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Transborder Insecurity in the Sahel: Assessing Non-state Actors in Enabling Terrorism in Mali

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Abstract

The study, on which this article is based, sought to examine the role of non-state actors in enabling terrorism and insecurity in Mali. The researchers analysed the insecurity situation in Mali within the broader challenge of insecurity and religious conflict in West Africa. The researchers contend that transhumanism as a migratory pattern, and the porosity of international boundaries along the Sahel region are enabling variables for the insecurity and instability in the country. Although the way transhumanism is practised today might have changed, the methodological approach by which it is carried out has not. However, many argue that the root causes of terrorist acts and violent conflict in post-independence Africa are not the unmet promises to address poverty and unemployment but rather people's experiences of inequality and relative deprivation. This article attempts to clarify some of the critical theoretical issues for which political elites need to look out as they put measures in place to address fundamental challenges the country is facing. The concept of ungoverned spaces is elaborated upon, and the researchers assert that the vast uninhabited spaces in Mali are breeding areas for terrorists with their nefarious activities. The article concludes by suggesting that the Malian government should renegotiate a social compact with the people of Mali and start re-engineering rapprochement between the Malian people and the government.

Keywords: Mali, Insecurity, Armed Conflict, Rebellion, Democracy

Rationale for the Study and Methodology

The first, second and third Tuareg rebellions were experienced between 1962–1964, 1990–1995, and 2007–2009 respectively. The fall of the Gaddafi administration in Libya in 2011 set in motion the fourth Tuareg rebellion in northern Mali in January 2012. In a precipitated move and jolted by the rapid advance of the rebellion towards the capital, Bamako, the military stepped in and deposed a democratically elected government. As the military could not address the challenges posed by the uprising, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), acting under Chapter VII of the UN Charter, determined that the situation in Mali constituted a threat to international peace and security.[377] The UN declaration set in motion a series of foreign, regional and international efforts to address the security, governance, transitional justice, development, and humanitarian crisis in the country. The United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali

(MINUSMA) was created in this regard. The mission of MINUSMA was to:

> Support the establishment of a state of authority throughout Mali, implementation of a transitional road map on the basis of a national political dialogue and an electoral process, the protection of civilians and UN personnel, the protection and promotion of human rights, support for humanitarian assistance and the protection of cultural and historical sites in Mali.[378]

The mandate given to the UN mission in Mali was therefore multidimensional, with an enforcement capability. This would allow the mission to defend itself in the event of an attack.

The current study assessed the motivation, objectives, operational strategy and manifestations of the activities of the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA), a Tuareg separatist group, and Ansar Dine, an Islamist group (designated a terrorist organisation by the United States in 2013). While the two groups have their roots in Mali, their objectives of creating an Islamic caliphate in West Africa have necessitated an international coalition to address the security challenges posed by the activities of these two groups.[379] The collapse of the Gadhafi administration in Libya in 2011 and the successful coup d'état in Mali in March 2012 created a power vacuum in the region. Suddenly, vast expanses of land became ungoverned spaces. The coup responded to the lack of strength and initiative displayed by the Malian government to control the post-independence battle against a Tuareg rebellion and the threat of terrorism in the northern part of the country.[380] However, the ungoverned spaces, especially along the Libya–Mali border, facilitated the free flow of arms and light weapons to nomadic Tuareg people who already had an active rebellion against the central government in Mali for greater autonomy. The porous international boundaries in the Sahel region, and the illicit flow of money, arms and light weapons, have sustained the Azawad and Ansar Dine rebellions to date. The uprising also showed signs of transforming into more traditional guerrilla warfare, with rebels hiding in the mountain areas and occasional suicide bombing of military targets.[381] The study equally examined the porosity of international boundaries in the Sahel region and found that measures should be put in place to address the porosity of international borders and mechanisms to manage unoccupied spaces within a polity better.

However, the Sahel region of Africa is generally inhabited by pastoralists whose transhumance activities[382] disregard ethnic, geographical and international borders. Most resort to small arms and light weapons to protect their herd as a protection strategy. Communal conflicts among these pastoralists, the struggle for self-determination, and the activities of Jihadist networks operating in the region have created both the demand and the supply market for small arms and light weapons.[383] The Sahel (the Arabic word for **shore**) stretches for about 4 800 miles (7 725 kilometres) from the Horn of Africa to Senegal, at its broadest, and about 400 miles (644 kilometres) wide at its narrowest point. Although the region cuts across international boundaries, its peculiarity is the similarity and commonality in language, culture and race of the inhabitants. Despite these similarities in culture and race, the region has experienced transboundary threats, such as terrorism,

organised crime, and kidnapping for ransom.[384] The instability in Libya, and the fragile security and political systems in most countries in the region, have led to the flow of small arms and light weapons across international boundaries.

