

Acknowledging Conflict across Mali's Centre: Drivers and History

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Abstract

As this paper is written (July 2018) the violence in the central regions of Mali is increasing in intensity. The availability of modern small arms is destabilizing the sub-region as local belligerents engage in inter-community and intra-community violence. The conflict in the central regions since 2014 is not merely an extension of the civil war in the northern regions, but rather the instigating factors are based in historical events specific to the Centre: a history of conservative Islam, water and land scarcity resulting from climate change events, and liberalization of regional markets interact to drive conflict. We apply a multi-lens framework: the 'New Wars', new types of war, and a plural security perspective to analyze the threats and their drivers as they manifest in the central regions of Mali. We conclude that the conflict in the centre is distinct from the larger conflict in the northern regions. Additionally, further research on the conflict and eventual peace process in the centre must centre on local historical and socio-political and economic dynamics. It is necessary to understand drivers of the conflict to create a lasting peace.

Introduction: Differentiating Conflict in the Centre from that in the North

Mali, once internationally acclaimed as a successful transition to democracy, does not have the capacity to extend security to all parts of the country, and may not have the resources to conduct a fair election in 2018 – a blow to the 'third wave of democracy' movement (Huntington, 1993). The state is confronted with a multifaceted crisis: a crisis of legitimacy and a deteriorating security situation that is spreading from the north where international forces have been engaged since 2013 into the central regions.

There is a lot at risk in Mali. Mali is central to West Africa, connecting North Africa with Sub-Saharan Africa, and West to Central Africa. The impact of another failed state, in the same region as the failed Post-Gaddafi Libya, has ramifications for the broader region, most specifically the four other G-5 Sahel states – Burkina Faso, Mauritania, Niger, and Chad. This study focuses on the latest multi-dimensional conflict zone, the central regions of Mali.

The State nearly collapsed in 2012 when a Tuareg separatist movement, the MNLA (National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad), declared a freeindependent

state of Azawad across then northern regions of Mali: Timbuktu, Kidal, Gao, Ménaka and Taoudenni. MNLA, in turn, was driven away by a coalition of Islamic fundamentalist groups, Ansar Dine, AQIM (al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb) and MOJWA (the Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa). In the battle for the north of the state, Malian armed forces were losing the asymmetrical war because they were not sufficiently trained and outfitted. Bamako's lack of action prompted a coup d'état led by junior officers that deposed the two-term President Amadou Toumani Touré two months before the end of his presidential term. Military rule was brief, and an interim government was assembled. The separatist/jihadist forces advanced south towards Bamako, and the interim president requested military support from France. In January 2013, the French military operation "Serval" commenced. French forces were able to thwart the militant offensive and eventually win back control of the captured cities (Harmon, 2014, Chapter 7; Hollande, 2018, pp. 27–35). The United Nations deployed a peacekeeping force (13,000 troops), The United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA, 2013), to support the French efforts to protect the sovereignty of the state. Antagonism in the north persists, and militants continue to escalate the violence. As of 2018, 133 UN troops have died, making the mission the fourth deadliest for UN peacekeepers in term of deaths caused by hostile acts (Offner, 2018a).

The Tuareg separatist movement and Islamic Jihad have catalyzed the militarization of the north as multiple western forces engage. The militarization of the north by western forces has thus far kept the Islamists from taking control of the territory but also contributes to disruption and insecurity in the region. As of August 2014, the French mission has expanded to a regional focus under the name, Operation Barkhane (4,000 troops). Malian armed forces support Barkhane and MINUSMA. The European Union contributes to operations in the Sahel with the EU Training Mission-Mali, established in 2013 as a capacitybuilding mission to train security forces from Mali and Niger to support domestic agencies countering extremism and organized crime. Moreover, the United States has been engaged in the Sahara since 2003 executing the Global War on Terror (GWOT) against its primary target, Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and its affiliates. The US has upward of 800 special forces deployed in Niamey and Agadez, Niger providing training, logistics, and intelligence in support of the Nigerien military (Haywood, 2017). Germany, too, has constructed a military base in Niger to support MINUSMA; Italy contributed forces to help stem migration to Europe; and, Canada sent a dozen troops and six helicopters to support the peacekeeping efforts. The majority of these forces are concentrated in the north with some overlap with the Centre.

The multidimensional crisis that broke out in 2012 was by all accounts confined to the northern regions; nonetheless, that conflict has conflated with localized

conflict in the central regions characterized as an inter-communal conflict between pastoralists and agriculturalists and intra-communal conflict as well. Since 2014, the Centre has experienced a proliferation of violence as Islamic-jihadist forces target Malian security forces, elected and traditional officials, schools and markets in the sub-region (Human Rights Watch, 2017; Tobie, 2017). The conflict dynamic observed in the sub-region of Mali's Centre is a response to state neglect within a context of scarcity due to desertification, a result of climate change and increased economic competition, a result of liberal market structures across the region. As locals compete for access to resources, communities are experiencing a retrenchment into ethnic and religious-based self-defence groups for protection as resources grow scarce and competition for political control increases.

Our analysis reveals that the socio-political and economic dynamics are much more complicated in Mali's Centre. We trace the causes of the current intercommunal violence and competition for political control through a list of cultural and historical factors. First of all, the Centre is experiencing a resurgence of political Islam – jihadists – that aim to cleanse the region from the sins of democracy with Islamic law. Despite the popular perception that Islam in Mali is a tolerant form of Sufi Islam, a history of radical Islam has endured since the 19th century.

