

## **Bringing space into the study of African peace and security politics**

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### *Abstract:*

*The African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) is often studied without a particular interest in theory building or the exploration of methodological approaches. The subject receives a lot of attention in policy publications, often with an implicit aim to evaluate “success” and “failure”. Scholars focus rather on specific cases and engage at best in an initial comparison in order to draw lessons learned. What is missing is a reflection of the entangled nature of the various intervention experiences of African peace and security actors as well as the continuous development of policies, e.g. regional vs bilateral interventions, mediation vs military deployment. Moreover, despite omnipresent references to spatial imaginaries, like “state”, “territory”, “region”, or “architecture”, space as a central dimension of social interaction is rarely considered explicitly.*

*Within the study of African peace and security politics, critical scholars have started to theorize on the basis of empirical observations employing notions such as arenas, fields, or assemblages. Building on some of this work, this paper proposes “space” as an analytical means to look at the politics of APSA and regional organizations more systematically, highlighting relations among various actors and their practices. These are guided by perceptions of space and contribute in turn to the shaping of space(s) around conflict intervention. Thus, the paper aims to contribute to a more theoretically guided debate on the politics of African peace and security.*

## **Introduction**

The African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA)<sup>1</sup> has received both a lot of criticism for its slow and inconsistent implementation and a lot of praise for the progress it has made nevertheless in several domains (e.g. policy consolidation, mainstreaming of norms and values) and for results achieved in peace-making on the African continent. Thus, it has received a lot of attention in academia and policy circles. However, studies and publications have largely focused on general assessments of “success” or “failure” (based on certain formal and/or normative understandings of what APSA is supposed to be and do). Alternatively, they have

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<sup>1</sup> The authors will assume that the reader has a basic working understanding of APSA consisting of five pillars. First and foremost the Peace and Security Council (PSC) that is supported by the Panel of the Wise, the Continental Early Warning System (CEWS), the African Standby Force (ASF), and the Peace Fund. For an introduction to the development and structure of APSA, see Engel, Porto 2010, 2013.

engaged in more or less detailed case studies, sometimes also in a comparative perspective, aiming to discern “lessons learned” and “best practices”. What has been missing so far is a theory-oriented approach, allowing to systematize analysis across cases and instances, and to develop a deeper understanding of the complex sets of actors and practices that are “involved” in APSA as well as of what APSA actually “does” and how it functions.

What is more, despite omnipresent references to spatial imaginaries, such as for example “state”, “territory”, “region”, and “architecture (e.g. in foundational APSA texts, official statements, policy papers, and academic publications), the spatial dimensions of APSA have received little or no attention from an analytical perspective. Confronted with this neglect, we argue that APSA is intimately linked to space in several important ways. Moreover, following the spatial turn in the social sciences and humanities and building on insights from (critical) geography, we perceive space as a central dimension of social interaction in general and politics in particular.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, we argue that considering “space” as an analytical lens helps us to do both: shifting attention to the important spatial dimensions involved and, at the same time, developing a more theory-oriented approach towards studying APSA and conflict intervention in Africa.<sup>3</sup> Some scholars have made first efforts to try to move beyond some of the shortcomings in the existing literature on African peace and security, for example by applying “assemblage thinking” and “field theory” as well as the concepts of “local”, “international”, or “intervention arenas” (see below).

Building on some of these works, in this paper, we develop a “spatial approach” for studying and theorizing APSA, related politics, and conflict interventions, drawing on ideas developed in critical and post-structuralist geography.<sup>4</sup> To this end, we start out by summarizing the main aspects and advantages of the literature that approaches African security through arenas, assemblages, and field theory as well as debates in post-structuralist geography that we intend to build our approach on. Subsequently, we will analyse APSA from a spatial perspective. Thereafter, we provide empirical illustrations on how to use a spatial approach in the analysis of the interventions in Guinea-Bissau and Mali.<sup>5</sup> Finally, we conclude by relating the value of a spatial approach to studying APSA to inquire into militarization.

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<sup>2</sup> This is also the core assumption of the Collaborative Research Centre (SFB 1199) “Processes of Spatialization under the Global Condition”, established in 2016 at Leipzig University, to which our research project belongs.

<sup>3</sup> Very recently, more scholars have acknowledged the need to pay more attention to certain spatial aspects in studying peace and security in Africa (Charbonneau 2017; Walther, Miles 2017). For a much earlier attempt see Engel, Nugent 2009.

<sup>4</sup> For a good overview, see e.g. Murdoch 2006.

<sup>5</sup> In guise of a disclaimer: Especially in the section on APSA from a spatial perspective, as well as the empirical sections on Guinea-Bissau and Mali, we are trying a particular argument. Thus, in its current version, the paper represents rather a research note. While these parts are deeply based in our qualitative research, they are not properly referenced yet.

## **Arena, assemblage, field**

Post-structuralist approaches to security in international studies draw on the works of Foucault, Bourdieu, Latour, Deleuze and Guattari, among others. These approaches to thinking, reasoning, and observing have been used to unravel empirical phenomena and problems in different ways. Authors that harnessed these insights by analysing security in Africa with the concepts arenas, assemblages, and fields have done so mainly to overcome two conceptual problems that existed thus far: misleading dichotomies between public/private, local/global, inside/outside, and civilian/military; and the lack of African actors and agency in the existing literature that presupposed a simplistic “Western” dominance in security governance. This section will provide a brief overview of the academic advances that the literature on arenas, assemblages, and fields has brought to the study of African security governance.

