"If our men won't fight, we will"

A Gendered Analysis of the Armed Conflict in Northern Mali

Helené Lackenbauer, Magdalena Tham Lindell and Gabriella Ingerstad

FOI

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Bild/Cover: (Helené Lackenbauer)

Sammanfattning

Konflikten i norra Mali har utvecklats avsevärt sedan den inleddes 2012. Enligt denna studie är många i Mali ense om att de grundläggande konfliktorsakerna är marginalisering och diskriminering av stora befolkningsgrupper. Konflikten får näring av den stratifierade samhällsstrukturen som skär genom hela samhället och alla grupper. Den skär genom geografiska platser, kön, etniska grupper, generationer och klasser, och skapar hierarkier mellan de som dominerar och de som är dominerade. Marginaliseringen är dock inte bara ett tillstånd av diskriminering och fattigdom, utan det är också en plats där motståndet mot regeringen gror. Detta gäller även bland kvinnorna i norr. Många av dem upplever svårigheter som är kopplade till en begränsad tillgång till samhällsservice, t.ex. sjukvård, elektricitet och vatten, i kombination med att deras mänskliga rättigheter kränks. Marginaliseringen skapar ett motstånd hos dessa kvinnor vilket bl.a. motiverar dem att mobilisera sina män att ta till vapen mot regeringen, som de anser inte bistår befolkningen i norr.

Marginaliseringen och regeringens frånvaro i norra Mali har skapat ett vakuum som islamisterna har utnyttjat under lång tid. De har hjälpt den fattiga befolkningen med hälso- och sjukvård och även skapat sysselsättning. Dessutom har de utnyttjat stratifieringen och avsaknaden av social mobilitet i det maliska samhället och blivit ett alternativ för fattiga män och kvinnor. Islamistiska grupper har också fått stöd från den lokalbefolkning som utsatts för våld och övergrepp, inklusive sexuellt och könsbaserat våld, av andra väpnade fraktioner. Islamisterna har erbjudit sig att återställa säkerheten i utbyte mot lokalbefolkningens stöd.

Den strikta hierarkin mellan män och kvinnor i Mali begränsar kvinnors deltagande i offentligt beslutsfattande. Detta betyder dock inte att kvinnor inte har möjlighet att påverka konfliktdynamiken och våldsanvändningen. Denna studie visar att trots att kvinnor inte kan delta i det offentliga beslutfattandet har de makt att bidra till både väpnad konflikt och fred. Därför är det väsentligt att inkludera dem i fredsförhandlingar för att uppnå en hållbar fred.

Nyckelord: Genus, konfliktanalys, gender, marginalisering, terrorism, väpnad konflikt, fred, islamisering, Afrika, afrikansk säkerhet, Mali, Västafrika, Sahel

Summary

The armed conflict in northern Mali has developed significantly since it broke out in 2012. The overwhelming result of this study is that its respondents are in unanimous agreement that the root causes of the violent conflict in Mali are marginalization and discrimination. The conflict is nurtured by the pervasive stratification between almost all groups in the society. The cleavages run between geographic locations, genders, ethnic groups, generations and classes, and enables hierarchies between those that dominate and those that are dominated. Marginality serves as a place of resistance for many groups, also northern women since many of them have grievances that are linked to their limited access to public services and human rights. For these women, marginality is a site of resistance that motivates them to mobilise men to take up arms against an unwilling government.

The Islamists have exploited the vacuum left behind by the absent government, through their provision of services such as health care and employment. They have also used the stratification between social classes to gain the support of impoverished communities and offer some sort of social mobility to both poor women and men. Islamist groups have also gained support from local populations in situations of pervasive violence, including sexual and gender-based violence, and they have offered to restore security in exchange for local support.

The strict stratification between men and women in Mali confines and constricts women's participation to the private sphere. Being denied a place in the public sphere does not need to signify that women do not have the power to impact the conflict dynamics and the use of violence. This study reveals that women with limited participation in the public sphere can have power to instigate violent conflict, as well as contribute to peace. Thus it is important to include them in peace talks aiming at sustainable peace.

Table of Contents

Acronyms

AFISMA	African-led International Support Mission to Mali
ATT	Amadou Toumani Touré
AQIM	Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb
CMA	La Coordination des mouvements de l'Azawad
CMFPR	Coordination des mouvements et fronts patriotiques de résistance
CPA	Coalition du peuple de l'Azawad
DHS	Demographic and Health Survey
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
FNLA	Front de libération nationale de l'Azawad
FOI	Totalförsvarets forskningsinstitut/ Swedish Defence Research Agency
GATIA	Groupe autodéfense touareg Imghad et alliés
GSPC	Groupe salafiste pour la prédication et le combat/ Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat
HCCT	Haut Conseil des Collectivités du Mali/ High Council of Regional Authorities
HCRL	High Council of Religious Leaders
HCUA	Haut conseil pour l'unité de l'Azawad
IBK	Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta
ICG	International Crisis Group
IDP	Internally displaced person
IMA	Islamic Movement for Azawad
IMRAP	Malian Institute of Research and Action for Peace
IOM	International Organization for Migration
MAA	Mouvement Arabe de l'Azawad
MIA	Mouvement islamique de l'Azawad

MINUSMA	Mission multidimensionnelle intégrée des Nations unies pour la stabilisation au Mali/ United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali
MNLA	Mouvement nationale de libération de l'Azawad
MOJWA	Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa
MUJAO	Mouvement pour le Tawhîd et du Jihad en Afrique de l'Ouest
MUJWA	Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (United Nations Refugee Agency)
UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
WFP	World Food Programme

Map of Ethnic Groups in Mali

Simplified spatial distribution

Arab-berber populations

Subsaharan populations

Kidal

Timbuktu

Gao

Mopti

Kayes

Ségou

Bamako

Koutiala

Sikasso

		Number	as % of total pop.
	Bambara	4 040 000	25
	Senoufo	1 996 000	12
	Songhay	1 591 000	10
	Fula	1 475 000	9
	Malinké	1 294 000	8
	Soninké	1 252 000	8
	Dogon	907 100	6
	Moor	840 000	5
	Touareg	813 000	5
	Bozo	762 900	5
	Bomu	248 000	2
	Khassonké	222 000	1
	Toucouleur	231 000	1
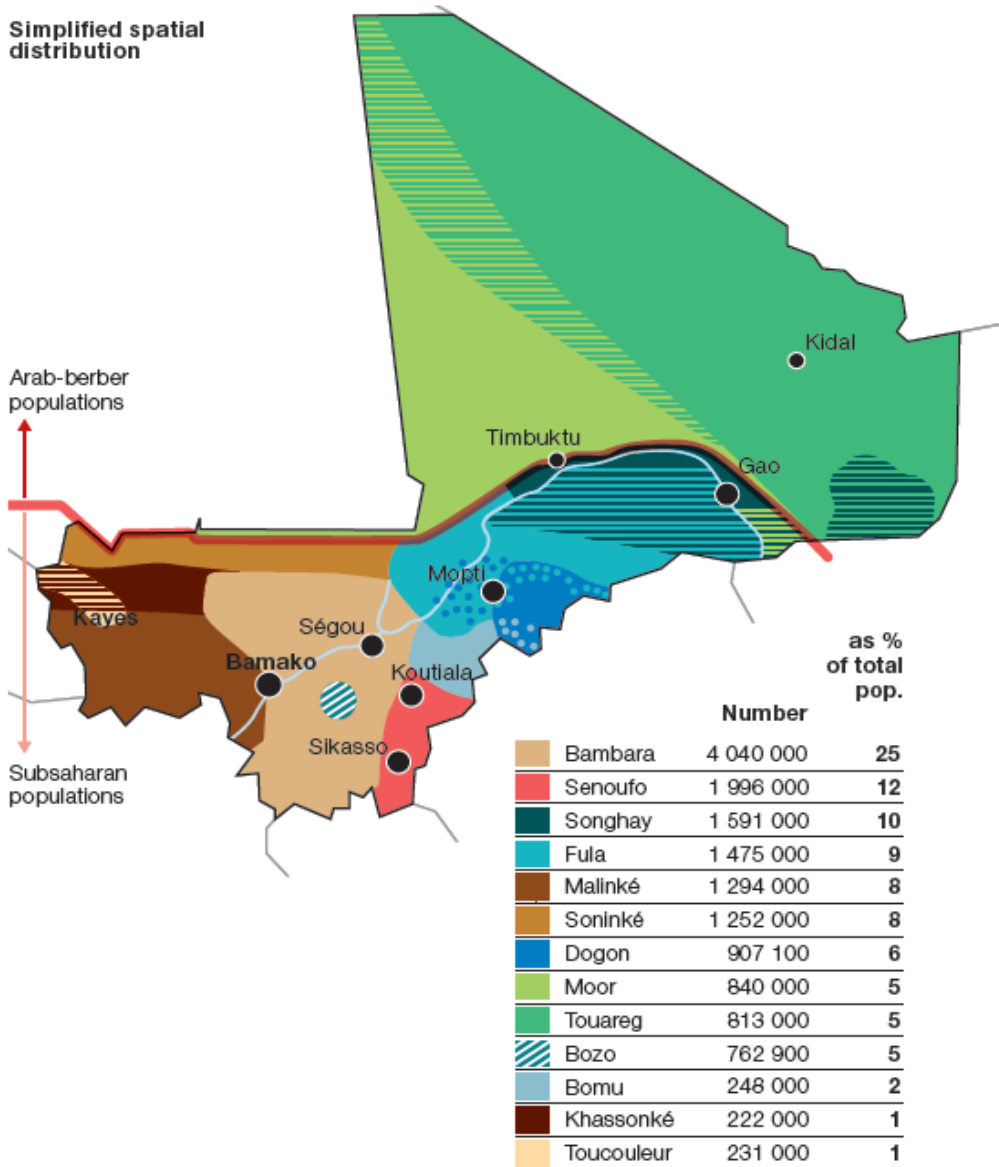
Source: OECD, 2015, *The population of northern Mali*, SWAC no.11 Facts and Maps.

1 Introduction

Since Mali had for twenty years been considered to be a model of democratic progress in sub-Saharan Africa, the extent and nature of the crisis in 2012 took many by surprise, as stability was overturned by three separate, yet interlinked, events. Tuareg separatists launched an armed rebellion in the north, a group of army officers ousted the president in the capital, Bamako, and armed Islamists took control over significant parts of northern Mali. The effects of the armed conflict were devastating and exacerbated an already serious humanitarian situation.

The outbreak of armed conflict provoked violent abuses, including extra-judicial killings, forced disappearances, acts of torture, the recruitment of child soldiers and sexual violence, committed by all parties to the conflict. By mid-2013 more than 500,000 people had been displaced, both within and outside Mali's borders. Although approximately half of those displaced have been able to return, insecurity is still rampant, in particular in the northern parts of the country, and the conflict has damaged the already weak social fabric, and further weakened the foundations of Malian society.[1]

The armed conflict in northern Mali has developed significantly since 2012. The armed Islamists were pushed back by the French operation *Serval,* in 2013; some of the armed groups have signed a peace agreement with the government; and the UN peace operation, MINUSMA, is providing security in at least some parts of the country. However, grievances persist and new actors emerge as the conflict develops into new phases.

At the roots of the ongoing armed conflict are marginalisation, social inequality and cleavages that are built in to the Malian society. This includes gender roles and gender relations, which more often than not have been omitted from conflict analyses, or merely been included as per obligation. Broadening the understanding of gender as comprising women, men, girls and boys, and integrating gender roles and relations as a natural part of a conflict analysis, has proven a rare exercise.

The present study has been commissioned by Sweden's Ministry for Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Defence, with the aim of contributing to a deeper understanding of the armed conflict in Mali. The purpose is to provide guidance to policy considerations regarding international support to Mali, and the surrounding region, by exploring the local conflict dynamics and more specifically by illuminating how gender relations and the status of men and women can impact conflict dynamics and the prospects for sustainable peace.

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[1] Human Rights Watch, 2014; OCHA, 2013; Oxfam, 2013A, p. 9.

1.1 What is a gendered conflict analysis?

Gender is a constructivist concept defined as the socially- and culturally-constructed roles of women and men. The roles vary among different societies, cultures, classes, and ages, and during different periods in history. Gender-specific roles and responsibilities are often conditioned by household structure, access to resources, representation, influence, power and specific impacts of the economy, and other local factors such as environmental conditions. Gender relations are the ways in which a culture or society defines rights, responsibilities, and the identities of men and women in relation to one another. The concept of gender is sometimes attributed to women only. However, it encompasses men, women, boys and girls alike.

Gender roles and relationships influence the major actors in conflict and their capabilities to intensify or resolve conflict. Therefore it is essential to analyse and understand how women, men, girls and boys, i.e. the *whole* population, engage in, contribute to and are affected by armed conflict, and how women and youth, who often are excluded, may contribute to conflict resolution and peacebuilding. A gender-based conflict analysis can compensate for the fact that analytical frameworks often are imbalanced in their exploration of sources and actions relating to conflict versus peace. This can contribute to a skewed understanding of the situation and subsequently ineffective remedies, or even to an exacerbation of the crisis. The inclusion of a gender perspective in conflict analysis can be beneficial not only to ensure better understanding of the conflict dynamics, but also because it highlights the linkages between armed conflict, marginalisation, human rights and development.[2]

Furthermore, gender can contribute to an enhanced understanding of social power dynamics and how they influence and are influenced by violence and armed conflict. Gender can be utilized in two different ways in the context of conflict analysis.

Firstly, a gender analysis of conflict can be used to examine the gender-specific dimensions of armed conflict through: the assessment of how women and men are affected by conflict; during its different phases; the roles of men and women before, during and after conflict; ideological factors concerning gender relations that have an impact on the conflict; and the status of men and women in society.[3]

Secondly, a gender analysis can be used to assist the understanding of the different experiences of and the impact of violence on men and women, respectively, during

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[2] Anderlini, 2006, p. 2.
[3] KOFF, 2012, p. 1.

and after armed conflict; the way gender roles change during conflict; and, the way gender inequalities shape and are shaped by armed conflict and violence.[4]

Gender roles and relations, however, intersect with many other lines of social stratification, or hierarchies, for example those of age, class, ethnicity and geographical location, which also contributes to conflict dynamics and possibilities for peacebuilding. These hierarchies are embedded in forms of traditional authority, including in persons and groups unquestioningly recognised, acknowledged and respected as power holders, and thus legitimised through the behaviour of the subordinated.[5] This is a complicating fact that omits simple explanations, such as women's total subordination and lack of power in all contexts. Women might have both agency and power over men based on for example age, class or ethnicity.

Intersectionality is especially important in a conflict context, since simplified explanations – such as maintaining that women are victims and men perpetrators – can lead to incorrect solutions for conflict management and peacebuilding. Influential actors with agency to impact the conflict can be disregarded based on gender bias, which is often the case with women, and become spoilers of any attempt to resolve the conflict.

