



Differentiated (Dis)integration and Deinstitutionalization in the African Security Regime Complex

Johannes Muntschick · Friedrich Plank 

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Abstract Differentiated (dis)integration processes of regional and international organizations seem to have grown over the past years. As a continent in which regional integration efforts and institutions mushroomed in the last decades and created a “spaghetti bowl” of regionalism, Africa is highly relevant for examining and explaining these processes. Against the background of a need to assess and conceptualize (dis)integration beyond Europe, we propose deinstitutionalization to grasp the puzzling bypassing of established institutions for, instead, the emergence of more informalized settings. We analyze two of such processes within the African security regime complex: the Western African response to the Boko Haram uprising in the Lake Chad region and the Southern African response to a coup d’état in Lesotho. Identifying evidence of such processes of deinstitutionalization, we argue that specific internal and external factors constitute drivers for this development. Internally, powerful states and regional hegemons favor domestic narratives and interests over regional ones, whereas externally, international partners create (unintended) incentives for extraversion strategies and disintegration practices in subregions. These dynamics can lead to further deinstitutionalization of the African security complex, such as through ad hoc groups, and eventually disintegrate established paths of African regionalism.

Keywords Regionalism · African security complex · Differentiated disintegration · Deinstitutionalization · Africa

Johannes Muntschick ·  Friedrich Plank
Institut für Politikwissenschaft, Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz, Mainz, Germany
E-Mail: friedrich.plank@politik.uni-mainz.de

Differenzierte (Des-)Integration und De-Institutionalisierung im afrikanischen Sicherheitsregimekomplex

Zusammenfassung Differenzierte (Des-)Integration ist ein Phänomen, das in regionalen und internationalen Organisationen in den letzten Jahren zugenommen hat. Mit Blick auf die Analyse und Erklärung von derartigen Prozessen ist Afrika besonders relevant und gut geeignet, da auf dem Kontinent in den vergangenen drei Jahrzehnten etliche Aktivitäten zu regionaler Integration stattfanden, zahlreiche regionale Institutionen geschaffen wurden und somit ein enges Geflecht von miteinander verwobenen und sich gegenseitig überlappenden Regionalismen entstanden ist. Da wir es als geboten und fruchtbringend erachten, (Des-)Integration auch jenseits des europäischen Kontextes zu konzeptualisieren und zu beurteilen, schlagen wir Deinstitutionalisierung als Konzept vor, um die rätselhaften Umgehungen etablierter Strukturen, an deren Stelle informale Zugänge entstehen, zu fassen. Wir analysieren beispielhaft zwei derartige Prozesse innerhalb des afrikanischen Sicherheitsregimekomplexes: zum einen die westafrikanische Reaktion auf den Boko-Haram-Aufstand in der Tschadsee-Region und zum anderen die Reaktion des südlichen Afrika auf einen Staatsstreich in Lesotho. Nachdem wir Deinstitutionalisierungsprozesse empirisch fassen, argumentieren wir, dass bestimmte interne und externe Faktoren diesbezüglich eine hohe Erklärungskraft haben. Mit Blick auf die interne Dimension favorisieren mächtige Staaten wie insbesondere regionale Hegemone offenbar nationale Narrative und Interessen gegenüber jenen auf regionaler Ebene, während in externer Hinsicht internationale Partner (unbeabsichtigte) Anreize für Extraversionsstrategien und Desintegrationspraktiken für die Akteure in den Subregionen schaffen. Derartige Dynamiken können zu einer weiteren Deinstitutionalisierung des afrikanischen Sicherheitskomplexes führen, etwa durch die Bildung von Ad-hoc-Gruppen, und schließlich sogar zur Desintegration von etablierten Regionalismen in Afrika führen.

Schlüsselwörter Regionalismus · Afrikanischer Sicherheitskomplex · Differenzierte Desintegration · De-Institutionalisierung · Afrika

1 Introduction

Against the background of regionalism as a key component of international relations (IR), scholars have generated vibrant research on regional integration dynamics across the world and in comparative perspective (e.g., Acharya and Johnston 2007; Börzel and Risse 2016; Muntschick and Plank 2024; Söderbaum 2016). A good part of the existing literature has compared or benchmarked regionalism in the Global South with the success story of global regionalism: the European Union (EU). While European integration appeared to be a one-way road toward “an ever closer union of the European peoples” (“*einen immer engeren Zusammenschluß der europäischen*

Völker”¹) for many decades—and for many scholars (Haas 1958; Sandholtz and Sweet Stone 1998)—Brexit is but one example of empirical evidence of growing centrifugal tendencies, dissociation, and disintegration—and even institutional dissolution—processes in regional and international organizations over the past years (Gänzle 2020). These developments have led to substantial research on differentiation and increasingly differentiated disintegration in Europe (Stubb 1996; Leruth and Lord 2015; Schimmelfennig et al. 2022), namely with a focus on Brexit (e.g., Schimmelfennig 2018; Trondal et al. 2022).