Secondly, the socio-cultural norms of the indigenous ethnic groups in the region have been disrupted by successive periods of deadly drought (1968-74, 1984-5, 2005) that have forever modified the lifestyle and livelihoods of the people. The intra-communal violence occurs between sedentary agriculturalist ethnicities and the semi-nomadic pastoralists who are engaged in battles for access to arable land and water. Climate change in the form of desertification has over the years dried up water sources, turned land for crops and cattle grazing into sand and killed off herds of animals. "Environmental destruction ... can also be the cause and not merely the consequence of premeditated violent conflicts...Environmental changes have drastically reduced the availability of cultivable land, green forests, freshwater, clean air and fish resources" (Swain and Öjendal, 2018, p. 3). These droughts have displaced people and forced many pastoralists to remain sedentary. These disruptions have harmed the once complimentary relationship between the inhabitants of the Centre. Furthermore, in relation to the ethnicities in the subregion, the arbitrary drawing of state boundaries by colonial powers at the Berlin Conference did not consider the existing territories inhabited by the indigenous ethnic groups; as a result, family and group relations extend over current national borders. The problems facing Mali's Centre are reflected in the border regions of Burkina Faso and Niger.

Third, new rivalries for political power have emerged in the Centre. State and village authorities are being contested by a 'new elite' empowered by the wealth

generated from illicit markets and ideology; radical Islam threatens the existing state authority. One feature of this begins with the 1996 implementation of the national decentralization program. Decentralization was meant to empower local leadership and expand stakeholder participation in governance by granting each municipality responsibility for critical administrative functions as well as, retain authority with regard to development issue (James et al. 2000; Farvacque-Vitkovic et al., 2007, p. 25; Brunet-Jailly, Charmes, and Konaté 2015).

The decentralization program has had uneven results. In October 2013, the Malian government convened a national forum on decentralization (États généraux de la decentralization), which brought together representatives of communities to discuss the state of Malian governance. The forum concluded that Mali needs more democracy and further decentralization. However, some observers claim that decentralization and democratization often increase “the intensity of the struggle for access to local power” (International Crisis Group, 2014, p. 29 in Pezard and Shurkin, 2015, p. 30). Our analysis focuses on the dynamics surrounding the struggle for local power in Mali’s Centre.

The fourth contributing factor is a backlash against the state that for decades since independence has neglected the rural areas across the country. In the north and central regions, this perception of marginalization is particularly acute and Islamist militias are promising Shari’a as an alternative to a failed democratic system. The central regions have large areas where state administration has either been weak and inconsistent or absent altogether (Thiam, 2017, p. 21). Marginalization by the state has created space for new sources of authority (Beau, 2018). This new authority is in some cases winning approval of locals, where it does not have the support it employs terror tactics. The conflict in the Centre is distinct from the conflict in the north for several reasons and may have more of an impact on the expected elections scheduled for summer 2018. The socio-political milieu in the Centre is the result of a clash between a weak state apparatus and an empowered Islamist movement that opposes the secular state and promotes conservative, often radical, application of Islamic Shari’a law as the solution. Since 2014 domestic Islamists have killed nearly 800 people in the regions of Mopti and northern Ségou (Thiam, 2018).

The problems in the Centre have local roots connected to regional rivalries. Mali’s total population is about 17 million people who identify with several different ethnic groups. The major ethnic group is Mande (e.g. Bamana, Jula, Malinke which makes up 50% of the population. The Peuhl, otherwise known as Fulani or Fulbe constitute 17%, the Voltaic (e.g. Bobo, Senufo, Minyanka) 12%, Tuareg and Arabs across the Maghreb in the north 10%, The Soninke of the old Songhai 6% and the Dogon constitutes the final 5% of the population. Estimates claim that 90% of Mali’s population is Sufi Islam (Ediozie & Gottschalk, 2014,

p. 219). “The [central sub-region] is home to more than half the country’s ethnic groups and all of its production systems: sedentary agriculture, agro-pastoralism, pastoralism, sedentary fishing, and transhumance fishing” (Thiam, 2017, p. 12).

The complexity of the situation demands a multi-lens analytical framework that permits a focus on the Centre as well as a focusing out on the Malian state. Our strategy is to analyze the dynamics of the Centre in relation to the challenges faced by the nation. To accomplish this, we apply the ‘New Wars’ framework (Duffield & Waddell, 2006; Kaldor, 2006; Parpart, 2010) which among other characteristics focuses on intra-state conflict within the era of neoliberal globalization. Secondly, we utilize Buzan’s (1991) conceptualization of five discrete security sectors that challenge ‘periphery’ states in the current ‘multi-polar,’ post-Cold War era.

The study begins with our conceptualization of the sub-region of Mali’s Centre. This distinction is precarious because of the overlapping socio-political and economic factors, yet we find it necessary to isolate the Centre from the rest of the country to effectively analyze the conflict dynamics. Following that is an explanation of the analytical framework. We describe why we see a nexus between the ‘New War’s’ framework and Buzan’s conceptualization of security challenges for states in the periphery of the global system. Subsequently, we analyze the dynamics driving the conflict through the lens of the framework to explain how the drivers of conflict in the Centre is partially related, yet distinct from the conflict unfurling in the north of Mali.