1.2 The aim of the study

This study seeks to contribute to an understanding of the armed conflict in northern Mali by exploring its drivers and dynamics on the local level. The analysis has a particular focus on the impact of gender on the ongoing conflict since this perspective is lacking in literature. The study thus aims to contribute to the understanding of how women, men, boys and girls affect and are affected by the conflict. The report's objective is also to identify women's roles, opportunities and resources to participate in the endeavours to create peace and security and to contribute to conflict resolution.

The study is guided by the following research questions:

1   *Which are the main driving forces behind the armed conflict in Mali?*

2   *Which are the gendered societal factors linked to the conflict?*

3   *How have women, men, boys and girls engaged in, and been affected by, the conflict?*

4   *How do gender roles and relations impact the conflict dynamics?*

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[4] KOFF, 2012, p. 1.
[5] Harris, 2012, p. 4.

5   *What are the opportunities for women, and what capabilities do they have, to participate in conflict resolution and peacebuilding in Mali?*

1.3 The scope and limitations of the study

The overall conditions and aspects of the conflict in Mali have been well-studied by academia, research organizations and NGOs. A panoply of strategic conflict analyses have been published in recent years (see the reference list at the end of this report). Nevertheless, while reviewing the existing literature and studies on Mali, it became clear that few – or no – structured gendered conflict analysis has been performed. This study, consequently, focuses on those gender aspects, in combination with aspects of intersectionality, which have an impact on the armed conflict, but which have received less attention, or no attention at all. This analysis addresses features– especially structural ones - of the Malian society that are drivers of the ongoing crisis and relevant for the Swedish government's policy development.

In addition, the conflict in Mali has a long history and the different stages are interlinked. However, in order to be able to meet, within the agreed timeline, the objectives for this study, the analysis centres on the 2012 crisis and the current situation. Similarly, the limitations imposed on the study have made a selection of actors necessary. While the primary local actors in the armed conflict are analysed alongside another main actor, the government of Mali, important external actors, such as Algeria, politically and France, militarily, are not covered by this report.

1.4 Sources and data collection

The main data was gathered through the conduct of semi-structured interviews of a variety of national and international actors and stakeholders in Mali and Mauritania. Three field trips were conducted in May, July and September 2015.

However, in order to enhance the understanding of how local women, men, boys and girls have experienced and impacted the armed conflict, a number of focus groups made up of women and men, respectively, and representing different age groups, ethnic groups, social groups and geographic locations, were organized both in the capital and Gao. Due to the security situation in the northern part of Mali, the researchers could not travel to all locations affected by the conflict, e.g., Kidal and Mopti. This is a detriment shared by other researches and journalists studying the Mali conflict. Nevertheless, data from inaccessible locations in the north were gathered through interviews and focus groups with people displaced from these areas, or residing for other reasons in either Bamako or Gao. In Mauritania, the interviews of refugees were performed in the Mbera refugee camp by a locally hired research assistant. The camp host refugees displaced for different reasons during the 2012 crisis. An additional challenge has been to identify groups

at the local level that have an impact on the conflict, but with limited or no representation in the formal sector. These groups exercise agency through informal means, and it can sometimes be difficult to verify information on their actions in relation to the conflict. However, the study is based on a substantial dataset, which counteracts some of these dilemmas.

In total, 70 interviews, distributed between women and men, were conducted, with representatives from NGOs, MINUSMA, authorities, research, traditional leaders and the Swedish Armed Forces' contingent in Mali. A total of 11 focus groups were organized, with 130 local women and men from different parts of Mali, including Bamako, Mopti, Kidal, Koro, Ménaka, Gao and Timbuktu. 20 male and female refugees from north Mali participated in an oral questionnaire conducted in the Mbera refugee camp in Mauritania.

In addition to the data collected in Mali and Mauritania, the study primarily uses a literature review and secondary sources as means of collecting evidence.

1.5 Research method and design

For the purpose of this study, an analytical framework was developed. It has been informed by the use of various analytical methods, such as Sida's *Manual for Conflict Analysis*, Schmeidl's and Piza-Lopez's *Gender and Conflict Early Warning Framework* and UNIFEM's *Gender and Conflict Analysis*, in order to accommodate the gender dimension and specific aspects identified as crucial for the understanding of the conflict in Mali. These aspects include men's and women's impact on the conflict; the conflict's impact on them and their culturally-prescribed gender roles; and the relevance of gender relations to the conflict.

Gender is essentially about power, but the simple understanding that sees "men versus women," conceals a complex set of relationships and power hierarchies. If analysed, they can contribute to a more realistic view of men's and women's impacts on a conflict's dynamics.[6] It can also bring forth aspects of gender biases of importance to conflict resolution. Therefore the analytical framework includes elements pertaining to intersecting factors - i.e. age, class and ethnicity - and power. For this purpose, the framework has been complemented with a set of power norms, derived from Haugaard's family resemblance model of power. The model encompasses three *"members of the power family"*; that is, episodic, dispositional and systematic forms of power. Applied to a gender intersectionality system, they explain the extent to which subordinated groups, for example women, can acquire a certain element of *"power over,"* without necessarily attaining

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[6] Harris, 2010, p. 4.

"power to" act (empowered), and only implicitly being able to impact the conflict.[7]

In order to further analyse the power dimensions, the framework has borrowed elements from the philosopher Bell Hooks' feminist theory on the relation between the margin and the centre. Hooks argues that marginality is not solely a site of deprivation. According to Hooks, it is also a place of radical possibility, a site of resistance. As such, marginality is not necessarily a place one wishes to give up as part of moving into the centre, since it is linked both to habits and the way one lives. It can be a place one clings to because it nourishes one's capacity to resist. It offers the possibility of radical perspectives from which alternatives, new societies, can be imaged.[8] This theory was chosen for this study's analytical framework since it offers a more complex understanding of the relations between the margin or periphery in northern Mali and the central power in the capital, and the development of the conflict, both during and post-2012.

1.5.1 The analytical framework

The key to incorporating a gender perspective into this study's framework is to begin with a context-specific analysis of gender relations, and then ask how gender relations have shaped the ways in which women and men – respectively - engage in, are affected by and seek to resolve conflict.

While the manifestations of armed conflict, for example violence — especially sexual violence — towards women or men can affect conflict dynamics, the specific gender dimensions of root causes have also been addressed in order to increase the understanding of the drivers of armed conflict.

The analytical framework consists of the following three key elements:

(1) Analysing structures

Background reasons constitute long-term enabling conditions for conflict: such as structural causes or root causes providing fertile ground and a conducive environment for conflict. The interaction of women and men in the armed conflict depends on the social attributes, expectations and social constructions associated with being a man or a woman, respectively, in a society involved in armed conflict. This might determine, for example, that men become combatants, and that women provide indirect, logistic and moral support. This analysis applies a gender lens on the factors and views them from both men's and women's perspectives and asks how the factors impact on the gender relations.

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[7] Haugaard, 2010, p. 425.
[8] Hooks, 1983, p. 341.

The list of factors that can impact on an armed conflict is extensive. The factors chosen for this conflict analysis are based on Schmeidl and Piza-Lopez' research on gender-sensitive and early warning indicators, which can also be applied after a conflict has erupted. According to Scheidl and Piza Lopez, the root or structural causes tend to be embedded in a historical/cultural context of long-standing disputes, dysfunctional state-building and governance, religious conflicts, poverty and economic exclusion, human rights violations, or ecological degradation. These factors can be instrumentalised or exploited by political actors.[9]

The factors are analysed in Chapter 3 and include:

- social and demographic factors
  Which are the gendered demographic and ethnic factors with an impact on the conflict? Which are the structural elements contributing to instability? To what extent do different groups have access to public services such as health care and education? Which cultural and ideological factors contribute to tension in the society?

- political factors

  Are there any groups that are marginalised from political power? Which are they and how do they contribute to the conflict? Which rights do women have and to what extent can they exercise them? Can women participate in public life and political decision-making?

- economic equality factors

  What are the main obstacles for sustainable development? How do they contribute to the conflict?

(2) Analysing actors

The analysis of actors in Chapter 4 is confined to identifying the main local and national parties to the armed conflict in northern Mali. The analysis focuses on aspects that commonly guide conflict and stakeholder analyses,[10] with the addition of the roles and participation of men, women, girls and boys. The main questions answered in relation to each group of actors are:

- interests

  What do the actors want to achieve? Are their goals gender-specific?

- behaviour

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[9] Schmeidl & Piza-Lopez, 2002, p. 10.

[10] For example Sida, 2006, *Manual for Conflict Analysis,* and as applied in Holmberg et al, 2012, p. 13.

What does the actor do to achieve its interests? By which means is the conflict pursued? What are the actor's behaviour and attitudes toward men and women, respectively?

- power

What is the power base and resources of the actor, and what opportunities does it have?

- roles and participation

What are the roles and participation of women, men, boys and girls with regard to the actor?

- relations

What are the relationships and the power relations between actors?

(3) Analysing conflict dynamics

In Chapter 5, the dynamics and proximate causes are analysed. They reflect the changing influences of the different actors, certain events, decisions and triggers leading to an increase in negative violent behaviour. The factors of importance, defined through Schmeidl and Piza-Lopez' research, are the following:

- societal/socio-demographic factors
- political/governance factors
- security factors
- economic factors

Since the factors are analysed through a gender lens, they encompass specific events, decisions and triggers directed towards men and women, respectively. Examples are violations of women's human rights, incidents of sexual and gender-based violence, gender-specific forced displacement, abduction and gender-specific unemployment.

Haugaard's model of power is applied in the final chapter, Chapter 6, to enable the understanding of the engendered power dynamics in the Malian society. As mentioned above, it encompasses three forms of power; episodic, dispositional and systematic power:

- *episodic power* refers to the exercise of power that is linked to agency;
- *dispositional power* signifies the inherent capacities of an agent that he/she may have;

- *systemic power* refers to the ways in which given social systems confer differentials of dispositional power on an agent, which structure possibilities for action.[11]

Bell Hooks' theory of marginalisation is also used as an analytical tool, in the final chapter, to illuminate how marginalisation has become a driving force for certain groups involved in the conflict.

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[11] Haugaard, 2010, p. 425.

2 Conflict Developments since 2012[12]

Mali's transition to democracy, in the beginning of the 1990s, after three decades of military rule, was considered one of the most successful in Africa. However, the events in 2012 unmasked the realities of the situation in Mali, and revealed how the government had failed to address long-standing societal tensions. One of the most important sources of recurring violence in Mali is the struggle for influence, autonomy or independence by rebel groups, notably Tuareg, in the north. Since Mali's independence, in 1960, the north has been increasingly marginalised, creating a deep sense of political exclusion, inequality and marginalisation among its population.

Launching a fourth rebellion, in January 2012, armed Tuareg groups pushed the Malian army south, taking control over two-thirds of the Malian territory. While such armed uprisings have occurred several times since Mali's independence from France, the return of well-trained and -equipped fighters to northern Mali, soldiers who had served Gaddafi in Libya until his fall in 2011, gave the separatist groups an unprecedented opportunity to contest the government.

The inadequate response by the government to the Tuareg uprisings, in combination with insufficient resources within the army, led to a demonstration of discontent by a group of army officers who, by the end of March the same year, took power in a military coup. The Tuareg groups benefited from the chaos that followed the unconstitutional change of power in the capital, and the main separatist group *Mouvement nationale de libération de l'Azawad* (MNLA), a merger of two political Tuareg alliances, proclaimed an independent state - *Azawad* - on 6 April 2012.

The military junta in Bamako was forced to step down under pressure from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and a transitional government was installed during spring 2012. However, ECOWAS' efforts to launch a military operation on its own, in order to push back the armed groups in the north, were never realised. In December 2012, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) authorised an African-led International Support Mission to Mali (AFISMA), which led to the deployment of an operation comprised of ECOWAS troops, with the additional contribution of Chad.

While the conflicts between Tuareg rebels and the state have been a recurring problem since independence in 1960, the presence of armed Islamist groups is fairly recent, adding a new dimension to the conflict dynamics. Soon after the separatist groups had proclaimed an independent state, the north fell into the hands of armed Islamist movements, *Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb* (AQIM),

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[12] This section is based on previous FOI studies: Tham Lindell, 2012; Elowson & Tham Lindell, 2013; Tham Lindell & Mattson, 2014; Ingerstad & Tham Lindell, 2015.

Mouvement pour le Tawhîd et du Jihad en Afrique de l'Ouest (MUJAO) and *Ansar Dine*, which effectively side-lined the secular MNLA, both politically and militarily, and assumed the dominant role in northern Mali.

With the armed Islamists advancing towards the south, France launched *Operation Serval,* in January 2013, following a request from Mali's government. Together with troops from Chad and Niger deployed for AFISMA, the French pushed back the armed Islamists and took control over most of the larger population centres. In July 2013, the 6,100 AFISMA forces, and nearly 400 police, were re-hatted as UN-personnel following the UNSC's decision to establish stabilisation mission MINUSMA,[13] through the adoption of Resolution 2100, in April 2013.

In June 2013, a preliminary agreement on presidential elections and inclusive peace negotiations in Mali was signed in Ouagadougou, between the transitional government and the armed separatist groups from the north. The agreement allowed elections to be held across the entire country, with presidential elections in July and August 2013, and legislative elections in November and December 2013. Considerable delays in implementing the provisions of the Ouagadougou Preliminary Agreement by the newly elected authorities of Mali seriously threatened the greater political stability and security situation, with new clashes between government forces and armed groups in Kidal in May 2014.

A new ceasefire agreement was signed in May 2014, and a first round of negotiations, held in July 2014 in Algiers, led to the adoption of a road map and a declaration of cessation of hostilities between the government and the two main coalitions of armed groups, the Coordination and the Platform. The fifth round of peace talks was finalised in Algiers in the beginning of March 2015, and the proposed peace agreement was signed by the government and the Platform (pro-government armed groups) in May, followed by the signatures of the Coordination (armed rebel groups) on 20 June 2015.

Meanwhile, there has been an increase in insecurity in the north as a result of more frequent clashes between the Coordination and the Platform armed groups, who are probably trying to position themselves in view of the ongoing peace process. Security is also threatened by widespread banditry, particularly targeting vehicles and convoys, and high levels of activity from armed Islamist groups, which continues to conduct operations, including attacks against MINUSMA and the French forces of the anti-terrorist operation *Barkhane*[14].

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[13] Mission multidimensionnelle intégrée des Nations unies pour la stabilisation au Mali/ United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali

[14] Operation *Barkhane* was launched in July 2014, and is the successor of Operation *Serval*. The operation covers Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger and Chad.

3 Analysing Structures

The conflict in Mali is to a large extent rooted in social, economic and cultural inequalities in the Malian society, despite two decades of democratisation and reforms.

