution demands prompt enactment of protective legislation, establishment of grievance platforms for safe expression of community concerns, and comprehensive institutional reform that addresses the political economy of land rather than merely managing ethnic tensions that obscure underlying structural causes of systematic displacement and conflict.

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ABSTRACT

Despite extensive research on the sectarian and farmer-herder conflicts bedeviling Central Nigeria, little research on the complicating effects of land grabs on conflict resolution has not been adequately explored. This study examines the effects of land appropriation on peacebuilding efforts. This paper employs a historical research design to argue that the political economy of land ownership poses specific challenges to conflict resolution that existing hybrid management strategies fail to adequately address. Secondly, it presents an analytical framework that prioritises land as the central unit of analysis, offering fresh insights into the limited effectiveness of current conflict resolution strategies. This research enhances our theoretical understanding of how resource appropriation relates to the recurrence of conflict in post-colonial African contexts. This research explores the roles of state and non-state actors in promoting or obstructing justice and reconciliation regarding land grab issues. Utilising historical data and oral interviews, the findings indicate that effective conflict resolution in Central Nigeria requires a fundamental reassessment of how land ownership dynamics impact peace processes. This study has significant implications for theory and practice, enhancing our understanding of resource-based conflicts in fragmented communities and providing practical insights for policymakers addressing Central Nigeria's human and food security issues.

KEYWORDS

Land Grabbing. Identity Conflicts. Food Security. Displacement. Central Nigeria. Nigeria.

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BORDERS WITHOUT BELONGING: STATELESSNESS, DISPLACEMENT, AND HUMAN INSECURITY IN POST-HANDOVER BAKASSI

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Introduction

The Bakassi Peninsula conflict remains one of the most complex and enduring examples of postcolonial territorial disputes in Africa, raising urgent questions about legal sovereignty, resource control, and human security. Originally situated within the fluid and often contested borders of colonial cartography, Bakassi was subject to shifting territorial claims by Nigeria and Cameroon, a conflict that culminated in the 2002 International Court of Justice (ICJ) judgment awarding the peninsula to Cameroon (ICJ 2002a; 2002b). While hailed internationally as a triumph of legal diplomacy and pacific settlement (International Peace Institute 2008; United Nations 2008), the ruling and its aftermath exposed the severe disjuncture between international law and local realities, particularly for Bakassi's inhabitants who faced statelessness, displacement, and legal ambiguity (Odinkalu 2012; Hussain 2023; Oyewo 2021).

The existing scholarship on the Bakassi conflict has primarily focused on its geopolitical and legal dimensions, particularly the role of the ICJ in adjudicating territorial disputes and enforcing treaty obligations between states (Bonchuk 2014; Ezeilo 2010; Nwoko 2015). Other studies have examined Nigeria–Cameroon bilateral relations, the role of natural resources in fueling the conflict, and the enforcement challenges of international decisions (Hart 2022; Ebolo 2022; Egeran 2015). While these contributions are valuable, they tend to adopt a state-centric lens that overlooks the lived experiences

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of affected populations, particularly in relation to citizenship, displacement, and social exclusion.

This study departs from such frameworks by foregrounding the human consequences of legal diplomacy, particularly the emergence of postcolonial statelessness and the marginalization of displaced persons. It builds on, but also critiques, literature that under-theorizes the link between international legal processes and everyday governance failures in borderlands.

At the heart of the conflict lies a convergence of legal, geopolitical, and socio-economic forces. The peninsula's strategic location within the Gulf of Guinea — an area rich in offshore oil and gas reserves — greatly intensified the stakes of the territorial contest, reflecting broader patterns in which natural resource endowments exacerbate boundary tensions across Africa (Hart 2022; Ebolo 2022; Egeran 2015). For Nigeria, relinquishing control was framed as a national loss, while for Cameroon, asserting sovereignty symbolized a long-awaited restoration of territorial integrity (Caldwell 2012; Baye 2010; Akhere 2023). Yet, these state-centric narratives often obscured the experiences of Bakassi's civilian population, many of whom were forcibly uprooted, denied legal protection, and left in a state of existential precarity (BBC 2013; Ngalim 2019; Macdonald 2024).

Despite growing calls for more people-centered approaches to territorial conflict (Beckly 2013; Fobella 2007), little attention has been paid to how legal rulings reshape citizenship regimes and perpetuate structural marginalization. The Bakassi case thus presents a unique opportunity to interrogate the limits of international conflict resolution from below where legal sovereignty does not translate into protection or recognition for borderland populations.

The humanitarian fallout of the conflict has been profound. More than a decade after the Greentree Agreement, thousands of displaced Bakassi indigenes in Nigeria remain in poorly resourced settlements with limited access to healthcare, education, or legal status (Unah 2021; Sheikh et al. 2016). The sociopolitical vacuum left by the state's retreat from Bakassi has also enabled patterns of militarization, exclusion, and impunity both in Nigeria and Cameroon where military forces were deployed not merely for border defense but also for the suppression of dissent and control of local populations (Kah 2014; Beckly 2013). In this context, as Beckly (2013) and Fobella (2007) argue, the Bakassi dispute has contributed to wider instability in the region, including the emergence of separatist movements such as Ambazonia.

Importantly, the Bakassi conflict cannot be understood in isolation from wider continental and theoretical debates. Legal scholars and critical

theorists, particularly those engaging in Third World Approaches to International Law (TWAIL), have critiqued the ICJ's reliance on colonial-era treaties and its marginalization of local voices in its adjudication (Nwoko 2015; Bonchuk 2014; LeFebvre 2014). While the judgment respected international legal norms, it failed to deliver justice in any meaningful socio-political sense. The result has been a fragile peace devoid of popular legitimacy, what Ngalim (2016) describes as a "hollow resolution" that neglects indigenous claims to land, identity, and participation in decision-making.