The term arena is used in traditional international relations to roughly denote the international space of or for politics.<sup>6</sup> In contrast to this understanding, scholars studying conflict have used the term “local arena” as an analytical frame.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, the UN as well as other international and regional organizations are conceptualized as arenas in which states collaborate, compete over resources and power, negotiate, or contest each other over the establishment of norms.<sup>8</sup> However, interventions have also been conceptualized as arenas in order to highlight the practices and processes that accompany them as well as their role as a space for the negotiation of the aims of the intervention itself, but also of norms more generally.<sup>9</sup> This latter approach is particularly relevant for our argument since it has already allowed highlighting the diverse actors, practices, and conflicts that occur within and around interventions.

“Transboundary formations”, a concept proposed by Callaghy, Kassimir and Latham<sup>10</sup>, combines the notions of “international arena” and “networks” (along others) to account for the interlinkages of global regional national and local forces in interventions in Africa. Thus, to some extent, this approach seems also to be influenced by assemblage thinking. In his contribution to the volume edited by the three authors, Latham adds the concept of “trans-

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<sup>6</sup> See e.g. Gretton 1980; Fry 1990; Housden 2014

<sup>7</sup> Mehler, Tull 2011; Mehler et al. 2012.

<sup>8</sup> See e.g. Claude 1966; Wight 1972; Maksoud 1995; Rittberger et al. 2012

<sup>9</sup> see e.g. Curtis 2012; Veit 2010; Witt 2016.

<sup>10</sup> Callaghy et al. 2001.

territorial deployment” to describe how global and local forces are joined “around the exercise of power and responsibility and the pursuit of political projects across boundaries”<sup>11, 12</sup>

The assemblage approach presents a particular kind of thinking about human and non-human actors, practices, routines and discourses as interconnected in a given context or phenomenon. Assemblage thinking has made its way into the study of international relations<sup>13</sup> and into the study of Africa in international relations<sup>14</sup> in particular in the analysis of interventions.

Some authors concerning themselves with security in Africa have used the idea of assemblages merely as a synonym for the “international” or to depict the entangled nature of certain actors or issues without further consequences for their analysis.<sup>15</sup> Others presupposed “global assemblages [that] need to be deciphered”<sup>16</sup> or employed the image of assemblage to argue for the historical entanglement of areas that are often treated as separate, as for example policing and war(-making).<sup>17</sup>

The assemblage approach can have ontological implications and authors reconstruct their subject accordingly as “being” assembled; this allows them to overcome the classical dichotomies between states and non-state actors, the local and global, or the private and public.<sup>18</sup> While assemblage approaches have been criticized as being merely descriptive, they have been employed in fine-grained analysis of contemporary intervention practices, their routines, and their self-perpetuating dynamics.<sup>19</sup> Further, the analytical value of this lens is to “examine the inner workings of the relations that actors have established”<sup>20</sup>, which helps to investigate underlying patterns, logics, or rationales of security governance. Our description of APSA by means of a spatial vocabulary (see below) is influenced by an assemblage ontology, yet pushes the approach further to highlight the role of spatial imaginations in its very constitution.

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<sup>11</sup> Latham 2001: 71, 75 ff.

<sup>12</sup> The promising framework, proposed by these authors, touches upon issues related to and with important implications for social space / spatiality. Nevertheless, it seems that direct analytical attention to “space” as such is largely eclipsed by a focus on actors, ideas, practices and institutions around different kinds of interventions in Africa.

<sup>13</sup> Acuto, Curtis 2014.

<sup>14</sup> Abrahamsen 2017a.

<sup>15</sup> See e.g. Olsson 2007; Ismail 2013.

<sup>16</sup> Aas 2012: 252.

<sup>17</sup> Bachmann et al. 2016.

<sup>18</sup> Abrahamsen, Williams 2011; Higate, Utas 2017; Sandor 2016a; Sandor 2016b.

<sup>19</sup> Doucet 2016.

<sup>20</sup> Bueger 2017: 2.

A different attempt of overcoming the conceptual global-local dichotomy makes use of Bourdieusian field theory.<sup>21</sup> Bourdieu's terminology and theory have received quite some attention in the international studies literature on security, which has led to the emergence of diverse applications of these concepts.<sup>22</sup> This proliferation to Bourdieusian thinking can also be related to an increased scholarly attention to practices in international relations.<sup>23</sup> The "Bourdieuian promise" was to overcome the neglect of symbolic power, to give reflexivity central stage, and to engage in a productive critical way with the common dualities of international relations, such as inside and outside or private and public.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, scholarly contributions with a particular focus on security in Africa have remained scarce. Notable exceptions include the analysis of the "field of border control in Mauritania" by Frowd.<sup>25</sup> He examines the Mauritanian border post project (funded among others by the EU and the International Organization for Migration), but eventually complements the Bourdieusian sociology with actor-network theory in order to account for the "agency of material factors"<sup>26</sup>. Most recently, Abrahamsen and Williams used Bourdieusian theory to interrogate the field of security and development.<sup>27</sup>

By introducing perspectives to overcome the dichotomies of classical IR (i.e. local/global, private/public, etc.) and by allowing to account for a diversity of actors and practices to be included in the analysis, these approaches have laid valuable ground for a better understanding of African security governance more generally. However, while these contributions have focused on several aspects such as intervention, peace- and/or state-building, they have not been applied to APSA, related politics, and conflict interventions carried out by African regional organizations so far. What is more, they largely ignore the multiple spatial dimensions involved, which means missing an important part of the picture, as we explain in the following section.

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<sup>21</sup> e.g. Richmond et al. 2015.

<sup>22</sup> from the many see e.g. Leander 2005; Adler-Nissen 2013; Berling 2012, 2016; Bigo 2006a, 2006b, 2011, 2013, 2016; Bigo, Madsen 2011; Bigo, Walker 2016; Go 2008; Götze 2016; Jasper 2016; McCourt 2010; Senn, Elhardt 2012.

<sup>23</sup> see e.g. Pouliot 2008, 2016; Pomarède, Schjødt 2015; Olsson 2015; Gunneriusson 2017.