Analysing societal relations and power structures in Mali provides a lens through which the underlying structures, roots and background reasons for the ongoing armed conflict can be understood. While each actor has its own interests, drivers, grievances and power base, the very structure of the Malian society, and the distribution of power and resources, serve as the arena on which those actors can flourish, mobilise and gain support.

In this chapter, the different root causes linked to the armed conflict are analysed from a gender perspective. The different dimensions have been chosen based on the analysis of the empirical material collected during field trips in Mali. The majority of the interviewees and the participants in the focus groups mentioned social, cultural and economic discrimination and exclusion as essential factors contributing to instability in Mali. It is important to understand that root causes alone are not necessarily the only factors that instigate armed conflict. It is in combination with other spoilers, events and drivers that they may lead to conflict.

3.1 Social and demographic factors

Population

It is estimated that nearly 48 percent of the population in Mali are younger than fifteen years old.[15] In a gerontocratic society such as the Malian, where age defines an individual's status, place in the hierarchy and power, this is a source of tension between generations. Age takes precedence even over gender hierarchies and gives elder women power over younger men in a household. Age puts younger unmarried women at the very bottom of the power hierarchy in the family and household. Age also defines the agency of younger generations and the possibility of having their voices heard, which is limited in the presence of older people. Nevertheless, the 2012 crisis in the north has inspired younger people in the south to rally against perceived injustices. Several demonstrations have been held in Bamako against government actions.[16]

The vast majority of the population live in rural areas and are dependent on agriculture. However, reoccurring natural disasters and demographic stress have led to large movements of people from the rural areas to urban centres, both

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[15] UNDP, 2014.
[16] Interview, Mali, 2015.

temporarily and permanently. Substantial migration from Mali, to neighbouring countries and beyond, occurred following serve droughts in 1973 and 1984. Almost 40 percent of the population in the most affected areas left. 70 percent of those left Mali. The same phenomenon occurred during the 2011 drought. It is mainly men who migrate, for economic and job reasons. Their remittances help to support the families left behind. Female migration is mainly related to family reunification within Mali. The majority of the migrants are men. It was some of these migrants groups, or their children, who returned radicalised and armed from the Maghreb—especially Libya, after Gaddafi was ousted from power—and triggered the 2012 crisis.[17]

Ethnicity

The population of Mali is ethnically diverse. Competition among groups and individuals in northern Mali has been a main driver of the armed conflicts, with violence being a means of economic, political and social advancement.[18]

The majority of Mali's inhabitants consist of Sub-Saharan ethnic groups that inhabit the south, while Tuareg and Arab (or Moor) people, living in the three northern regions of Gao, Kidal and Timbuktu, make up less than 10 percent of Mali's 16 million mainly Muslim population.[19] Neither the Tuareg, nor other ethnic groups in the north can be considered as one single polity, rather there are fractions, divisions and competition between, and within, ethnic groups. While the north-south divide is important in understanding cleavages in Mali, the ethnic groups in the north, also inhabited by Songhay and Fulani people, do not share the same culture, history, languages or traditions. Furthermore, divisions within those ethnic groups, often based on class, create internal conflicts and tensions.[20]

Despite the diversity of Malian society, inter-ethnic and inter-religious tolerance has been the norm. This is, in part, attributed to the presence of syncretic forms of Islam that blend Islam, including Sufi variations, with traditional practices and beliefs. Until the involvement of radical Islamist groups in the Tuareg rebellion in the north, political and economic marginalisation, not religious beliefs and ethnicity, were the foci of the conflict. Today, however, there are new ethnic and religious dimensions to the crisis.[21]

One of the main sources of the recurrent violence in northern Mali is the struggle for independence or autonomy by rebel groups, mainly comprising Tuareg with support from some Arab groups, in the north. Since independence in 1960 the north has been increasingly marginalised, creating a deep sense of political exclusion,

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[17] IOM, 2013, p. 7.
[18] Pezard & Shurkin, 2015, p. 21.
[19] See map of ethnic groups in Mali in this report; OECD, 2014, pp.187-191; Thurston & Lebovich, p. 9; CIA World Factbook.
[20] Chauzal & van Damme, 2015, pp. 34-41; Sidibe, 2012, p. 75.
[21] Stewart, 2013, p. 27.

inequality and marginalisation among its population. While all four rebellions, in 1963, 1991, 2006 and 2012, have started in Kidal, with the majority of its population being Tuareg, this marginalisation of the north has affected all of the north and not just one ethnic group. Among these groups are the Arabs; while numerically inferior in northern Mali, they have been deeply marginalised by the Malian central power. Before the 2012 crisis, no Arab succeeded in being elected to the National Assembly, nor the High Council of Regional Authorities (HCCT). On the contrary, 12 Tuareg representatives (out of 147) and numerous Tuareg territorial councillors, including renowned Iyad ag Ghali, have represented northern interests in Bamako.[22]

Although the armed conflict that broke out in 2012 has some new dynamics, as is demonstrated below, the Tuareg rebellion and proclamation of an independent state, Azawad, in April 2012, should be understood as a continuum of 50 years of unresolved conflict. Its roots are in the exclusion of communities and parts of communities, when it comes to access to political power, economic resources and public services. A complicating factor is that the central power is dominated by the ethnic group Bambara, and sees the construction of the national identity as being in opposition to the languages and cultures of northern Malians.[23] There is a deep resentment of the central government among the populations of the north. The government's policy is interpreted as a conscious attempt to deprive the north of possibilities for development.

The disunity between northern populations has been deepened by the resentment of Fulani (14 percent of the northern population) and Songhay (7 percent) against the Tuareg and the Arabs. However, unlike Tuareg communities, the former groups are far less divided and more integrated with the central state. The two communities have played a major political role in Mali's history and have never accepted that Tuareg grievances overshadowed their own needs. Their positions have been well-understood by Bamako, which regularly used Tuareg divisions to weaken the rebel movements.[24]

The focus groups assembled for this study revealed that both men and women are organized along ethnic lines in their support of the different parties to the conflict. Women, as well as men, were motivated by the grievances perceived by their ethnic group and related to their societal gender role. The focus groups also reflected the tension between different ethnic groups of the north, with strong tension between Songhay and Tuareg women.[25]

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[22] Gaasholt, 2015A, p. 204; Tham Lindell & Mattson, pp. 15-16.
[23] Lecoq, 2002, p. 96.
[24] Clingendael, 2015, p. 39.
[25] Focus groups, Mali, 2015.

Stratification and exclusion

Each of the ethnic groups are organised in strict hierarchies and heavily stratified into categories, in which certain ones, such as women, former slaves, travellers[26] and landless, are endowed with a very low social status and are objects of marginalisation.[27] Understanding the stratification within ethnic groups and tribes remains fundamental to understanding the conflict.

The stratification, though, is an intersecting factor that creates complex power dynamics, especially in combination with gender and age, and functions as a driver of the conflict. The intersecting factors prevent simple explanations, since the intersection is multi-layered and includes gender, ethnicity, geographic location, age and class. An additional level of differentiation and stratification is that between skin colours. In Mali a differentiation between red, white and black population groups is made. According to interviewees, regardless of their ethnicity, the light and "red"-skinned groups are made up of "higher-class" Tuareg and Arab populations, while the blacks encompass Songhay, Fulani, Bambara and the black Tuareg from the slave class.

The interviews revealed a compound relationship between light-skinned and black populations, where the so-called light- and red-skinned Tuareg and Arabs are held accountable for the 2012 crisis, at the same time as they reject the supremacy of the black Bambara population that they blame for having marginalised the north. There is also animosity, based on skin colour, within the Tuareg group, where the low classes with dark skin are being controlled and even kept in bondage by those classes with lighter skin.[28]

The structure of communities with "higher" and "lower" classes, including the legacy of slavery, with masters and slaves, has created inequalities and the exclusion of parts of communities from economic and political power. This fuels armed conflict.

In addition, tensions between different groups in society, such as Tuareg and Songhay, Fulani and Dogon, sedentary and pastoralists, people from the north and people from the south, white (light-skinned Tuareg, or Arabs) and black, which are based on exclusion and inequalities, fuel armed conflicts in Mali.[29]

Health

Under Malian law women have the right to plan the number of children they wish to give birth to, although abortion is illegal (with the exception of instances of saving a woman's life, rape or incest). In reality, the 2006 Demographic and Health

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[26] The term *flottants* is used in French.
[27] El-Bushra & Sahl, 2005, p. 69.
[28] Interviews, Mbera refugee camp, Mauritania, 2015; interviews, Mali, 2015.
[29] Interviews, Mali, 2015.

Survey (DHS) concluded that 72 percent of the women reported that it is their husbands who make decisions concerning their health. Reproductive health services are supposed to be provided through the primary health care system. However, DHS also reports that 31 percent of women between the ages of 15 and 49 have unmet family planning needs, and the fertility rate for 15- to 19-year-olds is that, out of 1000 pregnant women, 180 are girls. The distribution of health care facilities across the country and women's access to them have an impact on reproductive health and teenage pregnancy.[30]

Mali has signed almost all international conventions on the promotion of better access to quality health care. In spite of the country's low ranking in the UN Human Development Index, some progress has been made with regard to health care. This is reflected in the increased coverage of vaccinations, free caesarian-section operations, and mandatory health insurance. Still, a main impediment to improved health care is the unequal distribution of health facilities across the country. Huge disparities persist between regions, with regard to infrastructure, equipment and health personnel.

According to Mali's 2011 health map, the lowest rates of public health care facilities exist in the northern regions. This underlines the marginalization that the female interviewees from the north expressed during this study. It also reflects the degree of access that women of the north have to reproductive and sexual health care. In the whole of Mali, for every 100 000 live births, 540 women die from pregnancy-related causes and infant mortality is 80 out of 1000 infants born.[31] Given the unequal access to health care across Mali, it is fair to assume that both maternal and infant mortality is higher among women in the north. In addition, the Mali health map was produced before the 2012 crisis and, given the current security situation in the north, there are probably even fewer operational health facilities today.

Education

There has been significant progress in educational enrolment during the last decade. Problems still remain, especially with regard to access to education, the quality of teaching and the mismatch between a growing student population and funding. Poverty and lack of accessible schools are two of the main reasons for low school attendance. One in five children receive no basic education. The expected years of schooling for men are 9.6 years and 7.6 for women. Only 29 percent of the population between 15 and 24 years are literate; 36 percent are boys and 22 percent girls. Major impediments to quality education are low salaries and lack of personnel. Lack of access to education in many regions is also detrimental. It is quite common that children migrate to other parts of Mali to attend school. In

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[30] OECD Development Centre.
[31] Focus groups, Mali, 2015; IMRAP, 2015, p. 104; UNDP, 2014.

the north, there is no higher education. In order to attend university, the students have to move to Bamako.[32]

In the north, the 2012 crisis and current security problems have resulted in nearly 800 000 children missing school. In Kidal and Mopti, the school attendance is lower than in other parts of the region. Especially girls are absent. Their attendance is much lower than boys', especially in secondary school. Strong norms and values influence the attendance and education of girls. Domestic work, forced marriages and teenage pregnancy interrupt their education. In addition, the rural poor give priority to their sons, while the daughters remain at home. There is a clear link between education and the social, economic and political situation of girls and women.[33]

Religion

Mali is a secularized state with a religious population. The majority are Muslims. Islamic roots in Mali reach back to the ninth century. The majority of Malians follow tolerant Islamic traditions that reflect mystical beliefs and ancestor worship. It has only been in the last decades that Salafist thought established itself among sections of Malian society. Salafist organizations that run religious schools and that receive financial support from Kuwait, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia have been a key element in the spread of Salafism in Mali. Salafism, a puritanical movement that does not necessarily advocate violence nor does it frown on it, sees contemporary Islam as having strayed from its origins.[34]

In northern Mali, violent Salafism is present mainly among radicalized Arab and Tuareg communities. Their sworn enemies include what jihadists perceive as a deeply corrupted and Westernized Malian state and army, as well as French "crusaders" and their "mercenaries" (international peacekeeping troops).[35] Nevertheless, it is crucial to understand, rather than falling back on a simplified narrative of global Islamic terrorism, that violent Islamist groups emerge in and are shaped by the domestic contexts. The activities of armed Islamist groups have increased in a tradition of state neglect, lack of state territorial control, poverty and underdevelopment, and ethnic tensions.

The violent Salafist political program in Mali is advocating stratification between men and women. It propagates a societal order where the man is the head of the family and superior to women. Women are confined to the private space and they have no role in the public. Their freedom of movement is restricted and can only be allowed if they are veiled and under the supervision of a male relative.[36]

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[32] Davis, 2014, p. 23; OECD Development Center; interviews, Mali, 2015.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Soares, 2013.
[35] Ibid.
[36] Soares, 2013.

However, men also have strict obligations with regard to proper behaviour and clothing, which is considered a reflection of their righteousness and piety, and determines their social capital. During the occupation of the north, men were forced to wear short trousers and were not allowed to indulge in traditional amusements, such as music and song. The Salafist groups reinforce their rules and maintain order through the moral police.[37]

Although a majority of the population of the north rejected the Salafist interpretation of Islam, many interviewees, both in the north and the south, expressed concern regarding religious radicalization across Mali. This is reflected in the growing number of mosques with radical teaching, and the increased power of conservative religious leaders in politics.[38]

The leadership of the High Council of Religious Leaders (HCRL) also expresses loyalties with Salafist teaching. The HCRL has been an impediment to the empowerment of women and their liberties in the society. When the reform of the Family Code was endorsed by the National Assembly, angry crowds under the leadership of the HCRL took to the streets and, in the name of Islam, vowed not to "rest until the Code was trashed out," and forbade the President to sign the law. It was argued that it was the international donor community that had pressured the government to draft a family legislation that defied Malian tradition. They wanted to maintain the legislation that upheld that the man is the head of the household; that his wife must comply with the choice of residence; and obey their husband and his tutorship. Interviewees pointed out that the gains the conservative religious leadership won during the demonstration against the Family Code have empowered them to be a force with considerable clout in the political arena.[39]

3.2 Political factors

There are two levels of exclusion that must be understood in order to fully understand the armed conflict in Mali:

- excluded communities; and
- parts of communities that are excluded.[40]

Large segments of the population are excluded from political and economic power. This inequality is both horizontal and vertical. Exclusion is one of the main causes of the armed conflict in Mali. The fragmentation and division of society can be detected on several levels. Vertically, there is a cleavage between the elite and the

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[37] Interviews, Mali, 2015.
[38] Ibid.
[39] Diallo, 2009, p. 121.
[40] Interviews, Mali, 2015; Diallo, 2009, p. 121.

rest of the population, which to a large extent also translates into a gap between the urban and the rural population.[41]

Women and youth are an important demographic factor; women make up 50 percent of the population, and 65 percent of Malians are under 25 years old.[42] Still, both groups have limited political representation and access to power, since older men dominate the political arena.

