Regional Organizations and Conflict Management: A critical discourse analysis of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

Why did ECOWAS’s AFISMA fail to resolve the Malian conflict between 2012 and 2013?

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Bachelor programme – IR103L 15 credits thesis
Thesis submitted: Fall / 2023
Abstract
This paper seeks to investigate why did ECOWAS’s AFISMA fail to resolve the Malian conflict between 2012 and 2013. The idea is not to go over the different challenges that ECOWAS faced in handling the Malian conflict but to instead establish the single main challenge that inhibited ECOWAS from achieving its desired goals in resolving and managing the crisis in Mali. This thesis employed the theoretical framework of neoliberal institutionalism. Methodologically, this thesis has utilised critical discourse analysis method. The paper will analyse data from both primary sources (i.e ECOWAS’ policy documents, United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolutions on the Mali crisis, AU documents, Mali’s government documents, speeches and reports) and secondary sources (i.e news articles and media reports). This paper is arguing that the reason why ECOWAS’s AFISMA failed to resolve the Malian conflict with regards to its conflict management quest in Mali is the community’s lack of ownership of its military intervention initiative in the country. In agreement with its hypothesis the paper concluded by positing that indeed the ‘reason why ECOWAS’s AFISMA failed in its conflict management quest in Mali is the community’s lack of ownership of its military intervention initiative in the country’.

Keywords: Conflict management, ECOWAS, Mali, AFISMA, ownership.
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## Abbreviations

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<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tr>
<td>AFISMA</td>
<td>African-led International Support Mission to Mali</td>
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<td>AQIM</td>
<td>Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb</td>
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<td>AMU</td>
<td>Arab Maghreb Union</td>
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<td>AU</td>
<td>African Union</td>
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<td>AUPSC</td>
<td>African Union Peace and Security Council</td>
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<td>EAC</td>
<td>East African Community</td>
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<td>CDA</td>
<td>Critical Discourse Analysis</td>
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<tr>
<td>ECOMICI</td>
<td>ECOWAS Mission in Côte d’Ivoire</td>
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<td>ECOMOG</td>
<td>ECOWAS Ceasefire Monitoring Group</td>
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<td>ECOWAS</td>
<td>Economic Community of West African States</td>
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<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
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<td>IR</td>
<td>International Relations</td>
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<td>MINUSMA</td>
<td>United Nations Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA)</td>
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<td>MHS</td>
<td>Mutually Hurting Stalemate</td>
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<td>MUJAO</td>
<td>Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa</td>
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<td>MHS</td>
<td>Mutually Hurting Stalemate</td>
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<td>MNLA</td>
<td>National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad</td>
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<td>SADC</td>
<td>South African Development Community</td>
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<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
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<td>UNOMIL</td>
<td>UN Observer Mission</td>
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<td>UNSC</td>
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<td>UNSG</td>
<td>United Nations Secretary General</td>
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1. Introduction

Regional organisations like the European Union (EU), the East African Community (EAC), the South African Development Community (SADC), the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) among others, are increasingly engaging in managing and resolving conflicts within and among their member states. Right from the inception of the United Nations (UN) it was discussed that letting individual regions to directly manage conflicts within them by themselves was the most appropriate idea (Fredrik, 2015: 119). In this view the UN at the multilateral level would delegate different tasks including the security task to the regions who are the intermediate actors to execute them. Chapter VI, VII, and VIII of the UN charter does present various channels through which the UN organs maintain global peace and security by preventing, managing and resolving conflicts through their cooperation with agencies like regional and subregional organisations. Chapter VI calls for the pacific settlement of disputes (i.e. non-coercive or peaceful means) while on the other hand Chapter VII permits the UN Security Council (UNSC) to use force (i.e. coercive means) in maintaining international peace and security if the pacific approach fails. Chapter VIII lays down the different synergetic substructures and provisions which draw together the UN organs especially the UNSC and regional actors in maintaining international peace and security through conflict prevention and management (Chesterman et al., 2016: 7-9; Thakur, 2006: 31-32; Boyle and Chinkin, 2007: 229-232; UNC, 1945: 8-11).

In the 1992 Agenda for Peace, Boutros Ghali the former UN Secretary-General (UNSG) called for an extensive and sweeping involvement of the regional organisations in maintaining international peace and security by taking part in preventive diplomacy, peacemaking, peace enforcement, peacekeeping, post conflict reconstruction and peacebuilding (King & Matthews, 2012; Fredrik, 2015: 198-199). A UN reform high-level panel on threats, challenges and changes established by the UNSG understandably admitted and commended regional organisations for playing a significant role in promoting the stability and prosperity of their members (UN, 2004). In the 2005 In Larger Freedom the UNSG suggested that it was important
for the UN and regional organisations to work hand in hand in facing the challenges to peace and security (UN, 2005).

In the vein of regional organisations being involved in maintaining international peace and security, this study will offer a critical discourse analysis of why ECOWAS failed in its conflict management quest in Mali. Established by the heads of state and Government of fifteen West African Countries on 28th of May 1975 in Lagos, Nigeria, ECOWAS is the biggest regional economic community in West Africa. Today ECOWAS has 15 members with Cape- verde joining the bloc in 1977 and Mauritania withdrawing from the community in 2000 (ECOWAS, 2023). According to its founding treaty, ECOWAS was founded with the primary aim of promoting:

“co-operation and development in all fields of economic activity particularly in the fields of industry, transport, telecommunications, energy, agriculture, natural resources, commerce, monetary and financial questions and in social and cultural matters for the purpose of raising the standard of living of its peoples, of increasing and maintaining economic stability, of fostering closer relations among its members and of contributing to the progress and development of the African continent” (ECOWAS, 1975: 10).

There is considerable academic literature on the ECOWAS as a regional organisation and its numerous activities which is a clear reflection of the unparalleled ample interests among academicians in the block. In spite of the thorough appraisal of enormous literature on ECOWAS and its involvement in conflict management, this study does not in any way intend to provide a rigorous, exhaustive analysis of the former and the latter because that is beyond the scope of this thesis. However, by using Critical Discourse Analysis this study will analyse new data based on first-hand knowledge and primary sources, secondary academic and non-academic articles to provide a comprehensive answer to the research question; Why did ECOWAS’s AFISMA fail to resolve the Malian conflict between 2012 and 2013? Acting under the authorization and endorsement of the UNSC, ECOWAS deployed its troops to fight against terrorist and criminal groups in northern Mali under frameworks of the African-led International Support Mission to Mali (AFISMA) (S/RES/2056, 2012). AFISMA was mandated to assist Malian authorities in protecting the civilian population, defend and preserve Mali’s territorial integrity, unity and sovereignty, strengthen Mali’s defence and security forces, and provide humanitarian aid (S/RES/2056, 2012).

To answer the aforementioned research question, this paper employed the conceptual lenses of the IR theory of neoliberal institutionalism. Neoliberal institutionalism is a variant of liberalism which focuses on the international institutions and the role they play in shaping
international politics by promoting and coordinating international cooperation to achieve collective outcomes on a global scale (John, 2020: 244-245, Folker, 2016: 89). The theory of neoliberal institutionalism will be utilised to investigate why ECOWAS’s AFISMA failed to resolve the Malian conflict between 2012 and 2013. This paper’s hypothesis is that the reason why ECOWAS’s AFISMA failed to resolve the Malian conflict with regard to its conflict management quest was the community’s lack of ownership of its military intervention initiative in the country. The research puzzle at the heart of this thesis is: Why was ECOWAS’s AFISMA transformed into MINUSMA six months before the expiry of AFISMA’S one year initial period. My research puzzle is in line with the understanding of Gustafsson and Hagström 2018 who proposed that a good research puzzle should follow the formula of “‘Why X despite Y’ or ‘How did x become possible despite y?’” (Gustafsson & Hagström, 2018: 639). In this vein the ‘X’ in my research puzzle is ‘why was ECOWAS’s AFISMA transformed into MINUSMA’ and the ‘Y’ is ‘why did it happen 6 months before the expiry of AFISMA’S one year initial period’. This is because under normal circumstances AFISMA was supposed to operate in Mali for the full one year initial period that it had been granted by the UNSC (S/RES/2085, 2012). In addition to answering its research question, this thesis will contribute to the existing literature and academic debate on global governance, regional integration and regional organisations in conflict management. This study will also identify possible shortcomings and gaps which present avenues for future research.

Thematically, this paper comprises five sections. Following the introduction, the second section presents the literature review. Section three provides the theoretical and methodological framework. The fourth part provides a content analysis of what is the major missing component that inhibits the ECOWAS in its conflict management quest in Mali? Lastly, the fifth section presents the findings and conclusion of this study.