<sup>24</sup> Leander 2011: 294.

<sup>25</sup> Frowd 2014.

<sup>26</sup> Frowd 2014: 228.

<sup>27</sup> Abrahamsen 2017a; Abrahamsen 2017b.

## Relational Space: Insights from post-structuralist geography

Our proposition in this paper is based on the main observation of the “spatial turn” in the social sciences and humanities, namely that space matters and that it needs to be taken into account in analysis. More specifically, however, we base our argument on insights from what some have called critical geography, and in particular post-structural approaches to geography that sensitize us to the diverse and often unexpected ways in which space matters.<sup>28</sup> What is more, we want to draw attention to spatial phenomena, shifts, and (subtle) changes that cannot be captured with traditional understandings of space and spatiality, often limited to a taken-for-granted state territoriality.<sup>29</sup> Instead, we are confronted with multi-scalar, polycentric, and intertwined processes of de- and re-territorialization<sup>30</sup>, and, as we argue in this paper, of *re-spatialization*.

Before moving on to the analysis of APSA, we want to briefly synthesize the main points that inform our conception of space in this paper.<sup>31</sup> Space is socially constructed, resulting from continuous, open-ended social interactions and changing inter-relations among different actors; multiple, heterogeneous spaces coexist, at any given time.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, these socio-spatial relations are polymorphous, playing on one or several spatial dimensions at certain times or simultaneously. These include but are not limited to territoriality; instead stretching other spatial dimensions such as for example scales, networks, and places.<sup>33</sup> As part of everyday practices, space is also a category of thought (or an imaginative structure<sup>34</sup>) that allows people to make sense of the world around them, to give meaning to it, and to act upon it.<sup>35</sup> These thoughts and related practices make up reality, which in turn impacts back on people’s thoughts and acts.<sup>36</sup> Closely linked to this intimate relationship between social and spatial processes, the spatial is always also political, for example influencing how certain political questions are formulated, or legitimating / justifying (pre-existing) political arguments.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Massey 2005: 15.

<sup>29</sup> Agnew 1994; Brenner 1999; Allen 2016.

<sup>30</sup> Brenner 1999: 43–44.

<sup>31</sup> For a detailed overview of the emergence and intellectual basis of post-structuralist geography, see Murdoch 2006.

<sup>32</sup> e.g. Thrift 2009: 96; Massey 2005: 9.

<sup>33</sup> Jessop et al. 2008.

<sup>34</sup> Massey 2005: 9.

<sup>35</sup> Werlen 2009: 286.

<sup>36</sup> Werlen 2009: 287; <sup>36</sup> DeLanda 2016: 21.

<sup>37</sup> Massey 2005: 9.

Thus, different actors may mobilize “space” as a political resource to achieve specific ends, constructing specific (competing) framings.<sup>38</sup> This also points us directly to the relationship between space and power (e.g. in the forms of domination and resistance). Struggles over different imaginings, representations, and implementations (e.g. issues of (forcible) inclusion and exclusion) relate to efforts to (temporarily) construct or reconstruct and stabilize or destabilize certain spatial relations. The outcomes of these struggles are always precarious and under-determined in the sense that they may involve “openings” or the emergence of new forms.<sup>39</sup> Thus, drawing on Foucault, geographers have highlighted the nature of space and geography as reflecting specific power-knowledge relationships.<sup>40</sup> As such, spaces relate to discursive formations, which specify how particular sites should be organized<sup>41</sup> and who has the right (and/or capacity) to speak “sovereignly” about space.<sup>42</sup> In this, power, knowledge, practice, and space are interwoven and cannot be clearly distinguished.<sup>43</sup>

Also closely related to power, is another specificity of the relational approach to space, namely the effort to move beyond “easy geometries” (i.e. two-dimensional topography) and towards (including) topology. Using a vocabulary that includes terms like “fluidity”, “folding”, and “distorting”, this approach seeks to draw attention to the ways in which “proximity” and “distance” are not absolute but produced by actors with the power to make the “far near” and the “near far”<sup>44,45</sup> More recently, this point has been brought home forcefully by John Allen, describing the “changing same” of power in topological terms.<sup>46</sup> Allen argues that both space and power are continuously under transformation. Thus, while the “outcome” (e.g. state power) may seem to stay the same, the ways in which this outcome is reproduced may differ and they come along with subtle spatial shifts that we need to capture and rethink.<sup>47</sup> In particular, Allen sensitizes us to the different aspects of (distorted or folded) topological “reach”, which is rather about felt “presence” than about geographical distance, about intensity rather than extensity. This means that “proximity” (making presence felt) or “distance” (placing beyond reach) may be produced in different ways by actors with the power to do so.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Massey 2005: 9; Delaney, Leitner 1997: 94–95; Ó Tuathail 1996: 15.

<sup>39</sup> Murdoch 2006: 18–20.

<sup>40</sup> Ó Tuathail 1996: 10; Murdoch 2006: 48.

<sup>41</sup> Murdoch 2006: 35, 48.

<sup>42</sup> Ó Tuathail 1996: 11.

<sup>43</sup> Murdoch 2006: 48.

<sup>44</sup> Murdoch 2006: 94–95.

<sup>45</sup> Most notably John Law, Michel Serres, and Gilles Deleuze.

<sup>46</sup> Allen 2011; Allen 2016.

<sup>47</sup> Allen 2016: 1–2.

<sup>48</sup> Allen 2016: 2, 11–13.

To sum up, what is important for us is that space is the result of multiple, heterogeneous interactions and inter-relations between different actors. Moreover, it always involves relations of power and is constantly in the process of being made, maintained, or re-made. In this, a multiplicity of spaces co-exists – as do imaginaries, ascriptions of meaning, and representations (i.e. making sense), which are based on particular power-knowledge constellations and accompanied by different practices. Thus, the spatial is always also political, and, in turn, space (in one way or another) influences politics and is mobilized for political reasons (e.g. arguments, justification, goals).