Women's rights and participation

Women are almost totally absent from the public arena. Mali has adopted legislation promoting gender equality, although the concept has met fierce resistance. The national gender policy has never been properly institutionalised. Women's civil liberties are restricted by legislation, such as the previously mentioned 2011 Family Code. Nevertheless, women's participation has increased from the 1990s and onwards, but has been dropping lately, especially after the 2012 crisis. Of 1100 candidates in the legislative election in 2013, only 148 were women, compared to 248 in the previous election. Women hold 10.2 percent of the parliamentary seats and make up 7.6 percent of the councillors at the commune level.[43]

No legal quota exists regarding the minimum proportion of women in the national assembly and other political bodies. This is a source of discontent among many of the women's civil society organisations. In interviews and focus groups women describe that their possibility to influence the society is mainly through their husbands. It is described as a process where men consult their wives at home. This is particularly true at the local level, where women are absent from the decision-making bodies. Only older women are consulted concerning communal matters; however, they are not allowed to be present when a decision is made.[44]

In spite of the fact that women have limited voice in the public space, they organize themselves in associations at the local level. These organisations serve all kinds of different purposes, from providing economic assistance to disfranchised groups, to political protest. They have close-knit networks in support of their causes. Women are also organised in NGOs, although this is mainly in the cities and the participants belong to the urban elite. There are few NGOs among disfranchised women in the north.[45]

Women's political participation is viewed through the cultural gender concept. Politics is not considered a women's domain. It is often perceived as a dirty engagement, not suitable for women, since they risk being corrupted by the system.

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[41] Tobie, 2014.
[42] Sow & Ag Erless, 2015, p. 5.
[43] Davis, 2014, p. 14; OECD Development Centre.
[44] OECD Development Centre; Interviews, Mali, 2015.
[45] Hayden, 2008, p.37; Interviews, Mali, 2015.

Women risk losing their social capital if they venture into politics in the public space. Women's place is the home, where the man is the chief and outside the home men and women are not equal. It is believed that men and women have complimentary roles in the society; women in the private sphere, taking care of the house and family, and men, as breadwinner and protector of the family.[46]

Nevertheless, Mali is a country of contradictions. In spite of the fact that women are expected to refrain from politics in the public space, older women play an important role as mobilisers for political parties and candidates. Often an older woman will gather young people from the neighbourhood to mobilize them for political activity. This is done based on gerontocratic principles, rather than gender.[47]

Youth

Men, in particular youth, seem to have joined armed groups for economic reasons and in order to increase the opportunities for social mobility. While young men who belonged to parts of communities that had been excluded from political and economic power decided to join armed groups to increase their social status, women who joined or supported armed groups tended to stick to their family structures. Another factor fuelling the armed conflict, and providing youth who are ready to fight, is the intra-generational conflicts: the legitimacy of traditional leaders in the eyes of the youth is extremely low; they often perceive those leaders as accomplices in the corrupt past behaviour of the state. Youth in the south have been inspired by the 2012 crisis to organise themselves in protests against the corrupt state. Both young men and women participate in these rallies.[48]

The Bellahs

Descent-based slavery still exist in Mali, especially in the north. People descended from slaves remain as 'property' of their 'masters', either living with them and serving them directly or living separately but remaining under their control. This group is called *the Bellahs* and make up a distinct layer of the society, and belong to groups excluded from rights, power, influence, services and resources. Although slavery was abolished in the beginning of the 20th century, the process whereby former slaves detached themselves from their masters has been a slow and gradual one.[49] Some families have been living independently for generations, while others are still held in bondage. The Bellah question is very much alive in the everyday life of Malians who greet each other with the words: *I am your Bellah!* Disenfranchised Bellah women and girls who work as domestic servants are at the very bottom of the social ladder, without rights, influence, or political power, over

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[46] Hayden, 2008, p. 26; Interview, Mali, 2015.
[47] Interview, Mali, 2015.
[48] IOM, 2013, p. 3; Interviews, Mali, 2015.
[49] El-bushra & Sahl, 2005, p. 69.

their own lives. Interviews revealed that although both Bellah men and women suffer from discrimination, regardless of their economic status, the female servants are often victims of sexual and gender-based violence, without means of protection.[50]

The Bellahs' situation is closely linked to the conflict, since the almost total lack of social mobility in Mali has made both men and women a target of Islamist groups. Through marriage with members of the Islamists, and by joining the Islamist cause, both impoverished women and men can improve their social status and economic situation, and seemingly detach themselves from the stigmas attached to their class.

3.3 Economic equality factors

The conflict in Mali take place against a canvas of poverty and marginalisation. There is a strong need to combat the endemic poverty across the country. Mali has the lowest employment rate of ECOWAS, 47 percent (2006-2008). The informal sector make up almost 85 percent of the jobs in the country. Women are more often found in the informal sector, where the jobs are poorly paid. A major source of income for both the state of Mali and numerous families is the remittances from the migrant workers and diaspora to other countries. The remittances, however, do not come without a price paid by each family. Women are often the ones left behind to make up for the loss of men to migration, and to their shortcomings in securing employment and earnings that can be remitted. Women become invaluable for the survival of the families in these situations.[51]

The northern part of Mali is over-dependent on pastoralism, smuggling, and development aid. Political inclusion cannot alone cure the marginalization experienced by the populations in the Sahel region. There is a serious need for economic development. Challenges such as drought, state neglect, abduction for ransom and national economic decline are attributed to the failure of the state to deliver economic long-term development.[52]

Food security

According to the World Food Program (WFP), Mali is one of the least developed and most food insecure countries in the world. It is currently ranked 182 on the UN Human Development Index—the sixth lowest in the world.[53] In the present study's focus groups, female participants on several occasions highlighted the

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[50] Interviews, Mali, 2015.
[51] African Development Bank, 2011, p. 15; Davis, 2014, p. 25; Hayden, 2008, p. 29.
[52] Gaasholt, 2015B, p. 2.
[53] World Food Programme.

difficulties they experience in feeding their families.[54] According to a WFP study conducted in March 2014, more than 1.5 million people were experiencing food insecurity at that time. This number increases during the so-called lean season, meaning that 40 percent of people in northern Mali will face severe poverty and have problems to feed themselves and their families.

The lack of security in the north also impedes the ability of humanitarian agencies and the government to provide assistance and services. Food security is a main obstacle in Mali, even during the best of times. Vulnerable families are often at the mercy of different natural disasters, such as recurrent drought, flood and locusts. Mali has experienced a series of shocks, which include pastoral crises, drought and the armed conflicts that contribute to limited access to resources and assistance. As noted above, food insecurity is one of the push factors for migration.[55]

Employment

In Mali, most young people are struggling to find a job. One way to solve this has been to migrate, another one has been provided by the armed groups and trafficking networks. The fact that demographic stress has been a driver of conflict in Mali exemplifies how women's conditions have a direct link to the ongoing armed conflict. Mali has one of the highest fertility rates in the world[56] and the demographic challenge of rapid population growth and a high proportion of unemployed youth, all in the context of poverty, provide an opportunity for armed groups to recruit. Poor women give birth to poor children, who grow up to be disfranchised and marginalised people in search of opportunities to improve their living conditions. A fact that Islamist groups such as AQIM has preyed on.

The lack of employment and opportunities for young men are also closely linked to the expectations that follow with men's role in the society. A man is expected to provide livelihood and protection to his family. A man's not being able to provide for his parents is associated with great shame and humiliation. This pushes young men to seek economic opportunities where they are available. In the trans-Saharan region, contraband and Islamist groups are profitable opportunities in an environment where migration is one of the few other options. Islamist groups also appear to provide an opportunity for social mobility, which seems attainable in spite of Malian society, where rigid power hierarchies are reinforced through everyday activities.[57]

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[54] Focus groups, Mali, 2015.
[55] World Food Programme; IOM, 2013, p. 7.
[56] World Bank, *Fertility rate, total (births per woman)*.
[57] Interviews, Mali, 2015.

4 Analysing Actors

The armed conflicts in northern Mali can be divided, for analytical reasons, into three main categories: a political conflict over state power, an ideological conflict over the nature of society, and local intra- and inter-group armed conflicts. The primary parties to the political conflict over state power, and the actors currently involved in the formal peace process that resulted in a peace agreement in June 2015, are the government of Mali, armed rebel groups now joined in the *Coordination coalition of armed groups*, and pro-government militias that constitute the *Platform coalition of armed groups*. The main actors in the second type of armed conflict, the conflict over the nature of society, are the government of Mali and several armed Islamist groups, foremost *Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb* (AQIM), *Ansar Dine* and the *Mouvement pour le Tawhîd et du Jihad en Afrique de l'Ouest* (MUJAO). Finally, the main parties in the local armed conflicts in northern Mali are individual leaders and group constellations of often ethnically-based militias.

However, these different types of conflicts intertwine and feed into one another. Also, the actors involved, and their tactics, are highly influenced by family ties, economic considerations and not least the fight for daily survival, although the struggles are framed in political or religious rhetoric. The field of actors in the armed conflict in Mali is admittedly complex and changing. Nevertheless, there are some main types of armed groupings and main interests driving the armed conflict, which this chapter aims to depict. In the following section, the critical actors in the violent conflict in northern Mali are analysed, by focusing on their interests, behaviour, power, roles and participation, as described in Section 1.5.1. To conclude the chapter, the relations between the actors are examined.

4.1 The Government of Mali

Interests

Mali is a recent state formation, from 1960; the construction of a national identity has been the project of every government since. Another important interest of the Malian government is the integrity of the Malian territory and the secular character of the state. These objectives are also what puts the government into political and ideological conflicts with the actors that are in the focus of this report: the rebels in the north who refuse the kind of national identity and unity that the government promotes, and the armed Islamists, who challenge the secularity of the state.[58]

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[58] Pezard & Shurkin, 2015, p. 35.

Behaviour

To achieve their interests in nation-building, the different governments have used aggressive tactics that are the apparent drivers of the conflicts with the armed separatist movements. Numerous negotiations aside, a main response to the armed uprisings has been a strong military approach, putting Kidal under military leadership and martial law from 1963 to 1990. Following the first armed uprising in the 1960s, civilians were forced into labour camps, executed, as collective punishment of the rebels' families and communities, their cattle killed and wells poisoned – abuses that fuelled the 1990 rebellion, which in turn led to similar cruelties, involving the execution and forced displacement of civilians. Thus, violent manifestations of conflict have led to harsh countermeasures, which in turn have created new grievances and lines of conflict that in turn contribute to new outbreaks of violence.[59]

The nationalist culture imposed by President Keïta's regime in the 1960s limited the Tuareg's right to the use of their language, Tamasheq. The ensuing Traoré regime limited the access of Tuareg to public offices. Furthermore, political activity was banned during Traoré's twenty years of dictatorship. The exclusion and discrimination of minorities that did not fit into the nation-state modelled on Bambara identity and the use of Bambara language, caused further resentment and opposition to the Malian state. Critics have described it as the government's imposing a certain Malian identity from above, instead of building a truly inclusive citizenship from below.[60]

Another issue of confrontation between the government and the Tuareg elites was the Keïta regime's goal of eliminating slavery and actively seeking political support among the subservient Tuareg cast, the Bellah. Among the Tuareg nobles, this was perceived as an attempt by the government to consciously eradicate the culture and livelihood of the Tuareg. The same went for the government's efforts to force nomads to farm or work with construction, and the promotion of inter-ethnic marriage in the north.[61]

Another tactic has been to favour community divisions in attempting to undermine powerful groups in the north by supporting their opponents. The Malian state has for example used ethnically-based militias in the north as proxies to fight against the Tuareg separatists. Moreover, the state has tried to co-opt certain northern elites. During the 1990s, the government made use of the same elites among the Tuareg Kel Adagh to control the north as the French had. However, in 2008, the then president, Amadou Toumani Touré, often called by his initials, ATT, shifted

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[59] Chauzal & van Damme, 2015, pp. 21-22, 29; Gaasholt, 2015A, p. 199; Tham Lindell & Mattsson, 2014, pp. 16-17.

[60] Bleck, Dembele & Guindo, 2014, pp. 15-16; Chauzal & van Damme, 2015, p. 17; Gaasholt, 2015A, p. 199; Stewart, 2013, p. 23; interviews, Dakar & Bamako, 2013.

[61] Harmon, 2014, p. 23.

to supporting Tuareg commoners, specifically the Imghad, which led to armed confrontation within the Tuareg community. The government's strategy of divide and rule, pitting groups against each other by interfering with inter- and intra-group power relations, by favouring some groups or individuals over others, has worsened community relations in the north and has, seen from the south, created an image of a "tribal war."[62]

Another contributing factor to the unresolved political conflict is the insufficient implementation of several peace agreements, including decentralization initiatives. The agreements have been concluded to end armed rebellions, but have not succeeded in improving the population's living conditions. The responsibility for mismanagement and corrupt practices does not rest solely with the Bamako government, but also with local elites, who have taken the opportunity to enrich themselves. In a situation of extreme poverty and difficult living conditions in the desert areas populated by the Tuareg, the state's inability to provide any kind of protection or public service to the population has also become a cause of conflict.[63]

An additional characteristic of the governments' behaviour in the three northern regions was the withdrawal of the state, leaving vast areas without state presence. This also contributes to the population's weak identification with a Malian nationality. The void thus created was filled by the exercise of control over territories and communities by groups involved in illicit activities. Moreover, the state accepted the presence of AQIM, who were seeking refuge from Algerian authorities subsequent to the Algerian civil war, and of NGOs who were promoting religious beliefs foreign to the local communities. This neglect of the north has had important consequences for the latest cycle of conflict; it has empowered groups that in the end constituted a threat not only to the peoples in the north, but to the survival of the Malian state and, as expressed by the UN Security Council, even a threat to global peace and security.[64]

Power

Mali returned to constitutional order in 2013, when presidential and legislative elections were held. The current president, Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta (IBK), won the second round of the presidential elections, with over 77 percent of the votes. That voter turnout was 45.8 percent was regarded as a success, in comparison to previous elections in Mali.[65] Malian authorities, also in the northern provinces, are predominantly represented by the ethnic group, Bambara, from southern Mali.[66]

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[62] Chauzal & van Damme, 2015, p. 14; Harmon, 2014, p. 107; Pezard & Shurkin, 2015, pp. 25-26; Tham Lindell & Mattsson, 2014, p. 19.
[63] Tham Lindell & Mattsson, 2014, p. 16.
[64] Chauzal & van Damme, 2015, pp. 14-15, 20.
[65] Harmon, 2014, p. 226.
[66] Gaasholt, 2015A, p. 199.