2. Literature review

As it has been mentioned earlier in the introduction, there is adequate academic literature on the ECOWAS as a regional organisation and its numerous activities including its role in conflict management, a topic this thesis is studying. This is a clear reflection of the vast academic interest into studying the region with large proportions of researchers having conducted their research about the origins and rationale of ECOWAS, economic integration, development, peace and security, democracy and good governance. Lamont notes that literature review is a crucial element of research because it enables new researchers to
acknowledge the work and interventions of previous scholars on their topic of interest before having their own say on the topic (Lamont, 2015:64). The literature review will be divided into 4 sections. The first section will review existing work on regionalism. The second section of the literature review will look at IR relevant articles that have studied conflict management. The third section will identify and review IR articles that have studied the theory of neoliberal institutionalism. Finally, the fourth literature review section will identify IR articles that have studied ECOWAS and its involvement in conflict management. It is important to note that all the articles to be reviewed in this section are peer-reviewed scholarly publications and deemed to be relevant in the field of IR.

2.1. Regionalism

Touray looks at different schools of thought on the study of regional integration namely “the Functionalists and Neofunctionalists, Liberal Intergovernmentalists, Institutionalists, and Constructivists” (Touray, 2016: 2). Beginning with the Functionalist approach, Touray writes that according to this approach integration is perceived to be a slow self-sustaining procedure mainly inspired and fostered by non-state groups of technical experts. It is the habitual cooperation between and among these experts that eventually results in them experiencing the spillover effects in form of the increased cooperation in other spheres such as in the political and military affairs as these groups of experts tend to give up their “close identification with the state and develop new sets of allegiance to like-minded individuals within the Community” (Touray, 2016: 3). He goes ahead to present the approach of Liberal Intergovernmentalism to explain regionalism starting by admitting that this approach presents a big deal of “challenge to Functionalism and its subsequent variant, Neofunctionalism” (Touray, 2016: 3). Touray writes that Liberal Intergovernmentalism suggests that the process integration is an intergovernmental one which entails two sequential processes namely preference formation and international bargaining with the first process calling on the national leaders to advocate for the “interest of their domestic constituency and articulating national preferences” and the second process emphasises the idea of national governments bringing “their preferences to the intergovernmental bargaining table, where agreements reflect the relative power of each member state” (Touray, 2016: 3). He argues that the proponents of Liberal Intergovernmentalism observed a limited contribution of supranational organisations in the intergovernmental process and that this approach was gravely criticised by functionalist and neofunctionalist (Touray, 2016: 3-4). Touray argues that another approach to the study of
regionalism is the Institutionalists approach. He stipulates that the Institutionalists approach focuses on the role of institutions in promoting regionalism. The Institutionalists approach brings forth the question “of supranational delegation and agency and the agenda-setting role of institutions such as the European Parliament” by trying to establish the reasons as to why and under what circumstances powers might be delegated to agents by the members of an organisation and what be the consequences of the agent acting contrary to the preferences of the principal (Touray; 2016: 4). Touray argues that both Institutionalists and Liberal Intergovernmentalist share a common ground as both schools of thought emphasise the idea of states pushing for their national preferences through international organisations and selected institutions that are designed to maximise their utility (Touray; 2016: 4-5). However, contrary to shared common ground between the Institutionalists and Liberal Intergovernmentalist, there is an underlying schism between them and the Constructivist school of thought despite the fact that both the Institutionalist and their Constructivists rivals share one key premise on the centrality of institutions (Touray; 2016: 4-5).

In his book titled; Rethinking Regionalism, Soderbaum argues that regionalism has no one specific definition as it “means different things to different people in different contexts and time periods, and for some observers, regionalism may not mean much at all” (Soderbaum, 2015: 1). He offers the understanding to rethink regionalism based on four reflectivist and constructivist perspectives namely: “regionalism viewed historically, spatially, comparatively and globally” (Soderbaum, 2015: 2). In learning about regionalism from theory, similarly to Touray, Söderbaum writes that there are overlapping contending theoretical approaches to regionalism which include the Neorealist and Intergovernmentalist approaches, Functionalist, Liberal and Institutionalist approaches (Soderbaum, 2015: 37-42). On the topic of regions in global security governance, Soderbaum writes that “there was discussion of the relationship between global bodies and regional agencies in the provision of security” in the past century and in the 1940s during the inception of the UN. He further writes that this idea was conceived by the UN and was included in the provisions of the UN charter on regional arrangements or agencies. Soderbaum argues that the UN Security Council delegates tasks to regional agencies and organisations at the multilateral level (Soderbaum, 2015:198). According to Soderbaum the debate about the UN and regional organisations remains one of the key subjects within the planning of global security right from the end of the cold war era. To emphasise his claim about the existing relation between the UN and regional organisation, Soderbaum writes that regional organisations were urged to start participating in activities such as “preventive diplomacy, peacekeeping, peace-making and post-conflict reconstruction” by the Agenda for Peace by the
UN secretary-general in 1992 and in the following years the UN acknowledged the enormous contributions made by these organisations in promoting stability and prosperity among their member states (Soderbaum, 2015: 199). Referring to the work of Thakur 2005, Soderbaum goes on to argue that from the UN point of view, “(1) regional action should be organised within the UN Charter and be consistent with its purposes and principles; and (2) the UN and regional organisations should collaborate more effectively and in a more integrated fashion than in the past” (Soderbaum, 2015:198-199).

2.2. Understanding Conflict Management

In Mundy’s book titled “Imaginative geographies of Algerian violence: Conflict science, conflict management, antipolitics” he notes that by the end of the cold war the concept of conflict management had become “free of the political and ideational constraints” thereby embracing a different understanding of apolitical frameworks of management which were “based on apolitical frameworks of understanding” with “today’s most prevalent forms of international conflict management (...) arising out of depoliticized understandings of late warfare” (Mundy, 2015: 7-9). Mundy (2015) opines that the term conflict management is mostly linked to the business world and finance and that the term conflict resolution is often used with regard to issues concerning warfare (Mundy, 2015: 18). He argues that the notion of conflict resolution is misleading and illusionary based on the fact that conflicts are never truly resolved but instead transformed. In this vein he argues that conflicts cannot be resolved but “they can only be managed” (Mundy, 2015: 18). Mundy writes that contemporary conflict management and science have never adopted the maximalist or positive peace notions but instead operate “within the global structures of thought and power that make seemingly “minimalist” advances possible, yet actual conflict resolution impossible” (Mundy, 2015: 18). He also argues that even though there has not been any intentional and organised attempts to create a peaceful world, there is limited war and warfare these days yet there is not even a single conflict scientist who can explain this phenomenon hence a thing he claims reveals the degree to which we can understand the world of war and peace today in terms of conflict management (Mundy, 2015: 18).

2.3. The theory of neoliberal institutionalism

The theory of neoliberal institutionalism is premised on the core “liberal IR theory assumptions about the possibility of cumulative progress in human affairs” (Folker, 2016: 89).
The primary area of interest of neoliberal institutionalism is establishing how “cooperation among nation states and other actors in the international system” can be achieved (Folker, 2016: 88). Furthermore, Folker stresses that neoliberal institutionalism “focuses on the role international institutions play in obtaining international collective outcome” (Folker, 2016: 89). More expansively, Folker writes that neoliberal institutionalism subscribes to the notion that states are the main actors in the international system. She stresses that the international system is dominated by states which are rational, unitary and utility maximising actors which make “decisions based on a set of self-interested priorities and according to a strategic cost to benefit analysis of possible choices, reactions and outcomes” (Folker, 2016: 89). In other words states cooperate in order to achieve shared self-interests for instance peace and economic prosperity. Folker further writes that two historical developments namely ‘interdependence and hegemonic stability’ presented a common ground for self-interest states to cooperate with each other in order to obtain collective outcomes (Folker, 2016: 89-91).

In agreement with Jennifer, Johnson and Heiss write that neoliberal institutionalism “embraces and repudiates tenets (...)” of IR liberalism and that it “presumes that domestic and international institutions play central roles in facilitating cooperation and peace between nation-states” (Johnson and Heiss, 2018: 1).

In agreement with Johnson and Heiss, and Jennifer, David also stresses that “neoliberal institutionalism focuses on the supposedly important role, and beneficial impact, of international institutions” (David, 2013: 119). David went further to define what should be regarded as an institution. Speaking of what an institution is, David Forsythe notes that “any regularised set of expectations or behaviour is an institution” (...) and based on his definition “International law is an institution, (...) the United Nations is an institution, albeit also a formal intergovernmental organisation” (David, 2013: 120).

According to Robert Keohane “"institution" may refer to a general pattern or categorization of activity or to a particular human-constructed arrangement, formally or informally organised” (Keohane, 2018: 162). Both David and Keohane share the same understanding in defining what an institution is. Just like Jennifer, Keohane argues neoliberal institutionalism maintains the international system is state centric where states are the key actors (Keohane, 2018: 13).

