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Regional Power Asymmetries and their Effects on Regional Integration

The Case of ECOWAS

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Abstract

African regional trade integration remains an understudied field as most of the theories and concepts applied to the phenomenon have been largely drawn in the background of the European context. This study aims to study the Economic Community of West African States by applying a new theoretical approach that posits that there are two logics for developing countries to integrate regionally, an extra-regional and intraregional. If these are at odds, the more powerful country of the regional organization is likely to defect from the regional integration project. By constructing trade networks, the study shows that Nigeria holds a hegemonic role within the country and is closely related to its extra-regional trade partners. The study then goes on to investigate instances of Nigerian decision-making in reference to ECOWAS trade integration scheme and attempts to explain its behavior in the background of the theoretical framework. The research concludes that Nigeria acts both as a blockade and a driver towards regional integration in ECOWAS and is not only influenced by their extra-regional interests, but also national interests.

Key words: Trade integration, Africa, ECOWAS, Hegemon, Nigeria
Words: 9939

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AfCFTA	African Continental Free Trade Agreement
CET	Common External Tariff
CM	Common Market
COMESA	Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa
CU	Customs Union
EAC	East African Community
ECOMOG	Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EPA	Economic Preferential Agreement
ETLS	ECOWAS Trade Liberalization Scheme
EU	European Union
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
FTA	Free Trade Agreement
NTB	Non-tariff Barriers
PTA	Preferential Trade Agreement
REC	Regional Economic Community
RTA	Regional Trade Agreement
SADC	Southern African Development Community
TFTA	Tripartite Free Trade Area
UEMOA	Union Economique et Monétaire Ouest Africaine/ West African Economic and Monetary Union
WTO	World Trade Organisation

Table of Contents

List of Figures

1 Introduction

During the last couple of decades, the global political economy has radically transformed. Countries are now more interdependent and linked than ever before, with flows of goods and capital increasing yearly across national borders. Notwithstanding global crises, for example the financial crisis of 2008 and the Covid-19 pandemic, international trade statistics are increasingly following an upwards trend. One of the strongest driving factors that explain this trend is the augmentation of intraregional trade, particularly in Africa, Asia, and Latin America (De Lombaerde, 2006, p. 1). The World Trade Organization (WTO) annually records a cumulative increase in notifications and accessions to regional trade agreements (RTAs) in the Global South (WTO, 2022). It seems that developing countries are progressively starting to look inwards regionally for cross-border cooperation as a strategy for development.

It is to be mentioned that regional integration is not an unknown phenomenon in history, as empires and kingdoms have long cooperated with their regional neighbors. Nonetheless, the scope of regional agreements is unprecedented. Latin America, Africa, and Asia all host multiple regional economic communities (RECs), varying in size, scope, composition, and structure. However, when compared to the other two, research on Africa deem that the trade integration efforts have been quite disappointing and that the level of integration is relatively low. For example, in 2016, intraregional trade only amounted to 16% of total trade in Africa, while Asia's intraregional trade share of total trade amounted to over 60% (Bouët et al., 2017). Hence, the continent has received growing attention from scholars in recent decades, of which the focus has been on explaining the (in)effectiveness of regional trade integration in Africa.

Ever since the inception of the European Economic Community, today well-known as the EU, the landscape of regional organizations has taken new heights. However, the field of regional integration has long been dominated by European narratives, models, and theoretical approaches which have failed to explain the integrational trajectory on the African continent. An increasing amount of literature is now adapting and contextualizing their approaches to perceive regional integration in Africa as a unique phenomenon rather than a product of European integration. Nonetheless, the phenomenon has not been studied to its full extent and scholars have yet to explore satisfactorily variations and factors that can explain the regional processes in the global South.

Hence, this thesis aims to adopt a new theoretical framework that explains integrational trajectories in the developing world and apply it to the case of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). The theory frames the integrational process in the global South as driven by intraregional interests and extra-regional interests, and how these relate to economic power asymmetries within RECs. The study will be based on a multi-strategical approach by firstly studying ECOWAS' intraregional power dimensions by outlining quantitatively in a trade network trade linkages between the members of ECOWAS. The second part of the research will study qualitatively how these power asymmetries affect the regional integration project of the REC. The combination of two approaches intends to shed light on the integrational path of ECOWAS and explain the behavior of the member states.

1.1 Background

Regional integration in Africa became prominent following the independency of countries from their colonizers. From the 1950s and onwards, integrating with one's regional neighbors quickly became a strategy to induce development for the countries and for reducing trade dependency on external actors (Mistry, 2000). Regional cooperation was also constructed and drawn in the pursuit of an economically and politically united Africa – regional integration was essentially advanced as a stepping stone toward continental integration (Hailu, 2015). The RECs were founded based on the European blueprint of regional integration, consisting of five levels of integration: 1) a free trade agreement (FTA) which regulates free access to members' markets; 2) a customs union (CU) which establishes a CET toward non-members; 3) a common market (CM) which, unlike the FTA, allows for free movement of services and financial capital; 4) an economic union that is created by the establishment of a common central bank and consequently the abandonment of sovereign monetary autonomy, and lastly, 5) a political union that fully or partially absorbs the political autonomy of individual governments (Hülsemeyer, 2013).

Africa hosts a total of 14 RECs and countries are seldom limited to one membership - to paraphrase the renowned Harvard economist Jagdish Bhagwati (1995), the African landscape of overlapping RECs is comparable to a 'bowl of spaghetti'. The pursuit of multiple - and often contradicting goals - has often resulted in standstills in integrational efforts. The failures to fulfill the goals outlined in the RECs' statutes have consequently led to integration projects often being perceived as 'weak' or 'failed' in academia (Grant and Söderbaum, 2003, p. 1).

In light of the disappointing achievements, there has been a move towards interregional cooperation on a grand scale. During the last decade, two major FTAs have been signed: the Tripartite Free Trade Area (TFTA) in 2015, which remains to be ratified, and the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA) which was signed in 2018 and ratified in 2021. The TFTA encompasses three RECs: Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), the Southern African Development Community (SADC), and the East African Community (EAC), and if ratified would allow for a great enhancement of interregional trade flows (Ferreira and Steenkamp, 2020). In the case of the AfCFTA, while the effects are preliminary, the ambitious agreement is expected to increase African intraregional trade by 80% (Abrego et al., 2020).

1.2 The Economic Community of West African States

Relatively to some of the other RECs on the continent, the foundation of ECOWAS arrived late. The first integration efforts in the western region of Africa date back to 1945 with the establishment of the CFA Franc which aimed to unite the francophone countries into one single currency union (ECOWAS, n.d.), followed by the integration of Côte d'Ivoire, Sierra Leone, Guinea, and Liberia in 1962 in the goal of creating an economic union. It was not until 1972 that the ambitions to initiate a larger regional institution were advanced by the Nigerian and Togolese heads of state, Gen Yakubu Gowon and Gnassingbe Eyadema, respectively (ibid). The vision of the REC was to coordinate economic policies between the countries in the region to form an economic union, and in 1975, with the signing of the Treaty of Lagos, 16 countries[1] formally assembled ECOWAS.

[1] Benin, Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Cote d'Ivoire, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togo. Mauritania, the sixteenth founding member, dropped out in 2002.

The Treaty of Lagos, consisting of 25 pages, includes several articles which outline the goals of forming a regional economic union. In article 2, the stages of trade and economic integration are outlined, including the "[..] elimination as between the Member States of customs duties and other charges of equivalent effect in respect of the importation and exportation of goods" and the "[..] harmonisation of the economic and industrial policies of the Member States and the elimination of disparities in the level of development of Member States" (ECOWAS, 1975, p. 20). In essence, ECOWAS was founded on an economic rationale, as members sought to reduce the trade dependency of their former colonizers and promote economic stability in the region (Udoh, 2015).