Even though the Malian state is secular, religious leaders and institutions have an important say in the development of policies and laws and regulations. Politicians are sensitive to criticism by religious leaders, as previously described in Section 3.1.[67]

Roles and participation

Both in parliament and in government, women barely constitute 10 percent of the members. Out of Mali's 703 *communes*, six are led by women. In the Algiers peace negotiations of 2014-2015, only three women were included in the government delegation of over 40 men. Also, these women were not granted any higher positions and did not in practice influence the process.[68]

4.2 The Coordination

In June 2013, the government of Mali and the Tuareg-dominated rebel groups, MNLA and HCUA, signed the Ouagadougou ceasefire agreement. This was the point of departure for the peace process, following the rebellion in northern Mali against the state, in January 2012. Since then, the field of armed actors has evolved and at present the MNLA and the HCUA form part of a broader coalition. This *Coordination coalition of armed groups* (referred to as the Coordination, or CMA[69]) is one of the main parties in the national peace process in Mali, and an important actor in the political process.

The history of conflict between Tuareg-led rebel groups and the government of Mali is filled with coalitions and umbrella organizations uniting different groups, families and leaders, then splitting only to reunite in new constellations. The current coalition will therefore most likely change over time as different factions either accept or refuse aspects of the peace process. However, the Coordination is the current representation of the most important Tuareg and Arab rebel groups that oppose government control of northern Mali. In mid-2015, it consisted of the following groups:[70]

- *Mouvement national pour la liberation de l'Azawad (MNLA);*

- *Haut Conseil pour l'unité de l'Azawad (HCUA);*

- *Mouvement arabe de l'Azawad (MAA) (often referred to as MAA-Sidati or MAA-Azawad);*

- *Coordination des mouvements et fronts patriotiques de résistance II (CMFPR-II);*

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[67] Interviews, Mali, 2015.
[68] UNWOMEN, 2015; interview, Mali, 2015.
[69] La Coordination des mouvements de l'Azawad
[70] UN Security Council, 2015.

- *a faction of the Coalition du peuple de l'Azawad (CPA);*
- *another faction of CPA;*
- *another faction of CMFPR-II.*

Interests

These actors, and their predecessors, have since Malian independence been in conflict with the government over the relationship between the state and the population in the north. However, their exact goals, argumentation and the population included, have varied over time. The earlier rebellions focused, according to Bøås and Gaasholt, on *breaking into* the Malian state, and on ending the perceived exclusion and marginalization of the north, through improved access to the state. Nevertheless, the claim for *breaking away* from the state was not the main aim of revolts, until the 2012 rebellion broke out, and the MNLA, on 6 April 2012, declared the independence of Azawad. In fact, the political promotion of a Tuareg identity and a specific Tuareg territory, as opposed to claims concerning all of the north, was foremost observed in the uprising of 2006-2009. The liberation from Malian rule and an independent state was launched in 2012, as the solution to the unequal distribution of resources within the Malian state.[71]

At the core of Tuareg opposition to the state is a deep sense of political exclusion, inequality and marginalisation. Tuareg groups perceive themselves as being excluded from representation in government and perceive the central government as indifferent to the living conditions and suffering of the Tuareg people. Also, the question of identity is essential to understanding the colliding interests of the rebels and the government, since they, as mentioned above, promote rivalling nationalisms. When Mali became independent, some Tuareg desired to either join an entity of Saharan regions,[72] or even to remain attached to France. Due to deep-rooted notions of race, and historical relationships between ethnic groups and castes, the Tuareg elites did not wish to belong to a Malian state led by black Africans, nor to a state of equal citizens.[73]

The main Arab party in the Coordination, the MAA, was formed with the interest of safeguarding Arab communities when the Malian state ceased to exist in the north, and first the MNLA, and then the armed Islamists, took over control. At present, an important interest of the MAA is to protect the interests of the Arab communities and ensure them a voice in the peace process otherwise dominated by the Tuareg. The MAA is dominated by Berabiche Arabs, who are highly influential in an area stretching from the Mauritanian border to the northern Kidal

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[71] Bøås, 2015, p. 87; Gaasholt, 2015A, pp. 198-199, 202, 204, 210-211.
[72] Organisation commune des régions sahariennes
[73] Harmon, 2014, pp. 22, 25; Tham Lindell & Mattsson, 2014, p. 16.

region, including the trade hub of Timbuktu, and crucial for the securing of convoys and thus for the criminal economy.[74]

However, the rebellions are also manifestations of internal power struggles and individual ambitions to dominate movements or promote the interests of a certain clan. For instance, the HCUA represents the interests of the family of the Kel Adagh amenokal (traditional chief), whereas the 2012 revolt was preceded by tensions between Ifoghas[75] and Imghad, as well as disputes over leadership among different clans within the Ifoghas. Bøås suggests that the internal strife at the time in fact concerned who was to control the resources distributed from the state to the north, by virtue of being the government's principal counterpart.[76] Pezard and Shurkin summarise the logic as follows:

> "Taking up arms is a means of economic, political, and social advancement. In northern Mali as elsewhere, 'all politics is local'."[77]

Moreover, politics blend with crime; the violent clashes in northern Mali during 2015 more concern control by various groups over smuggling routes and logistically important hubs, than for example defending minority rights or protecting the population. Especially the MAA is often purported to have connections to smuggling networks.[78] Bøås describes the blurring of interests and activities:

> ". . . to a certain degree it is possible that it is the very ability to combine politics and crime, the legal and the illicit and the formal and the informal that characterises a successful 'Big Man' in this area."[79]

Behaviour

The Tuareg and Arab pro-Azawad movements have made use of a strong desire among the population for a change in society. The independent state of Azawad was presented, during the 2012 rebellion, as the answer to the wish for dramatically altered living conditions. However, as shown by Gaasholt, secession is a recent demand in Malian conflict history. Instead, the recurring Tuareg-led rebellions have been used to try to provoke international attention, international intervention

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[74] Chauzal & van Damme, 2015, p. 38; Pezard & Shurkin, 2015, pp. 37, 56.
[75] The Ifoghas are the leading clan of the Kel Adagh confederation of Tamasheq clans in the Kidal region and have participated in all revolts.
[76] Bøås, 2015, p. 92; Gaasholt, 2015A, p. 197; Pezard & Shurkin, 2015, pp. 16-17, 24-25, 54, figure 2.1; interview, Mali, 2015.
[77] Pezard & Shurkin, 2015, p. 21.
[78] Interviews, Swedish Armed Forces, 2015; interviews, MINUSMA, 2015; Pezard & Shurkin, 2015, p. 56.
[79] Bøås, 2015, p. 94.

and, most of all, settlements with the government, to ensure resources and power for the rebels.[80]

Autonomy and identity are important aspects in the uprisings. Nevertheless, the rebels have remained vague on the Tuareg identity that is sometimes put forward, at the same time as Arab groups also belong to the pro-Azawad movements. Likewise, the rebel groups are imprecise on the territory of Azawad. The geographical concept has foremost been promoted by Tuareg and Arab rebel groups, since the late 1980s, with the term Azawad eventually developing into a notion representing 2/3 of Malian territory. The exploitation of historic accounts of Tuareg resistance against foreign rule, and contested claims of a pre-colonial Tuareg empire, serve to emphasise a longstanding leading role for the Tuareg in the north, and a heroic culture of armed and continuous resistance against foreign domination. Yet, the rebel movements have not referred to historic rights to territory in negotiations with Mali's government. Under the threat of international military intervention to restore governmental authority in the northern provinces, the MNLA, in late 2012, relinquished their demands for secession and chose to prepare for more realistic negotiations.[81]

Initially, in 2012, the attacks by the rebel groups were mainly aimed at military personnel and army bases, but the groups have also been responsible for numerous war crimes, including killings, abductions, sexual violence, looting and the recruitment and use of child soldiers. These crimes have made the MNLA deeply detested in areas such as Gao and Ménaka, leading to the armed Islamist groups being welcomed, in order to get rid of the rebels.[82]

Among the actors involved in the peace process in Mali, the Coordination, and the MNLA specifically, are said to be consulting their supporters more than others. During the Algiers talks, 2014-2015, the Coordination consulted with women and youth in Kidal on a regular basis. In some instances, these consultations delayed the formal process, which caused tension and drew criticism from other parties. Interviewees from northern Mali pointed to the paradox that the international community hastened the signing of a peace agreement, without even accepting the Coordination's ambition to anchor the process and the agreement among men, women and youth at home, even though in other instances, the same actors maintain that popular participation and women's involvement are important principles.[83]

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[80] Gaasholt, 2015A, p. 202; Pezard & Shurkin, 2015, pp. 11, 25.
[81] Gaasholt, 2015A, pp. 199, 201-202, 204, 210; Stewart, 2013, p. 42.
[82] Tham Lindell & Mattsson, 2014, p. 17; Bøås, 2015, p. 94.
[83] Focus groups, Mali, 2015.

Power

The armed rebellions have never represented all communities in northern Mali. Instead, some clans within the Tuareg clan confederation Kel Adagh have become dominant. Even so, the rebellions have usually been weakened by diverging interests among the rebels, which have eventually led the movement to fall apart along family and geographical lines. The MNLA was created in October 2011 by Tuaregs who had returned from Libya after the fall of Gaddafi. Unlike the earlier rebellions, this time the organisation managed to include all the main Tuareg communities. Nevertheless, the unity merely lasted for a couple of months, until Ansar Dine (see below) was created and its leader, Iyad ag Ghali, especially recruited Ifoghas to his Islamist group.[84]

The first post-independence rebellion mobilised no more than a few hundred men, while the most-recent rebellion is estimated to have engaged a couple of thousand. The MNLA consists predominantly of men who had previously migrated to Libya or Algeria. In consequence, the MNLA members have been less integrated in the local communities than the armed Islamist groups have. Furthermore, the MNLA leadership belongs to one specific clan of the Kel Adagh confederation, the Idnan. Therefore, the political movement could also be a means for relative advancement within the confederation. This aspect has also been present in previous rebellions, where groups have organised, in order to change the traditional hierarchies within Tuareg society.[85]

Despite having launched the militarily strongest rebellion since Malian independence, the MNLA was evicted by the armed Islamists by June 2012. The French intervention, in January 2013, which retook the population centres in northern Mali from the armed Islamist groups, gave the MNLA an opportunity to regain a central role on the stage. However, the armed uprisings in northern Mali have never had broad support among all communities in the north. It is also possible that a majority of the Tuareg also oppose the MNLA and it is unknown to what extent the Tuareg, in general, support independence for northern Mali. The peace negotiations focus on the armed groups and their diverging demands, even though these far from represent northern Mali as a whole.[86]

The HCUA was formed in May 2013, allegedly by former elements of Ansar Dine. It is dominated by the Ifoghas clan and is, like the MNLA, based in Kidal. The CPA, established in March 2014, is also a Tuareg grouping that includes former MNLA members and elements of various self-defence groups of sedentary communities.[87]

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[84] Bøås, 2015, p. 90; Chauzal & van Damme, 2015, pp. 10, 32, 36.
[85] Bøås, 2015, p. 94; Pezard & Shurkin, 2015, p. 13; Tham Lindell & Mattsson, 2014, p. 17.
[86] Chauzal & van Damme, 2015, p. 35; Gaasholt, 2015A, p. 197; Pezard & Shurkin, 2015, pp. 11, 53; Stewart, 2013, p. 32.
[87] Chauzal & van Damme, 2015, p. 41; Daily Mail, 2015.

Parts of the Arab population in northern Mali have participated in all the Tuareg-led rebellions. The predecessor of MAA, the *Front de libération nationale de l'Azawad* (FNLA), was a militia from Arab Berabiche and Kunta communities, formed during the Islamist occupation of northern Mali in 2012. Its members included Arab soldiers who had deserted from the Malian army after the fall of Timbuktu. FNLA's aim was to safeguard Arab communities when the Malian state ceased to exist in the north, and when first the MNLA and then the armed Islamists took over control. The FNLA soon became the MAA. Today, the MAA is split and represented both in the Coalition and in the Platform, and is thereby in conflict with the government at the same time as it is promoting ties with it.[88]

In sum, the Coordination appears to be more of a joint venture between a large array of armed groups than a unified structure with clear command and control. This also means that the leadership of the Coordination lacks control over all parts of the alliance. It is also evident that the different parties within the Coordination divide territory between themselves, putting certain CMA groups in charge in specified areas, and joining forces only when needed.[89]

Roles and participation

In Tuareg culture, women have a pronounced position, now and then wrongly referred to as a matriarchate, but in reality meaning that women are respected and that they can own property. Women's role in Tuareg society is foremost a private one and few women have accessed the public sphere. Thus, all the rebellions against the state have been led and heavily dominated by men. According to the interviewees, women did not participate in the first upheaval, in 1963, but their participation has successively increased and evolved into the strong role it had in 2012.[90]

Women have been portrayed in rebel groups' propaganda as combatants. Whether in line with reality or not, the aim seems to be to promote an image where both men and women are willing to take up arms to defend their community. It is also claimed that women have joined armed groups to provide logistical support and intelligence.[91]

Women are ascribed an important role as "guardians of war and peace."[92] This means carrying the legacy of war and sacrifice, and the choices that women make to use history, either to encourage their children to take up arms and demand revenge, or promote peace, has been, and still is, crucial for the development of

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[88] Pezard & Shurkin, 2015, pp. 37, 56.
[89] Interviews, MINUSMA, 2015.
[90] Interviews, Mali, 2015.
[91] Focus groups, Mali, 2015; interviews, Mali, 2015.
[92] Focus groups, Mali, 2015.

conflict. During the conflict, women seem to have been essential in the recruitment of new combatants, especially youth.[93]

In the Ouagadougou peace process, in 2013, no women were included, but women's groups entered the negotiations and demanded to be participants. During the Algiers process, 2014-2015, very few women were among the formal representatives. Women from the Coordination were, nevertheless, visibly present in those negotiations. The political role that women in Kidal, the traditional stronghold of the Tuareg rebels, have achieved lately has not been reflected in the international peace negotiations on Mali's future.[94]

4.3 The Platform

The *Platform coalition of armed groups* (referred to as the Platform) were in mid-2015 composed of:[95]

- o   *Coordination des mouvements et fronts patriotiques de résistance I (CMFPR-I);*

- o   *a faction of the Coalition du peuple de l'Azawad (CPA);*

- o   *a faction of Mouvement arabe de l'Azawad (MAA, also referred to as MAA-Bamako);*

- o   *the Groupe d'autodéfense touareg Imghad et alliés (GATIA).*

Interests

The interests of the Platform groups are primarily centred on protecting and strengthening their own communities, and they do not question the territorial integrity of Mali. Unlike the Coalition, the Platform had already signed the peace agreement, alongside the government, on 15 May 2015. The formation of the self-defence militias that were included in the Platform was also aimed at ensuring that the rebellions did not advance Tuareg and Arab over those of those other groups.[96]

The GATIA militia, or self-defence group, as its name[97] states, was created in August 2014 by Tuareg Imghads, with the aim of strengthening its own clan (commoners) in opposition to the noble clan that dominated the MNLA. Another goal was the control of important smuggling routes in northern Mali. One of

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[93] Focus group, Mali, 2015; interviews, Mali, 2015.