However in order to understand the theory of neoliberal institutionalism one must first grasp the comprehensive conceptual milieu of IR liberalism. In Russett’s concise study of the IR theory of liberalism, he notes that core assumptions within liberalism premised the Kantian framework include “the belief in the rational qualities of individuals, faith in the feasibility of
progress in social life, and the conviction that humans, despite their self-interests are able to cooperate and construct a more peaceful and harmonious society” (Russett, 2016: 68-69). Kant stressed that the means to obtain international collective outcomes in the form of peace and prosperity and overcome the security dilemma of the international system was through democratic governments, economic interdependence, and international law and organisations as means to (Russett, 2016:69). This postulates that the liberal school of thought envisions democratic community, the rule of law, open markets, international institutions, cooperative security, progressive change, shared sovereignty, and collective problem solving. Kant argues that the increase and expansion of democracy and trade is a result of people’s aspirations for freedom and prosperity, thereby giving rise to the development of organisations (i.e. IGOs) and international law (Russett, 2016:69). Therefore, neoliberal institutionalism is premised upon the firm theoretical and conceptual foundation laid down by IR theory of liberalism.

2.4. ECOWAS and its involvement in conflict management

In Wilén’s article titled “Justifying Interventions—The Case of ECOWAS in Liberia”, Wilén notes that the UN remains the biggest peacekeeping force globally with over 90,000 peacekeepers deployed in different parts of the globe (Wilén, 2021: 339). Using critical discourse analysis, Wilén writes about the justification of ECOWAS’s intervention in the 1990 Liberian civil war and the responses of the key international actors namely the UN and the United States (Wilén, 2021: 339). According to Wilén, ECOWAS decided to intervene in the Liberian conflict by deploying a regional monitoring task force, the ECOWAS Ceasefire Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) mandated to rescue tapped ECOWAS foreign nationals and resolving the conflict. This decision was undertaken after it had become vividly clear that there was no other international actor interested in intervening in the conflict (Wilén, 2021: 343). However ECOMOG failed to uphold its neutral stance in conflict as it ended up working with the INPFL and AFL against Taylor’s faction which between 1990 to 1997 had taken over approximately 90 per cent of the country (Wilén, 2021: 343). One may wonder why did ECOWAS’s ECOMOG choose to cooperate with the weakest parties to the conflict and not the Taylor. Well, in my view ECOMOG had its own selfish interests in the conflict besides wanting to put an end to the conflict. ECOWAS’s intervention in Liberia was not only about resolving the conflict but also who ends up in charge of the country when the conflict is over. Wilén argues that in an attempt by the UN to support ECOMOG, in 1993 a UN Observer Mission (UNOMIL) comprising about 400 observers was established (Wilén, 2021: 343). Wilén goes
ahead to stipulate that the presence of ECOMOG and later on UNOMIL between 1990 and 1997 resulted in numerous ceasefire agreements and at least fourteen peace treaties but could not rescue the country from collapsing as the 1997 elections brought about a period of fragile peace which was short lived by the Taylors autocratic regime and the resurgence of the former rebel groups under new factions thereby leading to the outbreak of another civil war between 2000 and 2001 (Wilén, 2021: 343). A transitional government was put in place in August 2003 after Charles Taylor was forced to vacate power due to the growing pressure his government was facing both internally and externally (Wilén, 2021: 343).

In Ahouangan’s article titled; “Conflict resolution in West Africa: What is ECOWAS for?”, Ahouangan argues that ECOWAS’s founding treaty did not include the “components relating to peace, security, stability and governance” (Ahouangan, 2022: 6). Ahouangan notes that in 1978 ECOWAS member states later on adopted “the Protocol on Non-Aggression” after the region started witnessing instabilities and that in May 1981 this protocol was further improved when the member states of ECOWAS “signed the Protocol on Mutual Assistance Defense for mutual assistance in defence against any armed threat or aggression on a member State” (Ahouangan, 2022: 6). In this vein ECOWAS went ahead and established “the Defense Committee and Council, and the Allied Armed Force of the Community” with the member states’ undertaking not to fight one another but instead come to the rescue of any member country in the event of armed conflict by providing support and assistance (Ahouangan, 2022: 6). According to Ahouangan, ECOWAS finally incorporated components related to regional peace, stability and security in its 1993 Revised Treaty. This was followed with the signing of the 1999 protocol on “peacekeeping, humanitarian support and peace building capabilities as well as the issue of cross border crime”, and the 2001 protocol A/SP1/12/01 on democracy and good governance to compliment the “Protocol relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management Conflict Prevention, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security in West Africa” (Ahouangan, 2022: 6). In an attempt to study ECOWAS’s instruments for conflict management, Ahouangan looks at the Ivorian and Malian cases. He argues that ECOWAS got involved in the Ivorian conflict in September 2002 after a failed coup which left the country divided into two (Ahouangan, 2022: 7). He writes that the Heads of State and Government of ECOWAS member states convened an extraordinary meeting in the name of Accra I and it was decided by these heads of state and Government that immediate support should be provided to Cote d’Ivoire by all the ECOWAS member states. This meeting was in line with the “provisions of ECOWAS’ Protocol of the Mechanism for Prevention, Management, Settlement of Conflicts, Peacekeeping, and security” (Ahouangan, 2022: 7).
Ahouangan stipulates that ECOWAS succeeded in bringing the government and the dissident forces and the negotiating table with both parties agreeing to the cessation of hostilities and to begin dialogue, and a ceasefire monitoring force called Ecowas Mission in Côte d’Ivoire (ECOMICI) was deployed in the country (Ahouangan, 2022: 8). He however asserts that the ceasefire brokered by ECOWAS was temporary as the armed groups resumed the fighting after a couple of days thereby compelling ECOWAS to seek the UN’s intervention in the Ivorian conflict (Ahouangan, 2022: 8). Ahouangan argues that ECOWAS mediation is instrumental in bringing about pacific settlement of disputes as it is an African organisation which can not be perceived as the Western imperialist powers but he further stress that ECOWAS’s mediation in the Ivorian crisis was not fruitful as it failed to achieve its objectives (Ahouangan, 2022: 8). According to Ahouangan ECOWAS’s mediation failure in the Ivorian crisis can be looked at in two ways; first, poor timing of the negotiation due to lack of “Mutually Hurting Stalemate (MHS)” and lack of commitment on the part of the fighting factions. Second, ECOWAS’s growing unpopularity and incompetence had made the organisation less credible and inferior to the UN and the European Union (Ahouangan, 2022: 8). Even though ECOWAS was in support of the Ivorian democratically elected government, the organisation’s support was undermined by hand of the imperialist France in the mediation process a thing which weakened ECOWAS’s position as legitimate as mediator in the crisis (Ahouangan, 2022: 8-9). Ahouangan argues that the United Nations Operation in Côte d’Ivoire was more successful than ECOWAS even though the “UN mission also had difficulties in enforcing peace agreements in the Ivorian crisis” (Ahouangan, 2022: 9).

On the Malian crisis, Ahouangan writes that the conflict possess both an internal and an external implications as it impacts Mali’s “sovereignty and national cohesion” internally and also jeopardise the security and stability of the entire “Sahel zone and the countries of West Africa” externally(Ahouangan, 2022: 9). He goes ahead to write the Malian crisis has expanded to scale and has become a sub-regional crisis with the involvement of multiple actors like the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA), Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO) (Ahouangan, 2022: 9). Ahouangan notes that due to increased instability in Mali with the country experiencing three coups in the last ten years alone and the intensifying fighting of the government forces against the jihadists and other armed groups, United Nations Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) was founded (Ahouangan, 2022: 9). Similar to the Ivorian Crisis, Ahouangan stipulates that the French were involved in the Malian crisis as the French and Malian forces worked hand in hand in the fight against the jihadists and that open the visit of Francois
Hollande the then president of France he was given an exceptional reception in Mali because he was perceived to be a liberator (Ahouangan, 2022: 9-10). According to Ahouangan even though the Malian government and the separatist were able to sign a peace accord in Algiers in 2015, the political and security situation Mali remains unimproved and the situation deteriorated further when Colonel Assimi Goïta led a military junta to stage two consecutive coups in 2020 and 2021 respectively (Ahouangan, 2022: 10). In assessing what is being done by ECOWAS to solve the Malian crisis, Ahouangan argues that the different mechanism that were put in place to tackle the crisis to a greater extent seem to be deficient and that ECOWAS’s intervention in this crisis was based on the 1999 “Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping Security” a protocol whose frameworks were limited or inadequate to address Mali’s multidimensional crisis (Ahouangan, 2022: 10). He further argues that there exists a power struggle between ECOWAS and the Malian authorities with the former having imposed a set of sanctions on the latter. However the sanctions imposed on Mali by ECOWAS have failed to yield the desired outcomes of isolating Mali and weaken its economy so as to create internal pressure on the maliun authorities from the population but have instead triggered anger and promoted nationalist sentiment among the Malians and “reawakened a patriotic feeling that benefits the transitional government” (Ahouangan, 2022: 10). Ahouangan notes that the propaganda spread by the Malian authorities was successful in branding “France, the international community, and many other organisations” as hostile entities thereby undermining the recognized Malian government forces by encouraging the increase in the presence of foreign mercenaries in the country (Ahouangan, 2022: 10-11). Ahouangan writes that the on going crisis in Mali brings to light the existing differences and disunity among the ECOWAS member states hindering ECOWAS from adopting a more united and decisive mechanisms conflict management to tackle the Malian crisis and the general security situation in West Africa (Ahouangan, 2022: 11). He then concludes his interventions by opening the debate for further research by asking a number of different questions on ECOWAS’s priorities with respect to its conflict management mechanisms and role in conflict resolution (Ahouangan, 2022: 11).
3. Theoretical and methodological framework