Today, the REC is considered the most integrated REC on the African continent (Aduloju and Opanike, 2015; Bouët and Odjo, 2019), and has made important progress in implementing some of the goals outlined in the treaty of 1975 – albeit a couple of decades late (Osundo, 2015). One of the most recent development includes the establishment of a common external tariff (CET) that entered into force in 2015 (Karaki and Verhaeghe, 2017). However, as will be discussed later in this paper, the process of implementing the CET has not been smooth as opposing factions stalled the conclusion of negotiations for years.

1.3 Nigeria's Role in ECOWAS

The countries of ECOWAS are fairly heterogenous economically, and there is a clear academic consensus that Nigeria holds a hegemonic power within ECOWAS (Hulse, 2016; Karkare et al., 2022; Ojo, 1980; Osundo, 2015; Udoh, 2015; von Uexkull and Shui, 2014). The country is by far the largest economy amongst the members of the REC and contributes a large share of ECOWAS' total funding (Osundo, 2015). Nigeria, alongside Ghana, was also the initiator of ECOWAS, and has been the leading negotiator in the protocols, agreements, and acts, as will be discussed later. Outside the scope of discussion for this thesis, the hegemon has influenced heavily the political integration of ECOWAS, as the organization developed from solely being founded on a purely economic rationale to include an extensive peacekeeping agenda as well (Yoroms, 1993). Nigeria initiated the inception of the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) which intervened in Liberia, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea-Bissau, and Sierra Leone in the following years of its creation (Obi, 2009; Rönnbäck, 2008). The interventions were met with heavy skepticism from other members of ECOWAS as Nigeria assumed a hegemonic role within the new agenda of peacekeeping – allegedly, the country provided 90% of the group's funding and 80% of its military troops and took quasi-unilateral decisions for the group's interventions (Afaha, 2016; Obi, 2009). Nigeria's power and its influence on the regional trade integration have been substantial in the integrational project of ECOWAS, as will be discussed in the analysis.

1.4 Purpose and Scope

The purpose of the research is to apply the theoretical framework (hereby named the 'regional power asymmetry theory') described in section 3 and explain the regional trade integration trajectory of ECOWAS. The thesis aims to outline how economic power within ECOWAS is distributed, and how the concentrated power distribution consequently affects the trade integration of the REC. To achieve the aim, the research will quantitatively and qualitatively study ECOWAS to depict a comprehensive image of the behavior of Nigeria in the regional trade integration project according to the regional power asymmetry theory. More specifically, the quantitative approach will serve to highlight the interlinkages and interdependence of each member state, and the qualitative approach will serve to investigate specific instances of decision-making of the REC's hegemon.

The aim is to contribute to the growing amount of literature on African regionalism and fill the academic gap in theories, frameworks, and concepts adapted to the African phenomenon. The aim is also to provide an alternative approach in the form of trade networks to highlight comprehensively trade cooperation within ECOWAS.

The two guiding research questions for this thesis read as follows.

RQ1: *How are the intraregional and extra-regional trade linkages between members of ECOWAS and extra-regional key actors characterized?*
RQ2: *How do these trade linkages contribute to the asymmetrical concentration of economic power in Nigeria and consequently affect the trade integration of ECOWAS?*

1.5 Delimitations

It is necessary to outline and define the delimitations for this thesis. Firstly, the quantitative data, in the form of trade statistics, will be collected as reported in 2019. The selection of the year was motivated by the impact of the global pandemic of Covid-19. The crisis has had enormous repercussions on trade, not the least on international trade (OECD, 2022). Some of the effects are still uncertain, particularly in the case of regional integration. Motivating factors for integrating regionally may be to reduce trade dependency on external trade actors and mitigate economic trade shocks (Krampf and Fritz, 2015). It is outside the scope of this research to discuss the potential impact of Covid-19 and how the intraregional power dynamics and interests of the member states may have changed following the crisis.

Furthermore, a short note on the selection of countries included in the trade network needs to be added. For the scope of this paper, only ECOWAS' three largest external trade partners – China, the United States, and Germany - will be included in the network analysis. These are deemed representative to highlight the importance of ECOWAS' external trade, as the three actors hold a grand share of ECOWAS's total extra-regional trade (ECOTIS, n.d.).

Another delimitation will be the exclusion of the temporal aspect of the trade network. To fully catch how the intraregional power dynamics have influenced ECOWAS' trade integration trajectory, it would have been of benefit to depict trade networks dating back to the inception of the REC. However, the exclusion of a temporal overview has been motivated due to two reasons. Firstly, the trade data available in the first decades of ECOWAS is scarce and not coherent across databases (ECOTIS, n.d.; IMF, n.d.).

Secondly, even without highlighting the trade dependency within ECOWAS, it is evident that Nigeria has held a hegemonic role since the creation of the REC (Hulse, 2016; Omo-Ogbebor and Sanusi, 2017; Osundo, 2015; Udoh, 2015).

2 Conceptual Framework

The field of regional integration has proven to be quite difficult for scholars to orient themselves within. The multidimensionality of integration processes includes perspectives of, among others, economic, social, cultural, political, and historical natures. Often, these are highly intertwined and inseparable in some respects. Scholars from various schools, all from European studies, International Relations, Economics, and Development Studies (to name a few) have approached regional integration and have developed their corresponding theories, concepts, and frameworks which have further contributed to a fragmentation of the field, and the available literature is often situated confusingly in between these multi-layered dimensions. There is hence a vital need to address the ambiguity of the field, clarify and delimit the concepts that are going to be discussed, and situate the following discussion in its appropriate area of study.

The three concepts of regional integration, regionalism, and regionalization have proven to be used closely and sometimes interchangeably, and there is no clear scholarly consensus on what the three terms denote precisely (Hettne 2005; Söderbaum 2016; Hülsemeyer 2013). For instance, Gilpin employs the term regionalization in reference to Pacific Asia, regionalism in North America, and regional integration in Europe when discussing regional processes (2001:342-344). For this thesis, only two of the concepts - regionalism and regional integration - will be defined, delimited, and employed accordingly[2].

2.1 Regionalism

Regionalism has been a highly disputed concept within the field of social science, and its conceptualization has differed largely throughout history, particularly throughout different approaches to regionalism. While some scholars regard it as the wider theoretical field of study

[2] Regionalization refers to the process of dividing the world into regions – economically, culturally, politically, etc. However, as this research does not have a holistic focus and focuses solely on one region, regionalization will not be defined.

that includes studies of regional processes (Hettne, 2005; Hülsemeyer, 2013), other scholars refer to regionalism as a concrete and empirical process (Mansfield and Milner 1999; Grant and Söderbaum 2003; Söderbaum 2016; Haas 1961). The academic dissonance has "[..] reinforced existing divisions in the field" (Söderbaum 2016, 2), and lately, there has been a call for a consolidation of the field.

For the aim of this paper, regionalism will be considered as the broader analytical term for the regional process of integration and the field of research that which this thesis is situated in. However, as regionalism incorporates a plethora of regional developments, as previously mentioned, there is a need to define regionalism even further. Originally proposed by Albert Fishlow and Stephan Haggard (1992) and cited in the words of Mansfield & Milner, regionalism will be considered as the theoretical "[...] political process characterized by economic policy cooperation and coordination among countries.". In essence, regionalism is regarded as a process of political and economic nature.