Empirical evidence, however, suggests that regionalisms in other parts of the world have also been affected by the phenomenon of differentiated (dis)integration. Looking to the neighboring continent in the South, Morocco exited the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) in 1984, the Common Market of Southern Africa (COMESA) lost five member states between 1997 and 2007, and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) suffered the announced exit of Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger in January 2024 (Gänzle 2020). These are just a few examples, but they illustrate why scholars have called for comparative perspectives and systematic research beyond Europe (Leuffen 2013; Gänzle and Wunderlich 2022). We seek to expand research on such processes beyond the EU in order to fill existing knowledge gaps, focusing specifically on the African continent as a metaregion that features a wide range of regional integration projects (Brosig 2013; Hartmann 2018). In this endeavor, we provide a comparative perspective, as well as a perspective through a historic lens, and add value to existing research in empirical, conceptual, and context-specific terms. Africa is an ideal research area to start with because many regional organizations on the continent have gained substantial capacities and competencies, as well as engaging in regional integration processes across a wide range of policy areas (Henneberg 2022; Jetschke et al. 2020; Panke et al. 2020, 2022). Against this trend, the empirical phenomena of contestation and almost notorious (dis)integration troubles related to *inter alia* ad hoc coalitions, regional groups, and alternative structures in which African states increasingly and recently organize collective-action problems are rather puzzling. For instance, states seem to steadily establish new, alternative, or even competing regional formats such as the Regional Cooperation Initiative for the Elimination of the Lord’s Resistance Army (RCI-LRA), the Force Intervention Brigade (FIB) to fight the M23 rebel group in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and the Horn of Africa Cooperation. While research has to some extent acknowledged these empirical trends (Plank 2020; Baldaro and Lucia Lopez 2022; Brosig and Karlsrud 2024; Reykers et al. 2023), we hold that there is still a need to systematically conceptualize such processes of deinstitutionalization and interlink them with the broader research agenda on regionalism, especially since these processes have constituted a constant feature of African regionalism in the last decades. The analysis of deinstitutionalization processes in the African security regime complex over time constitutes a particular feature of our endeavor in this study. Specifically, we see these links with regard to structural challenges as related to interfering or divisive external influences by

¹ Treaty of Rome, 1957: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/DE/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:11957E/TXT&from=EN> (20/08/2022).

powerful international actors, e.g., the EU (Burlyuk 2017; Muntschick 2022, 2018; Plank 2022a), specific national preferences of African (state) actors, and the regional institutional setup. Whereas most academic research has focused on the progress, deepening, and performance of regional integration initiatives so far, we seek to specifically highlight deinstitutionalizing processes. The latter do not necessarily point to “failures” of regional integration but rather to makeshift solutions, reform, and continuation of regional cooperation processes, for instance if alternative formats are created (Gänzle and Wunderlich 2022, p. 54). Our research question is *What drives further deinstitutionalization processes in the African security regime complex?*

Empirically, we focus on Africa because it seems best suited for our endeavor, not least since research has already pointed to the continent as a potentially rich context for exploring differentiated (dis)integration beyond Europe (Leuffen 2013; Gänzle and Wunderlich 2022). Theoretically, we draw on the few existing engagements (Brosig and Karlsrud 2024; Omotola 2011; White 2022; Zimmerbauer and Paasi 2013) with the concept of defining deinstitutionalization, which we understand as “circumventing institutionalized forms of action, bypassing established rules of procedure, informalizing previously institutionalized power and [...] a transfer of decision-making power away from established centres” (Brosig and Karlsrud 2024, p. 17). Beyond engaging with this concept to conceptually capture the recent empirical trends in Africa, we seek to provide plausible explanations of the drivers that link to the research on regime complexes and also to differentiated (dis)integration. Although recent research has already proposed some such drivers (Leuffen 2013; Gänzle and Wunderlich 2022, pp. 58–59), we hold that capturing such driving conditions through comparative empirical analyses is still needed, especially in complex (sub)regional environments.

Our contribution embarks on empirical analyses of two cases within the African security complex: the Western African response to the Boko Haram uprising in the Lake Chad region through the use of the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) under the umbrella of the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC) in 2014, and the Southern African response to the 1998 coup d’état in Lesotho. We thus seek to capture the phenomenon of deinstitutionalization not only as a new development but as a continuing feature of the African security regime complexes by additionally applying a historic lens while including a recent case as well. We argue that this case selection can provide for an analysis across a larger spectrum of processes potentially linked to deinstitutionalization and can mirror recent trends. Moreover, we move the analysis of such processes beyond merely institutionally related drivers by additionally focusing on internal and external factors as drivers of such processes. Based on interview data, official documents, and media reports, we present two illustrative case studies and thus seek to generate insights for the debate in a comparative manner.

We proceed as follows. First, we engage with the rich literature on regionalism and differentiated (dis)integration processes before we conceptualize deinstitutionalization as a distinct concept. Next, we analyze the two cases in the African security complex. Finally, we discuss our key findings and provide avenues for future research.

2 Theorizing Disintegration Processes and Deinstitutionalization

Regionalism, regional organizations, and regional integration processes have increasingly become objects of research in IR. Against the background of decades of flourishing regionalism in Europe, mainstream integration theories have usually concentrated on explaining the drivers, institutionalization, and deepening of regional integration (Haas 1958; Moravcsik 1998). In parallel to the so-called new wave of regionalism in the 1990s, scholars increasingly looked beyond Europe and developed innovative approaches to analyze and explain the phenomenon in the Global South (Bach 2003; Söderbaum 2016). The focus on (comparative) regionalism research, however, was mainly on understanding the progressive dynamics and advancing of integration processes.

2.1 Differentiation and Disintegration Processes

Differentiation and disintegration processes, however, were often overlooked and have only recently become increasingly important research topics in EU studies and for IR scholars interested in (comparative) regionalism (Andersen and Sitter 2006; Holzinger and Schimmelfennig 2012; Leruth and Lord 2015; Stubb 1996; Warleigh-Lack 2015; Leruth et al. 2022). Certainly, it was Brexit that sparked a new wave of research on disintegration, which added several exceptional works (e.g., Leruth et al. 2019; Rosamond 2016; Schimmelfennig 2018) to the existing theoretical concepts and empirical studies.

Early conceptual works highlighted three main categories of differentiated integration (and their key variables): multispeed (time), variable geometry (space), and *à la carte* (matter/issue) (Stubb 1996, pp. 284–285). The scope and limits of the concept, however, have been challenged by various scholars (Andersen and Sitter 2006; Kölliker 2006), not least due to an inherent eurocentrism. Against the background of European crises such as the financial and eurozone crisis, the asylum crisis, and, not least, the crisis surrounding the Brexit process, IR and European studies scholars became increasingly skeptical about the one-way direction of the European integration process. Since then, research, theoretical concepts, and literature on differentiation was applied not only to integration processes but also to disintegration processes (Schimmelfennig 2018; Trondal et al. 2022).