The interface between the flow of small arms and the porous nature of international borders in the region has generated a conflict–insecurity–development nexus, which has led to the prevalence of various forms of violence across the region. This spatial variation and similarity of violence in pastoral spaces have created a fertile ground for the emergence of national, regional and global actors in pursuing their appalling activities. The forming of alliances between local pastoralists and emergent regional, national and international forces can be attributed to three critical fundamental issues:[385]

- First is the remoteness of most pastoralist communities from the centre of economic activities in most of the countries in the region.
- Second, pervasive poverty, rampant unemployment, and the proliferation of small arms and light weapons in the area have caused a high propensity for violence.
- Third, the 'the clash of civilisations'[386] and the need for a particular civilisation to dominate and control the region and create spaces for operationalising their nefarious activities have been the cause of insecurity in the area.

However, the methodology adopted by the current study was the case study, based on two field studies, Cote d'Ivoire and Mali, and a review of relevant literature on insecurity and development challenges in the region. The case study approach comprised administration of a semi-structured questionnaire to state building and role players in the security sector, such as government officials, academia and civil society organisations. Questions were based on intangible variables such as:

- National strategies in reducing poverty, unemployment and inequality;
- Acceptable national conflict prevention strategies;
- Shared and acceptable conflict resolution and management strategies; and
- Common cultural points of reference.

The researchers used purposive sampling in selecting respondents for the study. The lead respondent was instrumental in introducing the research team to other credible actors in the field through the snowballing sample method. Data was collected per the Human Sciences Research Council of South Africa (HSRC) Research Ethics approval guidelines. Emphasis was on respondents who represented the developmental voices in Mali. The data collected were analysed using the content analysis approach. In our analytical narrative, the responses from respondents have been nuanced with the statutory nation-building instruments in Mali.

Using these data collection instruments, the study reflected on the insecurity challenges in Sahel, and assessed why guns have not been silenced in that part of the continent.

Two questions guided the study:

- What are the major stumbling blocks in achieving a conflict-free Africa?
- What needs to be done to ensure that a workable conflict resolution approach can be adopted and adapted in the region?

Primarily, this article demonstrates the findings of the study, namely the devastating consequences of insecurity in the area regarding the impact of the conflict on human security, poverty, employment and the unintended effects on the foundation of the state in the region. The study also established that, because of the persistent security challenges in the area, vital financial resources have been diverted from critical economic sectors, such as health, education, and environmental protection, to the fight against terrorism and organised crimes.

Some of the terrorist groups that have taken advantage of these socioeconomic, security and political challenges in the region to impose their ideological bearings on the people and countries in the area are:

- Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM);
- Boko Haram;
- Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS);
- The Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO); and
- Many other splinter groups formed from the above.

The multiplicity and ideological orientation of these groups have complicated counter-insurgency operations, especially where national militaries are already overstretched. Interestingly, the fight against the Islamist groups was further compounded as President Amadou Toumani Touré (ATT) was a fervent supporter of the AQIM, on which he regularly relied to consolidate his power and authority in the northern parts of the country. The reliance on non-state actors by the ATT administration to consolidate state power facilitated the entry into the political arena of narcotic traders from South America. The involvement of narcotic traders provided the necessary financial resources to the ATT administration to address the liquidity challenges the government was experiencing. As a result, Mali became an important transit country for narcotics from many South American countries. The concerns of sub-regional powers were that Mali could become a failed state. While Mali was fast becoming a failed state, the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), a military response to Boko Haram set up by Benin, Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria, succeeded in countering the activities of Boko Haram around the Lake Chad area, the same cannot be said of Operation Barkhane in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger. The failure of Operation Barkhane mirrored the tense and complex relationship between France and Mali. While the French political leadership was interested in addressing the security challenges posed by AQIM and many other groups in the region, the political groups in Mali were focussed on consolidating state power.