2.2 Regional Integration

As stated before, regional integration incorporates processes of various nature. The complex interrelation of these has resulted in a confusing web of usages across literature that fail to distinguish these processes from one another (Hülsemeyer, 2013). Thus, to delimit the thesis effectively, regional integration will only be regarded in the light of economic integration - more specifically trade integration - and hereon defined as the process of intensifying regionalism through the increased coordination of economic policies. Early definitions of regional integration further defined it alongside the formal institutionalization of regional agreements and in turn a delegation of national sovereignty (Haas, 1961; Hettne, 2005). However, this paper recognizes that regional integration may - not must - incorporate informal or formal procedures of sovereignty delegations.

2.2.1 Regional Trade Integration

Trade integration refers to a specific process within the integrational process of intensifying trade links within a regional organization. This can take the form of coordinating trade policies, eliminating trade barriers such as tariffs or quotas, enhancing institutional regulations of trade, etc. (Balassa, 1961). The RECs in Africa are often founded on a purely economic rationale – thus, the trade integration is regarded as the sole process of the regional integration project and is often used interchangeably (Hülsemeyer, 2013). Hence, as the paper will only treat the aspect of trade, regional trade integration, and regional integration will be regarded as synonymous in the case of ECOWAS.

2.3 Regional Economic Communities

The formal regional body of a regional integration scheme is also a term that has been interchangeably used in academia. Denominations such as regional organizations, regional institutions, and regional communities are frequently used in literature, and often there is a lack of definition (Söderbaum 2016). For this thesis, the term employed to designate these bodies will be 'regional economic community' (REC). In search of a definition, the typology of Mansfield & Milner (1999) will be applied. The authors refer to criteria for a REC to classify as a community and operate a regional integration scheme; 1) the scheme is of economic nature, 2) the member states are of geographical proximity, and 3) the scheme includes a minimum of three states (Mansfield and Milner, 1999). According to these criteria, ECOWAS is a valid case for this study.

2.4 Power

Power is a multifaceted concept and must therefore be defined clearly. According to Dahl, the core definition of power is the ability of one actor to influence another to do something they would not otherwise do (Dahl, 1957). Although there exist numerous forms of power, like hard and soft power (Barnett and Duvall, 2005), this thesis will not define nor specify which kind of power the actors within ECOWAS exercise, but rather group all forms of coercion or influence under the term 'power' and 'economic power', which will be used synonymously. For the scope of this study, the concept will be further defined as the ability to influence the integration trajectory of the REC, regardless of the will of the other member states. Power will be expressed in the level of trade dependency of one country on the other countries. If one member is unilaterally dependent on trade links vis-à-vis another member, the latter member holds a dominant role over the former in their cooperation. Applied on a regional scale, the leverage in the decision-making process is invested in members that are less dependent on regional cooperation than the other members. The larger the economic trade asymmetries between states, the larger the power asymmetries within the REC. Power concentrated in one member state results in a hegemonic dominance over the integrational process for that specific state.

3 Theoretical Framework

Regionalism is often divided along the lines of 'old' and 'new' - both in a temporal and theoretical sense (Söderbaum 2016). This is often done dichotomously, where regional integration schemes and research is also often of 'old' or 'new' nature. Söderbaum (2016), one of the more renowned scholars of regionalism, has been a strong advocate against this classification and argued that the division between the two 'sorts' have aggravated the academic confusion and contributed to further fragmentation of the field of regionalism. In his work "Old, New, and Comparative Regionalism: The History and Scholarly Development of the Field" (2016), Söderbaum argues that there is a vital need to be aware that the historical development of regionalism has been drawn in the background of the European context to fully understand the contemporary regional processes of integration.

During the two last decades in academia, scholars have increasingly tried to contextualize and adapt theories and approaches to regional integration outside of the European continent. Previous euro-based concepts, narratives, and theories applied to African integration have failed to satisfactorily explain variations, trajectories, and factors within the regional processes. The uprising of work drawing on empirical findings in African RECs has been of great benefit for academics as well as policy makers to better comprehend and predict integrational paths and behaviors of RECs and their respective individual countries.

The theoretical framework for this thesis will draw much upon Krapohls' applauded work titled *Regional Integration in the Global South: External Influence on Economic Cooperation in ASEAN, MERCOSUR AND SADC* (2017). The authors propose a new theoretical approach – named the regional power asymmetry theory - to understand the rationales for regional integration within developing regions, and later apply it to understand the integrational trajectories and behaviors of individual member countries of three different RECs on the Asian, Latin American, and African continent. The theory proposes a framework consisting of two logics for countries to engage in regional integration – an intraregional logic and an extra-regional logic.

3.1 The Intraregional Logic of Regional Integration

The first of the two rationales for regional integration for developing countries build on findings from the European integration scheme. The multi-pluralistic theoretical approach builds on neofunctionalism, liberal intergovernmentalism, and institutionalist arguments, and focuses on the economic interdependency and rate of intraregional trade (Krapohl, 2017, p. 35). The neofunctionalism school of thought, developed by Ernest Haas (1961), argues that integration is a result of spillovers from one policy area to another – if integrational reforms in one policy area create negative externalities for another policy area, then integrational reforms in the second area are required and thus advances integration. The 'snowballing' effect is hence formed by increasing policy coordination and in extent increasing regional interdependence. The liberal intergovernmentalism argument, with Andrew Moravcsik in the forefront, holds that the regional integration process is drawn in the background of economic interests and economic asymmetries between the members and that member states advance integration through bargaining and negotiations at a state-level, rather than through a centralized authority (Moravcsik and Schimmelfennig, 2018). The third approach regards the correction of market failures and the regional economic distribution of wealth and benefits between states as a push factor towards regional integration (Hülsemeyer, 2013). These theories have been the prominent in available literature (Hülsemeyer 2013; Söderbaum 2016), however, scholars were quickly frustrated with the fact that they did not seem to correspond to the empirical findings in Africa – the high shares and levels of intraregional trade and interdependence observed in Europe have been very dissimilar to African records (Krapohl, 2017, p. 35); Krapohl 2010). Considering this, Krapohl (2017) argues that the failure of the applied theories derives from that the fact that they only include intraregional political and economic factors and do not incorporate extra-regional determinants for regional integration.

3.2 The Extra-regional logic of Regional Integration

At the turn of the 21st century, the ‘new’ regionalism and the adhering theoretical approaches gained important academic ground and, in contrast to Eurocentric theories, tried to explain regional integration by including and stressing extra-regional perspectives of regional integration (Hettne, 2005; Mansfield and Milner, 1999). The ‘new’ regional integration theories were further motivated by the paradigmatic shift in economic approaches in the developing part of the world as outward-oriented export strategies increasingly replaced the era of inwards-looking import substituting strategies (Krapohl, 2017, p. 42). The ‘new’ approach to regional integration in the global South sought to include the element of economic dependency on developed countries and essentially argued that regional integration has to be understood in a context of increasing economic networks between the two hemispheres (Grant and Söderbaum, 2003, p. 49).

Krapohl (2017, p. 43) proposes that there are two mechanisms of regional integration that spur member states to engage in the process. Firstly, the size and stability effects of economic integration are expected to increase extra-regional foreign direct investments (FDI) (Khalfaoui and Derbali, 2021). By integrating, the destiny market for FDI is enlarged, making it more attractive than the market of each individual state – the larger and the more integrated the regional market is, the more likely the investors can benefit from scale effects. Investing actors are not hindered by trade barriers between member states, increasing profitability and reducing investing costs (ibid).