Defining the Centre

No official demarcation for the sub-region of central Mali (Centre) exists. Several analyses on the sub-region concentrate on different areas; for instance, the Malian Government’s Integrated Security Plan for the Central Regions (PSRIC) covers Mopti and Ségou, whereas the European Union’s Programme of Support for Enhanced Security (PARSEC) covers Mopti and Gao regions. We delimit the Centre to include the regions of Mopti, northern Ségou stretching west to north Koulikoro and east to the borders of Niger and Burkina Faso. We narrow in on this expanse because the cultural and socio-economic dynamics of this sub-region have endured for generations (Thiam, 2017, p. 11).

We delimit the Centre as a sub-region within the state of Mali, but this Centre is actually transnational because similar ethnic, cultural and socio-economic ties extend into Niger and Burkina Faso, and in regard to the discussion of the Peuhl ethnicity (also known as Fulbe and Fulani) extends east across national borders.

We argue that these long-established dynamics make the Centre a discrete unit of analysis. This adds dynamism to the existing analyses of Mali that make a distinction between the ‘north’ and the ‘south.’ This division is used to underlie

the explanation for the Tuareg rebellions (1962-64, 1990-95), which were met with brutal state suppression (Lecocq, 2005) and the current rebellion ongoing since 2012. Similarly, the north-south distinction has continued as an analytical frame in the aftermath of the 2012 civil war and coup d'état. The distinction is enforced by the geographical demarcation along the junction of the Sahara and Sahel topographies. It is only as recent as 2015 that analysts have focused on Mali's Centre as a discrete conflict zone.

The conflict in the north is premised on a separate set of issues than the Centre even though some factors are similar, such as state neglect, environmental degradation due to climate change and infiltration of transnational Islamic-jihadist terrorist organizations. The Centre has its history that pre-dates the 2012 crisis. The conflict in the Centre is not merely a spill over effect, but rather factors embedded in history are driving conflict in the Centre. Instigating factors include the localized conflict between ethnic and tribal rivals. In broad terms, agriculturalist – Songhay, Arma, and Fulani – plus fishermen – Bozo and Sorko – are set against nomadic pastoralist groups – Tuareg, Arabs and Fulani in a battle for scarce land and water resources and local political power (Grémont, 2012, p. 134; Gaye, 2018; Maiga, 2015; International Crisis Group 2015, 2016). Bamako and southern regions where most economic-production takes place are relatively secure and distant from the frontlines, although not immune to terrorist attacks. Civilians have been targeted at the La Terrasse nightclub (March 2015) and Radisson Blu Hotel (November 2015) in Bamako and Byblos Hotel in Savare (Dearden, 2017; Human Rights Watch, 2016; The Telegraph, 2015). The security crisis threatens the institutions of government and further undermines state legitimacy across issues.

Analytical Framework: Exploring the Nexus between 'New Wars' and New Patterns of Security

Buzan (1991) explains that the end of the Cold War was a paradigm shift creating new patterns of geo-strategic security approaches stemming from changes in the security context at the 'centre' of the global power structure. The core of his thesis is that threats to state security from other states will diminish while intrastate threats would likely increase, as well as new environmental-based threats emerge. He demonstrates that the security agenda has expanded in the post-Cold War era identifying five interrelated sectors of security that states must contend with.

Just as Buzan (1991) focuses on disruptions in the post-bipolar world order, 'New Wars' theory is couched in the same period. The era of liberal-economic globalization began in the 1970s and continued to ramp up until the 2008 global economic crisis when the legitimacy of the Western-dominated economic system came under severe scrutiny. The neoliberal ideology that underpinned global

trade disadvantaged developing states in the ‘periphery’ in relation to advanced economies at the ‘centre’ (Chang, 2008). Kaldor (2013, p. 2) characterizes the New Wars as “the wars of the era of globalization” where “typically, they take place in areas where authoritarian states have been greatly weakened as a consequence of opening up to the rest of the world. In such contexts, the distinction between state and non-state, public and private, external and internal, economic and political, and even war and peace are breaking down.” Mali is a good case study of a developing state at the periphery struggling to institutionalize democracy and grow its economy, while local, national and global forces create challenges for success.

The two approaches combined will be applied to the situation in Mali’s Centre. Buzan’s five sectors of security include: (1) Political security which is concerned with “the organizational stability of states, systems of government, and the ideologies that give them legitimacy;” (2) Military security focuses on “the twolevel interplay of the armed offensive and defensive capabilities of states, and states’ perceptions of each other’s intentions;” (3) Economic security is concerned with “access to resources, finance and markets necessary to sustain acceptable levels of welfare and state power;” (4) Societal security includes “the ability of societies to reproduce their traditional patterns of language, culture, association, and religious and national identity and customs within acceptable conditions for evolution;” (5) and lastly, Environmental security encompasses “the maintenance of the local and the planetary biosphere as the essential support system on which all other human enterprises depend” (Buzan, 1991, p. 433).

The ‘New Wars’ thesis argues that modern conflicts are characteristically different from wars prior to the era of globalization. Newman (2004) is a detractor, yet he succinctly outlines the key descriptors of New Wars theory. From this perspective, wars today are more likely to be:

- Intrastate rather than interstate opponents;
- Characterized by state failure and a social transformation driven by globalization and liberal economic forces; this gives rise to competition over natural resources and illegal commercial entrepreneurship, private armies, and criminal warlords, often organized according to some form of identity;
- Ethnic and religious centred conflict as opposed to being over political ideologies;

- Deliberately targeting civilians as an object of new wars leading to increased casualties and forced human displacement;
- Confusing due to a breakdown of public authority which blurs the distinction between public and private combatants, and between combatants and civilians (Newman, 2004, pp. 174–5).