The Sahel region – the long stretch of land between Senegal and Chad and at the confluence between the Sahara Desert and West Africa – has witnessed a myriad of security challenges since the fall of the Gaddafi regime in Libya in 2011. There has

however not been any strong indication – at least not from researchers working in the region – of a link between the security challenges in Libya and insecurity in the Sahel. Although sketchy literature attributes this insecurity to the generalised collapse of the states in North Africa, there is a strong belief that most of the weapons used in the Sahel come from Libya. The political vacuum created in Libya after the fall of the Gaddafi administration, combined with the porous and vast unprotected international boundaries, has made the Sahel region an ideal territory for the operations of armed groups. In most of the countries in the Sahel, allegations of marginalisation and oppression of peripheral ethnic groups, such as the Tuaregs, Moors, Peul, and Fulani, have increased their vulnerability to join some of the armed groups operating in the region to alleviate the plight of the people of Mali.[387]

Transhumance as a Security Threat

Mali is an important country in the Sahel region, and most of its population practise transhumance as a way of life. The pastoralist world, by its very nature, is defined by territoriality, various forms of insecurity, and a lack of development, which together lead to violence in all its forms.[388] In Mali and other countries of the Sahel, pastoralists are still being accommodated at the periphery of the contemporary state structures primarily because their ways of life and the nature of their livelihood structure constantly alienate them from the centre of state activities. The practice of moving livestock from one grazing ground to another in a seasonal cycle, typically from the highlands in the dry season to the valleys and vice versa in the rainy season, has created a strenuous relationship between the pastoralists and farmers. As a result, and in the face of this existential threat to their livelihood, many pastoralist communities take it upon themselves to adopt alternative coping mechanisms, which they avail to community, national, regional and international actors to maintain and preserve their traditional livelihoods.[389] The alternative coping mechanisms include but are limited to transhumance, acquisition and expert utilisation of high-calibre weapons to protect their livestock and their families and to secure grazing lands and routes for livestock. Several clandestine organisations, including Ansar Dine and the Forces Nouvelles in Cote d'Ivoire during the 2010–2011 conflict, use these grazing routes to transport illegal weapons and to trade in contraband.

The implication of the pastoralists in aiding groups to destabilise countries and to weaken and undermine their security can therefore not be overstated. While the role played by pastoralists and expert hunters in aiding the Forces Nouvelles to defeat the government of Laurent Gbagbo in Cote d'Ivoire during the 2010–2011 crisis has been saluted, the role they are playing in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso is challenged by governments of these countries and the International Community. Although it has been difficult to track the groups that support the pastoralists in carrying out these activities, their actions have been localised and contained considerably.

However, literature dealing with transborder insecurity and organised violence often adopts two contrasting perspectives. First is the from below view, which gives prominence to cross-border traders and transporters, and second is the from above philosophy, which puts the state at the centre of cross-border insecurity in the region.[390] This article however

focusses on the "missing middle" of non-state actors and agencies that have influenced the prevalence and propagation of violence and insecurity in the region. One of the key reasons why the "missing middle" has created spaces through which they operate, sometimes with impunity, is the absence of the state and the loss of power and authority by state services, but also the negotiated governance of the border by the "from below" agency and the "from above" alternative. While considerable financial and human resources have been deployed by states in the region – with the assistance of global partners – to address the recurring insecurity challenges in the area, the situation persists. The greater Maghreb, as well as uprisings in Libya, Tunisia, Sudan, Egypt and Western Sahara that have characterised the Arab geographical spheres, have led directly and indirectly to a complex relationship between security and political dynamics in the region.[391] To a greater extent, this has led to the intervention of the military in the political arena in as many as four countries in the area. The involvement of the military in the political space in Mali, Sudan, Burkina Faso, Guinea Conakry, and – to some degree Chad – has been attributed to the insecurity situation in the region. The key reason has always been that the military would be able to handle the insecurity situation better than the civilian administrations. Unfortunately, the involvement of the military in the political arena of these countries has not yielded the necessary peace dividends. Instead, the African Union and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) have been at the forefront of negotiating an international intervention to address the increasing terrorist attacks in the Sahel.

However, concerns have been raised that response strategies following the French intervention in the Sahel, militarily known as Operation Barkhane, have been discriminatory and repressive towards the local population in the northern part of the Sahel. Many argued that this is the reason for the further escalation of the conflict, as support by the local population for the extremist and armed groups has increased significantly.[392] A significant consequence from the involvement of the military in the political arena in these countries and the persistence of insecurity along the Sahel has been the prevalence of anti-French sentiment. Two key reasons explain this. First, there is a general understanding among the political and security elites in Mali and many other Sahel countries that France, the former colonial master, has not done enough to address poverty, insecurity and inequality in the region. The fundamental reason is that France is a predatory state in the region. They are mining all the strategic natural minerals in the area to benefit French companies and entities, with little or no royalties or beneficiation projects for the local population. Second, since the intervention of the French military in Mali and other Sahel countries, there has been no significant change in the security situation in these countries. Instead, attacks by armed groups have increased with heavy casualties. This anti-French sentiment has manifested in street protests demanding the withdrawal of French forces from the region. It has also strained the relationship between Mali and France, and in July 2022, the French Ambassador in Mali was declared a *persona non grata*.