In order to detect and account for the continuous changes, shifts, and transformations of space and the complex social relations it consists of, we require new ways of imagining, seeing and talking about space.<sup>49</sup> Thus, we need to account for the relational spaces that do emerge (and those that do not) and ask how specific spatial arrangements are maintained as well as how some actors become powerful (while others do not) by using specific spatial arrangements to generate this power.<sup>50</sup>

As part of the Collaborative Research Centre (SFB 1199) “Processes of Spatialization under the Global Condition”, we make use of two additional (analytical) concepts: “spatial format” and “spatial order”. Spatial formats are lenses or patterns that enable actors to select, name, give meaning to, and communicate particular spaces relevant to their actions. Thus, spatial formats are tied to specific groups of actors, and based on ideas about how to imagine, name, visualize, and manage space, as well as on ideas about what “relevant” or “appropriate” spatial formats are. Consequently, spatial formats relate to particular entrepreneurs, instruments, strategies of signification, and eventually of spacemaking. Spatial orders both result from these practices (around several spatial formats) and inform them; they are produced by and produce relations between different spatial formats.<sup>51</sup>

In the following, we explain in more detail how the above applies to APSA and related conflict interventions more specifically.

### **APSA seen through a spatial lens**

In the following, we use a spatial vocabulary as a heuristic to uncover some of the ways in which APSA and related politics build on particular spatial imaginaries and how they have

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<sup>49</sup> Massey 2005: 13; Murdoch 2006: 99; Allen 2016: 3.

<sup>50</sup> Murdoch 2006: 20, 98; Allen 2016: 1–2.

<sup>51</sup> see also Engel 2017 (forthcoming).

spatializing effects on African security governance. First, we look at APSA's horizontal and vertical characteristics and their implications for spatial ordering, specifically the ways in which it territorializes African security regions and reaffirms a hierarchical relation between different scales and institutions (i.e. Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and the UN, through the principle of subsidiarity). Second, we highlight the role of different places and sites in the continuous creation and application of APSA. Third, we turn to the connections between the different people, institutions, rules, and regulations that engage with APSA as well as the network(s) they form.

#### *APSA's impact on horizontal spatial ordering*

The structure of APSA has introduced two layers of territorial organization. On the one hand, APSA works with and through the eight RECs that the African Union recognizes as core regional partners. These are the Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD), the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), the East African Community (EAC), the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), the Southern African Development Community (SADC), as well as the Arab Maghreb Union (UMA). On the other hand, the Protocol Relating to the Establishment of the Peace and Security Council of the African Union (henceforth PSC Protocol) defines specific Regional Mechanisms for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution (RMs) to facilitate the implementation of APSA.<sup>52</sup> These RMs represent a point of connection between the AU and particular "security regions" (as envisioned by APSA). Thus, RMs were established in areas where there was either no (cooperating or corresponding) or several overlapping RECs. Therefore, in the context of the implementation of the African Standby Force (ASF) in 2008, two RMs were established: the Eastern Africa Standby Force Coordination Mechanism (EASFCOM) and North African Regional Capability (NARC).<sup>53</sup>

Along with the three RECs ECOWAS, ECCAS, and SADC, these two RMs provide the institutional platforms for the five regional brigades of the ASF, divided along the general directions of north, east, south, west and centre. Thus, they represent the ASF geography (or spatialization), which is a specific territorial division with implications for determining the responsibilities and competencies in a particular conflict. For example, the situation in Mali in

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<sup>52</sup> AU 2002.

<sup>53</sup> AU 2008.

2012 highlighted the difficulties that can arise when a conflict erupts in a member state situated at the border of the respective territory of two of these regional brigades (see below).

In addition to this horizontal order, APSA also aims to strengthen a particular vertical order between the RECs/RMs, the AU, and the UN, by institutionalizing the principle of subsidiarity. The PSC Protocol positions the AU Peace and Security Council (PSC), physically located at the headquarters of the AU Commission in Addis Ababa, at the centre of APSA. Placing it in between the RECs/RMs on the one side and the UN on the other, assuming hierarchical nested scales from the regional to the continental and finally the global level. Article 16 of the PSC Protocol states that while “Regional Mechanisms are part of the overall security architecture of the Union”, the Union itself, nevertheless, “has the primary responsibility for promoting peace, security and stability in Africa”<sup>54</sup>. Thereafter, Article 17 defines the relationship with the UN, with particular reference to Chapter VIII of the UN Charter “on the role of Regional Organizations in the maintenance of international peace and security”<sup>55</sup>. This is enshrined in the principle of subsidiarity with the RECs/RMs as the most local and immediate actors in a given conflict, as “sub”-organizations to the AU that then relate the wider region to the UN.

However, an organization like ECOWAS which has a long-standing history in engaging in regional conflicts, has repeatedly circumvented the AU and thereby ignored this hierarchy. The organization has either tried to interact directly with the UN (as in 2012 for an intervention in Mali) – which was, from its point of view, justified under Chapter VIII – or acted on its own (as in 2012 in its intervention in Guinea-Bissau).<sup>56</sup>

### *The production of APSA in different sites and places*

The continuous evolution of APSA happens in different specific places and sites. These include among many others the headquarters of the AU, the RECs, the EU, and the UN as well as the training centres of excellence, think tank offices, and research institutes.<sup>57</sup> It is in these places that different actors that work with and on APSA interact and engage with existing rules, regulations, and procedures. Thus, it is also in these places that researchers, consultants, politicians, and practitioners produce, develop, represent, and enact “APSA” as an idea, a

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<sup>54</sup> AU 2002: 28, art. 16.