The remainder of the study explores Mali's Centre in relation to the above generalizations about security in the modern era. We highlight the six "new types" of conflict in the sub-region identified by Dakouo (2017, 288) which include: "(1) conflicts regarding the management and use of natural resources; (2) community leadership conflicts; (3) conflicts regarding the appointment of village chiefs and councillors; (4) social conflicts regarding the old relationships between masters and dependents; (5) conflicts regarding the redrawing of land boundaries as a result of decentralization; and, (6) religious conflicts marked by opposition and antagonism between sects and/or ways of thinking."

Political Security

The Centre of Mali is the latest tear in the social fabric of the impoverished Sahara-Sahel region (de Melo, 2016). The dynamics of social-conflict in Mali's central sub-region embody several characteristics of 'New Wars' framework. The first element is that the conflict is intra-state and localized. Communities are organizing self-defence militias and attacking local rivals. The influx of modern weapons into the region mainly from the failed state of Libya (Small Arms Survey 2015, 2015, Chapter 6) has elevated the violence beyond anything the sub-region has experienced in the past. The militias are self-identifying with specific ethnic groups and many Islamic ideologies. The conflict is asymmetrical as Malian State Armed Forces (FAMA) are engaged in anti-terrorism operations against local and transnational Islamist movements.

The sub-regional perspective informs about unique drivers producing this conflict; however, dynamics at the national level contribute to the realities at the sub-regional level; therefore, analysis of the state and its influence on the Centre is processed through the conceptualization of security sectors identified in Buzan (1991). The government of Mali is fragile and contested by several types of security threats that have relevance for the Centre both historically by contributing to its marginalization and underdevelopment and through recent policy choices that influence conditions.

Islamic-jihadist groups have been operating in northern Mali for a couple of decades; yet, it is only since 2014 that they have become active in the Centre. The earliest manifestations came from Katiba Macina, led by the popular preacher

from Mopti, Amadou Kouffa. Kouffa, an ethnic Peuhl, allied himself with MUJAO (Movement of Oneness and Jihad in West Africa) and Ansar Dine during the 2012 crisis. MUJAO is an offshoot of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), and Ansar Dine is led by Iyad Ag Ghaly, a prominent leader of the Tuareg Rebellion of 1990-95 who continues to operate illicit trafficking operations and enforcing Shari'a law in territories controlled by his armed group. Kouffa's militia has gradually become one of the key actors in the conflict because of relentless attacks on representatives of the state and traditional leadership in the sub-region. In 2017, Katiba Macina became part of a coalition of militias, Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimeen (JNIM) which has redefined the objectives of all its member groups toward a mission for global jihad, beyond the regional context (International Crisis Group, 2016; Thiam, 2018; Tobie, 2017).

It is necessary to note that individual leaders of militant groups join forces and disband regularly, even attack one another depending on the context. Family relations through marriages and ethnic connections may consolidate groups or fracture them. Similarly, intra-communal disputes have similar effects. This is a cultural artefact; loyalties may shift depending on power dynamics, economics, and family relations among others. This complicates the situation partly because the interests of belligerent groups are not articulated because they shift.

Not all Peuhl are Islamists, and not all Islamists are Peuhl. As mentioned earlier, one consequence of drought has been the forcing of some pastoralists to become sedentary. In Mali's Centre, this has affected the Peuhl ethnicity most pervasively. Historically, they were pastoralists who drove their cattle to graze and to markets in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso. As also mentioned, Kouffa, the Islamist leader of Katiba Macina is also Peuhl, as well as the terrorist group from Nigeria, Boko Haram, which has ties extending into Niger (Osaghae, 2017). These two associations – the 'outsider' and 'terrorist' – have made Peuhl outcasts in their communities in central Mali. The herdsmen are fighting against agriculturalists over competing means of production; armed groups extort them, and bandits and the FAMA target them for arrest and extrajudicial killings (Reuters 2018; Thiam, 2017).

In terms of security in the Centre, the Malian State has become one player among many and does not command the monopoly on violence. Currently, as in the past, the state tends to privatize security in the cities (Keita, 2017) and subcontract it in the regions. In some cases, Dogon and Bozo self-defence groups are acting as proxies for the FAMA against Peuhl communities. “[These] ethnic based self-defence groups who benefit from state patronage, [contribute] to local ethnic competitions” among similar armed groups aiming to benefit from the war economy or state patronage (Diallo, 2017, p. 300).

It is imperative to state that the conflict dynamics are extremely complex and they differ depending on the local dynamics of an area. Nonetheless, civilians are gunned down as they work their fields or travel to markets and markets are being targeted with improvised explosive devices (Human Rights Watch, 2017). ‘New Wars’ theory highlights that belligerents terrorize civilian populations to either control them or displace them to cause disruption.

Bamako doesn’t prioritize the rural areas of the Centre, and the population perceive themselves as marginalized. Bamako and local government agencies are ‘weak’ because they lack the capacity to provide services and security effectively. The lack of government accountability is rooted in inept and disengaged administrations through which a legacy of corruption and impunity lingers. The lack of political will by successive administrations to enforce state authority country-wide has exacerbated insecurity. Bratton, Coulibaly & Machado (2002, p.206) note that a “gap exists between state and citizen,” from the supply side it is because of “an eroded public bureaucracy with limited capacity for outreach” and on the demand side, there exists “a passive citizenry that places few pressures on its leaders.” This gap is especially pervasive in rural Mali.