Citizenship, too, remains deeply contested. As the Cameroon Multi-Country Office (2017) and Manby (2016) note, the Bakassi case reveals the inadequacies of citizenship regimes in Africa, where legal identity and political belonging are often decoupled. Under Cameroonian law, the process of naturalization remains opaque and exclusionary, leaving many former Nigerian residents of Bakassi in a liminal space of legal non-recognition (Nguindip 2017; Macdonald 2024). This dynamic particularly impacts marginalized groups such as women and youth. Studies have shown that displaced people in Bakassi face layered vulnerabilities, including gender-based violence, exclusion from policy-making, and economic precarity.

This study intervenes in the existing literature by shifting the analytical focus from high-level diplomacy to the socio-political aftermath of legal resolution. It explores how formal peace agreements obscure the everyday struggles of those rendered invisible by state-centric conflict narratives. Specifically, the study investigates two interlinked dynamics: (1) the crisis of postcolonial statelessness and the limitations of legal citizenship in contested territories, and (2) the structural consequences of displacement, resource contestation, and governance failure in the Bakassi Peninsula. In doing so, it bridges a critical gap between legal scholarship and the material conditions of marginalized borderland communities in postcolonial Africa.

Literature Review

The issue of postcolonial borders and their impact on statelessness has been widely examined in African studies scholarship. Researchers have highlighted how colonial-era boundary-making practices ignored the region's complex ethnic, linguistic, and political landscapes, creating persistent tensions in the post-independence era. This body of literature also underscores the ways in which such arbitrary borders contribute to displacement, contested sovereignties, and the production of stateless populations. Building on this scholarship, the following section situates the Bakassi Peninsula conflict

within this broader discourse, illustrating how these dynamics manifest in the specific context of the Nigeria-Cameroon border dispute.

Postcolonial Borders, Statelessness, and the Bakassi Conflict

The Bakassi Peninsula crisis is emblematic of the broader challenges that postcolonial African states face in navigating inherited colonial boundaries. Much like other African border conflicts, the Bakassi dispute has its roots in the arbitrary demarcation of territories by colonial powers, with little regard for the ethnic, linguistic, and socio-political realities on the ground (Bonchuk 2014; Ezeilo 2010). The 2002 International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruling that ceded Bakassi from Nigeria to Cameroon was lauded as a peaceful legal resolution (ICJ 2002a; 2002b; United Nations 2008).

Table 1: Timeline of the Bakassi Conflict

Year	Event
1961	Bakassi becomes part of Nigeria following a United Nations-organized plebiscite
1971	Nigeria and Cameroon reach a maritime border agreement
1994	Cameroon submits a case to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) over the Bakassi Peninsula
2002	The ICJ rules in favor of Cameroon, awarding it sovereignty over Bakassi
2006	Nigeria and Cameroon sign the Greentree Agreement on Bakassi handover. The Bakassi movement for Self-Determination (BAMOSD) declares the “Democratic Republic of Bakassi”
2008	Full withdrawal of Nigeria troops from Bakassi
2009	Cameroon completes the takeover of Bakassi

Source: Author’s compilation (2025).

Yet, as several scholars argue, the ruling failed to grapple with the long-term human consequences of this decision particularly the displacement, statelessness, and socio-economic exclusion of the Nigerian Bakassians (Odinkalu 2012; Hussain 2023).

Statelessness in the Bakassi region represents one of the most urgent humanitarian dimensions of the conflict. The literature emphasizes that the affected populations are caught in a legal limbo, denied Cameroonian citizenship and, simultaneously, abandoned by the Nigerian state. The Cameroon Multi-Country Office (2017) and Manby (2016) stress that statelessness

deprives individuals of civil, political, and social rights, including access to education, healthcare, and legal protection. Cameroon's restrictive nationality laws further complicate the path to legal recognition for Nigerian-origin residents (Nguindip 2017), while attempts to obtain legal identification have remained inconsistent and exclusionary (Macdonald 2024).

The crisis has also generated localized resistance in the form of secessionist agitation and community-led self-determination movements. The Bakassi Movement for Self-Determination (BAMOSD), for instance, emerged in response to the perceived abandonment of Bakassians by both Nigeria and Cameroon (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2010; Nwoko 2015). Scholars like Akhere (2023) and Beckly (2013) document the identity crisis experienced by Bakassi residents, whose ethnic and cultural affiliation with Nigeria contrasts sharply with their new legal and political reality under Cameroonian governance. This disjuncture has deepened grievances and reinforced perceptions of marginalization, akin to other borderland tensions in Africa (Fobella 2007; Ngalim 2016).

Furthermore, the role of international law in adjudicating boundary disputes has come under critical scrutiny. While legal instruments such as the ICJ ruling and the Greentree Agreement aimed to provide clarity and stability (International Peace Institute 2008), they often do so at the expense of border communities. Ebolo (2022) and LeFebvre (2014) critique the top-down nature of such legal solutions, arguing that they reinforce state-centric sovereignty while silencing subaltern voices. This exclusion has implications for both legitimacy and long-term peace, especially when the socio-political agency of displaced or stateless groups is ignored.

The Bakassi case thus represents a broader pattern in postcolonial African politics, where international legal mechanisms and regional diplomacy fail to adequately resolve the internal complexities of citizenship, belonging, and territorial identity. Without meaningful inclusion of local stakeholders and the institutionalization of rights-based frameworks for affected populations, legal peace becomes fragile and temporary.

Territorial Displacement, Resource Politics, and the Limits of Legal Resolution

The Bakassi Peninsula crisis exemplifies the complex entanglement of territorial sovereignty, resource competition, and displacement in postcolonial Africa. Located within an oil-rich maritime zone, Bakassi's geopolitical and economic value elevated the stakes of the territorial dispute between

Nigeria and Cameroon (Hart 2022; Nonju and Uwoh 2021). Resource endowments have long been identified as accelerators of boundary disputes in Africa, particularly in regions where natural wealth intersects with unclear or contested colonial-era borders (Egeran 2015; Otoro 2022). In Bakassi's case, the desire to control lucrative offshore oil reserves intensified nationalistic claims and shaped the post-ruling dynamics. Nigeria's hesitancy to relinquish the territory and Cameroon's assertiveness following the ICJ ruling reflected this deeper logic of resource-driven territoriality (Caldwell 2012; BBC 2013).