3.1 Theory

A neoliberal institutionalist IR theoretical approach will be used to conduct this study with respect to the argument and hypothesis of this paper which states that the reason why ECOWAS’s AFISMA failed to resolve the Malian conflict with regard to its conflict management quest is the community’s lack of ownership of its military intervention initiative in the country. One essentially chose the theory of neoliberal institutionalism due to its vast intellectual treasures consisting of its emphasis on the significant role of international institutions on facilitating and promoting international cooperation and developing cooperation among and between self-interested states while on the other hand reducing competition and rivalries (i.e. reducing the effects of the anachic structures of the international system) (Folker, 2016: 89, Keohane, 2018: 12-18, Weiss and Wilkinson, 2013: 119-123). With respect to this paper’s research question, the above mentioned liberal institutional theoretical framework will be used to study and analyse the role of different international institutions in managing the Malian conflict. These institutions include the ECOWAS, the African Union (AU) and the United Nations (UN). Even in the event where there exist common interests and shared benefits, states may not be able to cooperate without the coordination of the international institutions (Keohane, 2018:16). The ECOWAS member states were able to act collectively in managing the crisis in Mali not only because of their mutual interests in the anticipated outcomes but also because of the institutionalised international system which facilitated and in some sense coordinated their actions (i.e. their military intervention in Mali). Another tenet of the theoretical framework of neoliberal institutionalism which makes the theory most fitting for carrying out the analysis of this paper is its concept of interdependence which entails a “relationship of mutual dependence” of actors in the international system (Folker, 2016: 91). Speaking of interdependence, it should not be lost on one’s mind that ECOWAS is an economic block with 15 member states with the primary aim of promoting; “co-operation and development in all fields of economic activity (...) for the purpose of raising the standard of living of its peoples, of increasing and maintaining economic stability, of fostering closer relations among its members (...)” (ECOWAS, 1975: 10). As a result of the economic integration, ECOWAS member states became interconnected and interdependent. The interdependence between and among ECOWAS states led to the incorporation of the security
principles in its 1993 revised treaty as the community came to realise that the presence of insecurity or/and war in one of its member states would directly affect the entire community (ECOWAS, 1993: 6-7).

Hence by using the theoretical framework of neoliberal institutionalism one will be in position to conceptualise the relations which existed between agents (i.e. ECOWAS members states in particular) and structures (i.e. international institutions particularly ECOWAS, AU and UN) and how their interaction affected ECOWAS’s efforts to manage conflict in Mali by looking at the agency of different actors such as ECOWAS itself, the UN, the AU, the state of Mali and the other actors which will in turn enable me to test the aforementioned hypothesis of this study. The theory of neoliberal institutionalism will be used in a way that focuses on the role of international institutions in coordinating ECOWAS’s military intervention in Mali to provide a basis for understanding why ECOWAS’s AFISMA failed to resolve the Malian conflict between 2012 and 2013.

3.2 Conceptual Definitions

In order to avoid any ambiguity or misinterpretation of the different concepts that are to be used in this study, one therefore deem it important to lay down the conceptual definitions of the key concepts being used by this paper’s author. This is because having a clear and comprehensible conceptual definition of what one wants to study or investigate enables one to fully specify and plainly define the terms one chooses to use so as to make sure that these terms mean and are understood exactly the way they have to be understood. This will also allow the author to assess ideas and also facilitate research to enter into ongoing dialogue (Halperin & Heath, 2020: 143-148). The operational definition of these concepts is needed to enable one to recognise the existence of the defined variable when one sees it (Halperin & Heath, 2020: 149). In this view, the conceptual definition of the concepts of conflict management and ownership in line with this paper’s hypothesis are as follows: This thesis will adopt the conceptual definition of conflict management as the ‘ability to identify and handle a conflict efficiently’. Equally this thesis will adopt the conceptual definition of ownership as ‘the right and ability to have and exercise authority to adopt and implement policies to achieve set goals and objectives without the interference of others’. Besides having established a conceptual definition of a given concept, Halperin & Heath note that the operational definition has to be specified. This is because it is the operational definition that will enable one to ascertain the presence or/and the absence of what is being investigated. In other words, operationalizing a concept involves
defining a variable in a way that we are able to know it when we see it (Halperin & Heath, 2020:149). One will therefore operationalise conflict management by defining it as ECOWAS involvement in (1) mediation; (2) military intervention; (3) signing and enforcement of peace agreements; (4) negotiations and dialogue between the fighting parties to attain cessation of hostilities; (5) establishing measures to promote peace, security and stability. Lastly the concept of ownership will be operationally defined as ECOWAS having (1) power and authority to make decisions without external interference; (2) having total control of and being in charge of its undertakings.

3.3 Method and Methodology

After carrying out a thorough research review one realised that there exists significant research on the topic that this thesis is looking forward to studying. The previous research presented in the literature review shows that a larger proportion of scholars have great interest in studying ECOWAS, a regional organisation and its role in promoting and preserving peace, stability and security among its member states including Mali in particular. One however did notice that there was room for fresh and new research as there exists no adequate and new research particularly on ECOWAS’s conflict management in Mali. In this view this study aims at contributing to the ongoing academic debate on the chosen research topic by offering new information and understanding in the pursuit to answer the research question: Why did ECOWAS’s AFISMA fail to resolve the Malian conflict between 2012 and 2013?

3.4 Data collection

A qualitative Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) method will be employed to conduct this research as this thesis is interested in understanding and unpacking the reason why ECOWAS’s AFISMA failed to resolve the Malian conflict between 2012 and 2013 by looking at the actions and measures taken by ECOWAS to manage the conflict in Mali. In this vein this thesis will analyse data from both primary sources and secondary sources. Primary data sources shall include ECOWAS’ policy documents, United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolutions on the Mali crisis, AU documents, Mali’s government documents, speeches and reports (Halperin and Heath, 2020: 195, Lamont 2015: 79-82). To ensure the validity, authenticity and reliability of my research and avoid the reproduction of previous work, my research will largely use primary sources of data (Halperin and Heath, 2020: 196-197, Lamont, 2015: 79-82). However, as one earlier mentioned, this study will also use some secondary data
such as news articles and media reports in order to enrich data collection and not to limit it from accessing a variety of data available at the authors disposal.

While conducting the literature review, one noticed that none of the previous researchers had utilised interviews as a tool of collecting data for their studies, a thing that is believed to have hindered them from accessing some important ground data which could have enhanced their research process and final findings. However this thesis too will not use interviews as a tool to collect primary data due to practical constraints such as the inability to reach the people suitable and fit for the interviews. For instance to conduct interviews so as to access valid and reliable data for this thesis one would have to interview ECOWAS heads of state and government, ministers, other high ranking government officials and high ranking personnel in the army (i.e. generals and field commanders) but unfortunately one is not in position to reach people of this calibre. Above all, interviewing such people would be time consuming and costly as it would entail booking time for the interviews months before and would also involve a lot of expenses both of which being beyond the scope of this study. Being aware of this limitation, the author of this paper decided to solely rely on the official websites of both ECOWAS and the government of Mali as the source of the policy documents, communiques, Mali’s government documents, speeches, letters and reports the primary sources of this study’s data. The author’s choice to use critical discourse analysis is predominantly because of the nature of data one intends to collect and the analysis strategies that one will employ are non-numeric (Lamont, 2015: 78). In contrast to Lamont’s view that “qualitative methods often rely on inductive reasoning”, one is going to use qualitative methods in this study even though it is deductive in nature because these methods are not supposed to be associated with one “particular epistemological position” (Lamont, 2015: 78).