However, in the post-2012 period, the description of a ‘passive citizenry’ no longer applies. National media outlets condemn corruption and impunity while an increasingly vocal opposition expresses malcontent especially as the elections near (Babi, 2016; Konate, 2016). Furthermore, the agency is expressed through the mobilization of self-defence militias in the Centre which will be discussed shortly. These expressions of civil society agency are relatively recent developments.

Still, Malian leadership has failed to solidify the social compact between state and society; over the nearly 30 years of democracy successive administrations maintained a system of neo-patrimonial redistribution and clientelism to secure power (Craven-Matthews & Englebert, 2018; Poulton & Tonegutti, 2016, Chapter 1). Corruption and clientelism at the local level in the Centre are particularly acute (Bouju, 2000). The patrimonial networks linking Bamako and rural political elite is an enduring artefact of colonialism resembling the relationship between rural elites and the French administration (see: Young, 2004; Huillery, 2011). The pattern of patrimonialism perpetuates the marginalization of communities while corruption perpetuates underdevelopment.

In the absence of state authority, the Sahara-Sahel region has been inundated by criminal organizations. Transnational criminal networks link Latin American drug traffickers to transnational Islamic terrorist groups who traffic narcotics and people through Mali on route to Europe (UNODC, 2017a, p. 35, 2017b; US Department of State, 2017). Trafficking narcotics, weapons and people generate

an estimated \$3.8 billion annually and is intrinsically linked to the financing of terrorist organizations in the Sahara-Sahel region (International Crisis Group, 2015).

Political and Societal security sectors overlap where transnational organized crime and jihad undermine established social structures. Participation in organized criminal groups has been an opportunity for some in the lower social strata to gain wealth and enhance status as a 'new elite.' In this context, it is necessary to understand the importance of ethnic identity. The Centre has a stratified traditional social structure comprised of servile, labour and elite classes. In Mali, race is a created identity, ascribed on cultural basis; "slavery did not so much exist legally, as it did psychologically and socially" (Lecocq, 2005). While somewhat different in the Centre from the north, Harmon's description of class divisions offers insight into the social stratification common in the broader region:

The groups are said to be intentionally divided by class, by occupational specialization, and by race or perceptions of race. The Arabs, Tuareg, Fulbe (Peuhl), and Songhai consider themselves in various forms of noble, free, and servile status. Typically, the free lineages within each ethnic group were clients of the noble lineages. The servile-status groups were bound to either free or noble lineages. The Servile-status groups were typically regarded as not only socially distinct from the free and noble, but racially distinct as well, with servile-status groups being regarded as "black" and free and noble-status groups being regarded as "white" or "non-black" (Harmon, 2014, pp. 4–6).

Recently, new elites associated with strong Islamist militias and/or illicit trafficking networks have begun to challenge the entrenched traditional leadership structures (Pezard & Shurkin, 2015, pp. 27–29). Participation in armed groups, regardless of their affiliation, has permitted the emergence of new sources of legitimacy as traditional authorities and local public administrators are being targeted with violence and replaced by militia leaders (Human Rights Watch, 2016).

This change in generations-old socio-political dynamics undermines efforts toward a peace process. Traditional conflict resolution strategies are not effective in the current insecure climate. The inter- and intra-ethnic conflict is made worse because traditional authority, which in the past had been able to bring aggrieved groups together, are unable to muster sufficient legitimacy to broker peace. The traditional elites (imams, village chiefs, kadis, scholars, marabouts, and healers) have always acted as release valves in the Centre, in fact across the country. The legitimacy of these elites is being undermined by domestic and external narratives around Islamic authority, as well as, by opportunistic 'former' members of the servant-class as they use terror to capture political power.

Brossier, Jourde, and Cissé (2018) explain how the non-native Peuhl have been questioning the ancestral and customary rights of the indigenous Peuhl in Mali's Niger Delta. They explain that the Peuhl community is not monolithic and that not all Peuhl are connected to radical Islamist forces. De Bruijn and van Dijk (1994, p. 93) claim that the political hierarchies of the Peuhl society in the Hayre (Centre) began to form during the 19th century. The division between noblemen and slaves created a "precise division of labour" and "ideological differences came into existence" through the application of rules of Islam by the noble classes over the servile. Servile classes were not taught the Islam of the elites. Social evolution in the Centre for the Fulbe (Peuhl) was described as "difficult to combine an Islamic and pastoral way of life. The paradox is that, to create a political organization to maintain their pastoral way of life, the Fulbe needed Islam" (de Bruijn & van Dijk, 1994, pp. 92–3). Islam has become a central ideological force for many communities in the region for centuries.

The Centre's history includes periods of intensified adherence to conservative conceptualizations of Islam. Smith (1961) considers Islamic movements during the 19th century a 'neglected theme' of influence in West Africa. The Centre has its own Islam narrative, and while the perception is one of a tolerant Islam that allows for coexistence along with Animist and Christian cultures, radicalized political Islam has long been a feature in the Centre, and violence has been part of the jihadist modus operandi since the 19th century (O'Brien, 1981, pp. 14–15; Smith, 1961). We claim this history sets a precedent for a society permissive of Islamic rule as an alternative to an irresponsible secular democratic state. Some members of the Peuhl and Dogon ethnic groups told investigators that they fear the armed Islamist groups; however, they give them credit for "drastically reducing levels of banditry and state corruption within their villages" (Human Rights Watch, 2016).

Islam has [...] become one of the most important ideological forces, perhaps the central force of Fulbe society as a whole. Notwithstanding all the centrifugal forces that cause the disintegration of society, Islam links all the (ethnic) groups to each other and provides them with a common ideological frame, while interpretations of history have become vehicles for the promotion of group interests (de Bruijn & van Dijk, 1994, p. 104).