Literature Review

The insecurity situation in Mali and other West and Central African states needs urgent humanitarian intervention. By all indications and judging by the large number of people

across the continent who require humanitarian assistance, there is a disjuncture between the principles articulated in Article 4 of the Constitutive Act of the African Union on the one hand, and the implementation strategy of the Act on the other. While Article 4(g) stipulates that no other country of the Union should interfere in the internal affairs of another, Article 4(h) of the same Act notes, 'the right of the Union to intervene in a Member State according to a decision of the Assembly in respect of grave circumstances, namely: war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity'. The Act further notes that a member state could request intervention from the Union to restore peace and security. The ambiguously formulated Article 4 of the Constitutive Act, as it pertains to intervention by the African Union in a member state, is perhaps one of the reasons humanitarian protection has been a major challenge on the continent, largely because it is a challenging task to determine what constitutes war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity. Most security challenges in a member state are usually termed internal challenges and the onus would therefore be on the member state to address such challenges. The fundamental challenge would be to understand how the right of intervention is to be interpreted and why the heads of states and of governments thought it necessary to include the right of intervention in a member state in the Constitutive Act of the Union.[393]

Moreover, literature on transborder insecurity in the Sahel is available in abundance, with various reasons why the phenomena have taken a higher proportion in recent years than in the decades preceding independence in 1960. However, few researchers – such as Nyaburi and Massaoud (2019),[394] and Teirila (2014),[395]– provide primary data on the reasons for transborder insecurity in the Sahel. They go as far as to provide credible approaches the international community should take to address such attacks. Overall, the proliferation of violent conflicts on the continent and the inability of most post-colonial African states to resolve these conflicts have necessitated a new agenda or framework for conflict resolution. As Bos and Melissen (2019),[396] Traore and Dabire (2022),[397] and Alemu (2019)[398] note, a new approach to conflict resolution would be incomplete if humanitarian interventions and human security issues are not prioritised. As a result, the well-being of the people affected by the crisis needs to take centre stage; if not, a return to armed conflict is highly probable. Many – including Chabal (2001)[399] and Dalox (2015)[400] argue should be an alternative approach to resolve disputes on the continent should be followed. More importantly, the authors argue that the post-colonial African states have arrogated to themselves the authority of violence as a political instrument. Chabal (2001) and Dalox (2015) insisted that disorder should not be construed merely as a state of dereliction but rather as a condition to address the fundamental role African states should play on the continent. According to Chabal (2001) and Dalox (2015), the disorder could lead to new forms of conversation, which would lead to the development of critical areas of societal advancement. However, the authors do not address how these local conversations would lead to building bridges across communities across Africa.

As Baines and Paddon (2012)[401] note, the time has come for the humanitarian community to reflect on whether material assistance alone is sufficient, or whether humanitarian relief should be accompanied or even driven by protection concerns. Homewood (2005)[402] argues that Africa views itself from the mainstream Western debate on what is good or bad about the continent. What is good in Western media is projected as good for the continent and

vice versa. However, Homewood (2005) further argues that in most cases, these Western analysts do not speak with one voice. This translates into the various discourses Africa considers in terms of development and poverty on the continent. The role of civil society and traditional authorities on the peace negotiation table (Alozieuwa & Demiroglu [2017];[403] Lavallee & Volkel [2015][404] relates to general interest by Western nations, through the international community, to address the questions of civil society, insecurity and political instability on the continent, as witnessed in the case of the French intervention in Mali, the Central African Republic (CAR), and Cote d'Ivoire.

There is also consensus on the role of local actors in resolving these conflicts. In place of these interventions, (Tandogan & Bouacha (2017)[405] suggest that conventional inter-community conversations could be an alternative form of conflict resolution on the continent. Credible transitional institutions with a local dimension most people could own should be the option. However, these options are usually discarded by major international organisations as not responding to global prescriptions. On the other hand, Lavallee and Volkel (2015),[406] hold that the situation in Mali has necessitated a new framework through which intrastate conflict on the continent can be resolved. Experience has shown that dialogue between communities on the continent is an essential platform where consensus on pressing issues can be found. The current study therefore attempted to allow local dialogue as a framework for conflict resolution and as an important instrument for development thinking. The study also conceptualised local voices as an essential vehicle for development and nation building on the continent, and emphasises that the asymmetric form of conflict, as experienced in Mali, would need an innovative approach to bringing the state, communities, and the international community together to resolve the dispute.