This thesis will employ the understanding of CDA used by Alvons Habibie (2016) which postulates that CDA looks at language as an action with the purpose of elaborating the “relationship of power, dominance, and inequality produced in discourse” (Habibie, 2016: 5). Habibie’s understanding stems from Norman Fairclough’s conceptual frameworks of CDA (Fairclough, 2001: 117-139, Simpson and Mayr, 2010: 53-55).

3.5 Conducting method

To conduct the method, one will begin the method process by carrying out an intensive search for the primary data sources. To strengthen and ensure the validity and reliability of the data collected, primary data in particular sources one will only consider using official websites
of ECOWAS, the Malian government, AU and UN as my principal search engines. One will also use triangulation to further improve the validity and credibility of my data and research findings. This is because invalid or unreliable data would result in wrong and misleading findings of the research process (Halperin and Heath, 2020: 189-190, Lamont, 2015: 79).

3.6 Limitations and Delimitations

To remain focused on answering the research question of this thesis; ‘Why did ECOWAS’s AFISMA fail to resolve the Malian conflict between 2012 and 2013?’ It is important to identify both the limitations and delimitations (Theofanidis and Fountouki, 2018). To start with the limitations, this thesis has encountered a number limitations which include limited access data firstly because of inaccessibility to certain type of data for instance classified documents and information not available to the researcher due to their confidentiality, secondly the researcher’s incapability to use interviews a key tool for collecting first hand information. Interviews will not be used as a tool for data collection due to time and financial constraints and the inability of the researcher to get the people fit to participate in them who in this case include ECOWAS heads of state and government, ministers, other ECOWAS high rankings government officials and high ranking personnels in the army. The other limitations include conflicts arising from cultural bias and other personal issues and identify the limitation(s). Language barrier is yet another limitation facing this study. French being the official language of Mali, it means that most of the documents of the Malian government are written in French, a language the author of this thesis does not understand. To confine this study within its scope and limits it is important to set out its delimitations. This thesis does not intend to provide a rigorous or/and exhaustive analysis of ECOWAS’s conflict management because that is neither the objective nor is it practically feasible within its confines. This thesis instead aims at answering the research question; Why did ECOWAS’s AFISMA fail to resolve the Malian conflict between 2012 and 2013? One being aware of the limitation caused by language barrier due to the author’s inability to read or write French which is the official language of Mali, this thesis will therefore only analyse documents originally written or/and have been translated in English because the author of this paper is much conversant with the English language only.
4. Analysis

Following, the collected data shall be categorised in four sections which will be analysed individually to derive their insights. The first section will analyse ECOWAS’s founding treaty of 1975 and its revised treaty of 1993. The second section will analyse three resolutions adopted by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) on the Mali crisis. The third section will analyse data on AFISMA and its operations in Mali. The fourth and the last section will analyse documents about the transformation of AFISMA into the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA).

4.1 Section 1. ECOWAS treaty 1975 & 1993

The most striking and unmistakable thing when analysing ECOWAS’s treaty of 1975 and that of 1993 is the security element which is present in the latter and absent in the former despite the fact that both the 1975 and 1993 ECOWAS treaties stipulated that ECOWAS was founded in May 1975 with the main aim of creating an exclusive regional economic space through advancing co-operation and development in the different economic activities within the region (ECOWAS 1975: 6-7; ECOWAS revised treaty, 1993: 10-11). In Chapter 1, Article 2 of the 1975 treaty it was made clear that ECOWAS had been founded to predominantly champion an economic agenda through regional economic integration and co-operation. In relation to being preoccupied by striving to achieve the economic aims, ECOWAS seemed to overlook the element of security. In my view this can be attributed to the good and stable security situation in the region at the time when this treaty was signed. However in Chapter 2, Article of the 1975 treaty does mention the institution of the defence council and defence communion though their mandates were not specified (ECOWAS 1993: 7). As per Chapter 13, Article 56 of ECOWA’s treaty, it is noted that this treaty shall used to amicably resolve disputes that may arise between member in line with the interpretation or application of the treaty itself (ECOWAS, 1975: 37). As we can see the only form of threat in the form of disputes that was identified in the treaty is the one that would have been caused by the treaty itself but not for instance inter-state conflicts, civil wars or terrorism. This reflects the state of political and economic utopia in which the ECOWAS member states were in at the time of signing the 1975 treaty.

By this one can argue that the absence of elements of security in the first ECOWAS treaty was because the proponents of the treaty were naive about the correlation between the
economic development and peace, security and stability. Secondly, one can also argue that the security elements were left out of the 1975 treaty because of the desire to restrain the community from interfering with national sovereignty of the member states. In other words there was no collective political will among ECOWAS member states to look beyond the economic aspects of the community and include a common security framework. It is important to note that it is impossible to achieve economic co-operation and development in the absence of peace, security and stability. Eighteen years down the road (i.e. From 1975 to 1993), it had become clear that there was dire need to among other things include the element of security within the frameworks and provisions of the treaty hence the signing of ECOWAS’s revised treaty of 1993 (ECOWAS, 1993: 1-7). In the preamble section of the 1993 treaty three aspects that mirror the desire to expand the means to pursue the aims and objectives of the community have been highlighted. firstly it has been noted that the proponents of the treaty were convinced that the member states needed to gradually draw their own national sovereignty to the Community in order to achieve a collective political will; Secondly it had been accepted that there existed a “need to establish Community Institutions vested with relevant and adequate powers; Thirdly, [bearing in mind that] the existing bilateral and multilateral forms of economic co-operation within the region open up perspectives for more extensive co-operation” (ECOWAS, 1993: 1-2). One may ask why was it important for the member states to seek attaining a mutual political will by gradually giving up their individual national sovereignty to the community, the creation of powerful community institutions and also open up the region to realise extensive co-operation? To answer this question one can argue that the member states giving up their national sovereignty to the community meant an increase in the shared trust, reliance and high levels of interdependence among the member states after experiencing a longtime of unprecedented economic integration which had led to the reduction and in some instances the elimination of trade barriers within the community. The need to create relevant powerful Community institutions and the desire to build on existing bilateral and multilateral economic co-operation to achieve extensive co-operation in my view can also be attributed to the ever growing aspirations of the community including the desire to incorporate the components of security in the 1993 revised treaty.

By this one can argue that the three clauses partly reflect what might have been the key reasons as to why the treaty was revised in the first place. Chapter 2, Article 4 of the 1993 revised treaty does outline the different fundamental principles to be adhered to in the pursuit of the community’s objectives. The fundamental principles happen to be security components that were incorporated into the treaty and they include;
“(i) Non-aggression between Member States; maintenance of regional peace, stability and security through the promotion and strengthening of good neighbourliness; (ii) Peaceful settlement of disputes among Member States, active co-operation between neighbouring countries and promotion of a peaceful environment as a prerequisite for economic development; (iii) Recognition, promotion and protection of human and peoples' rights in accordance with the provisions of the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights; (iv) Accountability, economic and social justice and popular participation in development; recognition and observance of the rules and principles of the Community; (v) Promotion and consolidation of a democratic system of governance in each Member State as envisaged by the Declaration of Political Principles adopted in Abuja on 6 July, 1991” (ECOWAS, 1993: 6-7).

ECOWAS’s incorporation of the above mentioned security principles in its 1993 revised treaty shows that the community came to realise that peace and security were crucial to achieving its aims and objectives of promoting economic integration and development within and among the member states. However one can also argue that this was predominantly as a result of the interdependence of the member states which meant that war or instability in one the member states would directly affect the other ECOWAS member states. It is important to note that peace and security are preconditions for the economic activities to take place. These principles became the backbone of ECOWAS’s security frameworks that have defined its actions in the security domain including its choice to get involved in the management of the crisis in Mali.


Adopted by the UNSC on the 5th of July 2012, resolution 2056 begins by recalling the previous Security Council’s (SC) Presidential Statements and Press Statements on the Mali question which means that the SC had previously convened other sessions on the same Malian crisis (S/RES/2056, 2012: 1). The SC did reaffirm its dedication to the “sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of Mali”, condemned the coup for forcing the Malian democratically elected government out of power and on the hand commended “ECOWAS, the African Union (AU) as well as the neighbouring countries and other countries in the region, for assisting with the restoration of the constitutional order in Mali” (S/RES/2056, 2012: 1-2). This means that ECOWAS was involved in restoring the constitutional order in Mali even before the UNSC had authorised its military intervention in the country. ECOWAS and the AU played a
mediation role by facilitating dialogue between the fighting parties (i.e. Malian government and the rebel groups), the civil society and other political actors (S/RES/2056, 2012: 1).