Additionally, writing about the responses to drought by Sonrai society, Niezen states, "Drought in the Sahel made villages more dependent on each other for mutual aid, but at the same time traditional kinship ties and other bonds of reciprocity were weak, making the religious community a strong alternative focus of solidarity" (Niezen, 1990, p. 421).

The conflict is not only between the Islamic jihadists and the state but also between different versions of Islam. While belligerent forces promoting Islamic Jihad in the region extending from Algeria, al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), (Harmon 2010) and pushing into Niger, from Nigeria affiliated with Boko Haram and the Islamic State (Akinola, 2015), the conflict in central Mali is best analyzed as a Malian conflict. Malian actors are organizing militias, and some groups have affiliations with donors from the Arabian Gulf, Pakistan and elsewhere, resulting in imported Shiite/Sunni rivalries as well as Sufi/Wahabi dissensions. These imported forms of Islam compete with long traditions of local Islam in the Centre that extend from the Islamic theocracy of the 19th century. Jihadists are not only nostalgic but draw inspiration from this period. In the Centre, there were and continued to be conditions that are favourable to a confrontational and conservative form of Islam. A growing number of people in the Centre are receptive to Islamic law because of a “perceived entanglement of local elites with a corrupt federal state” and an assumption that radical Islamist forces can “purify the region from all the sins allegedly brought by democracy” (International Crisis Group 2015, 13, n. 85).

A growing acceptance of conservative Islam is connected to a commonly overlooked aspect of socialization, community and private radio stations. After the fall of the dictatorship in 1991, public and private radio stations proliferated across the local and national frequencies. Today hundreds of radio stations operate in the regions and on many of them Islamist preachers share their doctrine in local languages. Kouffa is one such preacher. This continues to contribute to favourable conditions for a ‘re-Islamization’ - an acquiescence to austere forms of Islam as a replacement for the secular state system that has long failed this sub-region. The emergence of information and communication technologies has accelerated the impacts with podcasts of radical preachers on social media.

Security is deteriorating severely in the Centre as the state, and its international partners struggle to regain control of the northern and central regions of the country. The militarization of the Sahara-Sahel brings additional interests into the broader region. While the goal is to provide security, state-sponsored militarization causes a reaction by sub-state actors committed to violence.

Military Security

The root causes of violence in the Centre are localized; however, the presence of international military forces in the state/region exacerbates local tensions. A wide-angle focus reveals the strategy of securitization by international forces has not quelled the violence in the north, nor Centre.

A regional approach to policing the Centre is also underway as of mid-2018. G-5 Sahel multinational joint task force (Secretariat Permanent du G5 Sahel, 2018) is a collaboration among Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger. Each has committed 1,000 troops to the borderland where Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso meet. This location is in the central region – the focus of this analysis. This force is a similar mobilization to the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) comprised of Nigerian, Nigerien, and Chadian soldiers deployed in the Lake Chad region against Boko Haram (Diallo, 2017, p. 303). The G5 Sahel joint command plans to mobilize in three geographic areas across the central region Sahara-Sahel. The prime objective of the force is to fight terrorism and transnational crime (Offner, 2018a) and “identify common projects that focus on infrastructure, food security, agriculture and pastoralism and security” (Bøås, 2018).

The presence of the new G5 force concerns Islamist factions in the area, and they have responded with attacks. In June 2018, the headquarters of the G5 Sahel force in Sévaré, Mopti region, was targeted in a “complex” attack by Islamist militants firing rockets and small arms killing six (UN News, 2018). Challenges continue to mount in the efforts for stability in the Centre.

Human rights organizations have documented that tactics applied by all of the combatants - self-defence groups, Islamists, security forces - in this asymmetric war are producing carnage and human rights abuses. Security forces, specifically Malian soldiers, are targeted with improvised explosive devices and ambush attacks (Diarra, 2018; Goldberg, 2018). Self-defence militias are actively targeting local rivals. In late June 2018, between 20 and 32 Peuhl herders were killed over a two-day period from the village of Koumaga. The death toll differs because many of the bodies were buried by the time officials arrived on the scene. The attack began on a Saturday when the militia entered the village and amassed multiple casualties. The following day Malian armed forces responded to the scene. When the FAMA exited, the militia returned to kill several more people. The vast majority of civilians reported killed in counterterrorism operations have been Peuhl (Ahmed, 2018). The imminent threat compels some Malian forces to commit human rights abuses as a means of being proactive in their defence. According to the Director for Human Rights Watch West Africa, since 2017, HRW has documented 60 alleged executions by the FAMA, and none have resulted in justice for the families (Reuters, 2018). Malian government admits FAMA soldiers were implicated in ‘gross violations’ after several mass graves were found in the central region of Mopti near the villages of Nantaka and Kobaka. Human rights groups claim the Malian military is conducting extrajudicial killings, kidnappings, torture and arbitrary arrests against suspected sympathizers of jihadist groups (Reuters, 2018; Human Rights Watch, 2016).

Another instigating factor in the growing distrust between locals and the state is a lack of justice for ongoing violence and criminality. The level of violence in the Centre is on the rise, and the state does not have the capacity, or the will to investigate crimes and provide legal justice. Since 2015, numbers of deadly attacks have been reported to local and Bamako authorities, but very few investigations move forward. The dire consequences of this were summed up by a Peuhl villager, “To end all this, everyone must be treated with dignity; every killing must be investigated. If not, if the state doesn’t pay attention, people will continue to join the jihadist and their numbers and force will continue to grow” (Human Rights Watch, 2017).