Conceptualising the Mali Conflict: Re-Assessing the Ungoverned Spaces Theory

Due to the advancing Sahara Desert, the complex web of weak state infrastructure, deliberate neglect, insecurity, economic challenges, and environmental privations has made the northern part of Mali a haven for smugglers, kidnappers, and traffickers of illicit goods.[407] For the United Nations, the inability of the Malian government to address these challenges is both a root cause and a symptom of recurrent crises in the country.[408] For many Malians, the failure to address the obvious challenges the country is facing is not necessarily the lack of a political will but incapacity by the state to perform its vital obligations to the Malian people. As a result of these failures, Mali is weakened and incapable of responding to development, security, and humanitarian crises.[409] A critical reflection on the inability of the state to provide vital functions to the population may theoretically be seen from an eclectic and class concept point of view. The propagation of these concepts within the Malian polity has widened the gap between the various classes in the country, and has equally increased wealth and the equality gap between the people. The rich are getting richer while the poor are marginalised further and pushed from the periphery of decision-making in the country. This has increased the likelihood of the marginalised to sympathise with the Jihadists.[410] Although resources are limited, the government has concentrated on providing in the vital needs of the people of Bamako and its environs, further alienating those on the periphery of decision-making. In this regard,

the ungoverned spaces concept has been used frequently to describe the prevalence and re-occurrence of conflict in the country.

The current study found that the propagation of the conflict in Mali is based on the ungoverned spaces theory. A careful examination of the locale of the conflict in Mali – and the Sahel in general – suggests that the epicentre of the conflict is situated around the ungoverned spaces of the country. Despite the disintegration of the state of Libya and the flow of small arms and light weapons across the border, the centre of the conflict in Mali has been at the periphery and in areas where state institutions have been absent. The "ungoverned spaces" theory holds that the vacuum created by the absence of the state in the northern part of the country is filled by non-state actors who use such spaces to recruit, plan logistics, settle, generate funds, and commit crimes.[411] States with limited financial and human resources and, more importantly, those with weak political systems and economic spheres, such as those in the Sahel, are vulnerable to having ungoverned spaces. Although ungoverned spaces can be associated with collapsed or sometimes failed states, some of the most ungoverned spaces on the continent are in well-governed and stable democracies. Nigeria, Cameroon, the CAR, Chad and the Democratic Republic of Congo are some countries with vast ungoverned spaces.

Nonetheless, three approaches have frequently been quoted to explain how states decide on how to approach the issue of inclusion, how to utilise space, and who will be excluded from state benefits, namely the population size of an area, the size of the state, and the financial and human capital of such country. According to these approaches, a country with a small land mass, such as Rwanda, has a better chance of properly administering all the areas of the country than the Democratic Republic of Congo. It seems that small countries with populations that are evenly distributed compared to large states with unevenly distributed populations have a good chance of occupying ungoverned spaces.

Admitted, there is an increased likelihood of violence in countries with large uninhabited areas giving the challenge the state will face in policing the whole country. While there is an exception to this assumption, such as the genocide in Rwanda, the general understanding is that violence and insecurity are prevalent in vast uninhabited areas. Lastly, a state with a solid financial base and significant human resource capital has the potential to administer its entire territory properly. Failure by the government in Mali and other Sahel countries to enforce their presence in all corners of their countries and to fulfil essential obligations to their citizens has given room for non-state actors to emerge and act as alternatives to the state.[412]

The current found that, for the government of Mali to address the insecurity situation in the ungoverned spaces, a new approach to governance and development thinking needs to be contemplated. While it is perfectly normal to adopt a more static and aggressive approach to defeat the non-state actors, the government should instead devise means through which state machinery could be implanted in the ungoverned areas. Working in collaboration with other development actors, the state should ensure that schools, healthcare facilities and roads are constructed in these areas. Working with the private sector, the government should create an enabling environment through which people in these spaces could do

business, and small and medium-sized enterprises should be established. Tax incentives to companies considering establishing in these areas should also be considered. A new approach in deploying state machinery in ungoverned spaces is therefore the way to go if insecurity and criminal activities are to be addressed.