However, while legal instruments such as the 2002 ICJ ruling and the 2006 Greentree Agreement have often been celebrated for averting war (ICJ 2002a; International Peace Institute 2008), they simultaneously displaced local priorities. As Bonchuk (2014) and LeFebvre (2014) observe, legal resolutions to border conflicts in Africa tend to favor elite, state-centric negotiations over participatory and inclusive justice. The Bakassi conflict illustrates how such legalism can obscure the human cost of peace: tens of thousands of people were uprooted, stripped of their legal status, or relocated to poorly resourced settlements without adequate state support (Ngalim 2019; Hussain 2023; Unah 2021).

Displacement is not merely a humanitarian side-effect but a structural consequence of how postcolonial states manage territorial transitions. In Bakassi, Nigerian returnees have been relocated to temporary camps and underfunded settlements in Akwa Ibom and Cross River States, where they face limited access to housing, education, and healthcare (Cameroon Multi-Country Office 2017; Beckly 2013). Several studies document how this institutional abandonment has exacerbated psychological trauma, with elevated incidences of PTSD, distress, and anxiety among displaced populations (Madoro et al. 2020; Sheikh et al. 2016). The crisis mirrors a broader African pattern, where the collapse of protection mechanisms and prolonged state inaction transform border communities into zones of perpetual precarity (Kah 2014; Ebiede et al. 2020).

These dynamics are compounded by gendered vulnerabilities. As Oke-Chinda (2021) and Oghuvbu and Okolie (2020) emphasize, women in displacement camps are disproportionately exposed to sexual violence, economic exploitation, and exclusion from decision-making processes. Despite international frameworks such as the Kampala Convention and UNSCR 1325 advocating for gender-sensitive post-conflict recovery, implementation in Bakassi has been superficial at best. Displaced women are largely absent from reintegration planning, and mechanisms for accountability and redress remain fragmented or nonexistent (Dayil 2015; Anthony 2014).

Institutional failure also characterizes the post-handover governance landscape. Despite the international community's celebration of the Green-tree Agreement as a diplomatic success (United Nations 2008), both Nigeria and Cameroon have struggled to implement sustainable frameworks for borderland development, social protection, and civic inclusion. Anthony (2014) and Taiwo and Igwebuike (2015) note that the absence of inclusive governance structures has allowed corruption and clientelism to flourish, particularly in the administration of relief and resettlement programs. The African Union's muted engagement in the aftermath of the transfer further highlights the limitations of continental bodies in safeguarding the human rights of communities affected by legal boundary shifts (Baye 2010; Ngalim 2016).

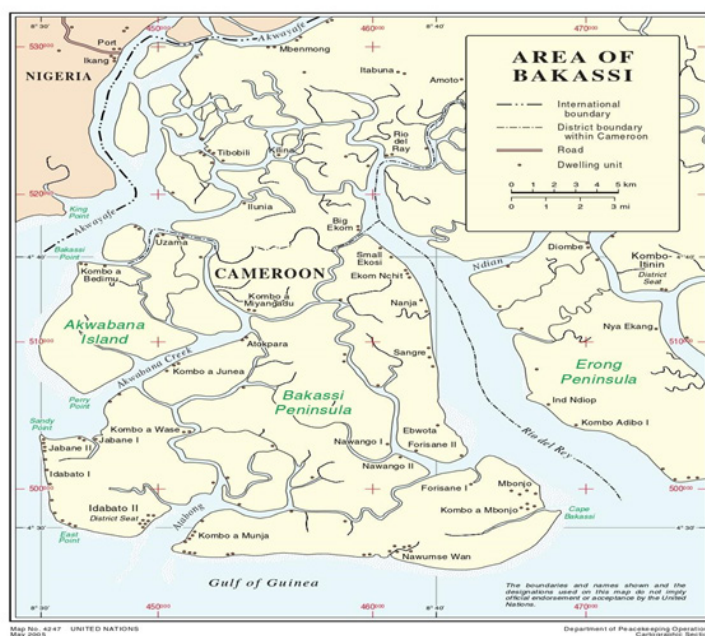
Public discourse and media coverage have played a critical role in shaping national and international perceptions of the crisis. Taiwo and Igwebuike (2015) demonstrate how Nigerian and Cameroonian media predominantly adopted state-centric and nationalist narratives that neglected the voices of displaced residents. This discursive framing has reinforced official versions of "peaceful resolution" while invisibilizing the continuing suffering and statelessness on the ground (Otor 2022; Macdonald 2024). As a result, the legitimacy of the legal solution is contested not only in political forums but also in the lived experience of border communities who remain unrecognized, unprotected, and unheard.

In essence, the Bakassi Peninsula case illustrates the paradox of legal peace. While sovereignty was redefined through international adjudication, the human costs, statelessness, displacement, psychological trauma, and institutional abandonment have remained unresolved. Legal closure has not translated into social justice or human security. Scholars have thus increasingly called for a rethinking of post-border conflict governance in Africa, one that prioritizes inclusive citizenship, gender justice, and participatory decision-making (Manby 2016; Odinkalu 2012; Nwoko 2015). The Bakassi experience offers a cautionary tale: that peace secured through legal fiat but devoid of local legitimacy and social equity may only entrench deeper and longer-lasting forms of insecurity in Africa's borderlands.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design grounded in postcolonial theory and Third World Approaches to International Law (TWAIL), aiming to critically examine the Bakassi Peninsula conflict through the intersecting lenses of legal sovereignty, statelessness, and displacement. The qualitative approach is particularly suited to unpacking how international legal decisions and state actions translate into human (in)security for affected populations in Africa's contested borderlands.