[94] Interviews, Mali, 2015; Svenska Dagbladet, 2015.

[95] UN Security Council, 2015.

[96] Bøås, 2015, p. 90; Chauzal & van Damme, 2015, p. 40; Gaasholt, 2015A, p. 206; Harmon, 2014, pp. 100-101; Pezard & Shurkin, 2015, pp. 39, 57.

[97] Groupe d'autodéfense touareg Imghad et alliés

GATIA's leaders is claimed to be a militant against slavery, an indication, once again, of how armed movements might intend to change social structures.[98]

The self-defence militias brought together under the *CMFPR-I* umbrella first emerged in the 1990s to protect Songhay and Fulani populations against the insecurity caused by Tuareg and Arab rebels. This also meant protecting sedentary populations against rebelling nomad populations, and meant the introduction of an intercommunal armed conflict between riverine farming and desert populations.[99]

Behaviour

Since the late 1990s, self-defence militias have been activated as soon as the security situation has deteriorated. This has also been the situation since 2011, due to the lack of security in northern Mali. In the absence of protection by state authorities, many groups have fallen back on ethnic allegiances and various forms of self-defence in order to protect lives and property in their communities. Since the 1990s, when self-defence militias directed massacres and other attacks against Tuareg and Arab communities, important ethnic and racial lines have been brought to the core of the conflict narrative, sometimes even approaching the rhetoric of ethnic cleansing. This has also meant a shift, for both sides in the conflict, to targeting civilians – up until its outbreak, violence had mainly been aimed at government representatives, such as the armed forces, gendarmerie and police.[100]

During 2015, GATIA has become an important actor in northern Mali, often engaging in combat against groups belonging to the Coordination. Apart from the militias included in the Platform, there are also other armed groups that are not analysed further here; these include the *Massina Liberation Front,* representing the interests of the poor population among the Fulani and led by former members of Ansar Dine.[101] As insecurity in northern Mali subsists, and neither the Malian authorities nor the UN mission MINUSMA manage to fully protect populations, similar groups will continue to form in the interest of safeguarding their next of kin.

Power

The Platform groups are allies to the government and to a certain extent used by it, as proxies, to fight other groups that challenge the state, without the Malian army needing to directly engage in combat. Another reason for the state to cooperate with these militias is that the military skills and capacity of for example

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[98] Chauzal & van Damme, 2015, p. 41; Daily Mail, 2015; interviews, MINUSMA, 2015.
[99] Harmon, 2014, p. 101.
[100] Bøås, 2015, p. 90; Chauzal & van Damme, 2015, p. 40; Harmon, 2014, p. 101; Pezard & Shurkin, 2015, p. 57; interview, Mali, 2015.
[101] Interviews, MINUSMA, 2015.

GATIA and Ganda Koy outrun those of the Malian army. In its fight against rebels, the government is thus dependent on these militias.[102]

GATIA is usually described as backed by the Malian army and controlled by a general important to the 2006 uprising – ag Gamou. According to a report from Clingendael, the Malian government has, since April 2014, supported the GATIA as a tool for fighting the MNLA by proxy. As concluded in the report, this has seriously contributed to the deteriorated security situation in the north. During 2015, Ménaka, an important city to the Tuareg, was taken over from the MNLA by GATIA. Despite being an important breach of the seize-fire agreement, GATIA's actions were supported by the local population, who had suffered harassments and assaults by the MNLA.[103]

The CMFPR-I is an umbrella for several self-defence organisations that consist of members from sub-Saharan African communities. Some of the most important members are elements from the Ganda Koy and the Ganda Iso. The Songhay militia, the *Ganda Koy*, is alleged to have either been created by the government, in 1994, or at least to have received support from the army. Its leadership is purported to consist of former army officers, deserted or simply detached. When formed, in the 1990s, the Ganda Koy gained important support among powerless groups such as the Bellahs, the Tuareg lower class. They were living among the Songhay and had more interests in common with other farmers than with the rebels who were turning against the state. *Ganda Iso* emerged in 2009, founded by the former leader of Ganda Koy's political branch, after a split with the military leadership. However, the two groups merged during the latest conflict and joined forces with the Malian army. The CMFPR umbrella was then created, for the Algiers peace process.[104]

The MAA is described above and represents the interests of the Arab population. The original MAA has been weakened by the split into one pro-Bamako wing, and another staying with the Coordination, allied to MNLA and HCUA. The MAA-Bamako is alleged to include former MUJAO members.[105]

Roles and representation

It is difficult to obtain information on female combatants in armed groups. Even if a few women might have participated in warfare, their combat role has definitely been very limited and not in the front line, due to women's limited role in the public arena in general. However, according to interviewees, young women do

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[102] ICG, Rapport Afrique No 226, p. ii; interviews, MINUSMA, 2015; Lessons Learned Seminar Swedish ISR Task Force "Mali01."

[103] Chauzal & van Damme, 2015, p. 41; ICG, Rapport Afrique No 226, p. 5; Jeune Afrique, *Crise malienne: pourquoi Ménaka cristallise les tensions*, 22 May 2015.

[104] Bøås, 2015, p. 90; Chauzal & van Damme, 2015, pp. 40-41; Gaasholt, 2015A, p. 206; Pezard & Shurkin, 2015, pp. 39, 57.

[105] Daily Mail, 2015.

play a role in the pro-government militias and are also claimed to participate as soldiers.[106]

4.4 Armed Islamists

Since the early 2000s, the activity of armed Islamists has increased in Mali. The groups that controlled northern Mali during the territorial occupation, 2012-2013, were *Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb* (AQIM), *Ansar Dine* and the *Mouvement pour le Tawhîd et du Jihad en Afrique de l'Ouest*[107] (MUJAO). Since then, also *al-Mourabitoune*, with the aim of establishing an Islamic state in the Sahel, has emerged as an important grouping, but is mostly active in Libya.[108]

Interests

Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) traces its roots back to the Algerian civil war and the group, GSPC.[109] The name change and affiliation with Al-Qaida took place in 2006, and also brought with it a change in the goals and aims of the organization, complementing the internal Algerian agenda with a jihadist one. Since then, its main objectives are the fight against the Algerian state and the establishing of a global caliphate. Up to 2012, AQIM's specific goals and objectives in northern Mali were mainly financial, with the use of kidnappings of Western citizens as a way to finance the struggle in Algeria. Since the 2012 Tuareg uprising, though, AQIM has changed its focus to territorial control, with the aim of replacing governments, such as the one in Mali, with governments that adhere to a strict interpretation of Sharia, the Islamic law. Another objective is to free the region from foreign influence, which puts it in opposition to France and the United States. Furthermore, AQIM has an interest in keeping trafficking routes open and maintaining control over their bases in northern Mali, which are also used for finalising negotiations for the hostage ransom payments.[110]

Ansar Dine has its roots in the secular Tuareg separatist movement. Former rebel leader, Iyad ag Ghali, founded this Islamist group after being denied the leadership of the Tuareg Ifogha clans and the leadership of the MNLA, which he sought to reform towards jihadist goals. Apart from providing a leadership platform for ag Ghali himself, the aim of Ansar Dine is the establishment of an Islamic Azawad

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[106] Interviews, Mali, 2015; Chauzal & van Damme, 2015, p. 40.

[107] In English, *Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa* (MOJWA) or *Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa* (MUJWA)

[108] Harmon, 2014, p. 225; Tham Lindell & Mattsson, 2014, p. 20; interviews, MINUSMA, 2015.

[109] Groupe salafiste pour la prédication et le combat/ Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat

[110] Harmon, 2014, p. 197; Stewart, 2013, p. 40; Tham Lindell & Mattsson, 2014, p. 20.

state, and instating Sharia law in controlled regions. Another goal of the organization is to restore the authority of the religious elders.[111]

The MUJAO, a local offshoot of AQIM, was founded in 2011, after alleged frustration at the Algerian dominance of AQIM. While the MUJAO is a militant Salafist movement, which seeks to establish a political system in Mali that is in line with Islamic principles, it is also highly integrated with organised crime, thereby representing interests of smuggling networks.[112]

Behaviour

AQIM has been active in northernmost Mali since the late 1990s, and has consciously and gradually built a supporter base by taking a role reserved for, but not filled by, the state. From several bases in the Kidal region, AQIM acted like a state, also in terms of collecting taxes and providing justice, during the decade preceding the territorial occupation of the three northern regions in 2012. Acting as traders, but more and more as a welfare organization, AQIM has been helping communities both financially and with protection against crime.[113] Two of the study's focus groups described it in the following way:

> "Then groups came from Algeria… They brought everything with them – water, food… They would help even the army with for example gas. Helped people with gardening. They were helped to integrate. On the border to Algeria, the government was not present. The government did not take responsibility. Hence the Algerians would provide all that the government had not provided . . ."[114]

and:

> ". . . for example, the Islamists approach a pastoralist's daughter that has been pregnant outside wedlock and give her help and assistance. They buy livestock from people so they do not have to walk far to sell their animals. They provide medicine and health care, help people to go to the hospital."[115]

Eventually, AQIM introduced its interpretation of Islam, allying with, and empowering, local religious leaders and teachers in order to influence their preaching:[116]

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[111] Chauzal & van Damme, 2015, p. 11; Harmon, 2014, p. 197; Stewart, 2013, p. 42; Tham Lindell & Mattsson, 2014, p. 20.
[112] Harmon, 2014, pp. 181, 197; Tham Lindell & Mattsson, 2014, p. 20.
[113] Bøås, 2015, p. 97; Tham Lindell & Mattsson, 2014, p. 21.
[114] Focus group, Mali, 2015.
[115] Focus group, Mali, 2015.
[116] Bøås, 2015, p. 97.

> "Every Friday, there was preaching in the mosque to the young men. For the first time they would bring the head of family to explain religion to them. In different ways, people understood that it was a different Islam than the traditional one. The Islamists would apply rules of vice. People did not accept their ideology. They didn't change their tactics though, they just stayed and continued to try to influence the communities."[117]

Taking advantage of the chaos that the 2012 rebellion created in northern Mali, the Islamist groups effectively side-lined the secular MNLA, both politically and militarily and assumed a dominant role in northern Mali. Taking control, AQIM and MUJAO offered protection against the MNLA and other violent groups. In Timbuktu, AQIM distributed a free telephone number to call if one was in need of assistance against harassment; MUJAO did the same in Gao. MUJAO gained public support, especially among youth, by taking over from the MNLA, which had committed serious abuses against the population. According to interviewees from Gao, the access to water, electricity and medicine was also better during the reign of MUJAO than both before and after its occupation of the city. To MUJAO, the support from young people was especially important and the group adjusted its behaviour when the reaction from youngsters was too negative. For instance, they did not interfere with schooling for either girls or boys. Nevertheless, if some communities were relieved to have the MNLA replaced by Islamists, they were soon deceived.[118]

Radical forms of Islam have been present in both southern and northern Mali since the end of the colonial period. Harmon describes how strict forms of Islam taught by the Salafist, but not jihadist, organisations, the Malian Wahhabiyya and the Pakistani Tablighis, came to lay ground for such social practices as sexual segregation, the veiling of women and confining them to private space, which the Islamist occupiers eventually made compulsory, in 2012. In addition, AQIM, Ansar Dine and MUJAO introduced violent jihadism and a legal system based on a strict interpretation of Sharia law. Until then, criminal punishments such as amputations and stoning were unheard of in Mali.[119]

The armed Islamists' imposition of Sharia law by force, and an interpretation of Islam foreign to the local tradition, led to strong popular protests and a collapse of the local informal economy. Numerous violations of human rights were reported, with people being flogged, arbitrarily arrested and executed. An Islamic police force was created, to ensure the population's adherence to new religious rules that affected, among other things, clothing and prohibited, for example, music,

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[117] Focus group, Mali, 2015.
[118] Bøås, 2015, p. 97; Harmon, 2014, p. 182; interview, Mali, 2015.
[119] Harmon, 2014, pp. 159-161.

television, football, alcohol, bars and smoking. Men and women were also separated in public spaces, such as buses.[120]

MUJAO has been claimed to be the most violent of the Islamist groups, and, according to Bøås, is responsible for 15 amputations in Gao, as a part of applying Sharia law, in comparison to one by AQIM. Ansar Dine's attacks, in July 2012, where pickaxes were used to destroy Timbuktu's World Heritage sites – shrines and mosques – caused an international outcry. Although Timbuktu is believed to house 300,000 antique manuscripts, the Islamists managed to find only a few of them, due to local routines for their protection. Another example of the Islamists' imposition of their norms was the looting of a community centre that encourages economic self-sufficiency for women and a women's health centre, in Goundam, near Timbuktu.[121]

Power

For AQIM, the parallel developments of decreased state military presence in the north, due to political agreements in 2006, and the steady rise of its own economy, based on ransom money and trafficking, fuelled its expansion in northern Mali. Originally, AQIM comprised mostly native Algerians, but it has been able to exploit the social exposure and poverty in other states in the Sahel to gather local recruits, predominantly young men.[122]

Ansar Dine, on the other hand, is composed mainly of Malian Tuareg, with its leadership and support coming from the same Ifogha elite as the secular HCUA. During 2012, Ansar Dine's strength grew due to recruitment of MNLA fighters and cooperation with AQIM. The use of mercenary boys and young men means however, that the religious conviction of the participants is sometimes questionable. Ansar Dine's main sources of financing are drug-trafficking and contributions from states in the Gulf, among which Qatar is the most important.[123]

MUJAO was founded by young men who broke away from AQIM and its Algerian leadership. If from the start it was made up of non-Algerian southern Saharans, including some influential Malians, its cadre has expanded to include various northern Malian communities. Several hundred boys are claimed to have been recruited by MUJAO from Quranic schools, during 2012, and then trained in camps outside of Gao. Interviewees describe MUJAO as much more integrated in the local communities than were AQIM and Ansar Dine who, for example in Gao, were thought to be alien to the population. Many of those who joined MUJAO also

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[120] Chauzal & van Damme, 2015, p. 12; Stewart, 2013, pp. 30, 41; Tham Lindell & Mattsson, 2014, pp. 21-22; focus group, Mali, 2015.
[121] Harmon, 2014, p. 195; interviews, Mali, 2015.
[122] Bøås, 2015, p. 97; Harmon, 2014, pp. 179, 195; Stewart, 2013, pp. 12-13; Tham Lindell & Mattsson, 2014, p. 21.
[123] Harmon, 2014, pp. 180, 194, 197-180; Pezard & Shurkin, 2015, p. 54; Tham Lindell & Mattsson, 2014, p. 27.

did so to support its opposition to the MNLA. In this, an ethnic dimension is visible, pitting for example Songhay against Tuareg.[124]

AQIM's presence in Mali has been dependent on the Malian state's inability to control its territory and also the government's previous negligent attitude towards this organisation. AQIM finances its operations mainly through kidnappings. Criminal networks and corrupt government officials in northern Mali provide AQIM with another source of income, namely trafficking in contraband, mainly cigarettes. In a society where, as Bøås describes it, the power of traditional authorities has eroded without being replaced by any new form of governance, money is key to power. The wealth originating from AQIM's criminal activities has thus been translated into power and periodic territorial control and most probably explains the successful takeover of the MNLA-instigated insurgency in 2012.[125]

The MUJAO and Ansar Dine were able to recruit young Malians to their ranks, due to social alienation and inequality, by exploiting internal tensions between ethnic groups and tribes, although some joined for ideological reasons. Among those Tuareg who joined Ansar Dine, some were convinced that the Salafist-Islamic ideology would be a unifying force for the Tuareg tribes. Many young men are said to have joined MUJAO for economic reasons, since its involvement in organized crime made it operationally and financially successful. Thus, MUJAO followed the same pattern as AQIM, introducing economic incentives in an environment where people lack even the most basic necessities and where youth, whether educated or not, have few prospects.[126]

Estimates claim that about half of the AQIM members have been killed by the French in northern Mali. AQIM has reorganized into four katibas – three that are Tuareg-dominated, north of Kidal, and one Arabic, in Timbuktu. Due to the military actions of the French Operation *Barkhane*, AQIM is presently more active in Libya, presenting a new safe haven. MUJAO is still the stronger Islamist organization in the surroundings of Gao. Ansar Dine seems to have been severely weakened by the French military intervention, and ag Ghali's deputy has formed a new organization (*Mouvement islamique de l'Azawad*, MIA).[127]

Roles and representation

Due to the deeply stratified Malian society, AQIM and MUJAO offer persons from lower classes or clans a unique chance to achieve social mobility. Since the Islamist groups preach everyone's equality before God, it is possible to break free

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[124] Interviews, Mali, 2015; Harmon, 2014, p. 192; Pezard & Shurkin, 2015, p. 52.