Furthermore, economic integration may also contribute to the market, political, and macroeconomic stability (Krapohl, 2017, p. 43). For instance, economic integration may have an insulating effect against external market and financial shocks (Krampf and Fritz, 2015; Singh, 2009), enhance political stabilization across borders (Mistry, 2000; Omo-Ogbebor and Sanusi, 2017; Qobo, 2007), and increase macroeconomic stability through suprarational institutional mechanisms and bodies (Ametoglo et al., 2018; Gupta and Yang, 2005; Mistry, 2000). In the case of regional integration in the Arab Maghreb countries, determinants such as market size and institutional quality were positively correlated to the inflow of FDI (Khalfaoui and Derbali, 2021).

Secondly, regional economic coherence and cooperation may provide countries with an enhanced position when it comes to bargaining and negotiating multilaterally (Krapohl, 2017, p. 44). The amplification of leverage power is a result of the size and stability effects and may provide member states with ameliorated trade conditions with external partners (ibid). The indirect extra-regional effects of regional integration may hence be substantial, particularly for developing countries that do not benefit from strong positions in the international negotiating arena (Schneider, 2011).

It is to be mentioned that these extra-regional mechanisms may be ineffective in light of other factors, such as colonial history, authoritarian regimes, and cultural similarities to name a few (Krapohl, 2017, p. 44). Regional integration is to no extent a guarantee of extra-regional benefits, but rather may be a strong incentive for developing countries to be rewarded exogenously.

3.3 The Intraregional versus the Extra-regional logic: The Effects on Regional Integration

It is important to add that the two rationales advanced above are not necessarily positioned as conflicting. A member state of a REC may enjoy enhanced intraregional trade, as well as receive a higher rate of FDI than it would without integration regionally. However, these may become conflicting for individual member states if extra-regional actors privilege individual members, for instance by signing Preferential Trade Agreements (PTAs) that contradict regional arrangements or agreements or directing FDI to a state that is not a member of the REC or diverging from the community (Kokko and Gustavsson, 2004). Hence, if a member country considers extra-regional linkages to outweigh the intraregional ones, an asymmetrical game situation arises – known as a 'Rambo' game where one member lacks the incentives to cooperate and is thus prone to defect.

Defection[3] is a likely outcome in these types of situations. Krapohl (2010) argues that for the rest of the members of the REC, prevention is either difficult or costly since the bargaining power that the external actor holds is relatively larger than the intraregional one. The difficulty is further aggravated since the institutionalization of supranational bodies that can regulate and hinder defecting behavior is typically weak or non-existent in the global South (ibid). Other enforcement mechanisms – reputational repercussions or sanctions – are expected to be equally inefficient. The former is only effective if the defector considers future regional cooperation to be important but is unlikely to do so since the extra-regional benefits outweigh the intraregional gains. The mechanism of sanctions, for instance in the form of trade restrictions and punitive tariffs, is also likely to have no important impact since intraregional trade ties are low, to begin with. Hence, the country that holds the largest economic power is more likely to defect than smaller countries, as the hegemon is relatively less dependent on intraregional ties than the smaller countries (Krapohl, 2010).

3.4 Theoretical Expectations for the Case of ECOWAS

The theory implies some expectations concerning the behavior of regional actors within ECOWAS. If the trade network (described below) depicts large trade asymmetries and centers one or a few member states in the center of the diagram, these are expected to uphold hegemonic dominance within the REC. The hegemonic dominance is equal to the economic power invested in these countries - the smaller countries are more dependent on regional cooperation than the actor(s) in the center. Thus, the actor holds a vital role in determining the direction of the REC and its integrational trajectory, as its power is of great influence over the other countries' will. Further, if extra-regional actors are situated centrally and close to the hegemonic actor(s), there are two implications: 1) the extra-regional trade is important for the member states of ECOWAS, and 2) trade with the

[3] Defection is here understood as blocking deepened integration. It does not necessarily entail leaving the REC but is defined as the act of halting implementations that would lead to further integration.

external actor(s) is of importance for the hegemon which may be inclined to privilege extra-regional interests.

It is hence expected that the regional hegemon, Nigeria, is more likely to prioritize extra-regional relations if these conflict with the regional integration project. A likely outcome is a Rambo situation since the peripherical countries – nor the REC as an institution – are not in an economic power position to hinder the defecting behavior.

4 Methodology

As mentioned above, the plethora of theories, concepts, and disciplinary approaches to regional integration have resulted in an abundant – and often confusing – number of methodological approaches to the phenomenon of regional integration and the research on RECs. In the applauded edited work of Philippe de Lombaerde's *Assessment and Measurement of Regional Integration* (2006), the editor stresses the essential relevancy of assessing previous methods and clearly defining and delimiting the method chosen, alongside its limitations, in a research project. The authors argue that while the phenomenon studied may benefit from a multidisciplinary methodological approach, as it is essentially a multidimensional field of study, it is vital to disentangle the method(s) chosen to enhance the validity and reliability of a research project.

In the following sections, the methodological approach for this thesis will be outlined. The methods chosen will be explained, discussed, and motivated. Furthermore, possible limitations to the methods and approaches will be addressed.

4.1 Research Design

In recent years, studies on regional integration have been increasingly concerned with the possibility of comparison between regions and integrational trajectories (Söderbaum 2016). The era of comparative studies has brought about an increased focus on methodology to ensure reliability across research, which has entailed an increased usage of case studies. Hence, the thesis will be drawn upon a case study of ECOWAS. Following Robson and McCartan's definition (2016, 150), a case study is a study of a specific contemporary phenomenon and can be approached by a multitude of data and methods. As the integrational process is inherently multidimensional, it is of great benefit using the case-design approach to the complex field of regional integration (Van Langenhove, 2006, p. 43). To fully incorporate and comprehend the case studied, the selected case will be investigated two-folded, by basing the research on a quantitative and a qualitative method, adhering to a mixed method design (ibid).

However, as Robson and McCartan's work (2016, p. 150) stresses, the case study design should be regarded as an approach rather than a design on its own. Hence, the research design will be based on the 'sequential transformative design'. As understood in Robson and McCartan, the sequential transformative design bases itself on a quantitative method and a qualitative method, where one method precedes the other and priority is given to either one (2016, p. 178). However, the predominance of one method is not fixed until data has been collected. The authors further regard the method as being conducted primarily by the theoretical framework adopted, which will be the regional power asymmetry theory as outlined section 3. After the collection of data, the author decided to prioritize the chosen quantitative method, followed by the qualitative method to assist in the explanation of the quantitative findings. This is further demonstrated in the order of the research questions as the first relies on quantitative data findings and the second seeks to elaborate further upon the effect of the trade asymmetries that are characterized in the analysis.

The advantages of using a multi-strategic approach to the field of comparative regionalism and the research questions presented above are multiple. The combination and integration of the two data may help to understand variations in indicators (e.g., external shocks or institutional changes) (Ivankova et al., 2006), compensate for limitations in the respective method (Scheyvens, 2014, p. 66), and ensure the validity of the research through triangulation (Robson and McCartan, 2016, p. 179).

4.2 Data Collection and Analysis

The following sections will address the quantitative and the qualitative data collection and analysis respectively, per the sequential transformative design of this project.

4.2.1 The Quantitative Data: Collection and Analysis

Regional integration has long been studied quantitively, often measured in trade flows between members to assess levels of integration and interdependence (De Lombaerde and Van Langenhove, 2006, p. 30). This is motivated due to the abundance of data available and the high quality and reliability of statistics (ibid). However, a substantial part of the existing literature has been criticized for using misleading measurements of trade interdependence, which have resulted in an incomparability across regions as these are sensitive to the size of the RECs – a smaller REC will display a lower share of intraregional trade compared to a larger REC regardless of actual trade (see Iapadre 2004 for further discussion on range variability issues). Further, measuring intraregional trade intensity does not indicate economic power asymmetries and the interests of the member states (Krapohl, 2017, p. 76).