Figure 1: Location of the Bakassi Peninsula



Source: Geospatial Information Section (2005). The map shows the Bakassi Peninsula situated along the Gulf of Guinea, at the maritime boundary between southeastern Nigeria and southwestern Cameroon. The disputed area lies near the Cross-River estuary and is known for its strategic position and resource-rich offshore zones. This geographic context is essential for understanding the territorial conflict and its human implications.

Data was collected through academic literature, and media reports. Primary sources include the 2002 International Court of Justice (ICJ) judgment, the Greentree Agreement, UNHCR and UN reports, and relevant bilateral agreements between Nigeria and Cameroon (ICJ 2002a; UN 2008; Cameroon Multi-Country Office (2017). Scholarly studies such as Bonchuk (2014), Hart (2022), and Ngalim (2016) provide critical insight into the structural and institutional dimensions of the conflict, while news articles and investigative journalism (e.g., BBC 2013; Unah 2021) offer perspectives on the lived experiences of displaced residents.

The analysis employs critical discourse analysis (CDA) to explore how legal, state, and media narratives construct exclusionary notions of citizenship and sovereignty. This is complemented by documentary analysis to trace inconsistencies between legal resolutions and ground-level implementation. Particular attention is paid to representations of displacement, gendered vulnerabilities, and the marginalization of local voices in decision-making processes.

Given the reliance on secondary sources, the study did not require formal ethical approval. However, care was taken to ethically represent displaced and stateless populations, and to avoid reifying state-centric narratives. All materials are cited appropriately, and cross-referencing was used to enhance source reliability and analytical depth.

A key limitation is the absence of direct fieldwork, which restricts access to first hand testimonies and may limit contextual nuance. Nevertheless, the triangulation of multiple data sources ensures a rich, multi-scalar analysis of how law, politics, and identity intersect in the post-conflict governance of Bakassi.

Results and Findings

This section presents the main findings of the study, organized around core themes that emerged from document analysis, policy reviews, and secondary data on the Bakassi Peninsula conflict. The themes shed light on how the legal resolution of the Bakassi dispute, far from ending the crisis, contributed to new forms of statelessness, militarization, and institutional abandonment in both Nigeria and Cameroon.

Colonial Legacies and the Reproduction of Statelessness

The origins of the Bakassi Peninsula conflict are embedded in the broader legacy of colonial cartography and legal frameworks that ignored indigenous spatial relations, community boundaries, and sociopolitical arrangements. The partitioning of Africa by European powers prioritized geopolitical expediency over ethnic, cultural, and ecological coherence. In the case of Bakassi, the Anglo-German Treaty of 1913, concluded between Britain and Germany, delineated territorial control in West Africa without local consent (Bonchuk 2014; Ebolo 2022). This treaty, later used by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in its 2002 ruling, legitimized Cameroon's sovereignty over the territory. However, by relying exclusively on colonial-era instruments, the ICJ sidelined indigenous claims and effectively decoupled legal sovereignty from socio-political belonging (Nwoko 2015; Ezeilo 2010).

The ICJ's legalistic approach to the conflict disregarded the intricate and historically rooted identities of Bakassi's inhabitants. Though the court ruled in accordance with international law principles on territorial sovereignty, it failed to address the social and humanitarian implications of its judgment. This included questions of citizenship, protection, and political belonging for Nigerian communities long domiciled in the territory (ICJ 2002a; Akhere 2023). The Greentree Agreement (2006), which operationalized the ICJ verdict, contained no binding guarantees for the protection of those at risk of statelessness. Instead, the onus was left on Nigeria and Cameroon to negotiate the status of Bakassi residents, many of whom were caught in legal limbo after the transfer of authority (International Peace Institute 2008; Baye 2010).

As a consequence, thousands of displaced Nigerians found themselves excluded from both Nigerian and Cameroonian citizenship regimes. According to Odinkalu (2012) and the Cameroon Multi-Country Office (2017), the citizenship status of Bakassi residents remains unresolved years after the transition. Many refused to naturalize in Cameroon due to fear of marginalization or cultural alienation, while others faced procedural and bureaucratic hurdles that blocked legal assimilation (Nguindip 2017; Manby 2016). This has entrenched a condition of de facto statelessness, characterized by a lack of political representation, access to public services, and legal recognition. The situation disproportionately affects women and youth, who face compounded vulnerabilities due to their socioeconomic marginalization (Oke-Chinda 2021; Dayil 2015).

The consequences of statelessness extend beyond legal invisibility to include psychosocial trauma, economic deprivation, and long-term disem-

powerment. Many displaced persons remain in poorly resourced settlements in Nigeria's Cross River and Akwa Ibom States, where they endure harsh living conditions and institutional neglect (Unah 2021; Oghuvbu and Okolie 2020). Those who stayed behind in Cameroon, especially in areas like Idabato and Kombo Abedimo, report being subjected to discriminatory taxation, denial of identity documents, and exclusion from political participation (BBC 2013; Macdonald 2024). Statelessness in Bakassi thus represents a multidimensional crisis rooted in historical injustice, legal oversight, and institutional apathy.

This crisis is emblematic of a broader failure in international law and diplomacy to account for the lived experiences of people displaced by legalistic statecraft. As Hussain (2023) notes, the situation in Bakassi is not an isolated incident but part of a pattern where international adjudications though procedurally sound neglect the human rights imperatives of affected populations. The emphasis on territorial integrity and diplomatic resolution eclipses questions of justice, inclusion, and democratic agency. Without targeted interventions such as inclusive citizenship reforms, robust legal aid, and transitional justice mechanisms the legacies of colonial cartography and statelessness in Bakassi will continue to undermine regional stability and human security in the Gulf of Guinea region (Hart 2022; LeFebvre 2014; Ngalim 2019).