<sup>55</sup> AU 2002: 30, art. 17.

<sup>56</sup> During its interventions in the 1990, ECOWAS regularly interacted directly with the UN referring to Chapter VIII of the UN Charter.

<sup>57</sup> For example, the National Defense College in Abuja, the Kofi Annan Peacekeeping Training Center, the Institute for Security Studies (ISS) in Dakar, Pretoria and Addis as well as the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI), and many more.

policy, and a practice. In addition to research, debates, and negotiations in those places, APSA is also produced at different sites. For example, these may be the sites of deployment of AU Peace Support Operations – as it was the case in Mali in 2013 with the African-led International Support Mission to Mali (AFISMA) – but also the sites visited by mediation teams, covered by field officers gathering information for the Continental Early Warning System or by liaison offices and special representatives.

### *The production of APSA through multiple connections and networks*

Closely related to the above, the places and sites in which APSA is practiced and shaped do not work, of course, on the architecture by themselves nor do they work in isolation from one another. Instead, they make multiple connections and form complex networks. They play the double role of bringing together and linking different actors in one particular site or place, as well as forming part of one or several sets of sites and locations linked by those actors. In other words, policy makers, practitioners, researchers, consultants, and others that are connected through personal and professional relationships form networks with certain hubs. At times, the personal relationship between people working in different institutions and different places or sites of APSA may be the element that actually facilitates the link to enable close cooperation.

In order to present our understanding of how APSA relates to space it was necessary to discuss some of the different aspects separately. Nevertheless, one should be aware of that fact that these dimensions intersect and are inseparable, thus creating a truly multi-dimensional space. APSA, its principles, and its structures are full of spatial imaginaries, references, and metaphors that actors invoke to communicate and enact a particular (spatial) order. This order relates them to one another and allows manifesting “proximity” and/or “distance”, as well as spaces of influence and responsibility – to make plausible or to justify the position of actors towards an issue or other actors.

### **APSA in Guinea-Bissau: space, subsidiarity and legitimacy claims**

In Guinea-Bissau, APSA has played an important role in the spatial ordering by different actors in several ways. Most importantly, it has been both a guiding instrument – although a contested one – structuring intervention (ordering space) and a symbolic resource to legitimize or delegitimize specific players (using particular spatial formats) in the struggle about who gets to

act how. To illustrate in a little more detail how this relates to space and the spatial ordering we refer to two examples: the tensions between ECOWAS and the AU as well as the tensions between ECOWAS and the Community of Portuguese-Speaking Countries (CPLP).

As explained above, APSA is built on several regional pillars. In case of a conflict, these are supposed to work together with the African Union to resolve the situation based on the principle of “subsidiarity”. While all agree on this in general, there is little agreement on what this means in concrete terms. As a result, subsequent crises have brought to the fore tensions between the African Union and some of its RECs. Most pronounced, however, these tensions have arisen between the **AU and ECOWAS**, which became particularly visible in the reactions to the coup d’état in Guinea-Bissau in April 2012.

Let us first sum up briefly the key events. After an initial consensus by the majority of the international community – condemning the coup and rejecting any transition organ emanating from it – ECOWAS broke out of this consensus and started negotiations with what called itself the “military command”, thereby *de facto* legitimizing it. While ECOWAS received a lot of criticism for this move, it was nevertheless able to broker a transition agreement and push the “military command” to accept an ECOWAS military mission to the country (ECOMIB).<sup>58</sup> Although today ECOWAS receives a lot of praise for this mission, and is in fact pushed to continue it, at the time of initial deployment, and three years after that, the organization received no support whatsoever.

For one thing, while supporting ECOWAS’ initiative to engage with the conflict in Guinea-Bissau in principle, the AU did not agree with ECOWAS about its interpretation of the principle of “zero tolerance” for unconstitutional changes of government (UCG). This disagreement created much tension between the two, because it triggered fundamental questions about the nature of their relationship. ECOWAS, on its part, expected the AU to support whatever step it took, emphasizing its competences in conflict intervention (gained since the early 1990s) and its comparative advantage: its ability to take quick action at the level of heads of state and an intimate knowledge of its “own” regional space. The AU, in contrast, took offense with ECOWAS’ pragmatic approach towards restoring “constitutional order”, i.e. tolerating the perpetrators of the coup at the negotiating table and accepting some of their premises. In practice, this meant that the AU, while formally accepting that ECOWAS was

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<sup>58</sup> In the context of this paper, it is important to note that ECOMIB has been a relatively small mission of some 600 to 700 police and military troops. Its main task has been the protection of state individuals and related VIPs. However, the ECOMIB presence in Bissau is rather symbolic; its actual capacity to physically prevent violence is very limited.

“closer” to the conflict and in the “front line”, insisted on the prevalence of its interpretation of “zero tolerance”, seeking to consolidate a continental policy on UCG.

Most importantly, it led the AU to refuse to lift the suspension of Guinea-Bissau (a decision taken right after the coup), despite repeated calls by ECOWAS.<sup>59</sup> In effect, this made it even harder for ECOWAS to get the transition government internationally recognized and to access external funding for its mission in Guinea-Bissau. Thus, the intransigent stance of the AU further added to the EU’s refusal to fund ECOMIB through its African Peace Facility (APF) (until mid-2015) and the reluctance of the UN Security Council (UNSC) to provide more support. It was not until mid-2015 that the UNSC acknowledged the important role of ECOMIB. But even then, the resolution only called on members to support the mission (at a time when ECOWAS got tired and wanted to withdraw).

The above clearly illustrates that while APSA provides for a spatial division of labour and the establishment of relations among the participating actors, the actual meaning and constitution of those are contested. In particular, the implied hierarchy of APSA – constituting hierarchical nested scales from the regional to the continental to the global – constitutes a serious bone of contention. Here, especially ECOWAS, as a strong and important actor in the AU, has sought to carve out and assert primacy in its own regional space.