The state and international forces are focused on a securitized approach to the problems facing the region. However, it is necessary for that approach to be supplemented with state-provided services before the Islamist forces take full control.

Ensuring that investigations into human rights abuses are carried out impartially, efficiently and thoroughly is key to building public confidence in a country’s justice system... The reality is that the effective functioning of investigative authorities, is hampered by a number of factors, including: an inadequate legal framework to inform investigative procedures, undue political influence or interference with investigative bodies by other spheres of government, a lack of resources to conduct investigations and inadequate technical skills or insufficient expertise on the part of investigative officials (Ngari & Cachalia, 2017, p. 87).

The proliferation of insecurity in the Centre is exacerbating the continuity of Societal security. As Buzan notes it is related to ‘threats and vulnerabilities that affect patterns of communal identity and culture’ (Buzan, 1991, p. 447). In the Centre, we witness Islamists versus secular democracy, agriculturalists against pastoralists and community members killing one another. As a means of concluding this section on Military security, we redirect to consider the dynamics of future peace talks as the most recent Algiers Accord atrophies (2015).

The Malian state and its partners must begin to consider how to draw down the violence in the Centre. The armed groups fighting in the Centre are not stakeholders in the stalled Algiers Agreement. We question whether it is realistic to try and implement this Agreement without taking into account the actors from the Centre. The Prime Minister, Soumailou Boubeye Maiga, announced in a policy speech that non-signatory groups would be integrated into the process and offered a four-point plan. Cynics may consider this political rhetoric, but it is worth exploring. The administration plans to:

1. Pursue the implementation of the Peace and Reconciliation Agreement in Mali, resulting from the Algiers process;
2. Reduce the growing insecurity in the centre of the country;
3. Satisfy social demand by accelerating the implementation of the Presidential Program of Social Emergencies;
4. Organize transparent, credible and peaceful elections (“Déclaration de Politique Generale de Monsieur Soumeylou Boubeye Maiga, Premier Ministre, Chef du Gouvernement,” 2018).

The Government’s plan is guided by the fundamental need to preserve the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the country and restore peace and security throughout the national territory, primarily in the northern and central regions. Maiga promises decisive action to restrict and ultimately eradicate the activities of the Terrorist Armed Groups (ATG) through the deployment of the FAMA. Once the sub-region is recaptured, the state will reinstate the Administration and appoint new municipal authorities; in addition to resettling of refugees and displaced persons (Primature, 2018). At this point, the state is not gaining against the militant forces, and in some areas, loyalty to the militants is growing. To fulfil these objectives much has to be accomplished. As Newbury explains:

In the search for models of conflict management and peace-building ... first building peace is possible, but fraught with pitfalls. Establishing sustainable peace requires a multipronged approach with multiple actors collaborating – internal and external actors, local, regional and international actors, and government as well as multilateral and nongovernmental organs. Second, successful peace-building requires resources. Third, to promote durable peace, post-conflict initiatives should endeavour to establish institutions that foster good governance, encourage policies that make governments inclusive and responsive, and provide resources to relieve inequality and poverty, while enhancing security (Newbury, 2002, p. 10).

It may not be enough for the State to extend the provisions of the 2015 Algiers Accord, to include the combatants in the Centre. A brief discussion of the Algiers Accord will reveal the precariousness of such a plan.

The Algiers Accord (2015) was negotiated between the government of Mali and two coalitions of armed groups battling against the government and each other, namely the Coordination of Azawad Movements (CMA) and the Platform of armed groups (the Platform). Accord pour la paix et la réconciliation au Mali issu

du processus d'Alger (Accord for peace and reconciliation in Mali emanating from the Algiers process) was formally signed in May and June 2015 by these parties (Offner, 2018b)

The existence of two distinctive coalitions of rebel groups indicates the presence of multiple and divergent claims against the state of Mali. The one clear distinguishing feature between the two coalitions of armed groups is that the CMA's movements have consistently pursued claims of self-determination, while the movements in the Platform have sought the resolution of existing political and socio-economic grievances within the unitary state of Mali. Beyond this difference between the two coalitions, none of the movements has presented a clear agenda of its claims, nor the constituency it is representing in the struggle (Nyirabikali, 2015).

The warring factions and dynamics in the Centre are vastly different from those in the north who have signed the Algiers accord. It will not be enough for the government to absorb the combatants from the Centre into the existing accord. A separate, specific treaty will have to be designed to quell the violence.

Economic and Environmental Security

Economic security is closely tied to Environmental security (also see: Dalby 2018, p. 43) in the Malian context because agricultural production dominates the economy. Climate change drives social disruption in the Centre. Severe periods of drought have contributed to resource scarcity in the Centre that has changed livelihoods and traditional patterns of life. The desertification of the land, killing off of cattle (wealth/sustenance), and displacement of IDP and EDP (internal and external displaced people) have had irreversible effects on the livelihoods of local ethnic communities. Desertification further instigates conflict between sedentary agriculturalist communities and semi-nomadic herders, pastoralists. The effects of droughts over the decades have caused changes in traditional cultural patterns. These patterns of relative symbiosis between agriculturalists and pastoralists have been in the process of disruption since the 1968-74 drought, and successive droughts in 1984-5 and 2005 have accelerated socio-economic change.