The quantitative methodological approach will hence consist of depicting a trade network. The purpose of constructing a trade network is to highlight the economic power distribution within ECOWAS and relate the economic trade balance to the interests and behavior of the REC's member states. In essence, a trade network analysis consists of structuring nodes (representing the countries) and linking them based on trade flows vis-à-vis one another (Krempel, 2014). The larger the link, the larger the trade flow. Further, the centrality and the size of their nodes indicate the economic interdependence within the ECOWAS – indicating that networks that display large disparities in proximity and size show high economic asymmetries, and vice versa. The higher the dependency on one or a few countries, the more power invested in these countries as these have a larger impact economically on the decision-making within the REC. Nodes representing extra-regional entities will also be included in a second network to portray the importance and dependency of extra-regional trade for the members of ECOWAS. If extra-regional trade links prove to be important, then it is plausible that extra-regional interests are of significance for member states within the REC.

The data will be collected using three databases - UN Comtrade Database[4], IMFs database Direction of Trade Statistics (DOTS)[5], and ECOWAS Trade Information System (ECOTIS)[6] – to ensure reliability and counter the issue of missing data. The data will then be inserted into the program Social Network Visualizer[7], where the export and import data will be linked from and to each member state respectively, as well as from and to external actors.

As mentioned previously, the regional power asymmetry theory holds that the increased reception of FDI is of great importance in the extra-regional logic. However, the availability and reliability of the data on FDI are inconsistent across countries and regions, particularly in Africa (Fujita, 2008). This factor, combined with time constraints, has motivated the exclusion of measuring FDI in this thesis, even though the theoretical framework posits it as an external interest for developing countries. Some studies have shown a positive relationship between trade flows and FDI (Akadiri et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2001), which further suggests that the actor(s) at the center of the network is also driven by the motivation to attract FDI. This is supported by the fact that Nigeria receives the overwhelming share of FDI to ECOWAS, and that a large share flow from the REC's three main external trade partners (UNCTAD, 2009). However, other studies have shown that they are not correlated or are only weakly correlated (Fontagné, 1993; Majeed and Ahmad, 2007). Therefore, while FDI and trade will be regarded to be correlated to some extent in this thesis, the contradictory data available on the relationship may be regarded as a limitation to this study.

4.2.2 The Qualitative Data: Collection and Analysis

In recent years, empirical research basing itself on qualitative methods has increasingly gained ground in the literature on regional integration (Van Langenhove, 2006, p. 43). Qualitative approaches may capture events, processes, or behaviors that cannot be quantified in statistics or numbers (ibid). Hence, as the aim is to investigate how power

[4] https://comtrade.un.org/data/
[5] https://data.imf.org/dot
[6] https://ecotis.projects.ecowas.int/trade-statistics/
[7] https://socnetv.org/

asymmetries within ECOWAS affect the integrational trajectory, qualitative data will be collected and studied to gain a comprehensive picture of the selected case.

De Lombaerde and Van Langenhove (2006, p, 32; p, 43) provide an extensive list of types of qualitative data viable for studying integrational trajectories. Amongst them, are policy papers, official documents, interviews, previous research, etc. This will motivate the selection of the data – which will be evaluated and used according to academic criteria and standards. Official documents and statements will both be gathered from the REC studied and from national sources in Nigeria.

The data analysis will base itself on the method of process tracing which serves to trace "[..] causal mechanisms using detailed, within-case empirical analysis of how a causal process plays out in an actual case" (Beach, 2017, p. 1). The choice of analysis is motivated by the suitability to case studies and the research questions: it allows for a wide comprehension of variations, causes, and trends over time (Beach, 2017; George and Bennett, 2005, p. 190). The process-tracing method consists of five steps (Simister and Scholz 2017): 1), identifying major occurrences that have either led to deepened integration within ECOWAS or defection by Nigeria; 2), Establishing evidence for those occurrences; 3), documenting the processes leading to those occurrences; 4), establishing alternative explanations; 5), assessing the evidence for each possible explanation.

4.3 Limitations

As with all research designs and scientific methods, certain limitations are vital to address. These will be discussed below.

The limitations of case studies are quite ambiguous in the field of regional integration. While it has been applauded in the era of 'comparative' regionalism as it may provide valuable insights for other instances of regional integration (Söderbaum 2016), it has been criticized by other scholars that argue that the ability to generalize results across cases is low (Merriam, 2009, p. 51). However, dynamics and factors that are to be found in ECOWAS and explain the integrational process may be identical or like other RECs, as the theory posits a consolidated framework for developing countries – hence, the generalizability may be derived from a general level of the theory.

Furthermore, as argued before, it is plausible that there are a multitude of factors that is important to the regional integration of ECOWAS, but will be excluded due to time constraints, resource constraints, and biases (Merriam, 2009, p. 52). These issues of validity and reliability are inherent to all studies of specific cases. However, these will be addressed by properly preparing the data collection and analysis, as well as employing strategies of data condensation and effectively delimiting the study.

In reference to the trade network analysis, missing data is an important factor to discuss. In the article *Quantitative Analysis of Trade Networks: Data and Robustness* (Sajedianfard et al., 2021), the authors discuss the issue of missing data in trade network analyses, as numerous countries in the global South do not report accurate trade flows – or any at all. This may be "[..] due to delays in reporting, disruptions (war, disaster) in the country, or being too small or sparsely populated to support reporting infrastructure" (Sajedianfard et al., 2021, p. 2). The risk of missing data in this thesis has been addressed by looking at three different databases and has further been countered by looking at member states' reported imports from non-reporting countries. The potential issue of missing data has also motivated the selection of the reported year, being 2019, as the crisis of Covid-19 may have contributed to an underreporting of data.

5 Empirical Analysis

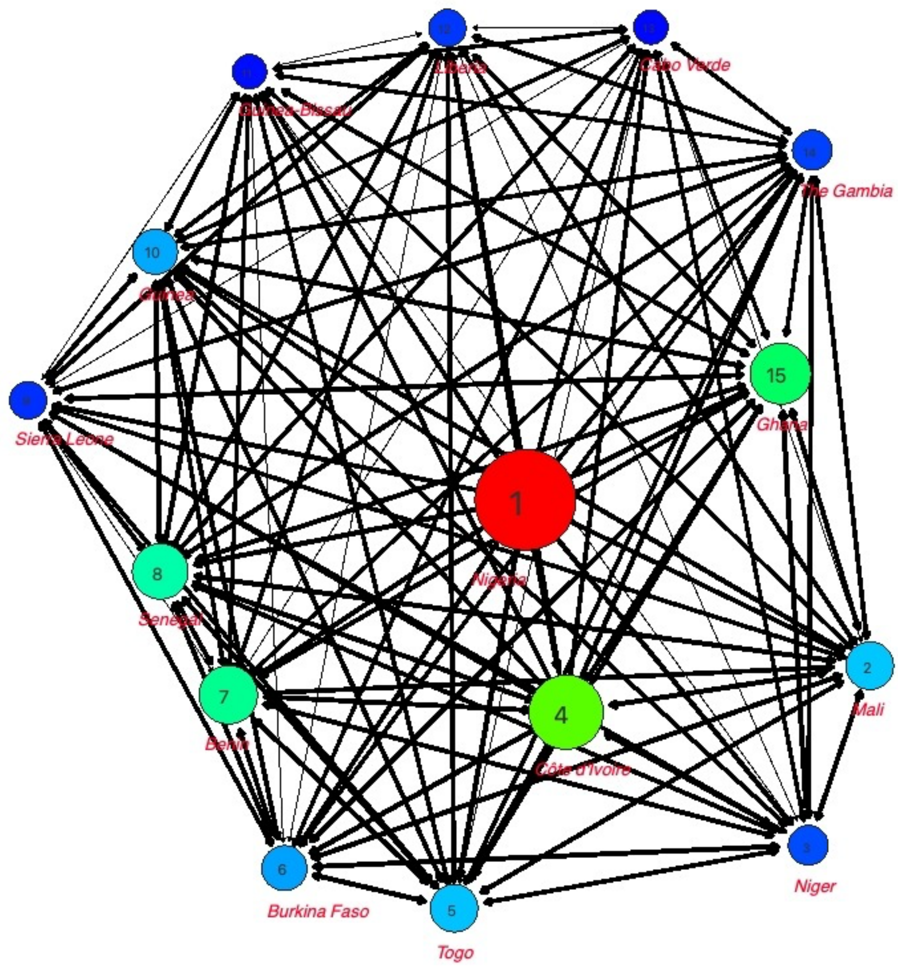
In the following sections, the collected empirical data will be presented. Firstly, the quantitative data will be presented, followed by the qualitative data.