ECOWAS’s mediation role in the Malian crisis has been identified by this study as the first piece of the puzzle with respect to the community’s attempt to manage the conflict. In the event when ECOWAS and AU decided to impose targeted sanctions in Mali, the UNSC categorically stated that it reserved “the right to consider appropriate measures as necessary” (S/RES/2056, 2012: 3). In the succeeding resolution, the UNSC referred to ECOWAS’s intention to adopt targeted sanctions in Mali as “decisions and recommendation by ECOWAS (...)” (S/RES/2071, 2012: 3). By stating that it reserved the right to decide what measures to be taken with regards to the decision by ECOWAS to impose targeted sanctions in Mali, depicts that the UNSC had the final say on what was to be done in the management of the Malian conflict. The act of referring to decisions made by ECOWAS as ‘recommendation(s)’ does too show how much approval the UNSC accorded to ECOWAS and also re-emphasises its position of being the head and the overseer in the management of the Malian conflict. UNSC’s underlying power and influence in the management of the conflict in Mali is apparent as it can be seen in the way UNSC positions itself as the main decision maker in devising frameworks to be followed by all the other actors including ECOWAS. For instance looking at the statement saying that the UNSC “expresses its support to the Transitional authorities in Mali (…) and decides that the Transitional authorities shall develop (...))”, one can argue that the word ‘decides’ as portrayed by the UNSC shows that the UNSC was in charge of what was going on in Mali. The UNSC had power, authority and control over the processes for restoring the constitutional order in Mali (S/RES/2056, 2012: 3). In other words the UNSC was the master planner and architect of ECOWAS’s activities in Mali. On the issue of protecting and preserving the territorial integrity of Mali, this resolution made a number of interventions but the outstanding ones were when the UNSC demandes “the full, immediate and unconditional cessation of hostilities (...), all parties in Mali ensure full, safe and unhindered access for the timely delivery of humanitarian aid to persons in need (...) and that all parties and armed groups take appropriate steps to ensure the safety and security of humanitarian personnel, equipment and supplies (...))” (S/RES/2056, 2012: 3-4). The word ‘demands’ has been singled out as it was used by the UNSC to assert its mastery over the ECOWAS and the other parties. A demand is neither a request nor a supplication but rather a command. By this one can argue that the UNSC using this term ‘demands’ tells of the power it exhibited over ECOWAS in particular in the management of the Malian conflict. Furthermore, the UNSC took note of ECOWAS’s security support as ECOWAS and the AU were requesting its “mandate authorising the
deployment of an ECOWAS stabilisation force” in Mali (S/RES/2056, 2012: 4). ECOWAS’s request was subjected to further examination by the UNSC as it was remembered in the succeeding resolution (S/RES/2056, 2012: 4; S/RES/2071, 2012: 2).

The document went ahead and requested for the Secretary-General’s report on what was taking place in Mali and the implementation of the resolution by ECOWAS, the AU, neighbouring nations as well as ameliorating the international community on the Mali crisis (S/RES/2056, 2012: 5-6). In resolution 2071, a request was made to “the Secretary-General to immediately provide military and security planners to assist ECOWAS and the African Union, in close consultation with Mali, (…)” and in the succeeding resolution 2085 the UNSC authorised the deployment of an “African-led International Support for Mission in Mali for an initial period of one year” (AFISMA) (S/RES/2071, 2012: 3; S/RES/2085, 2012). ECOWAS and the other parties involved in the management of Malian conflict including the AU were requested to “to report to the Security Council every 60 days on the deployment and activities of AFISMA (…)” (S/RES/2085, 2012). This request by the UNSC is yet another indicator of the UNSC being in charge ECOWAS’s undertaking in Mali. AFISMA was to comprise troops from ECOWAS countries, the AU, the UN and other countries which were willing to contribute troops to support this cause. Similarly AFISMA’s funding was to come from contributions and financial assistance from ECOWAS member states and international organisations such as the European Union which had already expressed its willingness to “provide such financial support to AFISMA through the mobilisation of the African Peace Facility” (S/RES/2085, 2012). The UNSC also expressed “its intention to consider the provision of voluntary and United Nations-funded logistics support packages to AFISMA, including equipment and services for an initial period of one year” (S/RES/2085, 2012).

The analysed documents here reveals that the UNSC holds the position of the main decision maker, chief architect of policies and strategies, the supreme power and authority in the management of the Malian conflict. It also provides strong evidence of the role of ECOWAS and the other actors involved being that of implementers of the UNSC’s mandates, directives and recommendations. The UNSC was indeed in charge of the conflict management processes in Mali as it was on one hand responsible for making all important decisions, establishing frameworks and strategies to be followed, granting permissions for actions to be undertaken and on the other hand other actors including ECOWAS were implementers the UNSC agenda in the country.
4.3 Section 3. AFISMA operation in Mali.

Established on the 20th of December 2012 by the adoption of the UNSC resolution 2085, the African-led International Support for Mission in Mali (AFISMA) was authorised to deploy in the country for an initial period of one year with a highly ambitious mandate (S/RES/2085, 2012). Speaking to journalists after an emergency summit West African leaders in the Nigerian capital Abuja on the 11th of November 2012, President Alassane Ouattara of Ivory Coast the then chairman of ECOWAS said that the community anticipated the mobilisation of 3300 soldiers to be deployed in Mali for a one year timeframe and a “potential training of 5,000 Malian troops” (Al Jazeera, 2012; BBC: 2012). According to President Ouattara the outcomes of the summit “would be transferred to the UN Security Council (for approval) via the African Union” hoping that the UNSC’s approval would be issued as soon as possible to permit the eventual deployment of troops (Al Jazeera, 2012; BBC: 2012). The ECOWAS authority in the summit also emphasised the use of force to fight “terrorist and transnational criminal networks” even though they maintained that the Malian political crisis would be resolved through dialogue which according to them was the preferred option (ECOWAS, 2012: 2-3). Taking note of the UNSC Resolution 2071 the authority said that the resolution was the basis for devising means to rally international efforts to put an end to the Malian crisis and also commended the putting in place of a “strategic concept for the Resolution of the Crisis in Mali (...) and the endorsement of the Concept by the AU Peace and Security Council (AUPSC) (...)” (ECOWAS, 2012: 3). After adopting the idea to deploy an African-led international force in Mali, the authority went ahead to request the AUPSC to endorse and seek the authorisation of the UNSC endorsing the deployment in accordance with the UN Chapter chapter VII. The idea to adopt the deployment of the African-led international forces in Mali was the brainchild of ECOWAS even though as one can see ECOWAS needed both the AUPSC and the UNSC to endorse and authorise the execution of this action plan. This shows how much power and influence both the AU and the UNSC would later have in the entire process and operation. The ECOWAS authority also emphasised that working in collaboration with the AU and the UN, the community was going to lead the African-led international forces in Mali in both the mobilisation of resources and military command (ECOWAS, 2012: 3). One may however wonder why did ECOWAS not go ahead and deploy its forces in Mali without seeking AU’s and UN’s endorsements? Well, being a regional organisation ECOWAS does not have the legitimacy to unilaterally launch a military intervention without seeking the approval of the UNSC. According to the guiding principles of
the international system stipulated in the UN Charter, Chapter VIII, Article 53, both regional and subregional organisations must first seek the authorisation of the UNSC before undertaking any enforcement action (UNSC, 1945: 11). Even after seeking the approval of the UNSC, the regional and sub-regional organisations are compelled to always report back to the UNSC inline Article 54 of Chapter VIII with stipulates that “the Security Council shall at all times be kept fully informed of activities undertaken or in contemplation under regional arrangements or by regional agencies for the maintenance of international peace and security” (UNSC, 1945: 11). The UN is the most important and powerful international organisation as it occupies the most high hierarchical position in the international system where the UN is the custodian of international peace and security and in charge of “nearly all aspects of international life” (Klabbers, 2017: 94-95).

Accordingly, ECOWAS had to submit its request for the UNSC to authorise its military interventions in Mali through the AU. ECOWAS being part of the AU security architecture does not exempt it from seeking AU’s approval of its military actions because all the activities concerning security of regional and sub-regional organisations on the continent are coordinated by the AUPSC and the chairperson of the union’s commission. According to Article 16 (3) of the Protocol Relating to the Establishment of the Peace and Security Council of the African Union, regional structures are required to “(...) keep the Peace and Security Council fully and continuously informed of their activities and ensure that these activities are closely harmonised and coordinated with the activities of the Peace and Security Council (...)” (AU, 2002). It is in the vein ECOWAS sought first AUPSC’s endorsement of its military operations in Mali before seeking UNSC’s authorisation through the AUPSC.