Conditions for regionalism in Africa differ markedly from those in Europe, particularly from a structural perspective. Empirical evidence and academic research indicate that African regional organizations (ROs) are more susceptible to significant external influence, which can either promote integration or lead to disintegration when external policy options prove more attractive for member states and are incompatible with regional goals (Brosig 2022; Muntzschick 2013, 2018). Furthermore, overlapping regionalism is a prevalent feature in Africa, with countries often holding memberships in multiple ROs or forming subsets within larger organizations, frequently driven or influenced by external actors. Recent trends in Africa's regional frameworks, especially in security regimes, highlight increasing fragmentation, duplication, and processes of differentiated disintegration (Henneberg and Plank 2020; Plank 2020; Baldaro 2021; Welz 2022).

While established theoretical conceptualizations of differentiation and differentiated (dis)integration provide good explanatory power regarding the European (dis)integration process, which is typically also the main empirical reference case, they have been rarely applied to similar phenomena in regionalisms outside Europe (e.g., Gänzle et al. 2024). Observations from Africa, for example, give evidence that processes of differentiation—and particularly differentiated disintegration—do not fit widely used category systems (see, e.g., Leruth et al. 2019) because they seem to be less formal, unidirectional, and definite and instead more situational, flexible, informal, and adaptive. In a nutshell: more ad hoc and improvised. The recent mushrooming of ad hoc coalitions (Cumming et al. 2024; Reykers et al. 2023) and the number of African countries being suspended from ROs, voluntarily exiting ROs, and, again, rejoining ROs (Gänzle et al. 2024; Panke et al. 2024) illustrates this perception with rich and concrete empirical examples.

2.2 Deinstitutionalization as Conceptual Framework

Given this situation, we take up the concept of “deinstitutionalization” as a viable approach to analyze and explain the phenomena and research puzzles specified above. The term “deinstitutionalization” has only rarely but also recently been used to study IR and regionalism. Early works highlighted the territorial aspect and referred to regional deinstitutionalization as the dissolution of a region, either through merging with another region or by a larger region splitting into smaller units (Zimmerbauer and Paasi 2013, p. 31). Regions and regionalisms, however, are also strongly shaped and institutionalized by regional symbols, norms, rules, practices, and identities. The latter are often informal but may construct and define a stable social pattern of behavior in such regional (organizational) contexts. Against this background, deinstitutionalization implies an erosion and eventual destruction of given formal and informal institutionalized patterns (Stepanenko 2015, pp. 30–31).

Aspects of informality and actions that cross and blur institutional boundaries were deemed important by White (2022), who seems to have coined the first elaborate concept of deinstitutionalization from a political science/IR perspective. In the context of his research on transnational governance in the EU, he argues that “informal forums,” “concentration of power in individuals,” “collaboration of leaders across institutional boundaries,” and “a reliance on personalised authority” (White 2022, pp. 195–196) are four key features of deinstitutionalization. The latter can be extremely useful and effective in (managing) crisis situations because bypassing formal institutions via an informalization of (decision-making) power provides functional benefits in terms of enhanced flexibility and faster (re)action capabilities (White 2022, p. 188).

Going beyond Europe, Brosig and Karlsrud (2024) look at ad hoc coalitions in Africa and arrive at deinstitutionalization as a viable concept for analyzing this recent and frequent phenomenon. Building on ideas of White (2022), they develop three indicators to assess deinstitutionalization and propose three arguments on key conditions—the problem-solving capacity of an institution, its adaptability to external changes, and its reflection of historic and current interests—that influence such processes in the context of ad hoc coalitions. They conclude that deinstitutionaliza-

tion refers to “circumventing institutionalized forms of action, bypassing established rules of procedure, informalizing previously institutionalized power and [...] a transfer of decision-making power away from established centres” (Brosig and Karlsrud 2024, p. 787).

We agree with White (2022) on the key features of deinstitutionalization and welcome the convincing specifications and conceptualization by Brosig and Karlsrud (2024). Building on the latter, our aim is to expand existing research and explain deinstitutionalization in the African security regime complex, which includes acknowledging and identifying (additional) conditions and factors that drive such processes. The African security regime complex constitutes a specific environment where various regional entities and international organizations operate, overlap, and perform and where external actors engage and unfold influence. Even within sub-regions, there is usually more than one regional integration mechanism available besides the continental African Union (AU) and the officially recognized regional economic communities. Against this background and taking reference to conceptual ideas and existing research outlined above, we point to the following conditions that are likely to influence the emergence and course of deinstitutionalization:

First, we argue that drivers specific to the member state exist, which can lead to such processes. Deinstitutionalization might occur when a specific state chooses an organization in which it has a relatively strong influence, such as because of its own economic power, financial contributions, or population (Jupille et al. 2013, p. 9). States might then also look for preferences of allies and other states within the organization that are close to its own interests, as well as to what extent potential allies exceed potential opponents (Urpelainen and Van de Graaf 2015). In such a context, an overriding logic for an issue-specific, rational-choice notion that has been described as embedded rationality might apply (Koremenos et al. 2001; Snidal 2002; Henneberg and Plank 2020). It describes a logic in which the choice for an institution is shaped by factors specific to the national environment. Fostered by domestic political pressure that can be expressed through demands by the opposition, population, or national elites (Urpelainen and Van de Graaf 2015), a decision is then not only dependent on rational assessments of transaction-cost reduction in one particular decision but also involves broader considerations based on specific national interests, operational intents, and external perceptions. Governments and states then tend to engage in deinstitutionalization when this offers the maximum protection to national prestige and state sovereignty.