5.1 The Trade Networks of ECOWAS

Figure 1 presents the intraregional trade network of ECOWAS. Each node represents one country, and the numbers corresponding to a member state can be found in the appendix[8]. The 15 countries have been linked and weighted accordingly to their export to and import from a respective member state. However, the lines could not be visually weighted in the program. Further, the program did not allow for a visual presentation of two parallel lines to represent export and import, so the flow of exports and imports are interpreted in the direction of the arrows to and from each country in the figure. Three correlated indicators represent the economic importance of each node: color, size, and centrality. These have been chosen to optically clarify the power linkages of the network. The size and color correspond to the position given to each node – blue colored and smaller countries are situated in the periphery, and range to a red nuance and the larger size the further central the node is[9]. The more central a node is situated, the more important it is as a destination for exports.

[8] It is to be mentioned that the number of a node has been attributed randomly and does not represent anything else than the node itself.
[9] The color is determined by a wide scale, and therefore a key to depicting what level of importance the color represent cannot be included.

Figure 1: Intraregional Trade Network of ECOWAS.



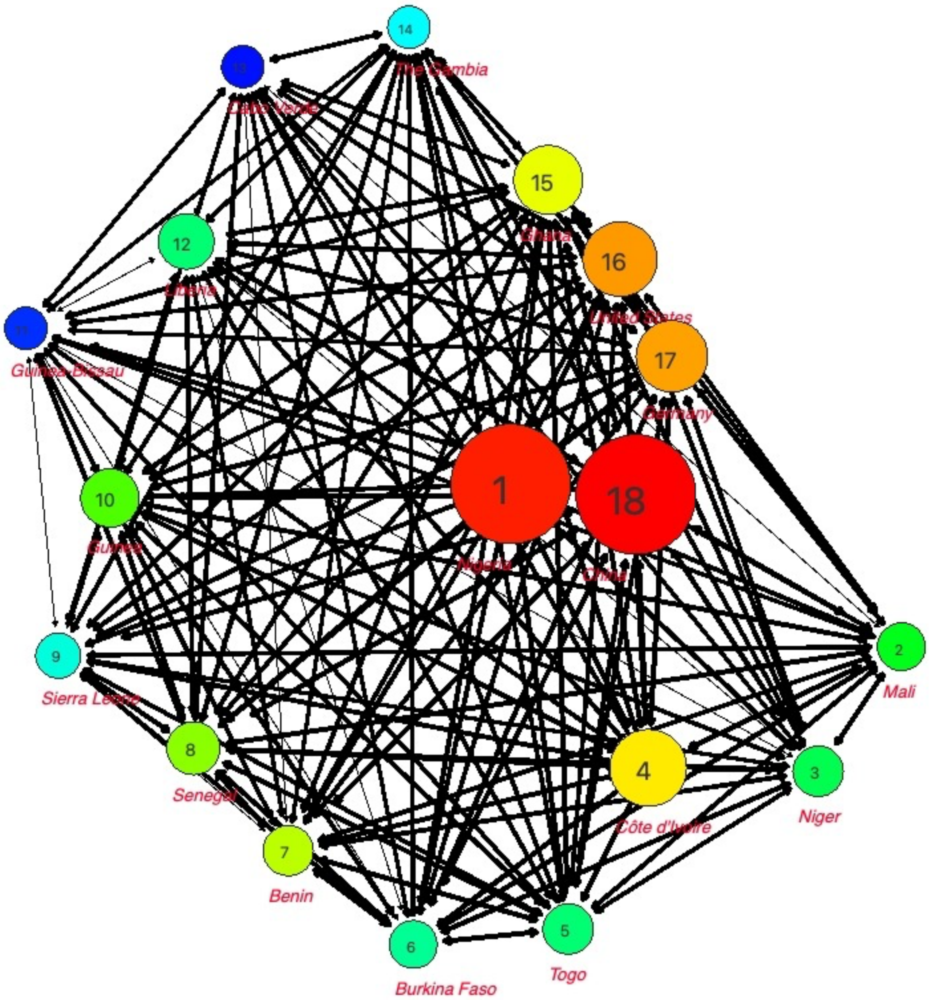
Source: UN Comtrade Database, IMFs database Direction of Trade Statistics (DOTS), and ECOWAS Trade Information System (ECOTIS).

Note: The input of data is expressed in millions of USD.

Note: Description of numbers: 1=Nigeria; 2=Mal;, 3=Niger, 4=Côte d'Ivoire; 5=Togo; 6=Burkina Faso; 7=Benin; 8=Senegal; 9=Sierra Leone; 10=Guinea; 11=Guinea-Bissau; 12=Liberia; 13=Cabo Verde; 14=The Gambia; 15=Ghana.

As figure 1 depicts, Nigeria is situated in the center of the diagram. Côte d'Ivoire holds the second-largest node, followed closely by Ghana. However, the central gravity of Nigeria and the fact that the rest of the countries are situated in the periphery indicates a strong economic power asymmetry and that power is skewed towards one single country – Nigeria represents an important regional export market for the members of the REC, but it is not reciprocated. Hence, it indicates that Nigeria's motivation to integrate regionally is not primarily driven by the factor of intraregional trade since the network would have shown a close-knitted diagram if there were more equal trade links.

Figure 2: Trade Network of ECOWAS and the REC's three largest trading partners.



Source: UN Comtrade Database, IMFs database Direction of Trade Statistics (DOTS), and ECOWAS Trade Information System (ECOTIS).

Note: The input of data is expressed in millions of USD.

Note: Description of numbers: Description of numbers: 1=Nigeria; 2=Mali, 3=Niger, 4=Côte d'Ivoire; 5=Togo; 6=Burkina Faso; 7=Benin; 8=Senegal; 9=Sierra Leone; 10=Guinea; 11=Guinea-Bissau; 12=Liberia; 13=Cabo Verde; 14=Gambia; 15=Ghana; 16=United States; 17=Germany; 18=China.

Figure 2 has included three external actors – China, the United States, and Germany. These three export destinations represent by large ECOWAS share of total export (ECOTIS, n.d.). As the figure depicts, China is the largest extra regional market and is thus situated centrally. Nigeria and China nodes are situated very closely, indicating a high level of trade. In a similar vein, Germany and the US are also quite closely related to Nigeria and are therefore positioned semi-centrally[10]. The diagram depicts a high extra-regional dependency, with a high concentrated external export flow from two countries – Nigeria representing 77% and Côte d'Ivoire 10% of ECOWAS total extra-regional exports, respectively (ECOWAS, n.d.).