Additionally, while on a state visit to Germany on the 16th of January 2013, President Alassane Ouattara of Ivory Coast the then chairman of ECOWAS emphasised the impact of the conflict on the international peace and security as he was trying to rally international support to resolve this crisis and in this vein he also stressed that France was welcomed to quickly deploy its troops in Mali within the frameworks of AFISMA. During his visit to Germany, President Ouattara mobilised the German government to support ECOWAS’s mission in Mali both in humanitarian and military terms (DGAP, 2013).

According to the subsequent communiqué of the Authority of ECOWAS Heads of State and Government, Abidjan - Côte d'Ivoire, 19 January 2013, a vast number of non ECOWAS member states participated in the summit either as observers or special guests. These countries included Chad; France; “Germany, Belgium; Burundi; Canada; Egypt; Germany; Italy; Libya; Mauritania; Morocco; South Africa; Spain; Tunisia; United Kingdom and United States of
America” (ECOWAS, 2013). The AU, UN and the EU also participated in this ECOWAS summit as observers. In my view the participation of the above mentioned nations and organisations in the summit is a reflection of two things; Firstly, it shows how crucial and important the Malian conflict was to the regional and international community, and secondly it also demonstrates the pivotal role of the international institutions in facilitating and coordinating cooperation of the self-interested nation states to obtain collective outcomes which is this case is resolving the Malian crisis. Deeply concerned about the deteriorating security situation in Mali, the authority of the heads of state and government “reaffirmed their determination to assist Mali in the resolution of its security and institutional crisis within the framework of the norms and principles underpinning Community Protocols” and also acknowledged the role of France’s operations in the fight against terrorist and extremist groups in Mali (OCHA, 2013). The authority called for expeditious deployment of AFISMA forces in Mali following the adoption of the UNSC resolution 2085 by calling on both its member states and non member states to contribute troops for mission and also appointed “Major General Shehu Usman Abdulkadir (Nigeria) and Brigadier General Yaye Garba (Niger) as Force Commander and Deputy Force Commander of AFISMA respectively” (OCHA, 2013). In this vein the authority instructed the President of the commission to cooperate with the UN, the AU and the Malian government to expeditiously put in place “a functional mission headquarters to facilitate coordination and deployment of AFISMA” (OCHA, 2013). In what seems to be an admission of lack of logistics and funds for the deployment of AFISMA, the authority petitions the UN for logistical and financial support needed to facilitate the fast deployment of AFISMA.

The authority also called on member states of the community to urgently pay their community levy obligations and even authorised the commission to employ an exceptional mechanism “outside the normal ECOWAS procedures” to raise resources to support AFISMA operations (OCHA, 2013). It is therefore right to argue that the delayed deployment of AFISMA troops in Mali was primarily because ECOWAS did not have the logistical and financial support it needed for the operations. The act of ECOWAS requesting the UN to provide the logistical and financial support without which ECOWAS could not deploy its AFISMA operations shows how much influence UN and power the UN would later have on these operations. The inability of ECOWAS to cater for the logistical and financial needs for its military operations in Mali within the frameworks of AFISMA was yet another failure on the part of ECOWAS as it made AFISMA vulnerable to external influence by the donors thereby reducing ECOWAS’s self determination and ownership of its conflict management initiative in Mali.
As the ECOWAS authority was still preoccupied with the mobilisation of both its member states and non-member states to contribute troops and acknowledging those that had already availed their troops for deployment and appointing the leadership of AFISMA operation in Mali with no functional Mission Headquarters in the country, on the other hand the French had already launched their military operations in the country. Speaking about the presence of the French troops in Mali, President Francois Hollande the then president of France said that his troops had “(...) brought support [this afternoon] to Malian units to fight against terrorist elements” and that “the intervention complied with international law, and had been agreed with Malian President Dioncounda Traore” (BBC, 2013; Aljazeera, 2013). However President Hollande did not specify what international law or international legal frameworks he was referring to justify his country’s military operations in Mali. Speaking of the timeframe of the operations President Hollande said that the French military actions in Mali were to last “as long as necessary” (BBC, 2013; Aljazeera, 2013). By this one can argue that France’s military intervention in Mali was not in line with the UN authorised AFISMA operations. Contrary to AFISMA which was authorised to deploy in Mali for an initial period of one year, the French military operations in the country were neither authorised by the UN nor had a specified timeframe. In my view France owes the ability to launch its military operations in Mali to its colonial legacy of Mali being France’s former colony and the position it occupies in the international system. Being a permanent member of the UNSC, France had the power to veto any jurisdictions by the body against its military operations in Mali. Such a state of affairs where France has an upper hand and to some extend enjoyed unlimited prerogative power in handling the Malian crisis meant that ECOWAS’s position and operations (i.e. AFISMA) in the management of the conflict in Mali had been jeopardised and undermined. France’s action reflects what neoliberalism refers to as cooperative difficulties or barriers to international cooperation which exist in the international system (Folker, 2016: 92-94). In my view the collaboration of the French and Mallian forces was the indirect commencement of the new formation which later inspired the transformation of AFISMA into MINUSMA.

4.4 Section 4. Transformation of AFISMA into MINUSMA

The idea of transforming AFISMA into MINUSMA was first raised on the 7th march 2013 by the [AU] chairperson of the commission in the progress report on AFISMA operations that were going on. This report contained a review of the performance and state of deployment of AFISMA, a revision of the concept of operations (CONOPS) of AFISMA, the transformation
This progress report indicates that deployment of AFISMA had been accelerated as result of success of the Franco-Malian operations though the 3,300 military personnel that had been deployed under the CONOPS of AFISMA as per the provisions of resolution 2085 of the UNSC had been overpowered by the threat of the enemy on the ground. With up to 7,727 troops pledged, 6,167 troops had already been deployed on the ground as of 3rd March 2013 (AUPSC/PR/358, 2013: 1). The sharp and fast increase in the number of AFISMA troops deployed on the ground shows that ECOWAS was never short of human resources and that the shortcomings faced by the AFISMA operations cannot be blamed on the lack or shortage of military personnel.

In response to the request of the African Union Peace and Security Council (henceforth, the Council) the chairperson of the commission in close consultation with both ECOWAS and the countries that had contributed troops for AFISMA operations appointed President Pierre Buyoya who was the AU High Representative for Mali and the Sahel, and ECOWAS’s Ambassador Cheaka Touré of Togo, as the Special Representative and Head of AFISMA and Deputy Special Representative and Head of AFISMA respectively (AUPSC/PR/358, 2013: 2). Bearing in mind that AFISMA was the brainchild of ECOWAS and the fact that ECOWAS leading the military operations on ground in Mali one can argue that the appointment of Ambassador Cheaka Touré from ECOWAS as the Depute to AU’s President Buyoya demonstrated that ECOWAS was not in charge of AFISMA but rather lagging behind the UN and the AU as far as the leadership of AFISMA is concerned. The appointment of President Buyoya as the Special Representative and Head of AFISMA meant that ECOWAS had officially been sidelined in matters concerning the running of AFISMA. This was vividly clear in the subsequent frameworks of AFISMA where the AU appeared to be in charge of proceedings. For instance the Mali Integrated Task Force (MITF) that was created to coordinate AFISMA operations at the strategic level and launched by the chairperson of the [AU] commission on the 29th of January 2013 had its headquarters in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia where the AU headquarters are situated and not in Abuja, Nigeria where the headquarters of ECOWAS are situated or in any other ECOWAS member state (AUPSC/PR/358, 2013: 2). Furthermore the report notes that the [AU] commission had previously organised a conference in Addis Ababa with donors in an attempt to mobilise logistical and financial support for AFISMA and a total of US$ 455 million was pledged. Among other things the issue of lack of enough logistical and financial support for AFISMA seems to have been one of the major stumbling blocks to AFISMA in executing its mandate. In this vein one can argue that the lack
of enough logistical and financial support for AFISMA to some extent did contribute to the transformation of the mission into MINUSMA.

According to the revised CONOPS of AFISMA put together by the AU, ECOWAS, Mali, civilian and military experts, and bilateral and multilateral partners and later validated by the ECOWAS Authority of Heads of State and Government, AFISMA was to increase the number of its troops from 3,300 to 9,620 comprising of 171 civilians, 590 police personnel and 8,859 troops. AFISMA Under the revised CONOPS, AFISMA was to receive strategic direction from the AU Commission and the “implementation of the Mission's mandate and exercises authority over all civilian, military and police personnel in the Mission area” was under the Special Representative of the Chairperson of the Commission whereas the “Deputy Special Representative [was put in charge of] managing the civilian organic units” (AUPSC/PR/358, 2013: 3). The act of the ECOWAS Authority of Heads of State and Government endorsing the revised mission’s CONOPS can be understood as an act of acceptance of the transfer of authority over and leadership of AFISMA from ECOWAS to the AU. This is so because as we have noted above the revised CONOPS of the mission stipulated that AFISMA operations were put under the strategic direction of the AU commission and Special Representative of the Chairperson of the Commission. Due to the prevailing situation on the ground, the need for a lasting resolve of the crisis in Mali necessitated the UN’s intervention even though the AU and ECOWAS were working relentlessly together to support the authorities in the country. One way the UN would assist in the handling of the crisis in Mali was through the transformation of AFISMA into a UN operation with adequate and appropriate mandate. In support of Mali’s request for the transformation of AFISMA into a UN operation, the ECOWAS commission was asked by the community’s top authority to submit a similar request to the UN in collaboration with the AU (AUPSC/PR/358, 2013: 3-5).