Contextualising the Conflict in Mali: Identity, Power and Legitimacy

The discourse on the broad ideological dimensions of ethnic identity and power politics that characterise post-colonial Mali political spaces have created an asymmetric and tedious relationship between the various ethnic groups in Mali. The Fula, Soninke, Dogon and, more particularly the Tuareg ethnic groups, have long felt politically and economically marginalised from mainstream Malian society.[413] As a result, these groups draw the support of the local communities by presenting themselves as the saviours of the communities by defending them against the injustices meted out to them by the state.[414] Some of these ethnic groups have created alliances with other groups across the Malian border to create some form of a haven to safeguard their cultural identity. The Tuareg, for example, having kinship relationships, have made alliances with groups in Libya, Niger, Algeria and Mauritania to address some of their immediate challenges. The Tuaregs have felt marginalised by successive Malian governments. Their claim for better treatment and accommodation within the Malian state structure has been suppressed by the Songhai militia.[415] As a result, the aspirations of the Tuareg people have traditionally focussed on independence or autonomy, not the creation of a religious state or caliphate.[416] The question of identity has therefore been at the centre of the Tuareg demands. Admittedly, the MNLA raises a fundamental challenge to Malian territorial integrity and internal stability. People of Tuareg background in Niger, Mauritania, Algeria, and Libya have expressed determination and zeal to support the MNLA aspirations in Mali.[417] The challenge to Malian territorial integrity is not necessarily coming from internal Tuareg rebellion, but rather from support the Tuaregs have from neighbouring countries. As a result, Mali has been unable to address the challenge from outside the country, considering that it is unclear how many of the Tuareg community support an independent state, and political identity remains highly localised.[418] In this regard, the immediate challenge to Malian territorial integrity is not from the internal Tuareg grievances but from the international support the Tuaregs are receiving from neighbouring countries and other Tuareg communities in the diaspora.

Despite the complex development challenges in Mali for decades, the collapse of the Gaddafi administration in Libya and the return of heavily armed fighters from Libya in 2011 upset the precarious balance of power in northern Mali. Many who came to Mali were members of the Ansar Dine and AQIM groups with a solid Islamic tendency. AQIM traces its roots to the Salafi movement in Algeria, which waged a ferocious battle against the secular government in Algeria in the mid-1990s. The *Salafist pour la Predication et le Combat*, a splinter group from the Armed Islamic Group (GIA) aligned themselves with al-Qaeda in 2006 after their pledge of loyalty was accepted by the al-Qaeda leadership.[419] Successive countermeasures by the Algerian state pushed AQIM to establish a foothold in northern Mali, where they achieved notoriety through a campaign of kidnappings for ransom, especially United Nations (UN), European Union (EU) and United States (US)

diplomats. Kidnapping for ransom became a lucrative business for AQIM between 2006 and 2011, and they are believed to have received an estimated $70 million.[420]

Another significant Salafi movement that attempts to assert its power and authority over the Malian state is Ansar Dine.[421] The emergence of Ansar Dine in Mali can be traced to the negative economic impact of the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP) in the country during 1980s. The globally imposed financial restructuring programme exacerbated the severe economic, political and environmental grievances that the northern part of Mali was already experiencing. More importantly, the unimpressive educational infrastructure in the country had increasingly made room for *madrassas* – Quranic schools that teach a Salafi brand of Islam – to flourish.[422] The *madrassas* taught students in Arabic, not French or indigenous Malian, thereby creating a divide between Arabic, primarily spoken in the northern part of Mali, and the rest of the country, which is more accustomed to the official Malian language, French. Ansar Dine, loosely translated as "Defenders of the Faith", thus exploited this cultural divide within Malian society, and imposed its version of Sharia law on the learners and people living within the ungoverned spaces.[423] Leaders of the Ansar Dine movement also ensured that the leadership of the religious elders, the *ulama*, was restored and their authority on issues of faith and customs was rehabilitated. After being declared a terrorist organisation in 2013 by the United States and facing increasing attacks from the French and later UN forces in Mali, the numbers of the group dwindled, and many crossed the border into Mauritania, Algeria, and Libya. While the group still maintains a presence in Mali, most of its members have aligned with other Islamist groups, including AQIM.

One of the most active terror groups in Mali since 2012 is AQIM. The group seized control of northern Mali in January 2012 after successfully attacking a strategic army garrison. Working in collaboration with the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJWA), the group succeeded in sidelining MNLA, and secured a safe territory in the northern part of the country.[424] Their advance towards the capital, Bamako, was halted by the French army, which deployed considerable human and material resources into the country. Through Operation Serval, France halted the southern advance of the terrorists and liberated most of the major cities in the northern part of the country.[425] The leaders of the group maintained that their main reason for initiating the rebellion was the socioeconomic disparities between the northern and southern parts of the country.[426] At the time, they argued that all economic activities of the country were concentrated in the south of the region while the north wallowed in poverty, and suffered due to drought and starvation. Their objective, they argued, was to ensure that the entire Mali population benefitted from the resources in the country.