Analyzing the networks shows that Nigeria, alongside China, Germany, and to some degree the United States, holds highly important roles in the trade with and within ECOWAS. Nigeria holds a central role and trade gravitates towards the country, which according to the theory would imply that Nigeria holds a hegemonic role within the decision-making of ECOWAS. Including external actors, the centrality of the three actors suggests that extra-regional trade is of grand importance for ECOWAS, particularly between Nigeria and China. It can therefore be interpreted that Nigeria's motivation for integration is built on extra-regional trade interests. The following section will investigate how Nigeria balances the extra-regional and intraregional interests in instances of decision-making in reference to deeper integration, and how it uses its hegemonic role to influence the trade integration trajectory of ECOWAS.

5.2 Qualitative Data

In this section, Nigeria's behavior in the country's decision-making in reference to instances of deepened integration will be investigated. Particularly, the focus will be on instances where Nigeria has either halted or advanced regional trade integration according to the goals outlined in the ECOWAS Trade Liberalization Scheme (ETLS) described below, and more specifically how they have done so. It will also investigate if the decision made by the hegemon has been driven by extra-regional or intraregional interests.

It seems that the objectives of ECOWAS have been overambitious as many of the objectives have not been met in time or at all – for example, ECOWAS was supposed to have implemented a common market 15 years after its inception in 1975, a target that

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[10] For transparency, it is to be mentioned that the determination of a country's relative position is done visually and subjectively. While the categories of central, semi-central, semi-peripheral, and peripheral may be difficult to distinguish ocularly, it has been done so considering the trade data put into the network by the author.

remains to be fulfilled (Mistry, 2000; Qobo, 2007; UNCTAD, 2018). The institution has further been plagued by its unsuccessful attempt to achieve full liberalization of movement, a protocol signed in 1979 (ECOWAS, 2018). The targets outlined in the Treaty of 1975 and the aforementioned protocol were further emphasized with the creation of ETLS which was established in 1990 (ECOWAS, 2004), as the trade integration advancements were slow and did not meet the timeframe set (Aduloju and Opanike, 2015). The scheme essentially advances the necessity to liberalize trade and the movement of people to deepen integration and achieve the fundamental trade integration goals (ECOWAS, 2004). The ETLS was primarily a product of Nigerian and Ghanaian interests, as the two countries sought to increase their exports in the industrial sector and foster intraregional trade (Karaki and Verhaeghe, 2017). The scheme had a timeframe of 10 years, during which a gradual implementation would end up with a zero rate of duty and tariff in 2000 (ibid). However, it has not been nearly as successful as expected (Hulse, 2016; Karaki and Verhaeghe, 2017). Nigeria has for long been one of the contenders against the implementation of the scheme. According to Hulse (ibid), the hegemon has long acted as a quasi-veto player in the negotiations of the ETLS and has continually obstructed the effective implementation and institutionalization of its objectives. Nigeria has yet to implement several of the provisions included in the ETLS and is the state with the lowest implementation rate in ECOWAS (Hulse, 2016; Karkare et al., 2022). The free trade zone of the REC is constantly undermined by the lack of institutionalization and legal resources devoted to customs control, corruption, and transparency by Nigeria (ibid).

5.2.1 The Liberalization of Movement of Goods in ECOWAS

The inconsistency of Nigeria's trade policy has been a major impediment to deepened integration within the REC – while the hegemon advocates for enhanced intra-regional trade, they continuously avoid implementing vital reforms and directing resources to facilitate cross-border transports of goods (Karkare et al., 2022). Nigeria's non-compliance with the article on the free movement of goods has mainly been in the form of non-implementation of agreements: an abundance of entry check points at the borders, the refusal to address corruption within the customs administration, and unofficial import bans (Adepoju 2015). For example, Adepoju writes that "[..] for a radius of ten kilometres along the Nigerian side of the Lagos–Seme border, there are no fewer than 25 checkpoints during the daytime and many more at night, instead of the approved three checkpoints" (2015, p. 447). It is to be mentioned that Nigeria cannot be solely blamed as the unitary actor that inhibits the expansion of intra-regional trade within the REC– virtually all the members of ECOWAS display some levels of non-compliance with the liberalization of the movement of goods (Adepoju, 2015). However, seeing that Nigeria's market is a central trade hub for ECOWAS as depicted in figure 1, obstruction of trade in Nigeria has a larger inhibiting effect on the effective operationalization of the ETLS (Adepoju, 2015; Alabi, 2020).

The 'unofficial' barriers to free trade put up – or the refusal to address them - by the hegemon may stem from Nigeria's unwillingness to open the delivery corridors from other regional members. Nigeria's poor infrastructure, customs operations, and weak management of its ports have paved the way for other members to act as gateways between the hegemon and its external partners (Karkare et al., 2022). This has particularly been the case for Benin which has been a relatively more attractive export destination than Nigeria as the small country has made significant investments to act as an entrepot economy for the hegemon and upholds low transshipments cost – around 80% of the imports to Benin is directed to Nigeria (Karkare et al., 2022; USDA, 2014). Karkare, Odijie, and Van Seters write that "[..] following Nigeria's ban on imports of used cars to boost domestic production, Benin's per capita car imports reached about $70 in 2007, seven times the ECOWAS average, with most of these imports being further re-exported to Nigeria. A similar story can be seen in cloth imports which reached an average of $100 per capita, compared to an ECOWAS average of $7, along with several other products." (2022, p. 5).

However, it is to be mentioned that a large share of the re-exports to Nigeria is smuggled over the borders and is not registered in the official statistics (Bensassi et al., 2019; Golub and Mbaye, 2019). Nigeria has actively tried to stop the informal trade with its neighbor countries by implementing protocols and urging the other states to tackle the problem jointly but still faces informal trade flows that undermine the hegemon's domestic production, particularly in the industrial sector (CBN, 2016; Karkare et al., 2022). Two of the most noteworthy integration reforms that Nigeria has driven forth have been the Joint Border Project, which consists of constructing and managing joint border posts alongside members' borders, as well as the supplementary act 'axle road harmonisation'[11] to the Convention on Intra-transit of Goods (ECOWAS, 1982). The project and the act have deepened integration with intending to enhance border transparency and cooperation. However, proving relatively ineffective, Nigeria has continuously resorted to implementing informal barriers to stop the illegal trade (Karaki and Verhaeghe, 2017; Karkare et al., 2022), and in 2019 the country radically decided to unilaterally close its trade borders against Benin, Niger, Chad, and Cameroon - the first two mentioned being members of ECOWAS - for two years (The State House of Nigeria, 2019). According to Nigerian president Buhari, the closure was mainly motivated to force the targeted countries to address the informal cross-border trade, and in the case of Benin and Niger, to respect the ETLS, the related Convention on Intra-transit of Goods, and the Treaty of ECOWAS (CDG, 2019; The State House of Nigeria, 2019). The president was further impelled by the threat to Nigeria's food security, as a large share of the smuggled goods consisted of rice which inherently was a threat to Nigeria's agricultural sector (The State House of Nigeria, 2019). The closure signified a major breach of the ETLS and its relating protocols and is regarded as a defecting act of Nigeria from the integration project of ECOWAS.