Second, we argue that drivers specific to the region and regional cooperation agreements do exist. Obviously, the legal competencies within the respective policy area to address the problem with a full spectrum of policy options are important. Moreover, the institutional design of decision-making procedures, e.g., to what extent there is majority-rule voting or a veto power for the state, plays a role. Not least, the institutional capacity an organization possesses, for instance in terms of budget, personnel, experience, and track record (Jupille et al. 2013), constitutes an important factor for the regional dimension. Scholars of differentiated integration have, to some extent, also pointed to similar drivers such as vertical integration and internal tensions between member states (see Gänzle and Wunderlich 2022, p. 58; Leuffen 2013, p. 21). Since most ROs in Africa are strongly intergovernmental in character

and mainly rely on consensus in decision-making, and given the fact that the institutional capacity of African ROs is relatively low, we assume that African regionalism is generally prone to deinstitutionalization—much more than, e.g., regionalism in Europe.

Third, we argue that an external dimension shapes such processes of deinstitutionalization. External actors influence regional integration in the Global South to a considerable extent and affect the decisions of member states of regional organizations. As a result, regional actors might engage in deinstitutionalization activities in anticipation of external actors (Muntschick 2013, 2018) or through extraversion strategies, a strategy practiced by political elites to manipulate their country's unequal relationships with other states to their own benefit (Cheeseman et al. 2019). Depending on the strength and asymmetry of external relations between African and external actors, this may lead to deinstitutionalization or serious disintegration in the weaker part, which is usually the regional organization or the institutional setup of a region in Africa. In this context it is important, however, to note that states in the Global South are not passive recipients of the policy whims of these external actors. In contrast, they engage in such extraversion strategies in response to the external actors available (Bayart 2000). These include, among others, self-serving strategies for personal wealth, access to external funds for their own patronage networks, and the possibility to sideline regional opponents or to secure the rule of the political elites. Ample research evidence for this factor has been specifically found in the Sahel, with such processes also embarked upon by actors from the Global South (Baldaro 2021; Plank 2022b; Tar and Mustapha 2017; Welz 2022). Given the still nascent research on deinstitutionalization and its drivers, our empirical analyses will also consider other factors that might further such processes. It is important to note that our conceptualization refers not only to specific regional organizations but also to larger institutional setups of a region in which several institutions are often available to engage with a policy issue. This can then, for instance, refer to regional security complexes as distinct features of global governance generally and of African subregions specifically (Brosig 2013).

3 Examining Differentiated (Dis)integration in the African Security Regime Complex

Our main aim is to illustrate and examine deinstitutionalization in the African security regime complex to derive an analysis of factors that drive such processes. The insights shall contribute to the debate, conceptualization, and explanation of the said phenomenon. Based on our assumption that existing research has a tendency to focus primarily on Europe, we turn to Africa as a key metaregion for our analysis since the phenomena of overlapping regionalism and the puzzling creation of new formats such as ad hoc groups are probably most prevalent there. Moreover, we turn our attention to the issue area of security because most of the (little) existing research has dealt with the realm of the economy so far. We assume that deinstitutionalization is more likely and pronounced in the security realm since this issue area directly affects state sovereignty (see Leuffen 2013).

Security governance in Africa is complex and involves a multitude of actors and institutions on national, (sub)regional, and international levels that partially converge, compete, and overlap. While there is decent interaction between the various components and interrelated units, there is no clear hierarchy, and there exists no dominant actor or center (Brosig et al. 2023). Taken altogether, security governance in Africa is often understood as a security regime complex on the continental or subregional level (Brosig 2013, 2021), which can then be shaped by deinstitutionalization processes.

The Western African response to the Boko Haram uprising in the Lake Chad region through the use of the MNJTF under the umbrella of the LCBC in 2014 and the Southern African response to a coup d'état in Lesotho with a common military brigade under the umbrella of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) in 1998 represent, respectively, a rather recent case and an older case that both show evidence of specific deinstitutionalization tendencies as a feature of the African security regime complex. While both subregional security complexes involve a regional organization and have an undisputed regional hegemon, they are different in that the Western African security complex is quite diversified and characterized by a larger number of ROs and formats that have been involved to various degrees in the notoriously conflict-ridden region over time. In contrast, the security complex in Southern Africa is characterized by SADC's prominent position, few conflicts, and little involvement of regional or third actors in the past and present (Hull and Derbolm 2009, p. 14; Muntschick 2018, pp. 189–191, 231). The cases thus reflect to some extent the changing setup of African regionalism and allow us to explain potential trends of deinstitutionalization over time. Our illustrative case studies are informed by a triangulative data approach that captures interview data (see Table 1), official documents, and media reports as sources.

Table 1 Interviews conducted by Friedrich Plank (all interviewees were guaranteed full anonymity)

EU_MS 6	EU member state official	19 January 2017 Cologne
AU_MS 2	AU member state official	27 February 2017 Addis Ababa
EU 10	EU official	7 March 2017 Addis Ababa
UN 2	UN official	8 March 2017 Addis Ababa
EU 11	EU official	8 March 2017 Addis Ababa
AU 1	AU official	9 March 2017 Addis Ababa
CS 5	Civil Society Organization	30 May 2017 Abuja
EU 13	EU official	1 June 2017 Abuja
EU 16	EU official	13 November 2018 Brussels
EU 19	EU official	15 November 2018 Brussels

EU European Union, *AU* African Union, *UN* United Nations

3.1 A Deinstitutionalized Response to the Regional Threat Posed by Boko Haram

The uprising of Boko Haram marks a major attempt to impose religious ideology on the Nigerian society. Since 2009, Boko Haram has adapted tactics of other militant Islamist groups and conducted weekly attacks on state institutions, the police, and the Nigerian population (Weeraratne 2017). There have also been cross-border attacks in Niger, Cameroon, and Chad. The group is mostly composed of local supporters from the north of Nigeria, but its members also come from neighboring states, primarily Chad, Cameroon, Niger, and Mali (Onapajo et al. 2012). Consequently, and due to its transnational character, the Boko Haram uprising required regional efforts. The challenge posed by Boko Haram created strong incentives for a joint approach within the Western African security regime complex. The affected states increasingly realized that there was a need for transnational coordination. For instance, Nigeria's chief of defense staff, Alex Badeh, described it as "a menace that has become a regional [...] problem" (Agence France Presse 2015b). Boko Haram's attacks were perceived as challenging for the whole region (IHS global insight 2014; Nigerian Tribune 2014). State officials in the Lake Chad region and West Africa stated that "the threat of terrorist attack is real and we are all vulnerable" (Interior Minister Mark Woyongo from Ghana, BBC Monitoring Africa 2015a) and that "single-handedly, no country can overcome this threat" (Idriss Deby, President of Chad, Channel News Asia 2015). Because of the regional nature of the Boko Haram uprising, a joint approach within a regional body was perceived to be the main solution to the challenge (Warner 2017).