While the economic factor was the main driving force behind the rebellion, many argued that the ethnicisation of politics and development discourse in the country were the determining factors in the Malian conflict.[427] In the course of a negotiated settlement of the conflict, the *ulema* (religious elders) had expressed dissatisfaction in the manner in which the Tuareg are economically and politically marginalised in the country.[428] The peripheral way the Tuareg and other ethnic groups are accommodated in the country has equally raised concerns about the place of the Bambara ethnic group, which has

dominated the political space since the country attained political independence in 1960.[429] The Tuareg ethnic marginalisation is witnessed at two levels. First, is the non-appointment of people of the Tuareg ethnic group into strategic political and economic positions in the country. Many Tuaregs have argued that, for more than 60 years after independence, no Tuareg politician has been appointed as minister of defence or minister of finance. The situation, they argue, is compounded by relatively high levels of illiteracy among the Tuareg.[430] Second, some of the Tuareg leaders noted the wanton neglect of the northern part of Mali, which, ironically, is populated by ethnic Tuareg. These challenges have been at the centre of the Tuareg and separatist rebellion in the country since the 1960s.[431]

Renegotiating a New Paradigm for Conflict Mitigation in Mali: Some Critical Perspectives

While there have been four waves of Tuareg rebellions in the northern part of Mali since 1960, efforts at resolving the underlying conflict denominator have not improved.[432] Persistent feelings of marginalisation among the Tuaregs, combined with widespread droughts in the 1970s and 1980s and the failure of various governments to address the core grievances of the Tuaregs are widely believed to explain the renewal of the rebellion in 2011.[433] While a National Pact was signed between the government and Tuareg leaders in 1992, an implementation strategy was not adopted. The Pact called for a ceasefire between the belligerents, a reduced military presence in the north, and meaningful local autonomy through decentralisation.[434] However, the Moussa Traoré and Amadou Toumani Touré regimes did not implement these fundamental conflict resolution strategies. Feeling frustrated with the lack of progress in implementing the National Pact and the continuous marginalisation of the north, the rebellion resumed.[435] As a result, the various strategies adopted by the government to address the underdevelopment of the northern part of Mali failed. There is a need to renegotiate a new development paradigm for the country, one paradigm that addresses the concerns of the people and the challenges the government is facing in addressing these concerns.

One of the first policy orientations the government needs to consider is renegotiation of a new social compact with the people of Mali. The constitution of Mali and many other international law obligations to which Mali subscribes granted broad mandates to enact rules that carry the force of law.[436] The political elites in the country therefore have all the legal instruments to address the challenges facing the people. A re-engagement with the Malian people is essential to refashion the social relationship between the governed and the governors. An inter-Mali discussion on the social challenges the country is facing would go a long way to assuage issues and challenges that have laid dormant for decades. This discussion should involve civil society, traditional and religious leaders, government officials, and the private sector. The government and aggrieved parties could coordinate the process together with support from civil society organisations and international partners.

The success of the consultation process would lie in people and institutions taking responsibility for failure to implement the recommendations of the 1992 National Pact. To account for something is to explain or justify the acts, omissions, risks and dependencies for which one is responsible to people with a legitimate interest.[437] The

concept of accountability in government suggests that the government needs to provide answers to government priorities and targets.[438] Accountable government involves how officials conduct themselves concerning government responsibilities and obligations. The fundamental concern is being answerable to the people by providing answers to questions about how well or poorly officials have carried out their duties. Malian officials responsible for the non-application of the resolutions of the National Pact of 1992 consequently need to give account to the people of Mali. Implementing all the legal means at its disposal, the Malian government should ensure that the culprits are held to account according to the laws and traditions of Mali.

Another critical concept that the government of Mali needs to consider is decentralisation. Over the past three decades (i.e. since 1993), decentralisation has become one of the broadest concepts on the African continent. It has also been debated intensely by policymakers in the developing world. Evidence from data collected in several countries in the Global South suggests that decentralisation made governments more responsive to local needs by improving the capacity of provincial administrators and to disenclave people in neglected rural areas.[439] Several World Bank studies also show that satisfaction with government and local services improved notably after decentralisation.[440] From our observation, it seems the political elites in Mali would do the Malian people and the government much good if they could intensify the decentralisation process that commenced in the country in the 1990s. Although decentralisation is a complex governance process, the people of Mali would be able to own the development discourse in their regions. A post-conflict Mali should therefore, ensure that the decentralisation process continues, and the government should empower local traditional and religious leaders to ensure that they handle the development discourse in their regions with care and consideration.