Displacement, Dispossession, and Institutional Abandonment

The transfer of authority over the Bakassi Peninsula from Nigeria to Cameroon following the 2006 Greentree Agreement led to the displacement of thousands of Nigerians, who were hastily relocated to resettlement sites in Akwa Ibom and Cross River States (Unah 2021; Eboho 2022). These relocation initiatives, driven more by diplomatic symbolism than genuine resettlement planning, were marred by poor coordination, underfunding, and administrative neglect (Ezeilo 2010; Akhere 2023). Many displaced persons were forced into overcrowded and underserved camps, such as those in Ikang and Atabong, lacking basic social amenities, healthcare, and education facilities (Sheikh et al. 2016; Macdonald 2024). The conditions of these camps did not meet minimum humanitarian standards, and residents remained in legal limbo, with no guarantee of sustainable reintegration or economic empowerment.

These post-displacement conditions exemplify what scholars and human rights observers term institutional abandonment. Despite promises of compensation, rehabilitation, and reintegration made by Nigerian authorities

at the signing of the Greentree Agreement, little tangible support has reached the displaced populations over the years (Kindzeka 2013; Hart 2022). Federal and state agencies have largely shifted the burden of care to non-governmental organizations and faith-based groups, creating a fragmented and insufficient support system. The lack of a coordinated policy response reveals a deeper structural disregard for displaced and marginalized communities in Nigeria's governance architecture (Odinkalu 2012; Otor 2022).

The consequences of this abandonment are disproportionately felt by women, children, and youth. Displaced women face heightened risks of gender-based violence, economic marginalization, and inadequate reproductive healthcare (Oke-Chinda 2021; Oghuvbu and Okolie 2020). Children from displaced families suffer educational disruptions and exhibit signs of post-traumatic stress and psychological distress due to their prolonged displacement and the loss of home, identity, and safety (Sheikh et al. 2016; Madoro et al. 2020). Youth are increasingly drawn into informal and precarious labor markets or local militias as a means of survival, exposing them to cycles of violence and poverty (Dayil 2015; Ebiede et al. 2020).

The gap between state rhetoric and ground-level realities is not merely a policy failure but a form of systemic violence that reinforces historical patterns of neglect and marginalization. Despite international attention to the Bakassi handover and assurances by the United Nations and key actors under the Greentree Agreement framework, long-term monitoring and assistance have been inadequate (International Peace Institute 2008; United Nations 2008). This neglect fuels distrust among displaced populations, undermining both domestic and cross-border peacebuilding efforts. The lack of durable solutions such as land tenure security, citizenship documentation, and livelihood opportunities leaves these communities in a perpetual state of uncertainty.

Most importantly, the case of Bakassi returnees illustrates the failure of state institutions to uphold the rights of displaced populations in the aftermath of international conflict resolution. As Baye (2010) and Ngalim (2019) observe, the absence of inclusive post-conflict planning has entrenched new forms of marginalization and worsened human insecurity. Legal scholars have criticized the Greentree Agreement for prioritizing territorial sovereignty over human dignity, effectively rendering displaced Bakassi indigenes invisible in both domestic and international legal frameworks (Anthony 2014; Hussain 2023). Addressing this institutional vacuum requires a concerted effort to bridge humanitarian assistance with political accountability, emphasizing inclusive governance and justice for displaced persons.

Militarization and the Criminalization of Dissent

The post-transfer period in Bakassi has witnessed an intensification of militarization, which has become a central mechanism for asserting state control and sovereignty. In Cameroon, the state has relied on a combination of armed presence, administrative restructuring, and economic coercion to solidify its authority over the disputed peninsula. Reports indicate that Cameroonian forces have implemented aggressive taxation and conducted surveillance and policing operations that contribute to a climate of fear and intimidation among local populations (BBC 2013; Macdonald 2024). Such measures are not merely administrative but form part of a broader securitization strategy that seeks to suppress dissent and ensure compliance through force. These policies have had a chilling effect on civic expression and have delegitimized traditional leaders and community voices who contest state practices or advocate for the rights of the displaced (Beckly 2013).

On the Nigerian side, militarization has taken a different form. While ostensibly deployed to protect the rights of displaced Bakassi citizens and to ensure regional stability, Nigerian military operations have sometimes become enmeshed in local disputes and power struggles. In several instances, soldiers have been accused of arbitrary arrests, harassment, and extrajudicial actions, particularly against those suspected of aligning with separatist or self-determination movements (Kah 2014; Bonchuk 2014). These practices have blurred the lines between protection and repression, especially as communities struggle to navigate the ambiguities of post-transfer governance. As Akhere (2023) notes, the Nigerian state's security interventions often lack a coherent post-conflict strategy, leading to fragmented and sometimes contradictory outcomes.

One of the most visible consequences of this militarized environment has been the criminalization of dissent. Movements such as the Bakassi Movement for Self-Determination (BAMOSD) emerged as grassroots responses to perceived abandonment and injustice but were quickly labeled as security threats by both states (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2010; Fobella 2007). Leaders and members of these groups have faced imprisonment, surveillance, and forced exile. The silencing of such voices has foreclosed possibilities for political negotiation and exacerbated the alienation felt by residents of Bakassi, many of whom already contend with statelessness, displacement, and economic precarity (Ebolo 2022; Ngalim 2019).

Moreover, the intertwining of militarization with resource control adds another layer of complexity. The Bakassi Peninsula is rich in oil and fishing resources, and control over these has become a strategic interest for

both Nigeria and Cameroon (Hart 2022). In such a context, dissent is not only politically inconvenient but economically threatening. Armed forces are thus deployed not just to secure borders but to guard resource sites, further militarizing everyday life. This nexus between economic interest and military force reinforces structural violence against Bakassi's residents, who often lack formal employment, access to justice, or secure land tenure (Ezeilo 2010; Otoro 2022).