However, the affected states, most notably Nigeria, chose neither the ECOWAS nor the AU, which both had an extensive track record in the security realm and were the (sub)regional organizations available, but the MNJTF under the umbrella of the LCBC in late 2014 (Warner 2017; Henneberg and Plank 2020; Plank 2020). We argue that this bet on the MNJTF as a rather impulsive and temporary endeavor constitutes a process of deinstitutionalization in the subregional Western African security regime complex and the continental African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA). Drawing on the definition outlined above (see Brosig and Karlsrud 2024, p. 17), we hold that the decision for the MNJTF reflects key characteristics of such processes: First, the decision circumvented institutionalized forms of action in the Western African security regime complex and bypassed existing and established rules of procedure. This primarily refers to the creation of the MNJTF as an ad hoc group outside the framework of the APSA, which would have, in principle, foreseen a key role of ECOWAS or the AU (see also Brosig and Karlsrud 2024; Plank 2020). Second, we argue that the MNJTF informalized institutionalized power and transferred decision-making powers away from established centers. Although the AU emerged as a principal partner of the MNJTF with dedicated cells and support, decision-making powers about the force's operational approach and coordination remained with the MNJTF states and thus away from the established AU and even the LCBC (Albert Olawale 2017). The operational posture of the MNJTF and its member states to confine actions to their own national borders stands in contrast to the frameworks of the AU and ECOWAS and has been described as noncompli-

ance (Adela 2023). In addition, the dedicated strategic support cell in Addis Ababa, which provided assistance to donors, and the technical team in N'Djamena, which provided daily support to the MNBJTF, mainly logistics and technical infrastructure (Assanvo et al. 2016), underline the merely supportive role of the AU. In its deinstitutionalization, the continental body was downgraded to providing more bureaucratic and technical services rather than being the leading entity. This limited role even terminated in later years and through external actions. As an example, support by the EU to the MNJTF was finally given without the AU under the European Peace Facility, which allows funding outside of the APSA framework, and thus mirrors this informalized approach. It furthered the competitive relationship between the AU and the MNJTF as a striking example of the deinstitutionalization (Brosig and Karlsrud 2024; Plank 2020). This is also related to the perception that the AU was unable to provide for and organize the funding of the MNJTF in a sufficient manner (Albert Olawale 2017; Henneberg and Plank 2020).

We further argue that this process of deinstitutionalization was shaped by three drivers. First, specific exclusive national interests as characterized by Nigerian influence within the newly created MNJTF shaped the process of a deinstitutionalized response in the sense that existing institutions within the APSA were not used and, rather, a flexible and less definite process was followed. First, Nigerian elites put an emphasis on keeping the force in a regional ad hoc group in which the country has a strong influence, in contrast to (sub)regional organizations such as the ECOWAS or the AU, in which other rivals would have a say. When Ghana put Boko Haram on the agenda at the January 2015 AU summit and the AU decided to commit an 8700-person force, Nigeria quickly restructured the AU force to become a regional one and thus engaged in an impulsive strategy (interview EU 19):

“[T]he ECOWAS would then have been the rational choice. However, in the light of its external and internal hegemonic aspirations, Nigeria pushed for the use of the LCBC. This approach facilitated keeping the actions against Boko Haram in the Nigerian sphere” (Henneberg and Plank 2020, p. 592).

The creation of this new body gave Nigerian elites the chance to reshape the perception of their activities, introducing the narrative that Nigeria was taking a regional lead in building a new institution to fight against the common threat of Boko Haram (interviews CS 5; EU 19). The creation of the MNJTF as a more flexible and less definite response was in line with the concept of a Pax Nigeriana as a prominent feature of Nigerian external policies (Tar and Mustapha 2017; Warner 2017). This practice could be understood as a diversionary maneuver with the aim of covering up the fact that Nigeria had failed against Boko Haram previously and “appears to be the greatest impediment to the militarization of regional security through an evolving security architecture in the Lake Chad area” (Tar and Mustapha 2017, p. 111). The Pax Nigeriana describes an unequivocal statement of Nigeria’s leaders to become and continue as a regional power (Warner 2017, p. 641). This image vehemently opposed an ECOWAS-led force, which would have seriously undermined Nigerian power (interviews EU_MS 6; CS 5). In this regard, the reference to Nigeria as a leading nation in Africa effectively hampered other regional solutions to Boko Haram and thus deinstitutionalized the measures, for instance when Nigeria rapidly

changed its mind on invoking Chap. VII of the United Nations (UN) Charter (Agence France Presse 2015a). Relying on established actors in the African security regime complex such as the AU was objected to by referring to Nigeria's sovereignty (PM News 2015). The reference to Nigeria as a powerful African leader stands in sharp contrast to the failure of Nigeria to fight the terrorist group. It was finally confessed by its foreign minister, Aminu Wali, stating, "It is not that the Nigerian army isn't fighting, it actually is. [...] the conventional armed forces aren't adapted to this kind of conflict" (BBC Monitoring Africa 2015b). Top officials ruled out the need for a UN- or AU-backed force to fight Boko Haram (interview CS 5). For instance, even after the Chibok kidnapping, the country's national security adviser, Sambo Dasuki, underlined that assistance from the UN or the AU was unnecessary (Eurasia Review 2015). This reluctance to engage actors other than the deinstitutionalized response by the MNJTF also applies to the Chadian regime, which engaged in a security paradigm shift predicated on the geostrategic calculation for regime survival and legitimacy (Tar and Mustapha 2017).