A key element for the return to normalcy in Mali would be a return to democracy and constitutionalism with a particular focus on decentralisation. Over six decades since independence, Mali has experienced more than five coups that have truncated democracy and constitutionalism. For peace and tranquillity to return to the country, the military would have to return to the barracks permanently. The government would have to cultivate a new system of governance with solid Malian characteristics. Deliberative democracy fits the Malian context and would be a perfect governance instrument the government should adopt to reconnect with the masses.

Interestingly, there has been an unprecedented volume of talk about and in praise of democracy. Many governmental, non-governmental, and international organisations have been engaged in democracy promotion.[441] While the 1960s saw many citizens going to the polls, the last decades have seen a gradual decline in the number of citizens participating in the democratic process. A new form of participatory democracy would have to be fashioned to ensure that citizens participate in the governance process of their country. Deliberative democracy assumes that citizens' congresses at village and regional level deliberate on critical issues affecting their community. These special deliberative forums ensure that everyone in the community participates in the governance and development discourse concerning their area. Since the 1990s, we have observed that deliberative democracy has

subsumed participatory democratic processes. Deliberative democracy has been held to include school boards, community policing, deliberative polling, community consultations, citizens' assemblies, and judicial bodies.[442] These deliberative assemblies aimed to arrive at a consensus on a developmental matter, make a decision or reveal how individual preferences might change after the people have deliberated. The Malian socio-cultural and political setup favours the deliberative democratic model. Government and civil society would have to ensure that communities organise themselves into deliberative organs through which crucial developmental and political matters affecting the community could be debated, and consensus decisions reached. If Mali wants to escape the current security predicament, a new form of political engagement must be contemplated. Deliberative democracy would ensure that the voices of all in the country are heard, and nation-building parameters are defined and practised by the majority in the country.

Traditional and religious leaders remain influential political and socio-cultural actors in contemporary Africa, especially in rural areas where some have absolute political and traditional powers. Despite the desecration of their conventional symbols in the colonial and post-colonial eras, traditional and religious leaders still command respect and dignity from their people. In most cases, these traditional leaders still maintain the established system of accountability and consultation in their areas of command.[443] They also command respect, as they play an essential role as a link between the spiritual and those in the land of the living.[444] Sometimes, traditional leaders intercede with the spiritual world for the rain to fall during drought. Traditional leaders are also respected as they also intercede for a bountiful harvest.[445]

As a result of the crucial roles that traditional leaders play in African society, this article calls on the government of Mali, acting together with their social and international partners, to support the traditional leaders of Mali in their endeavours to bring peace and tranquillity to the country. Although traditional leaders have sided with successive governments in oppressing the people, their role in the new dispensation needs to be more nuanced and perhaps neutral as the country navigates new contours in addressing security and development challenges. Moreover, the government should establish a new social contract between the government and traditional and religious leaders. This social contract should stipulate the critical government priorities on which the government would want the traditional leaders to focus. Key to these priorities should be maintaining law and order in their various command areas. The Malian government should also ensure that traditional leaders encourage their people to participate in the different democratic processes, as the government would occasionally call upon the Malian citizens to attend these processes.

Conclusion

The changing patterns of conflict on the continent have necessitated new ways through which conflict resolution should be contemplated. In seeking to understand the causes of conflicts on the continent, several conceptual underpinnings have been proposed. The negative effect of unemployment, poverty, and inequality on the people is immeasurable. The affected parties have consequently resorted to unorthodox methods to change their economic situations. In some cases, the military has intervened to address political and

socioeconomic challenges. Nevertheless, how power is acquired and dispensed on the continent has been the primary cause of conflict in many African countries. In Mali, ethnic politics and regional development imbalances have been the driving forces of the various Tuareg rebellions in the country. What has been alarming is the lack of accountability towards those responsible for implementing the 1992 National Pact between the Tuareg leadership and government at the time. As a result, the Tuareg leadership have taken an unwavering position to ensure that their concerns are addressed. While the previous governments have found it challenging to manage the insecurity posed by the Tuareg rebellion and many others, the current administration has shown a strong political will to resolve the Tuareg question in Mali.

Overall, the article highlighted the causes of insecurity in Mali. It was argued that the porous international boundaries, especially those with Libya, Mauritania, and Niger, have enabled small arms and weapons to flow to belligerent parties in Mali. The article illustrated that Mali is a vast uninhabited country, and 'ungoverned spaces' have become havens for bandits to operate with impunity. The article concluded by indicating that the government needs to enter a new compact with the people to address the myriad of economic, political and cultural challenges the country is facing. The first would be to ensure that civil society organisations and traditional and religious leaders are empowered to accompany the government in realising this vital mission.

ENDNOTES

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