[125] Interview, Mali, 2015; Bøås, 2015, p. 94; Tham Lindell & Mattsson, 2014, p. 26.

[126] Chauzal & van Damme, 2015, p. 34; Tham Lindell & Mattsson, 2014, p. 21; interview, Mali, 2015.

[127] Bøås, 2015, p. 97; Pezard & Shurkin, 2015, p. 54; interviews, MINUSMA, 2015.

from traditional societal hierarchies. For example, Fulani pastoralists are claimed to have joined MUJAO and AQIM in order to fight societal power structures and the domination of their masters. Since family and community expectations of women leave them with much less unrestricted room for manoeuvre, it has been easier for men than women to join these non-traditional groups.[128]

As demonstrated above, AQIM has consciously exploited social exposure and poverty in order to gather local recruits, predominantly young men. During the decade preceding the latest uprising, AQIM increased its popularity by having its members marry into the poorest families, thereby both providing financial assistance and becoming part of local family structures. This also meant that young women had a specific role in the originally Algerian group's strategy to become part of society in northern Mali. One example is, Mokhtar Belmokhtar, one of AQIM's leaders, who is said to have married four women from different Tuareg and Arab Berabiche families of importance, in order to enlarge his network. During the occupation of northern Mali, AQIM relied on these alliances with local clans for logistical support and protection. This is in line with the historic use of marriages in the Sahara region, where interregional connectivity was made possible through marriages between local women and traders from other communities.[129] This is also the background to the ethnically mixed towns and villages in the Sahel where inter-ethnic marriage "is both the necessary condition for and the consequence of interregional Saharan commerce".[130]

4.5 Relations between actors

As shown in the analysis above, post-independence Mali governments have made use of ethnic militias to weaken the Tuareg-led rebel movements in the north. The governments' acceptance of AQIM's presence has also been seen as a means of challenging the rebels on their home ground and possibly of bringing resources to Mali within the framework of the United States' global war on terrorism. The government of president ATT (2002-2012) was also frequently accused of corruption and having economic ties with both terrorist and criminal networks that reaped profits from smuggling. The alleged connections between high-ranking officers and political leaders with criminal networks seems to have been one important reason for the discontent within the army, and which led to a coup d'état by junior officers, in March 2012.[131]

The notion of race is still crucial for the relationship between the government and the Tuareg population. This means that Tuareg elites do not accept the domination

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[128] Interviews, Mali, 2015.
[129] Bøås, 2015, p. 96; Harmon, 2014, pp. 178-179, 184; Stewart, 2013, p. 41; Tham Lindell & Mattsson, 2014, p. 21; focus groups, Mali, 2015.
[130] Harmon, 2014, p. 12.
[131] Harmon, 2014, pp. 92-93, 186-187.

of a black African majority, and that the government, to a certain extent, takes revenge on the privileged position that Tuareg had during the colonial period.[132] What became apparent during interviews for this and previous FOI studies on Mali is that many Malians regard the MNLA as a terrorist group and make little distinction between them and the armed Islamist groups that internationally have been designated terrorist organisations. One interviewee expressed it as:

> "The population's apprehension is that the MNLA, Ansar Dine and AQIM are the same thing; they switch loyalties depending on who has the most power but they are very close, they are from the same family."[133]

From developments of the conflict in 2012, it is evident that the armed Islamist groups collaborated and that AQIM facilitated the operations of the two younger organisations. Especially Ansar Dine was closely linked to AQIM, in following its orders. The boundaries between these terrorist organisations are today still fluid and memberships vary.[134]

It is also known that the secular MNLA, now a main party in the Coordination, and the armed Islamists, Ansar Dine and MUJAO, cooperated in the early stages of the uprising in 2012. But later on, the Islamist groups effectively side-lined the MNLA. In Timbuktu, for example, the differences in the MNLA's and Ansar Dine's objectives led to a confrontation that ended the tactical alliance and left Ansar Dine in control of the city. In Gao, a similar situation arose, but involving the MNLA and MUJAO, with the former, in the end, being expelled from the city by the latter.[135]

The militias that formed part of the pro-government Platform participated, according to interviewees in Harmon, in the defence against the armed Islamists. Together with the Malian army, they were deployed during the occupation to hinder a possible southern advancement of armed Islamist groups.[136]

There are currently also links and cooperation between armed Islamist groups and armed rebel groups, often following ethnic, geographic, or family lines. The HCUA of the Coordination is regarded as the political wing of Ansar Dine, both of which seek to ensure a powerful position for the Tuareg Ifoghas. In interviews for this study, it was also said that the followers of the Ansar Dine leader, Iyad ag Ghali, care less for ag Ghali's specific political or religious agenda, and rather support him due to his leadership role among the Tuareg.[137]

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[132] Harmon, 2014, pp. 15, 17, 22.
[133] Focus group, Mali, 2015.
[134] Harmon, 2014, p. 179-180; Stewart, 2013, p. 41.
[135] Chauzal & van Damme, 2015, p. 11; Gaasholt, 2015A, p. 209; Harmon, 2014, p. 184.
[136] Harmon, 2014, p. 193.
[137] Interviews, MINUSMA, 2015.

On the other hand, the MNLA has always denied any links with AQIM, and instead offered its assistance when France intervened to liberate northern Mali from terrorist organisations; that is an operation that has expanded into a regional approach and still ongoing. In Mali, the Tuareg are often perceived as supported by the French, while France is continuously accused of bias towards the elites in Kidal. From interviews within MINUSMA of military personnel of various nationalities, there also seems to be some truth behind this, explained by the fact that France needs allies in countering the terrorist threat in the Sahel and, from time to time, in negotiating the release of French citizens who have been taken hostage by terrorist organisations such as AQIM. In this perspective, it would be logical for France to make use of historic ties and longstanding relationships.[138]

By the end of 2012, the prospects of an international military intervention in northern Mali affected relationships among armed groups. The MNLA abandoned its demand for secession and sought an alliance with the French forces against the Islamists. Ansar Dine wanted to cut ties with MUJAO and gave up its demands for the application of Sharia law in Mali. Later on, during the Algiers process, several influential MUJAO members became part of the MAA-Bamako (part of the Platform). One interpretation of this is that individuals switched to supporting the government in order to improve their chances of avoiding legal prosecution for crimes committed against the population during the occupation. Since the intervention, new groups such as the MIA,[139] an off-spring of Ansar Dine, have formed and MUJAO has sought allegiance to the Islamic State. In general, Tuareg groupings have split along clan lines, with the Platform foremost gathering Imghad and the Coordination Ifoghas.[140] To a large extent populated by opportunists, the field of actors will continue to evolve, as individuals and groups in diverse ways seek to maximise power, profit and prospects.

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[138] Harmon, 2014, p. 17; Stewart, 2013, pp. 40-41, 43; interviews, MINUSMA, 2015.
[139] Mouvement islamique de l'Azawad/ Islamic Movement for Azawad (IMA)
[140] Interviews, MINUSMA, 2015; Harmon, 2014, pp. 203, 207; Tham Lindell & Mattsson, 2014, p. 18.

5 Analysing Conflict Dynamics

In this chapter the proximate causes, such as certain events, decisions and triggers that lead to an increase in negative violent behaviour are analysed in accordance with the third and last step of the analytical framework. Factors of importance are the following:

- societal/socio-demographic factors;

- political/governance factors;

- security factors;

- economic factors.

As the previous steps in the analysis have demonstrated, the armed conflicts in Mali have their roots in a highly unequal and stratified society, with limited access to public goods, security and economic opportunities for most of the population, which has paved the way for the armed Islamist groups. An additional driver of conflict in the north is internal politics and the interests of individuals or groups, which have been ongoing, in the absence of the State.[141]

5.1 Societal and socio-demographic factors

The spark that set off the crisis in 2012 was the return of the Malian mercenaries from Libya and other countries. They had left during drought or earlier rebellions and joined Gaddafi's armed forces. When Gaddafi was ousted, the men serving in his army returned to their countries of origin, among them Mali. The return of the diaspora had happened before, but this time the returnees were military-trained, heavily armed and experienced soldiers. This was a new development that motivated the armed rebellion against the state. On their return they were welcomed locally, since they were considered as part of the community and with family ties.[142]

Ethnicity

Although the population welcomed the diaspora back to Mali, the developments that followed the declaration of an independent Azawad split the population along ethnic and class lines. The tension between different groups has increased, which is reflected in the different focus groups that were assembled for this study. The black communities, for example Songhay, blamed the so-called red and white Tuareg and Arab communities for the 2012 crisis and current situation. This has led to violence between women from different ethnic groups. It was reported that

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[141] Small Arms Survey, 2015, p. 161; Pezard & Shurkin, 2015, pp. 24-25.
[142] Focus groups, Mali, 2015.

women in Kidal had fought physically. The same had happened in Gao, where Songhay, Fulani and Tuareg women had fought physically in the UN-supported peace hut.[143] A similar incident took place in Bamako, during a peace conference between women. The animosity between the different ethnic lines is described in the following anecdote told by focus group participants:

> "A Tuareg woman participating in the peace hut in Gao came to a meeting and accused the Songhay women: *'Your brothers have killed my brothers. I hate you.'* After this episode, the Tuareg women did not continue their participation in the peace hut activities."[144]

Songhay and Fulani women in Gao testified to having the same sentiment towards so-called white and red women. One Songhay woman confessed that she had almost punched a Tuareg women's face during a peace meeting in Bamako.[145]

There is increasing tension between different ethnic groups and a growing racism towards Tuaregs and Arabs across Mali. In several focus groups and interviews, the respondents of Tuareg and Arab descent – men and women from both the north and south – testified how they had been bullied, harassed and threatened, because of their lighter skin colour, and accused of being responsible for the crisis in 2012.[146]

The interviewees living in the Mbera refugee camp in Mauritania confirmed the increasing animosity between different ethnic groups. They accused the government of discriminating light-skinned populations, such as Arabs and Tuaregs. According to the refugees with an Arabic heritage, black people had better access to public services, and skin colour determined how the conflict impacted different groups. Tuaregs in Mbera reported that they were threatened by black neighbours and considered them to be a security problem.[147]

Public support and services

None of the respondents in this study identified Islamism or terrorism as a cause of the 2012 crisis, or of the current situation. There is unanimous consent that the lack of governmental public support and services is the underlying cause for the 2012 crisis and subsequent violence, in combination with the return of the Malian diaspora from the Maghreb.[148] This is also confirmed by the Afrobarometer; where the local population in the rural areas overwhelmingly stated that the lack of state

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[143] Ibid.
[144] Ibid.
[145] Ibid.
[146] Ibid; interview, Mali, 2015.
[147] Interviews, Mbera refugee camp, Mauritania, 2015.
[148] Interviews, Mali, 2015; focus group, Mali, 2015.

public services and infrastructure were actually the crisis of importance, and not necessarily the rebellion.[149]

Almost all women who participated in the focus groups, regardless of their ethnic background, expressed disappointment in the government's inability to provide assistance, both before and after the 2012 crisis. They listed lack of health care, education, electricity and water as factors that disabled them from carrying out their daily chores and caring for their families.[150] It is also noteworthy that women in Gao find their living conditions to be worse, and deteriorating, since the Islamists have been ousted from the north. Although they did not support the Islamist cause nor the violence, they claim that the occupiers provided water, electricity and free medicine. The food was also cheaper. One respondent asked:

> "Why can't the government provide food, water and electricity now, when MUJAO could during the occupation?"[151]

The answer to this question is probably three-fold:

- humanitarian goods from international humanitarian actors were distributed by the occupiers, since they had looted humanitarian warehouses. According to respondents, humanitarian organisations sent trucks with goods but without humanitarian staff, since humanitarian access was limited due to the security situation;

- subsidised goods purchased in Algiers were smuggled into northern Mali, and subsequently became inexpensive;

- the occupants, especially the Islamists, received financial support from groups and states in the Gulf, and used it to win the hearts and minds of the local population.[152]

The MNLA, however, behaved differently from the Islamist occupiers, with regard to providing for the population. Several focus groups and interviewees, from Gao and Timbuktu, reported that the local population supported the MNLA when they first arrived, but turned against them after a while, since they pillaged, stole and committed atrocities. The locals thus gave their support to MUJAO, instead, since the latter had promised to overthrow MNLA and end the violence. However, respondents from Kidal reported that the MNLA had been different there, since this is a stronghold for MNLA, with strong support from women.[153]

The perceived lack of governmental support, public services and lack of infrastructure is considered, among different women in the north, as a major

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[149] Bleck & Michelitch, 2015, p. 5.
[150] Focus group, Mali, 2015.
[151] Ibid.
[152] Ibid.
[153] Ibid.

impediment to survival. Tuareg, Songhay, Fulani and Arab women who participated in the focus groups vowed that there will be violent conflicts if the government does not change their approach towards the north. This is reflected in the frequently repeated declarations:

> "I will personally take up arms if nothing changes;"[154] and

> "We have told our men, if you do not want to fight, give us your trousers and we will fight instead."[155]