Second, our analysis finds some plausibility of a driver that is related to the relative influence within such an organization and thus points to decision-making structures within, regardless of the capacities and problem-solving track record. Ample research evidence points to the low-developed capacities of the LCBC and its force, the MNJTF, which had no extensive track record of handling security-related issues (Henneberg and Plank 2020; Plank 2020). In fact, both the ECOWAS and the AU would have been an option with far more experience, capacities, and proven capabilities to conduct such a force (interviews AU 1, EU 13, UN 2). In contrast, data on the LCBC show not more than two conflict-related activities between 1996 and 2016 (Henneberg 2022). Concerning financial capacity, both the ECOWAS and the AU are part of the APSA, which granted the organizations access to EU resources through the Africa–EU partnership. European Union funding for peace missions under the umbrella of the African Peace Facility (APF) as well as training facilities and direct allowances for troop-contributing countries have provided a major incentive for regional security cooperation in the past (interview EU 11). However, security efforts under the umbrella of a regional group that is not part of the APSA cannot be funded directly by the EU and other donors, which creates obstacles to the fast acquisition of funds for the troop-deploying countries (Plank 2020). Although the MNJTF had a legal competency in the area, this was created by the impulsive decision of the member states to create the institution, rather than a previous track record–related competence. In contrast, the institutional *de facto* design of the LCBC and the MNJTF enabled Nigeria, as with the most powerful member states and with Nigerian diplomats in key positions within the organization, to keep the fight against Boko Haram effectively in their own sphere.

Third, externally influenced drivers provide a plausible explanation for deinstitutionalizing processes in this case. In fact, it shows extraversion strategies by Nigerian elites who were eager to keep the response against Boko Haram in Nigerian hands but also to generate funds and benefits from external actors. The case illustrates that Nigerian elites managed to further their own interests in anticipation of a global emphasis to tackle the problem of the Boko Haram uprising. Nigeria, which has been referred to as West Africa's big brother (Adebajo and Mustapha 2008, p. 13), might

have specific interests both on behalf of its elites as well as toward external actors. These interests such as resistance against external influence by being dependent on it at the same time, or the attempt to exert more control by creating a rather small organization such as the MNJTF, might seriously undermine regional integration projects and instead strengthen intergovernmental ad hoc engagement (Adela 2023; Assanvo et al. 2016; Tar and Mustapha 2017). Due to its weak institutions, LCBC could cover the external demand for a regional approach while also presenting a national approach to the Nigerian public at the same time. This impression is supported by the Nigerian tendency to act without consulting LCBC partners and to use troops contributed to MNJTF under national command (Assanvo et al. 2016, pp. 8–11). Nigeria managed to keep control over the regional efforts, even forbidding MNJTF forces from other countries from crossing the Nigerian border. The case also reflects a strategy of political elites to strengthen their position at home through the acquisition of funds. These resources especially affect the military forces of the countries as important stakeholders. As long as there is funding, local governments might be encouraged to ignore the consequences of their actions and nonactions. These funds have also been referred to as additional resources for equipment and military development of the military forces (interviews AU_MS 2, EU 10). European Union funding might particularly facilitate resource acquisition of military forces. For instance, a soldier deployed within the MNJTF receives a considerably higher salary than his comrades paid by the local government (interview EU 16).

In terms of the preference of external actors, one key aspect of the deinstitutionalization process in response to Boko Haram was a perception on the part of the EU of the inability of other regional actors, specifically the ECOWAS, to tackle the security challenge (interviews EU 10, EU 19). This stems in particular from an overarching trend of the EU at that time to favor new formats and ad hoc groups in Western Africa (Plank 2020). A striking example is the involvement of EU staff in the operational lead-up and planning of the MNJTF (Tar and Mustapha 2017) and, notably, the adaption of the EU's main funding framework for peace and security in Africa, the APF. It was replaced by the European Peace Facility in 2021, also as a response to perceived inability of the EU's efforts in Africa and as a means to support newly created formats such as the MNJTF (Brosig and Karlsrud 2024). Overall, there is ample research evidence that the EU (passively) enabled the decision regarding the MNJTF (Plank 2022b).

In sum, the analysis of the first case suggests that the decision for the MNJTF reflects deinstitutionalization processes in the Western African security regime complex. While the subregional ECOWAS was not put in charge by the states affected, the continental AU served as a primary partner for the force, although in an informal and merely supportive role as a resource and logistics hub. We further argue that several drivers have shaped the deinstitutionalization of the African security regime complex in the response to Boko Haram. The case displays specific exclusive national interests, national influence within less formal institutions, and externally influenced calculi as generating a considerable amount of plausibility to explain these processes. However, the creation of the MNJTF did not lead to a lasting disintegration in the Western African security complex or organizational death. Rather, it shows competition practices of ROs in a complex environment across several cases

that have continued in the response to the security crises in the Sahel (Baldaro 2021). It further illustrates the relevant role of affected states and their understanding and specific calculi, as well as the external environment (Adela 2023; Henneberg and Plank 2020; Akanji 2019).

3.2 Deinstitutionalization of SADC's Security Organ After the 1998 Lesotho Coup

The SADC is one of the most promising regionalisms in Africa. Founded in 1992, it aims at promoting economic development, peace, and security among its member states. However, the events following the 1998 coup in Lesotho catalyzed a significant shift in the operational dynamics of SADC's key security institutions. Prior to the Lesotho crisis, SADC's security initiatives were guided by formalized structures such as the SADC Organ on Politics, Defence and Security (OPDS). However, the rapid deployment of a "SADC force" during the Lesotho crisis bypassed the OPDS's and SADC's established forms of action. Informal decision-making and exercise of power, mainly by South Africa, point to deinstitutionalization—and revealed limitations of SADC's formal structures in responding to urgent security threats.