It can be argued that Nigeria's intra-regional trade policies are inconsistent and ambiguous. On one hand, they are pushing for deepened cross-border cooperation to enhance and facilitate intra-regional trade while on the other hand, they are blocking efficient flows from their neighbors (Karaki and Verhaeghe, 2017; Karkare et al., 2022). The hegemon is seemingly stuck in a limbo, discouraged from pushing further for increased regional integration due to a lack of ratification from the member states both before and after the implementation of ECOWAS provisions. Despite Nigeria's indisputable role as a hegemon and thus strong influential power and lack of follow through, other members of ECOWAS are also responsible for halting the development of the ETLS, for example by signing agreements without following through on implementation or refusing to address violations of such agreements, such as the Joint Border Project (Karkare et al., 2022). Thereby, instead of maximizing the gains of

[11] Supplementary Act A/SP.1/08/11 Relating to the Harmonization of Standards and Procedures for the Control of Dimensions, Weight, and Axle Load of Goods Vehicles Within Member States of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS 2011)

cooperation, the members are more concerned with following an individualistic and lower risk path that results in stagnation of regional trade integration in reference to the free movement of goods across borders.

5.2.2 The Pursuit of a Common External tariff

The most evident instance of Nigeria's opposition to trade integration has been in the quest of establishing a CET. A CET has been put as a foundational integration goal for the REC as it aims to consolidate the members differing tariffs into one and thus harmonize external tariffs (ECOWAS, 2016; Karkare et al., 2022). It is further seen as a grand commitment to the integration project, as the establishment of a CET disallows for members to privilege individual trading partners which may create 'race-to-the-bottom' scenarios within the REC (Karkare et al., 2022). However, the implementation of a CET proved hard to carry out within the region.

The sub-region of ECOWAS, the West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA[12]), had been pursuing a CET across its member countries, a tariff that would inherently compete against an establishment of an ECOWAS-CET (Hulse, 2016). If the UEMOA-CET tariff would be implemented before a tariff on a regional scale, then the former would become a baseline for the remaining countries of ECOWAS, which ultimately became the case in 2000 (ibid). In the following negotiations to harmonize a potential ECOWAS-CET with the UEMOA-CET, Nigeria was reluctant to adopt the proposed tariffs and stalled conclusions for several years (de Roquefeuil et al., 2014; Karaki and Verhaeghe, 2017). It was not until 2013 that the ECOWAS-CET was signed, and it entered into force two years later (ECOWAS, 2016).

Nigeria was unwilling to adopt the tariff bands set in the UEMOA-CET, mainly due to two reasons. Firstly, the bands provided were considered too low to protect the country's industries, mainly in the manufacturing and agricultural sector (de Roquefeuil et al., 2014; von Uexkull and Shui, 2014). In the case of the agricultural sector, Nigeria has historically

[12] UEMOA is the acronym of it French name – Union Economique et Monétaire Ouest Africaine. The regional organization is a colonial legacy consisting of the French-speaking states of Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Niger, Senegal, and Togo.

considered its food security important for development, and viewed the UEMOA-CET as devastating if implemented (de Roquefeuil et al., 2014). Secondly, the hegemon feared a loss of international attractiveness for extra-regional partners if such a CET would be implemented. In a memorandum written in 2011 by the president of the National Association of Nigerian Traders (NANTS), addressed to the Coordinating Minister of the Economy and Minister of Finance, Ken Ukahoa noted the detrimental effects of implementing the UEMOA-CET for Nigeria. He wrote that "[I]t will make logical sense to European, Chinese and Far Eastern exporters to open ports in neighbouring ECOWAS countries and through them, export to Nigeria taking advantage of ECOWAS Trade Liberalisation Scheme (ETLS) at near zero duty thereby beating even the CET" (Akosile, 2022). Nigeria feared that extra-regional imports would be diverted from being directed to the hegemon towards countries with cheaper entrances, and thus undermine the Nigerian economy and relation with its external partners. It is plausible that it put pressure on the country to speed up the conclusion of negotiations between ECOWAS and UEMOA.

In 2014, the EU - after several years of negotiations - established an economic preferential agreement (EPA[13]) with ECOWAS, an agreement that required a unified external tariff by the member countries in West Africa (de Roquefeuil et al., 2014; Hulse, 2016). As the network analysis shows above, Germany represents a highly important trade partner for Nigeria (c.f figure 2), and other EU-members' markets are also of great importance for Nigeria (IMF n.d.). Hence, it is probable that Nigeria was 'bullied' into conceding a CET due to extra-regional interests. However, it is to be mentioned that Nigeria managed to implement a fifth tariff band that seeks to protect 'sensitive industries', which in essence is their agricultural sector as 90% of the band consists of agricultural goods (de Roquefeuil et al., 2014). While it is only a minor 'win' for Nigeria as the rest of the four bands remained without change from the UEOMA-CET, it indicates that Nigeria still holds a strong position even when cornered by extra-regional and intraregional pressures.

[13] An EPA is the EU's regional trade instrument and is registered as an RTA by WTO. In other words, it is an interregional trade agreement.

6 Conclusion and Discussion

This study has sought to shed light on the regional trade integration trajectory of ECOWAS and how the economic power concentration in Nigeria has affected the integration process of the REC. The thesis has drawn upon the framework of the regional power asymmetry theory that aims to explain regional integration in the global south. Firstly, it posits that developing countries pursue regional integration according to two logics – an extra-regional logic and an intraregional logic, and the former is prioritized in case of a clash of interests. Secondly, the theory advances that if there are large economic trade asymmetries between the countries, the more powerful country (that is, a country that is not reliant on intraregional trade with its neighbors) can dictate the regional integrational path and is more likely to defect than the less powerful countries. This study has attempted to discuss and answer the following research questions:

RQ1: *How are the intraregional and extra-regional trade linkages between members of ECOWAS and extra-regional key actors characterized?*

RQ2: *How do these trade linkages contribute to the asymmetrical concentration of economic power in Nigeria and consequently affect the trade integration of ECOWAS?*

To answer the questions above, the theory has been applied to the case of ECOWAS. To investigate how power asymmetries affect the regional trade integration of the REC, the study has been approached both quantitatively and qualitatively. Firstly, the qualitative part consists of trade networks that have aimed to depict the regional trade flows of the REC. Analyzing the networks, the results show that Nigeria holds a central role in ECOWAS and that external trade linkages are important for the country as well as the other members of the REC. In turn, the hegemonic role of Nigeria entails that the country can influence the integration path and is likely to defect if extra-regional benefits are at odds with the intraregional interests.

The qualitative part has consisted of process tracing instances of possible deepened integration for ECOWAS. The analysis shows that Nigeria has both acted as an inhibitor and a driver for regional trade integration for ECOWAS – while the country holds a central position within the community and plays a vital role in the integration of the REC, the country remains relatively dependent on the other members as they are also able to influence the trade integration. It seems that the actions of Nigeria are mainly driven by extra-regional and national interests. The analysis indicates that the policies advanced are partly influenced by its extra-regional privileges with its cross-continental partners, but also by the threat to its domestic production and development. The blockades towards the full implementation of the free movement of goods seem to stem from national concerns rather than extra-regional, while the implementation of a CET was motivated by the fear of losing out on extra-regional benefits. The future of ECOWAS seems to rely on the efficient implementation of agreements by other members to get Nigeria to adhere to the regional integration project.

6.1 Further Research

African trade integration has yet to be satisfactorily researched from different perspectives than the European integration theories. There is a need to contextualize and adapt concepts, ideas, and theoretical frameworks to African regional integration to fully understand the dynamics on the continent. The study of economic power dimensions and the asymmetries between member states may help to explain regional integration in Africa and on other continents as well. Scholars of regionalism need to expand and integrate approaches and methods to gain a better understanding and enhance policymaking for regional communities across the world. Further, the network analysis method is a promising approach to accurately depict the characterization of trade linkages within RECs, and how these may influence the integration trajectory.

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