In addition to this “internal contestation”, some actors have also used “APSA” as a **symbolic resource**. For example, a key element in the conflict leading to the coup in Guinea-Bissau in April 2012 was an Angolan military mission (MISSANG) which was officially deployed to the country to assist in security sector reform (SSR) in early 2011. This mission legally depended on a bilateral agreement between the governments of Angola and Guinea-Bissau. Interestingly, however, the Angolans justified their mission in spatial terms. Both countries are part of the CPLP, along with Brazil, Mozambique, Portugal, Sao Tome and Principe, Timor-Leste, and more recently Equatorial Guinea. These countries form a (virtual) region linked by certain historical, cultural, and linguistic commonalities (i.e. Lusophony).<sup>60</sup> When Angola turned to the AU (whether to inform them or get approval is not clear), it framed MISSANG as a CPLP mission, arguing that it was only helping a fellow member of the lusophone space.

The mission was not well received, neither by the military of Guinea-Bissau (for obvious reasons) nor by several West African states. In particular, Nigeria, Côte d’Ivoire, and Senegal

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<sup>59</sup> The AU lifted the suspension of Guinea-Bissau only in mid-2014, after internationally accepted elections in the country.

<sup>60</sup> For more information about the CPLP especially with regard to security cooperation, see Herpolsheimer 2014, 2018 (forthcoming).

saw the Angolan involvement as a direct interference in their own space (affecting their national and regional interests).<sup>61</sup> Interestingly, they framed their response, first, in regional terms, mobilizing ECOWAS and then turned to the African Union, arguing that CPLP was not part of APSA, that APSA had to be applied, and consequently that the Angolan mission had to leave. Eventually, the AU concurred and Angola agreed to withdraw its mission.

What becomes apparent is that the phrase “apply APSA” may be used by different actors for different reasons and purposes. While its meaning is very much contested, it nevertheless constitutes a common reference point that may enable different actors to claim legitimacy, primacy, or to de-legitimize certain efforts. Here, particular spatial understandings come to play, e.g. about what is “our region”, who is “close” and who is not, and how different (nested or interlinked) scales should or should not relate to each other. Therefore, spatial formats (such as ECOWAS and CPLP) have enabled different actors to reframe and re-scale their action. In this, APSA has been an instrument for spatial ordering (used in both ways, i.e. bottom-up and top-down), and the recurring common references to “APSA” as well as the evolution of relations among different “parts” might indicate a spatial order “in the making”.

### **APSA in Mali: space, territoriality and militarization**

Ever since ECOWAS and the AU started engaging with the conflict and politics in Mali, the country has become a site where APSA is practiced. In 2012, the country witnessed a re-emergence of armed violence in the north, a coup d'état, and an independence declaration. The occupation of vast parts of Mali's territory by armed groups created such an international attention that, apart from ECOWAS and the AU, the UN, the EU as well as various non-African states – among which France is only the most prominent – had become enmeshed in the conflict. As of October 2017, Mali was still host to a UN Mission (MINUSMA), a French-led military deployment (Operation Barkhane), a regional military deployment (G5 Sahel Joint Force), as well as countless post-conflict, peace-building, state-building, and further security *cum* development initiatives – most of them initiated and conducted by donors/partners. Bamako has become the centre of gravity for the majority of these efforts as international personnel flies in

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<sup>61</sup> Since we cannot go into detail, only some brief indications: Nigeria saw its hegemonic aspirations threatened. Côte d'Ivoire still remembered the involvement of the Angolans in its own conflict in 2011 (Angola had support president Gbagbo). Lastly, Senegal feared Angolan economic and infrastructure projects in Guinea-Bissau (around Angola Bauxite) which had the potential to disrupt and change (i.e. respatialize) sub-regional economic relations and flows, unfavorably for Senegal.

and out of fortified hotels. Despite a peace process, armed violence prevails in many parts of the country.

From the beginning of the conflict in 2012 on, all major actors involved in shaping the response to the armed violence opted for a military approach.<sup>62</sup> The Malian government under President Amadou Toumani Touré (aka ATT) responded by engaging the national armed forces, ECOWAS proposed a robust force to support the Malian forces in their efforts, the AU – though after months of deliberations – got involved in deploying a joint mission with ECOWAS, and, finally, France and Chad also started deploying troops. Since then, the French broadened their area of operation to stretch beyond Mali and into the region (Operation Barkhane). At the same time, Mali and its neighbours have sought a means to (re-)deploy troops in a frame that allows to conduct offensive operations, which the UN peacekeepers are per their mandate prohibited from undertaking. When looking at the development of these different military interventions since 2012 it is noteworthy that they were not only proposed by different actors, but also drew on very different spatial references to mobilize legitimacy, troops, funding, logistics, and other resources. Which role did these references to space(s) then have in the development of these different deployments? How did actors profit from a re-spatialization of a subject (i.e. “the Sahel”) as their position vis-à-vis others changed in the process? How were spatial imaginaries used to justify or legitimize certain responses or the inclusion/exclusion of certain actors? And, how did APSA shape these developments, and vice versa?

Already on 26 April 2012 the ECOWAS Heads of State and Government decided to deploy the ECOWAS Standby Force (ESF) to support the Malian government and army to reclaim the lost territory from the armed groups in the north.<sup>63</sup> At that time, hopes were high for a potential ASF success story as the ECOWAS deployment to Mali was discussed in the frame of the ESF.<sup>64</sup> Despite the coordination of ECOWAS with Mali’s non-ECOWAS neighbours, Mauritania and Algeria, the proposal to deploy the ESF – later discussed under the name MICEMA – was mainly seen as an ECOWAS initiative and sourced its troops accordingly. ECOWAS representatives, from their perspective acting in accordance with Chapter VIII of the UN charter, approached the UNSC directly to ask for a mandate and support. They were referred (back) to the AU as within APSA (i.e. a specific interpretation of the PSC Protocol), the AU PSC is the junction between the regional mechanisms/RECs and the UN.