Finally, the psychological and social consequences of militarization cannot be overlooked. Inhabitants of Bakassi particularly children, women, and displaced youth have suffered long-term trauma due to exposure to violence, forced displacement, and state surveillance (Sheikh et al. 2016; Madoro et al. 2020). Studies on internally displaced populations reveal heightened rates of PTSD, depression, and community fragmentation in militarized zones. As Hussain (2023) emphasizes, the securitization of Bakassi must be understood not only as a geopolitical strategy but also as a lived reality that deepens human insecurity and undermines the prospects for peaceful reintegration and reconstruction. Thus, any sustainable resolution to the Bakassi crisis must move beyond legalistic or militarized frameworks and toward inclusive, rights-based governance that centers the experiences and demands of the affected communities.

Citizenship, Identity, and Legal Exclusion

The aftermath of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruling on Bakassi has left a troubling legacy of exclusion and legal uncertainty for many of its former Nigerian inhabitants. While the ICJ's decision (ICJ 2002a; 2002b) resolved the state-centric boundary dispute in favor of Cameroon, it did not sufficiently consider the implications for the people living in the affected territories. The Greentree Agreement that followed lacked robust mechanisms for securing the citizenship rights of displaced persons, particularly those who chose to remain in Bakassi under Cameroonian control (International Peace Institute 2008; Bonchuk 2014). This omission created a legal vacuum in which tens of thousands of people have found themselves without clear nationality, legal status, or protection under either state's laws (Odinkalu 2012; Cameroon Multi-Country Office 2017).

Cameroonian nationality law has been widely criticized for its opacity and selective enforcement. As Nguindip (2017) explains, naturalization procedures in Cameroon are marred by bureaucratic inefficiencies, ethnolinguistic biases, and executive discretion. In Bakassi, former Nigerian nationals are frequently denied identity documents and are excluded from civic participa-

tion, including the right to vote or access public education and health services (Macdonald 2024; Hussain 2023). This institutional denial has compounded the statelessness crisis, especially for younger generations born after the territorial transfer who remain undocumented and legally invisible. The denial of legal identity effectively restricts mobility, undermines livelihoods, and perpetuates marginalization (Oyewo 2021; Manby 2016).

This exclusionary framework is deeply gendered. Women in Bakassi face a unique set of vulnerabilities due to their compounded status as both displaced persons and members of a historically marginalized gender group. Research indicates that displaced women have been systematically excluded from policy consultation processes and denied access to land ownership and housing rights, both of which are often allocated through patriarchal systems (Dayil 2015; Oke-Chinda 2021). In some cases, they are more susceptible to gender-based violence, exploitation, and trafficking risks exacerbated by the absence of legal identity and state protection (Ezeilo 2010; Sheikh et al. 2016). The failure to integrate a gender-sensitive framework into the post-conflict legal regime has perpetuated a cycle of social and economic dependency for women in Bakassi.

The political economy of exclusion is further reinforced by discriminatory narratives around indigeneity and national belonging. In both Nigeria and Cameroon, state discourses often treat displaced Bakassi populations as politically expendable or culturally suspect (Anthony 2014; Akhere 2023). These narratives frame them as neither fully Nigerian nor acceptably Cameroonian, thereby legitimizing their exclusion from social protections and entitlements. As Hart (2022) and Baye (2010) suggest, such exclusion is not merely administrative, it reflects deeper anxieties about sovereignty, identity, and control in contested borderlands. This dual alienation contributes to the broader securitization of displacement and weakens the prospects for meaningful reintegration or restitution.

The Bakassi case ultimately exposes the limitations of state-centric conflict resolution mechanisms that prioritize territorial integrity over human security. Although the ICJ ruling adhered to international legal principles, it failed to create pathways for the preservation of the identity and rights of the displaced populations (Nwoko 2015; LeFebvre 2014). In the absence of supranational enforcement, neither Nigeria nor Cameroon has assumed full responsibility for the legal and political rehabilitation of Bakassi's displaced citizens. As such, Bakassi has become emblematic of a broader failure of transitional justice and inclusive governance in post-colonial Africa's border

disputes, one where people, especially women and youth, are left stateless, silenced, and structurally excluded.

Media Erasure and the Silence of Displacement

One of the most striking outcomes of the Bakassi Peninsula conflict is the sustained erasure of displaced communities from mainstream media and policy discourses. While the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruling in 2002 (ICJ 2002a; 2002b) resolved the territorial dispute between Nigeria and Cameroon, the human cost of that decision — particularly the forced displacement of tens of thousands — has received comparatively little attention. Media coverage in both countries tends to prioritize geopolitical narratives such as sovereignty, diplomatic cooperation, and legal compliance, while sidelining the everyday struggles of displaced persons (Taiwo and Igwebuike 2015). As Ezeilo (2010) notes, this pattern of coverage perpetuates a form of structural invisibility that renders the displaced population peripheral to both state accountability and public empathy.

This media neglect has profound implications for policy formation. When the experiences of displaced Bakassi residents are omitted from public discourse, their needs are similarly excluded from national and international policy agendas. The dominant narrative of Bakassi as a “success story” of peaceful conflict resolution (Bonchuk 2014; International Peace Institute 2008) masks the underlying social dislocation and long-term humanitarian crises. For example, reports highlight that many displaced persons still lack access to housing, education, and legal documentation over a decade after the territorial transfer (Unah 2021; Macdonald 2024). Without visibility in media or political forums, these issues fail to galvanize action or attract sustained international attention, leaving affected communities in protracted limbo.