Going back in history, the Kingdom of Lesotho was affected by political instability, unconstitutional changes of government, and (attempted) coups d'état since the country's independence in 1966. In August 1998, political tensions erupted in the country, only a few years after the last coup in 1994, when King Letsie III clashed with the major opposition party in the aftermath of the (disputed) parliamentary elections. What began with raising objections against the election results was followed by opposition parties disarming the police, shutting down businesses and government offices, and intimidating ministers, workers, and business owners (Pherudi 2022). This culminated in a mutiny when some members of the Lesotho Defence Force removed the entire command structure of the army and started harassing the officer corps (Parliament of South Africa 1998b). Maseru, the capital city of Lesotho, was hit by chaos, violence, and rampage.

Against the background of the situation becoming worse and the coup threatening to destabilize the entire country, Prime Minister Mosisili, as head of the elected and legitimate government, turned to SADC for help and asked for an intervention on 12 September 1998 (Matlosa 1999; Neethling 1999).

The coup and Prime Minister Mosisili's call for help triggered reaction in the SADC region: On 22 September 1998, the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) mobilized about 600 troops and launched a military intervention in Lesotho in cooperation with a smaller armed force of about 200 soldiers from the Botswana Defence Force. In the course of this "SADC operation" called "Boleas," which lasted until 19 October 1998 and allegedly did not fly any SADC symbols or flag (Likoti Johnson 2007, p. 255), the allied Southern African military forces were able to pacify the country and restore public order after neutralizing the mutinous armed forces in Maseru (Neethling 1999). The military intervention in Lesotho "succeeded in all military objectives within an extremely short planning cycle" (Parliament of South Africa 1998b). In general, and specifically with regard to the

planning and conducting of the military operation, the role of South Africa was of key importance (Parliament of South Africa 1998b).

Irrespective of its success, however, operation “Boleas” is an example of deinstitutionalization within the Southern African security complex and not a cooperative SADC project authorized and conducted according to formal mechanisms of regional security governance. The intervention was characterized by a swift and unilateral decision by key member states, notably South Africa and Botswana, which acted with minimal consultation or adherence to the prescribed procedural norms of SADC as the main RO in the subregion. Both governments as key (and eventually the only) troop providers planned and coordinated the necessary processes in the run-up to the intervention in Lesotho. Most other SADC member states, however, were not actively involved. There might have been additional consultations and agreement between South Africa, Botswana, Mozambique, and Zimbabwe on how to deal with Lesotho at the SADC Summit in Mauritius (13–14 September 1998), but there is no record of such a decision in the minutes (de Coning 2000, pp. 42–43). It was only South African President Mandela, however, who referred to regional unity and remarked in his closing address at the Summit that “SADC stands ready to continue its efforts to facilitate a resolution of the problems that have arisen in Lesotho” (SADC 1998).

Given the lack of transparency, it seems that only an “inner circle” of SADC states, possibly only South Africa in cooperation with Botswana, actively engaged in agenda-setting and decision-making processes regarding Lesotho within and particularly outside the responsible OPDS framework (Berman and Sams 2000, pp. 185–186; de Coning 2000, p. 43). Most SADC member states became only later involved insofar as being notified—when the issue was tabled on the summit level (Ngoma 2005, p. 167; van Nieuwkerk 1999, p. 17). Evidence suggests that there was no formal SADC decision that authorized the Lesotho intervention and mandated South Africa and Botswana to execute it in the name of SADC because the SADC Summit was never convened to explicitly confirm and ratify the military mission before it actually took place (Likoti Johnson 2007, p. 257). Hence, the specific norms and processes for decision-making as outlined in the SADC Treaty and the Protocol on Politics, Defence and Security Cooperation were largely ignored. The intervention proceeded without the comprehensive deliberation and endorsement typically required. It can thus be described as an endeavor in which South Africa and Botswana circumvented institutionalized forms of action within SADC and bypassed the OPDS, reflecting a shift toward more informal and “pragmatic” decision-making processes and action.

The key driver of the “SADC intervention” in Lesotho—a report even referred to it as the “SANDEF—SADC intervention” (Parliament of South Africa 1998b)—was clearly South Africa as the regional hegemon. Research and empirical evidence on the motives suggest that Pretoria was keen to intervene in the Kingdom not only to politically stabilize the country but also to secure the Katse Dam, which is a key infrastructure of the Lesotho Highland Water Project (LHWP). The LHWP was always of strategic importance for South Africa as the key source of fresh water for the province and metropolitan area Gauteng, which is the economic powerhouse of the Cape Republic. Because the 1998 Lesotho coup jeopardized this essential

infrastructure (Likoti Johnson 2007, pp. 257–258; Pherudi 2003, p. 126), Pretoria anticipated a serious threat to its national (water) security that it could not tolerate.

Moreover, institutional design and the consensus decision-making mode in the relevant SADC bodies, namely the OPDS (SADC 1996b, article 8), favored deinstitutionalization processes in the 1998 Lesotho crisis. Against the background of South Africa and Zimbabwe competing over regional power and influence in the SADC institutions, Harare was able to maintain strong influence over SADC's regional security governance institutions throughout the 1990s, including the OPDS. The latter was sometimes referred to as the “Mugabe Organ” due to the Zimbabwean President's occupying role (chairmanship) and autocratic understanding of leadership in SADC's key body for security cooperation. South African President Mandela, a vocal proponent of human rights and democracy, held the SADC chairmanship during this time period, and the SADC therefore had virtually “two chairmen” representing two member countries with rather diverging interests (de Coning 1998; Likoti Johnson 2007).