Acting under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations, the UNSC adopted resolution 2100 on the 25th of April 2013 and decided to permit the requests of both Mali and ECOWAS, and established the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) taking over from the United Nations Office in Mali (UNOM) for an initial period of 12 months. Six months after its establishment, AFISMA was asked to transfer its authority and mandate to MINUSMA on the 1st of July 2013 the day when it was to officially start its operations (S/RES/2100, 2013: 5). Following these developments, AFISMA finally transferred its authority to MINUSMA on the 1st of July 2013 in accordance with the UNSC Resolution 2100. Comprising 12,600 troops and police personnels MINUSMA became the 3rd and the 16th largest UN peacekeeping mission in Africa and the world
respectively (AU, 2013). Speaking to the people at ceremony former President Pierre Buyoya the Special Representative of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission and Head of AFISMA said that, I quote;

“Going forward, the AU and ECOWAS will maintain a strong presence in Mali, and accompany the country in its efforts to resolve the crisis. The AU in particular, will work towards infusing new impetus into the political process, in a bid to efficiently respond to the multifaceted threat facing this region and the Sahel”.

The fact that this progress report on AFISMA operations was compiled by the AU chairperson of the commission and addressed to the AUPSC gives an idea of the position of the AU being that of much significance as compared to that of ECOWAS. The leadership of AFISMA had been snatched from ECOWAS by the AU with the appointment of AU’s former president Pierre Buyoya to be the Special Representative and Head of AFISMA. In my view AU’s appointment of President Buyoya to a greater extent saw ECOWAS lose its position of leadership in overseeing AFISMA operations. The idea to transform AFISMA into a UN peacekeeping operation was first brought forth by the AU chairperson of the commission in the report just a few months after the mission had been launched. In my view ECOWAS was not given enough time to execute its mandate under AFISMA as it was compelled to transfer the mission's authority to MINUSMA six months before its initial one year timeframe expires. By this one can argue that the AU opted for a new formation with regard to the management of the crisis in Mali because it lacked a clear understanding of the initiative and therefore could not lead it.

5. Conclusion

To answer the research question; Why did ECOWAS’s AFISMA fail to resolve the Malian conflict between 2012 and 2013, this paper has demonstrated that ECOWAS’s lack of ownership of its military intervention initiative in Mali [under the frameworks of AFISMA] was the reason as to why ECOWAS’s AFISMA failed in its conflict management quest in Mali. This was done by using the theory of neoliberal institutionalism and a critical discourse analysis method to study and analyse documents about ECOWAS’s founding treaty of 1975 and its revised treaty of 1993, three resolutions adopted by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) on the Mali crisis, AFISMA and its operations in Mali and lastly documents about the
transformation of AFISMA into the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA). This paper has established that among other things ECOWAS’s decision to ditch its founding treaty of 1975 and adopt a new revised treaty in 1993 was due to the community’s desire to incorporate security elements in its frameworks thereby ceasing being a purely economic block due to the unprecedented levels of interdependence among its member states as a result of their economic integration thereby necessitating these adjustments (ECOWAS 1975; ECOWAS revised treaty, 1993). In line with this paper’s conceptual and operational definitions of both the concept of conflict management and ownership, this study has revealed that; First, ECOWAS was directly involved in the management of the conflict in Mali by playing a mediation role by facilitating negotiation between the Malian authorities and the armed groups, imposing targeted sanctions on Mali, mobilising international support for Mali, safeguarding and implementing resolutions adopted by the AUPSC and UNSC on Mali, and lastly intervening militarily under the frameworks of AFISMA. Second, this paper has also demonstrated that in the beginning of ECOWAS’s quest to resolve the Malian conflict, the community owned the initiative with respect to its conflict management plan of action as per the operational definition of the concept of ownership adopted by this paper which is; (1) ECOWAS having power and authority to make decisions without external interference; (2) ECOWAS having total control of and being in charge of its undertakings.

AFISMA was the brainchild of ECOWAS and right from the beginning ECOWAS was at the centre of the undertakings involving the management of the conflict in Mali and also provided leadership of international efforts to resolve the crisis. Mali being a member state of ECOWAS by default put the community at forefront in the handling of the crisis. In its capacity ECOWAS requested the UNSC through the AUPSC to approve its security concept which would see the deployment of AFISMA as required by chapter VII of the UN Chapter. The ECOWAS authority however stipulated the intentions of the community to continue offering leadership to all the processes of solving the crisis in Mali including; leading the deployment of AFISMA and the mobilisation of resources (ECOWAS, 2012:3).

However this research has also revealed and demonstrated how ECOWAS lost the ownership of its initiative in Mali as far as its conflict management quest is concerned which resulted in the failure of the mission. As established by this research, ECOWAS lost the ownership of its initiative in Mali as a result of what one may refer to as the structural institutional hierarchy (i.e. from ECOWAS to the AU and from the AU to the UNSC and the vice versa). In this vein, this thesis has demonstrated that ECOWAS’s loss of the ownership of its initiative in Mali started by; Firstly, ECOWAS seeking the approval of the AUPSC and
UNSC for the AFISMA operations as required by Article 16 (3) of the AU Protocol Relating to the Establishment of the Peace and Security Council of the and UN Charter, Chapter VIII, Article 53, respectively. This paved the way for the AU’s and UN’s involvement in the operations. Secondly, France’s launch of a parallel military operation in Mali on the invitation from the Malian authorities thereby jeopardising and undermining ECOWAS’s AFISMA operation. Thirdly, the appointment of President Pierre Buyoya to be Special Representative and Head of AFISMA by the AU chairperson of the commission meant that AU had gained control of AFISMA operations and consequently all the major decisions concerning AFISMA that followed were made by the AU. Fourth, the transformation of AFISMA into a UN peacekeeping operation, namely MINUSMA, was the last nail in the coffin as far as the end of ECOWAS’s leadership (i.e ownership) of the processes of conflict management of the crisis in Mali was concerned. To arrive at this conclusion that it was ECOWAS’s lack of ownership of its military intervention that led to the eventual failure of its conflict management quest in Mali one carried out the analysis of the collected data using the theory of liberal institutionalism by focusing on the role of the different institutions (i.e ECOWAS, AU and the UN) involved in the entire process and the CDA method to scrutinise the language used in the documents that were analysed so as to reveal the intended and practical meaning of the language that had been used. Language was treated like action and a subject to interpretation and explanation. Nevertheless, as much as this thesis had demonstrated that ECOWAS’s lack ownership of its conflict management initiative in Mali was the reason as to why ECOWAS’s AFISMA failed in its conflict management quest in the country, it has also revealed that the lack of sufficient logistical and financial support for AFISMA was another stumbling block in the way ECOWAS. This paper has established that the lack of the logistical and financial support for the AFISMA operation delayed the deployment of AFISMA troops itself. However this paper has also revealed that the issue of lack of logistical and financial support for AFISMA played a role in making ECOWAS lose the ownership of the AFISMA operation. In an attempt to mobilise resources for the support of AFISMA, ECOWAS was compelled to seek donations from the international community including from the UN, AU, EU and individual nation states such as France and Germany. This resulted in increased foreign influence in AFISMA operation hence undermining ECOWAS’s sense of self determination with regard to leading this operation. In conclusion, the findings of this research have proved its hypothesis which stressed ‘that the reason why ECOWAS’s AFISMA failed to resolve the Malian conflict with regard to its conflict management quest was the community’s lack of ownership of its military
intervention initiative in the country’. In this light one can suggest that in order for the international institutions to successfully coordinate and facilitate cooperation between and/or among the rational self-interested nation states [including other actors] in the international system in their endeavours to obtain collective outcomes a line between support and control must be drew so as to avoid blunders and misreading of situations. Like in this case of ECOWAS military intervention in Mali, the AU and the UN were supposed to provide assistance to ECOWAS while at same time respecting and acknowledging ECOWAS’s autonomy, meaning letting ECOWAS lead and manage AFISMA operations without any interference. In a nutshell, this paper has equally revealed that there is room for further research on the topic of the role of regional organisations in maintaining peace and security in their member states and regions.

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