In addition, this silence serves as a mechanism for the depoliticization of displacement. The media’s focus on legal outcomes rather than lived realities reinforces a technocratic approach to conflict resolution, one that treats borders as abstract lines rather than social spaces inhabited by real people (Akhere 2023; Hart 2022). As LeFebvre (2014) and Ngalim (2019) argue, the absence of people-centered narratives allows states to celebrate legal compliance while evading responsibility for the human suffering their decisions produce. This silence is especially troubling given that many displaced persons, particularly women and children, continue to experience trauma, dispossession, and statelessness (Dayil 2015; Sheikh et al. 2016). Their exclusion from dominant narratives reflects a broader failure to humanize displacement in border conflict reporting.

The Bakassi displacement also illustrates how media silence intersects with broader patterns of marginalization and statelessness in post-colonial Africa. As Manby (2016) and Hussain (2023) observe, statelessness often results not only from legal exclusion but also from epistemic invisibility — that is, the absence of affected populations from public knowledge systems. In Bakassi, this invisibility has been reinforced by the failure of Nigerian and Cameroonian authorities to publicly acknowledge and address the long-term implications of their policies. Even global platforms have rarely highlighted the plight of these communities in the same way as more high-profile displacement crises. The lack of international media attention diminishes the urgency of intervention, funding, or humanitarian relief.

The silence surrounding Bakassi's displaced communities is not merely an oversight but a structural feature of how displacement is narrated or ignored in African border politics. The ICJ ruling, hailed in international law circles as a peaceful solution to a long-standing territorial conflict, stands in stark contrast to the unresolved social and humanitarian problems it helped generate. As Beckly (2013) and Ebolo (2022) emphasize, peace agreements that ignore the voices of displaced populations are not sustainable. The Bakassi case should compel scholars, journalists, and policymakers to reconsider how media representation or its absence shapes the fate of marginalized communities. Only through inclusive, people-centered approaches to both justice and journalism can the silences of displacement be effectively broken.

Discussion

The findings of this study point to a profound disjunction between the formal legal mechanisms deployed to resolve the Bakassi Peninsula dispute and the lived experiences of those most affected by the territorial handover. While the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruling in 2002 and the Green-tree Agreement of 2006 have been globally acclaimed for demonstrating a rare instance of peaceful adjudication of an African territorial conflict (Bonchuk 2014; International Peace Institute 2008), they nonetheless illustrate the limitations of legalism devoid of a robust human rights foundation. These instruments prioritized the principle of *uti possidetis juris*, the maintenance of inherited colonial boundaries but failed to adequately address the human security and identity needs of displaced borderland communities. In this sense, the case of Bakassi not only reveals the insufficiencies of state-centric international law but also underscores how conflict resolution that fails to

integrate social justice and localized participation can deepen, rather than alleviate, marginalization and displacement (Nwoko 2015; Manby 2016).

By situating Bakassi's displaced communities within the broader discourse on statelessness and post-conflict exclusion, this study challenges dominant interpretations of the dispute that center on territorial integrity and sovereign compliance. Specifically, it highlights the production of legal invisibility and administrative abandonment among Bakassi residents, especially those who remained in Cameroon after the territory's transfer. As Nguindip (2017) observes, Cameroonian nationality law, though formally codified, is functionally exclusionary posing both procedural and substantive obstacles to naturalization. Many former Nigerian residents report being denied birth certificates, identity cards, and access to basic services such as education and healthcare (Macdonald 2024). This situation directly contradicts Cameroon's obligations under international human rights law, including the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons. Hussain (2023) and Odinkalu (2012) note that this form of exclusion is not merely a legal oversight but a structurally embedded form of violence, producing a population that exists in a legal vacuum, with neither recognition nor redress.

This study's gendered analysis further complicates the narrative by showing how women in displaced Bakassi communities suffer multidimensional forms of exclusion. The research reveals that displacement has amplified pre-existing gender inequalities, subjecting women to heightened risks of sexual violence, disinheritance, and social isolation. As Dayil (2015) and Oke-Chinda (2021) emphasize in their respective works on gender and conflict in Nigeria, post-conflict environments often reproduce patriarchal structures that render women both invisible and hyper-visible as victims of violence yet excluded from formal recovery processes. In Bakassi, the absence of gender-sensitive transitional justice mechanisms means that women's specific experiences are neither documented nor addressed. For instance, female-headed households often lack access to land or housing in resettlement areas, while trauma support for survivors of sexual violence remains virtually non-existent. These findings corroborate broader feminist critiques of peacebuilding, which argue that "post-conflict reconstruction" often privileges elite male actors and national-level political settlements at the expense of everyday justice and healing (Cohn, Kinsella and Gibbings 2004).

In addition to legal and gender-based exclusions, this study sheds light on a less examined but equally critical dimension: representational erasure. Media analysis reveals that Nigerian and Cameroonian news outlets,

as well as international reporting agencies, have largely framed the Bakassi story through the lens of intergovernmental cooperation and legal compliance (Taiwo and Igwebuike 2015; BBC 2013). While these narratives affirm the legitimacy of the ICJ ruling and portray the handover as a diplomatic success, they simultaneously efface the voices and struggles of displaced Bakassi communities. This selective storytelling has significant political consequences. It contributes to the erasure of the displaced from public discourse, policymaking, and civil society mobilization. As Ezeilo (2010) and Unah (2021) suggest, such narrative silencing translates into institutional inaction and funding neglect, thereby sustaining the humanitarian crisis well beyond the formal end of the dispute.

This phenomenon of media and policy invisibility also aligns with what McDowell (2008) describes as “infrastructures of forgetting” the institutional processes through which displaced populations are deliberately excluded from national memory and citizenship-making. Our findings align with Beckly’s (2013) research, which found that even local government officials in Cameroon express limited knowledge or political will to address the needs of Bakassi’s displaced populations. Similarly, Ngalim (2019) notes that post-conflict reintegration efforts between 2006 and 2016 largely failed due to the lack of cross-border collaboration, resource allocation, and community participation. As a result, displaced persons have found themselves stuck in protracted liminality, unable to claim full membership in either Nigeria or Cameroon, and left out of regional refugee protection frameworks due to the formal conclusion of the conflict.