The agricultural sector in the Centre sits at the nexus between ecological and economic security. The central regions of Mali have an abundant potential for agricultural development due to underutilized farmland. Additionally, husbandry has always been part of the region's social fabric, and for generations a large portion of the meat consumed in Mali and border countries originated from central Mali. It is worth noting that the "countries of the Sahel have contributed little to global carbon-dioxide emissions, yet they [are] among those most hurt by the consequences" (Bøås, 2018).

The region experienced several episodes of serious drought. During the first decade of independence, drought hit the region (1968-74). Accounts from subregional studies provide insight into the culture and mores of the Centre more broadly. “Around 1968, a period of drought set in that hit Fulbe (Peuhl) society in the Hayre. In the minds of the inhabitants, the period of independence is very closely associated with the drought. For them, prosperity was lost and the colonial period is often remembered with nostalgia” (de Bruijn and van Dijk, 1994, p. 94).

Two phenomena can be observed that continued to disrupt established patterns of life for the inhabitants. Distrust of the government in rural central and northern regions was solidified because government officials allegedly misappropriated the relief aid supplied by the international community during the drought events. Secondly, changes in weather patterns began to shift migratory patterns for herders. Thousands of internally displaced people from the north “descended” into the Centre. These displaced people have settled in communities where they are perceived as outsiders or even invaders. The drought events contribute to a pattern of impoverishment as wealth was lost. Pastoralists’ livestock was decimated and agriculturalists’ farmland transformed into the desert (de Bruijn and van Dijk, 1994, p. 97). Moreover, state strategies for crisis management had been ineffective. Assistance meant for disaster victims had been in part embezzled, and NGOs and the major multilateral organizations imposed systems that did not correspond with local realities making them ineffectual (Cissé, 1989). Another drought occurred between 1984 and 1985 and again in 2005 drought compounded the difficult situation by continuing to kill livestock and displace communities.

The decimation of the livestock sector in Mali’s Centre had repercussions for regional markets and local economies. Traditionally, these herders were the source for much of the meat consumed in the region. The combination of diminished livestock populations and liberal market forces drove up the competition. Mali’s agricultural exports had for generations, been walked across borders, now face stiff competition. Global markets also threatened local rice production because the sub-region sources inexpensive imported rice from Asia. Fish sourced from the Niger Delta has competition in the Centre from international markets as well.

Tourism was another important revenue stream for the northern and central regions, but it has suffered since the events of 2012. The now-defunct tourism industry used to infuse foreign capital into the local economy. Since, the sector has been strangled by the conflict leaving tour guides, artisans and hotels without customers. Tourism, in the 2000s, was the third largest revenue generator for the economy. In 2011 nearly 200,000 tourists visited Mali, and on average, they spent \$100 per day. After the coup and Tuareg uprising, a mere 10,000 estimated tourists visited (Ford & Allen, 2013). The unrest led many state embassies to warn

their citizens against travelling to Mali's 'red zone' which covers the northern borders with Mauritania and Algeria down to the north shore of the Niger River in the city of Ségou, encompassing nearly three-quarters of the country including the Centre.

Tourists toured historic sites in the centre such as, 'Dogon Country', Djénne and Badiangara on their way north to Timbuktu. Among West African states, Mali is home to the most sites on the World Heritage List as designated by the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). Despite the direct benefits the tourism industry provides for local communities in the Centre, Mali's tourism industry remains virtually non-existent due to the instability in the Sahara-Sahel region.

Conclusion

This study has shown how the conflict in the central regions of Mali is related, yet distinct from the war in the north that erupted in 2012. This study set out to understand the key problems and drivers that have ignited intercommunal conflict in the Centre of Mali, an expanse of territory beginning west of the Niger Delta into Mauritania and east across into Niger and Burkina Faso. We explained that this conflict is rooted in historical events relevant to this sub-region.

We chose to frame our analysis within the concepts of 'New Wars' and new patterns of security because, as we have shown, the security situation in the Centre reflects the characteristics presented in them. The 'New Wars' thesis focuses analysis on the localized and asymmetrical features of this conflict. The proliferation of ethnic-based self-defence groups shows a fracturing of interest groups and the complications for peace this produces. The five sectors of security identified by Buzan show the overlapping challenges created by internal warring parties and external forces like climate change, international interests and economic marginalization as a result of globalized commerce.

Two macro-level drivers filter down to influence the conflict at the community level. The first is the militarization and securitization of the broader region. Jihadist are claiming territory by force and terror, yet slowly convincing people that a democratic state cannot provide security; the way Islamic law can. And, the response from France, MINUSMA, US, and other partners prioritize securitization with minimal developmental efforts. Currently, the state and its allies have minimal diplomatic outreach aimed at learning the motivations and interests of belligerent groups. Islam has roots in the sub-region since the 7th century, a resurgence in the 19th and again in this current era. The population in some areas is considering conservative Shari'a rule as an alternative to democratic governance. Currently,

western military forces are propping up the democratic government in Bamako; yet, patrimonialism and corruption have eroded the public trust in democratic institutions; thus; making the Jihadists' point.

Secondly, the war in the north is not the main disrupting force affecting the Centre, rather, the changes to lifestyle and livelihood that threaten communities and drive them to violence are rooted in the societal changes that result from climate change: drought and desertification and macroeconomic forces. The traditional way of life in the Centre has been disrupted by the loss of arable land that supported agriculture and husbandry; while, economic liberalization has increased competition; thus, contributing to the marginalization of the population. Amid a multi-faceted violent conflict drawing in local, regional and international

forces, Mali expects to hold presidential and legislative elections in July 2018 at a time where some parts of the country are questioning the merits of democracy.

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