Against the background of latent tensions between South Africa and Zimbabwe on various levels, Pretoria feared open conflict with Harare over how to handle the Lesotho crisis, which implied at least exhausting negotiations and ineffective decision-making within the regular and responsible institutions, i.e., the Summit and OPDS (Likoti Johnson 2007, p. 258). To avoid this, South Africa circumvented the latter and fueled deinstitutionalization of the SADC insofar as it established an ad hoc “coalition of the willing” together with Botswana. The latter had corresponding national interests with South Africa in terms of securing water supply from Lesotho and was therefore willing to take quick action to stabilize Lesotho and keep control over the LHWP (Berman and Sams 2000, pp. 184–185; Neethling 1999, p. 6, 7).

Official SADC statements hailed the success of the organization's initiative but had to admit that the Lesotho coup failed “as [a] result of SADC military intervention in the form of Botswana and South African forces, in response to a request from the Lesotho government” (SADC 1999b). This statement was mainly to highlight and communicate the regional and cooperative character of the military operation “Boleas” to the outside world. Since neither the OPDS nor most of the member states were significantly involved in the decision-making process and the authorization of the mission, evidence suggests that the intervention in Lesotho was not a formal SADC initiative but rather a South Africa-led ad hoc coalition in cooperation with Botswana (Berman and Sams 2000; Nathan 2006). Thus, Pretoria circumvented SADC—or used its institutions merely as a symbolic fig leaf—leading “Boleas” as an “SADC mission” and contributing the lion's share of the (military) resources needed (Parliament of South Africa 1998a).

Furthermore, there is no empirical evidence that external actors or influence played any role in the decision-making procedures, institutionalization, or deployment of the military intervention. There was, in fact, not even a formal request to or sanction from either the OAU/AU or the UN on the matter. Notwithstanding that, according to Chap. VIII Article 53 of the UN Charter, regional organizations shall obtain authorization from the Security Council before proceeding with any intervention (Likoti Johnson 2007, p. 260). Thus, deinstitutionalization of the OPDS as SADC's main security management body was neither caused nor driven by exter-

nal influence, even though this could have been expected to happen given SADC's strong and constant structural dependency on external donor funding (SADC 1999a, p. 66).

In sum, the SADC military intervention in response to the 1998 coup d'état in Lesotho was mainly driven by South Africa as regional "paternal" hegemon (Whang 2024). It was mainly internal factors such as South Africa's national interests, namely responding to a threat to national security and securing the LHWP and water supply to the Gauteng province, that motivated operation "Boleas" for the most part. This is strong evidence for a national driver at play, which led South Africa to circumvent regular SADC institutions and fuel deinstitutionalization by promoting (informal) decisions in alternative fora and by establishing an ad hoc "coalition of the willing" to conduct the "SADC mission." The case represents a typical example of deinstitutionalization: By circumventing institutionalized forms of action, bypassing established rules, informalizing power, and decentralizing decision-making, SADC's response to the crisis marked a significant shift in regional governance. While this deinstitutionalization enabled a more agile response to immediate threats, it also highlighted the need for a more robust and coherent institutional framework to effectively manage regional security in the long term. In the aftermath, the undermined authority of the OPDS caused (even more) institutional paralysis in regional security governance and management in the years to come—until "the Organ" was reformed and relaunched in 2001 (Muntschick 2018, p. 209). The SADC as a whole, however, did not suffer severe damage or disintegration in the course of these events.

4 Conclusion

Against the background of a need to expand the universe of cases beyond Europe in research on differentiated (dis)integration, this study has embarked on an analysis of such processes in the African security regime complex as prominent examples of the complex environment in which regional organizations have operated for decades. Drawing on the rich literature on differentiated (dis)integration and regionalism and engaging with the few previous studies on the topic, we have introduced deinstitutionalization as a concept to capture distinct processes in the Global South generally and Africa specifically. It describes processes of bypassing and informalizing established formats, including away from established centers (see White 2022; Brosig and Karlsrud 2024). Based on two illustrative cases, the Western African response to the Boko Haram uprising in the Lake Chad region through the use of the MN-JTF and the Southern African response to a coup d'état in Lesotho allegedly under the umbrella of the SADC, we found evidence for such deinstitutionalization processes in both historic and recent cases. This lets us to assume that such processes constitute a constant feature of the African security regime complex over time. The puzzling nonusage of existing, well-established (sub)regional security regime complexes shows, as we argue, instances of deinstitutionalization as distinct from differentiated (dis)integration. The analysis further indicates that specific drivers play a role in these processes. Whereas Nigeria placed its bet on the MNJTF as a rather unexperienced and potentially counterintuitive organization due to national

preferences and external opportunities, the historic Lesotho case equally points to national preferences leading to ad hoc and unilateral engagements. More generally, the enhancements of ad hoc groups, regional groupings, and creations of new institutions with limited capacities, track records, and integration successes constitute a new pattern in the African security regime complex, further adding complexity to the already existing “spaghetti bowl” of organizations. It is noteworthy that the established frameworks within the African security regime complex are already contested from the inside, for instance through member state–related drivers, as well as being challenged from the outside by external actors such as former colonial powers, donors, and, increasingly, Russia and China and thus form part of the more global contestations. Given the contrasting findings on external influences as drivers for deinstitutionalization processes, we hold that this might constitute a rather new trend and requires more research. Overall, external influence stands in contrast to the debate on differentiated (dis)integration in Europe, mainly in terms of institutionalization. While we hope to have illustrated the empirical and theoretical need to engage with processes beyond Europe and especially in Africa, there is considerable evidence that processes of differentiated (dis)integration might unfold in a different manner when we analyze cases beyond Europe. We thus argue that there is substantial ground for future research that embarks on such processes, specifically deinstitutionalization, and investigates how they unfold and through what factors. Empirical trends such as ad hoc groups, forum shopping, and informalized governance illustrate the relevance of future research for which this study has, hopefully, generated incentives.

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