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<sup>62</sup> This is by no way to say that they only opted for a military approach. In fact, national, regional and international actors alike were involved in a multi-dimensional response to the political and armed conflict in Mali; including among other measure mediation, ceasefire negotiations, the facilitation of a political transition process and elections. However, in the context of this paper we will emphasis the military aspect in the intervention.

<sup>63</sup> ECOWAS 2012.

<sup>64</sup> Aboagye 2012.

ECOWAS was urged to rework the proposal for MICEMA in coordination with the AU to ensure better cooperation with Mali's non-ECOWAS neighbours and greater continental backing.<sup>65</sup> When the UNSC finally approved the intervention force for Mali in December 2012, it did so within the frame of an "African-led International Support Mission to Mali"<sup>66</sup>. This established the first ever AU-ECOWAS hybrid mission with a joint mission headquarter being promptly set up in Bamako as troops were already deployed in January 2013, due to the rapid developments on the ground.

At the same time, additional troops from France and Chad were deployed in the frame of Operation Serval. This controversial military deployment of France in its former colony was justified with an apparent, self-evident need to defend a particular space/place, the capital Bamako, from being run over by armed groups that had already occupied vast parts of the country.<sup>67</sup> The felt need to maintain territorial control and a particular spatial order of states, i.e. with the capital as a significant place and entry point for international politics, was strong enough to legitimize a bilateral French military intervention in West Africa. What is more, African and international actors alike hailed it as welcome and successful. In the bow wave of Operation Serval, several European countries had already entered the conflict by providing technical, intelligence, and logistical support. Thus, the international response was soon re-scaled to the "global level" as on 1 July, AFISMA was re-hatted to the UN mission MINUSMA. Under the impression of a former colonial power deploying to an African country – moreover upon the seemingly desperate request of that country – the AU PSC provided the ground for two initiatives that would re-spatialize APSA by re-drawing the spatial frame.

On 25 January 2013, the AU PSC requested the Commission on the one hand to report on the development of the ASF and its Rapid Deployment Capability (RDC) (as the deployment in Mali was seen as un-timely), and to initiate on the other hand a meeting between Mali and the states in the region to mobilize support for AFISMA.<sup>68</sup> The African Capacity for Immediate Response to Crises (ACIRC) and the Nouakchott Process<sup>69</sup> emerged from this request. ACIRC aimed for a robust mechanism to quickly deploy African troops financed by the participating volunteering nations to conduct offensive operations. It was introduced as an interim measure within APSA until the ASF's RDC would be fully operational, but clearly marked a shift

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<sup>65</sup> UNSC 2012a; UNSC 2012b.

<sup>66</sup> UNSC 2012b.

<sup>67</sup> However, Yvan Guichaoua suggests that the reason was not so much the progressing of the armed groups (that are said not to have aimed at the capital but rather the strategically situated airport at Serval), but rather indications of a new coup attempt against the interim president (Guichaoua 2013).

<sup>68</sup> PSC 2013.

<sup>69</sup> AU 2013; AUC 2013.

towards militarization in African security governance. Moreover, it moved beyond the ASF geography with its regional forces and was heavily supported by South Africa and Algeria,<sup>70</sup> yet opposed by Nigeria. This re-spatialization of rapid intervention allowed for a greater involvement of countries even from a region “far” from a given conflict. The Nouakchott Process, which aims at increasing intelligence cooperation in the Sahelo-Saharan region<sup>71</sup>, presents an alternative re-spatialization within APSA as it not only includes countries from three of the ASF regions across the north, west, and centre, but also bridges the previous regional divide between Mali and Algeria.

The robust military design of ACIRC was justified with situations like that in Mali and in addition, the Nouakchott Process proposed early on an intervention force for Mali and the Sahel. Moreover, already during the re-hatting of AFISMA to MINUSMA some actors advocated for a robust force to be deployed alongside the UN peacekeeping mission. While proposals for such a force within the frame of the Nouakchott Process did not materialize, in June 2017 the UNSC welcomed the deployment of the G5 Sahel Joint Force.<sup>72</sup> The G5 Sahel was founded as a regional organization in December 2014 during a presidential summit of its five participating countries Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Chad with the aim to foster security and development. The G5 Sahel is heavily supported by France and has re-drawn a regional space for intervention<sup>73</sup> for Mali and the Sahel that excludes Algeria.

Throughout this process, international and Malian actors frequently used spatial references to describe and communicate their concerns: Mali’s “territorial integrity” was compromised or in danger and “safe havens” had or were emerging in the north of the country and the wider Sahel. All of this happened because the “state” was not present in “ungoverned spaces” of the country. Finally, Mali was in grave danger of becoming the “Afghanistan of Africa” from which “terrorists” could launch attacks on regional and international targets, threatening regional, continental, and international security as well as stability and order. The remedy for this threat scenario was equally rich of spatial references as the “Malian authority over its entire territory” needed to be restored, the administration “decentralized”, the provincial

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<sup>70</sup> It seems that in particular these two African power houses were deeply offended by the French intervention and wanted to reaffirm African stewardship in security matters on the continent. Members of ACIRC are Algeria, Angola, Chad, Niger, Senegal, South Africa, Sudan, Uganda, UR of Tanzania, Benin, Burkina Faso, Egypt and Rwanda.

<sup>71</sup> The participating countries are Burkina Faso, Chad, Libya, Mali, Mauritania, Senegal, Algeria, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Niger and Nigeria.

<sup>72</sup> UNSC 2017.