Crucially, this study illustrates that such exclusions are not isolated, but part of a broader pattern in international conflict resolution practices that prioritize the settlement of territorial disputes over the restoration of justice for those displaced by such decisions. The Bakassi case typifies what Achiume (2019) refers to as “legalistic containment”, meaning the tendency of international law to resolve interstate disputes while systematically ignoring the socio-political and human rights consequences for affected populations. In the case of Bakassi, the ICJ’s ruling may have satisfied the legal conditions for peaceful boundary demarcation but failed to mandate concrete protections for displaced persons. Nor did it provide an accountability mechanism to ensure that state actors would fulfill resettlement obligations. The consequence has been a humanitarian vacuum filled with broken promises, prolonged statelessness, and intergenerational trauma.

These findings have far-reaching implications for policy and practice. First, there is a need for more inclusive legal frameworks that integrate

human security into the adjudication of territorial disputes. Such frameworks must go beyond binary sovereignty claims to incorporate community histories, cultural identities, and participatory justice. As LeFebvre (2014) contends, successful peace negotiations require a recognition of how border communities experience identity and belonging — not merely where borders are drawn. Second, there is an urgent need for post-conflict reconstruction programs that center the voices of displaced persons and prioritize legal status, gender equity, and media representation. This entails not only the provision of identity documentation and voting rights, but also psychosocial support, trauma counseling, and durable housing solutions. Efforts must also be made to include displaced communities in the design and implementation of these policies to avoid reproducing top-down paternalism.

Finally, the Bakassi Peninsula dispute presents an opportunity to rethink the ethics and politics of territorial realignment in Africa's fragile borderlands. As Otor (2022) and Kah (2014) argue, many African border conflicts are rooted not only in colonial cartography but also in the persistent failure of states to reconcile administrative sovereignty with the lived realities of borderland populations. The Bakassi experience demonstrates that legal resolutions without human-centered follow-up can produce a false peace, one in which the guns may fall silent, but the structural violence of exclusion persists. Therefore, scholars, diplomats, and policymakers must interrogate the assumptions underpinning legalistic models of conflict resolution and advocate for approaches that embed justice, recognition, and care into the post-conflict landscape.

Conclusion

This study has critically examined the Bakassi Peninsula territorial transfer, exposing how legal exclusion, statelessness, media erasure, and post-conflict governance failures have collectively shaped the lives of displaced communities. While the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruling and the Greentree Agreement were internationally applauded for their adherence to peaceful boundary settlement protocols, they simultaneously exemplify the pitfalls of international legal mechanisms that prioritize state sovereignty over the human consequences of territorial realignment. This research contributes to debates in international law, border studies, and post-conflict justice by foregrounding the lived experiences and legal liminality of those rendered invisible by formal peace processes.

One of the study's central contributions lies in illuminating how displaced Bakassi residents — particularly those who remained in Cameroon — have experienced not just loss of homeland, but also loss of legal identity and political agency. It adds to existing literature on statelessness and identity politics in Africa by showing how nationality laws, when coupled with weak institutional support, perpetuate multi-generational exclusion. The study also draws attention to the gendered impacts of statelessness, where women are disproportionately affected by violence, land insecurity, and political silencing, extending the work of scholars like Oke-Chinda (2021) and Dayil (2015) on gender and displacement in post-conflict settings.

A significant insight from this research is the role of media and discursive silence in reinforcing structural neglect. The erasure of displaced Bakassi communities from public discourse and policy agendas reflects a broader pattern of narrative control in post-conflict environments, where state-centric legal victories eclipse grassroots suffering. This dimension contributes to critical media studies and peacebuilding research by demonstrating how invisibility in national narratives correlates with institutional inaction and the denial of restorative justice.

By focusing on the human costs of legalistic conflict resolution, this article advances the argument that peace settlements must be reimaged through inclusive, people-centered approaches. The findings resonate with scholarship on postcolonial statehood, African border disputes, and transitional justice, emphasizing that durable peace requires integrating human security, legal identity, and participatory governance mechanisms into post-adjudication processes. The Bakassi case thus offers both a diagnostic and prescriptive contribution to understanding the long-term implications of international law on vulnerable populations.

Future research should further investigate the comparative experiences of displaced populations affected by other African border realignments, such as in the Ilemi Triangle or the Sudan-South Sudan boundary. In addition, interdisciplinary inquiries that combine legal anthropology, gender studies, and conflict resolution can deepen understanding of how statelessness is negotiated and resisted at local levels. As African states continue to confront overlapping crises of borders, belonging, and displacement, scholarship must remain attuned not only to the formal outcomes of international law, but to the everyday survival strategies and claims to justice advanced by those left in its wake.

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the enduring human security crisis in the Bakassi Peninsula following the 2002 International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruling that transferred sovereignty from Nigeria to Cameroon. While the ruling resolved the legal dispute between the two nations, it created a protracted humanitarian emergency for thousands of Nigerians who remain stateless, undocumented, and marginalized in their ancestral homeland. The objective of this study is to critically examine the multi-dimensional challenges — legal, political, and existential — faced by the displaced Nigerian population in Bakassi and to analyze the institutional responses to their plight. Drawing on a qualitative methodology that combines policy analysis, secondary literature, the study situates the Bakassi crisis within the broader theoretical

framework of human security. It contends that the securitization of territory without parallel protection for human lives has deepened the vulnerability of affected populations. Furthermore, the study highlights how forced assimilation, bureaucratic statelessness, and identity erasure have fostered insurgent responses and undermined regional stability. The study contributes to ongoing debates on postcolonial border governance, the limits of international adjudication, and the urgent need for rights-based approaches to conflict resolution in Africa.

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Borders. Cameroon. Statelessness. Displacement. Human insecurity. Bakassi Peninsula. Nigeria.

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