<sup>73</sup> Elsewhere, we explored the term “space(s) of intervention” and pushed the understanding of interventions as arenas beyond the focus on actors and norm negotiations to include the strategic use of spatial imaginaries by actors to alter their position vis-a-vis one another through the practices of scaling and establishing reach (Döring, Herpolsheimer 2018 (forthcoming)).

borders in the north needed to be re-drawn, the state presence increased, and borders needed to be secured.

Paying attention to the spatial references that were invoked throughout the intervention(s) in Mali reveals a paradox tension between the emphasis on defending a particular spatialization of the state on the one hand and advocating a (government-led) regional integration/regionalization on the other. The terms spatial order and spatial format can help to reconcile this tension. What is at stake in Mali is nothing less than the defence of a particular spatial order, in which “the state” has to play its role in an international system and is also a constituting component of regional and international organizations. These regional organizations, like ECOWAS and the AU, thus have a stake in maintaining the state and this spatial order. Their responses are impacted by a specific spatial format, based on what appears a “regional paradigm”, which prompts them to frame their actions in regional terms.<sup>74</sup> This dynamic has had implications not only for the regional organizations/regionalisms involved, but also for the creation of new regions and spatial formats (i.e. securitized spaces such as the Sahel) – new regional initiatives within<sup>75</sup> APSA (i.e. the Nouakchott Process and ACIRC), and new regional organizations (i.e. the G5 Sahel).

APSA has shaped these developments as it was used to argue for a particular hierarchy between ECOWAS, the AU, and the UN in the development of MICEMA and AFISMA. Moreover, the ASF geography that delineated Mali as part of the Western standby force and Algeria and Mauritania as part of the dormant Northern force impacted this process. On the other hand, this specific impact of APSA on the responses to the conflict in Mali provoked a reflexive dynamic and a process in which new additions were made to APSA; i.e. ACIRC, the Nouakchott Process and the G5 Sahel. The intervention experience in Mali had further implications for the relationships between ECOWAS, the AU, and UN. Thus, APSA and its intervention site Mali were/are closely entangled in their impacted on each other.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Döring 2017.

<sup>75</sup> Indeed, the Nouakchott Process and ACIRC are both explicitly related to APSA, and even the G5 Sahel Joint Force is treated in the respective PSC Communique almost like a regional mechanism (PSC 2017).

<sup>76</sup> Döring 2016.

## Conclusion and Outlook

This paper has been a first attempt to make the discussions inspired by the so-called spatial turn in the social sciences and humanities fruitful for the study of APSA and African security governance in general and to highlight lines of inquiry for the engagement with militarization in Africa. Rather than presenting a finished result, our aim was to explore how to harvest the analytical insights from post-structuralist geography for the study of APSA, related politics, and intervention experiences.

After discussing the value of arena, assemblage, and field concepts in the study of security in Africa, we proposed to further these discussions by making the spatial dimension explicit. Drawing on post-structuralist geography, we sketched out an understanding of space as relational. By “seeing APSA through a spatial lens”, we suggested how to draw attention to the spatial dimensions within APSA by making visible the ways in which APSA is shaping processes of spatialization. This part gave an overview of the central assumptions about APSA that provided the foundation for the two subsequent parts on the intervention in Guinea-Bissau and Mali.

The focus on these two conflicts in West Africa allowed showing in broad strokes the potential of a spatial analysis. Highlighting the spatial imaginaries, both in the making of the conflict, in the interveners’ understanding, as well as in the proposed responses has two advantages. On the one hand, it allows to shed light on how actors profit from alternative space(s) or the results of re-spatialization, on the other, it reveals how space is used by actors (intentionally and unintentionally) to legitimize certain approaches or the inclusion/exclusion of certain actors. Moreover, it brings to the fore how APSA plays a role in (spatial) ordering with regard to interventions of ECOWAS, the AU and the UN, and at the same time is influenced by them. Thus, through the continuous interaction among several spatial formats and the actors linked to them, guided by APSA, referring to “it”, and working it, APSA may be regarded as a spatial order “in the making”.

By way of connecting these elaborations to the three main questions proposed by the workshop, we put forward three corresponding points. First, there seems to be a tension between, on the one hand, using the term militarization to describe an observable change within African security politics and governance and, on the other hand, trying to make it fruitful for academic analysis. As our section on Guinea-Bissau showed, African security actors still exercise governance in non-military ways that nevertheless have several long-term implications for the development of a conflict and the country. (APSA as a way of ordering space is still

used as a means of politics and to do politics.) Our analysis suggests that it might be fruitful to ask, when do actors chose to use military means and when not? Since one could read both the conflict in Guinea-Bissau as well as the one in Mali – as perceived by the intervening actors – as being a conflict about a “fragile state” under “threat” by illicit/illegal non-state actors. Moreover, it could be fruitful to think about the difference between militar-ization and militar-ism and the consequences for analysis that a process oriented or an outcome-oriented understanding might have.

Second, studying processes of spatialization helps to unravel the way APSA is ordering African peace and security governance and how spatial references/imaginaries are used to communicate a given understanding of this order. It allows to understand how the drawing of additional regions in the trans-regional processes, such as the Yaoundé Process, Djibouti Process, or Nouakchott Process also privileges particular actors. While this might be pursued strategically, the space-making is mostly unintended by the actors that do this intuitively rather than consciously. In addition, the interpretation of the changing spaces for (military) intervention in Mali highlighted how an emphasis on spatial reference can help to understand the ways in which military interventions are negotiated.

Third, bringing “space” to the study of APSA is a concrete proposal that makes specific theoretical and along with them methodological choices, which we have tried to sketch out in this paper. However, further refinement and specifications will have to be part of future work – thereby also bearing in mind the overarching goal to develop an approach that allows systematizing and theorizing more coherently, also beyond the examples presented in this paper.

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