Forced displacement

The most salient impact on the interviewed communities, apart from poverty, is displacement. People were forced to leave their homes in 2012, following the clashes between the Malian army and the MNLA. Many Tuareg left, because they feared reprisals from other ethnic groups, or the Malian army. Other groups left the areas where the armed Tuareg groups had claimed autonomy and the security situation was volatile. Further displacement took place following the occupation of Kidal, Gao and Timbuktu. Other reasons given by displaced groups are abandonment by the authorities and lack of public services, and fear of the imposition of a strict version of the Sharia law by Islamist occupants, together with fear of international military interventions.[156]

Some of those who were internally displaced went to live with relatives, in other parts of the country, while others took refuge in a neighbouring city. Others crossed into neighbouring countries and settled in refugee camps.[157] According to UNHCR, the majority of the refugees remain in the neighbouring countries. At the peak, around 165 000 persons in the Sahel region were registered with UNHCR as refugees and 240 000 internally displaced persons were identified in 2014. Today, around 137 000 persons remain outside their native countries as refugees.[158]

The experience of displacement has been described by the people concerned as both positive and negative. On the positive side, it was mentioned that women became more independent as a result, since they often became the family's sole provider. They were exposed to other cultures and learned that men's and women's roles are not static, but can change. In fact, men can also assist with children and household chores. Women also learned new skills that are useful for income-generating activities. The negative impact of the exile is endemic poverty. Refugees in the Mbera refugee camp, Mauritania, reported that they lost significant numbers of livestock, an outcome that is detrimental to the refugees' livelihood, their resilience against economic shock, and human security. An especially

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[154] Focus group, Mali, 2015.
[155] Ibid.
[156] Interviews, Mbera refugee camp, Mauritania, 2015; Oxfam, 2013B, p. 7.
[157] Interview, Mali, 2015; focus group, Mali, 2015.
[158] UNHCR, 2012; UNHCR, *Opération Sahel: Mali situation*.

vulnerable group is the Bellahs. Oxfam reports that there are cases of discrimination against them, with serious consequences, since their access to food and humanitarian assistance had been impeded.[159]

IDPs from Kidal reported that they had left their hometown for Gao since they did not support the MNLA and had been ostracized. They did not receive any humanitarian assistance nor any other type of support. They experienced discrimination from the black community, since they are light-skinned Tuaregs and Arabs.[160]

5.2 Political and governance factors

During the 2012 crisis, the population that already felt marginalised by the Malian state was abandoned, and left in the hands of the armed separatists and Islamists. As mentioned above, MNLA's looting and violence against the local population paved the way for the Islamist groups to fulfil their promise to push out the MNLA and impose law and order. However, their interpretations of Sharia, with public punishment and petty harassment inflicted on ordinary people, of whom the majority were Muslims, turned the communities against them. Women and youth led the protests against both MNLA and the armed Islamists.[161]

Women's rights and participation

When the armed Islamist groups took power in the northern communities, they enforced their political program and social order, which focus especially on women's status, functions and private moral issues. Women were banned from all public activities, while the freedom of both men, women and youth was severely reduced. Music and television were banned, as well as many activities important to children and youth, such as sports. Sharia law was rigorously implemented, which resulted in numerous human rights violations. Women were forced into seclusion and to wear the veil at all times, even in their own homes. Their freedom of movement was severely restricted and they could only leave their homes if accompanied by a male. Men were also subject to rules of modesty; they were forced to wear shorter trousers and smoking was forbidden. In the zones controlled by MUJAO, Ansar Dine and AQIM, i.e., Gao, Timbuktu and Kidal, men and women were flogged for violating the Sharia rules on socialising, smoking, or listening to music. However, the MNLA gave women certain liberties, at the same time as they committed atrocities, such as rape.[162]

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[159] Oxfam, 2013A.
[160] Focus groups, Mali, 2015.
[161] Interviews, Mali, 2015; focus groups, Mali, 2015.
[162] Focus groups, Mali, 2015.

In Kidal, Gao and Timbuktu, women, joined by young men, protested against the rules of the armed Islamists, who repressed the demonstrations with whipping, beatings and firing into the air. Women belonging to the association of the free Azawad (MNLA) organised marches in Kidal, to protest and denounce the Islamist interpretation of Sharia and their suppression of the Tuareg culture. This was the first time women in Kidal took to the streets to pursue a political cause. Women also composed poems and songs criticising the Islamist rule, which is in accordance with Tuareg culture.[163]

Almost all respondents in this study, with only a few exceptions, talked about how women had protested and mobilised young men against the occupying forces, at the same time as men stayed at home or left the region. Although women have limited representation – even at the best of times – in the public sphere, during the crisis they publically contested both MNLA and the Islamists. Some women defied the Islamist ban on women's freedom of movement by veiling themselves and then walking wherever they wanted to. However, the most noteworthy impact that women had during the crisis was as mobilisers of young men who opposed the occupying forces in the streets. The women also supported them with water and supplies during their actions, which could be in the form of demonstrations or violent attacks.[164]

The women exercised their power, as mothers and elders, over young men, which precedes their inferior position as women in the Malian society. In Gao the Islamists were very cautious not to arouse the wrath of the youth unnecessarily. On several occasions, they lifted their ban on activities, such as playing computer games, and replaced equipment they had destroyed, so as not to annoy the young men. The reason is that young people – in spite of their inferior position in the gerontocratic structure – are a political force to reckon with and the Islamists wanted to leave it undisturbed. The power of the youth relates to their having denounced what is considered the gerontocratic nature of the political power and decisionmaking procedures formulated by elders. It reflects the tension between the generations in Mali.[165]

Women in the north are in no way politically united. Their support follows their ethnic and family lines. In Kidal, the MNLA has considerable support among Tuareg women, since it is the hub for this fraction. In Gao, women, as well as the rest of the community, supported MUJAO when they first arrived, since they resented the MNLA and wanted their atrocities to end.[166]

A positive impact of the crisis in 2012 is in women's active participation and protests in the public sphere. Since men either left, or stayed behind at home, they

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[163] Interview, Mali, 2015.
[164] Focus groups, Mali, 2015; Interviews, Mali, 2015.
[165] Ibid.
[166] Focus groups, Mali, 2015.

left a space for women's agency. Several interviewees and focus groups claimed that women have been made conscious of societal issues and politics through the 2012 crisis. According to the respondents, it has made women more interested in political participation and possibilities for influencing their society. More women participate in decision-making in their local community and in politics.[167]

Governance

In the north, the consequences of the 2012 crisis and the subsequent occupation have been the systematic destruction of all state presence. State functions such as the territorial administration, security, justice, education and health care were particularly hard hit. They were strategic targets for Islamist groups who sought to replace the judicial order with the Sharia law. Public service buildings and infrastructure were destroyed. State officials, civil servants and the security forces fled the north and left the population in the hands of the armed separatists and Islamists. According to people interviewed, the state abandonment of the north is not only seen as a proof of the state's discrimination against and unwillingness to support the northern populations. It is also considered to explain why the Islamists gained support among certain groups.[168]

The Islamists established an Islamic police force, with the task of monitoring and ensuring that strict Islamic laws were being followed. The respondents reported that the Islamic Police executed a long series of punishments for alleged crimes. Simple every-day activities, such as a man and women riding on the same motorbike, became criminal offenses. Especially men were victims of amputation as punishment for alleged crimes, and both men and women were publicly flogged as punishment for breaches of the Sharia law.[169]

The Islamists also brought their own religious leaders with them; they were responsible for interpreting the Quran and Sharia law in accordance with the groups' teaching. The local Marabout,[170] with their more tolerant and liberal understanding of the Quran, were sidestepped and marginalized.[171]

All communities occupied by rebels in 2012 established crisis committees. They took the role of the absent state. The committees were made up of traditional leaders, community leaders and the Marabouts. The objective was to serve as interlocutors between the rebels and the locals and to make plans for how to handle the crisis. The present study has not been able to establish if any women participated in these committees. There is some evidence that one or two women could have been included in committees in Kidal and Timbuktu. In Gao, no women

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[167] Focus groups, Mali, 2015; interview, Mali, 2015.
[168] Focus groups, Mali, 2015.
[169] Focus group, Mali, 2015; interview, Mali, 2015.
[170] Religious teacher in North Africa.
[171] Focus group, Mali, 2015.

were on the committee. The traditional leaders in Gao, all elder men, claimed that women had no role whatsoever during the entire 2012 crisis. Their place was and is in the home, was the message. According to the traditional leaders, they themselves solved all problems and handled the rebels. They did not acknowledge that women mobilized and supported young men during protest rallies, although this study found significant proof that confirms participation by women. This example reflects the distance between those in power and those groups considered to be inferior.[172]

Not acknowledging the agency of different groups constitutes a security problem, which can turn into a major crisis. This attitude is also an example of how far women are from enjoying their rights as citizens. Their actions during the crisis are disregarded by the male decision-makers. In spite of this, interestingly enough, women identified themselves as holding the key to peace and war in Mali. Several respondents claimed that they could both instigate war and, if they wanted, ensure sustainable peace. There is a dichotomy between women's inferior position and absence in the public space, and their confidence in their own possibility to control the security and political situation. It can only be explained by the gerontocratic system and women's position in the private sphere.[173]

5.3 Security factors

Violence

The respondents from Kidal, Timbuktu and Gao reported atrocities committed by the different armed groups during the 2012 crisis. Sexual and gender-based violence are particularly mentioned. UN reports also confirm this information. Nevertheless, the women from Kidal claimed that the MNLA did not commit any atrocities, which can be explained by the fact that they themselves are supporters of this fraction.[174]

According to respondents from Gao, the MNLA came into town on several occasions and abducted girls, whom were gang-raped and then dumped without any care. They especially targeted the Bellah women and girls. Another type of crime mentioned was forced marriages. Girls were forced to marry several rebels and then were gang-raped and abandoned after a swift divorce. According to the UN, Ansar Dine, AQIM and MUJAO all committed these types of crimes. Women in detention were raped in the women's prisons in Timbuktu and Gao, on the grounds of claims that they had violated Sharia. Other crimes committed during the crisis were extrajudicial and summary executions and amputations, for alleged

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[172] Focus groups, Mali, 2015.
[173] Focus group, Mali, 2015; interviews, Mali, 2015.
[174] Focus group, Mali, 2015.

theft, which especially targeted men. There is also anecdotal evidence that men were raped, especially in detention.[175]

Today the stigmatization of victims is a major obstacle to their possibilities for receiving care. Sexual abuse is viewed as shameful in Mali, because of the loss of dignity for the families concerned. The girls and women are stigmatized and can no longer marry or remarry. Under these circumstances, sexual abuses are rarely reported. An additional dilemma for the victimised women and girls is the children born out of forced marriages and rape. These children, together with their mothers, are ostracised and marginalised, with little or no support.[176]

The security situation in northern Mali continues to be volatile. According to MINUSMA, road piracy, looting, pillaging, killings and rape still plague villages in the rural north. Both regular criminals and militias use villages as their supply line. The Malian security forces have no capacity to protect the local population outside the major population centres; the same is true for MINUSMA.[177] This leaves the population in the hands of both Islamist groups and other armed groups.

Men's responsibility to protect

According to cultural practice, men are responsible for providing for and protecting their families. During the 2012 crisis, many men in the north left their families in the hands of their wives, who had to fend for themselves. The reasons for leaving were multiple. Some left to join a rebel group, others left for economic reasons, with the aim of remitting their earnings to their families, while some feared forced recruitment by any of the armed fractions. There was also a group that left as a way of protecting their families, since it was believed that the presence of a man in the household would attract rebels, who would violate the women. If the man was gone, it was thought, the rebels would ignore the household. It was also explained, by respondents to this study, that to be a man in Mali is to provide and protect one's family. If a man cannot fulfil these responsibilities, he would rather leave the household than stay and risk being humiliated, either in the event that the women were violated, or if he were forcefully recruited and also forced to fight against his own group. Women exploit men's humiliation or damaged honour when encouraging them to take up arms and retaliate against those who had violated women or girls in the family.[178]

Boy soldiers and protected girls

During the crisis, young boys were subject to forced recruitment by different armed fractions. In some cases, the parents or the teacher in the madrassa handed their children over to these groups, either in exchange for money, for ideological

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[175] Focus groups, Mali, 2015; interviews, Mali, 2015.
[176] Ibid.
[177] Interviews, MINUSMA, 2015.
[178] Interviews, Mali, 2015.

reasons, or as a way of optimizing their own protection and opportunities. According to MINUSMA, many children have been arrested by the international military forces and handed over to the government, UNICEF, or the International Red Cross Committee. The government has also detained children in maximum security prisons.[179]

Young girls had a different situation than boys during the crisis. Many of them were held in seclusion in their homes or sent away to relatives in other parts of the country to limit their exposure to sexual violence conducted by the MNLA or other armed groups. In Gao, some older girls had supported MUJAO against the MNLA and were fighting together with young men. Initially, MUJAO accepted girls among their ranks, but, soon after they had established their presence, they imposed Sharia law and restricted, among other things, the freedom of movement of girls and women.[180]

5.4 Economic factors

During the conflict, ready cash was the key for all armed groups in winning the hearts and minds of the population. Economic incentives are mentioned by the majority of respondents as a factor that motivates men to join a rebel fraction. Many respondents reinforced the finding that ideology was rarely a reason for voluntary recruitment, which is substantiated by the fact that many fighters deserted when the rebels lowered their salaries, or ran out of money.[181]

The Islamist occupants were careful not to disturb people's possibilities to feed themselves, which is part of their winning-hearts-and-minds strategy. As mentioned above, in Gao they guaranteed water, inexpensive food and free medicine. An anecdotal example from Gao is that MUJAO destroyed the telephone tower, which meant that people could not receive remittances from their families abroad, since the transfers were conducted via Internet. The crisis committee complained to the rebels that the telephone tower guaranteed food on their table. MUJAO then quickly re-established Internet communication via Malitel. They also donated a significant amount of money to the crisis committee to ensure electricity and water.[182]

An economic factor that has an important impact on the conflict and the recruiting activities of different factions and organised crime, is the role that illicit trade and trafficking has, and the possibility for men to earn money. Men have more access

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[179] Interviews, Mali, 2015.
[180] Focus groups, Mali, 2015; interview, Mali, 2015.
[181] Ibid.
[182] Focus group, Mali, 2015.

to these activities than women. It has had an impact on not only men's expectations, but their families', who expect them to earn more money faster.[183]

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[183] Interview, Mali, 2015.

6 Conclusions and Recommendations

In a stratified society such as the Malian, gender is for obvious reasons at the very core of the conflict, although it is not the root cause. The relations between men and women, along with the expectations that society exerts, respectively, influence not only the actions that are taken during the conflict, but the possibility for sustainable peace. In addition, some of the major actors, for example, armed Islamists, are motivated by the vision of a society based on stratification between men and women. In their political program, men are superior, while women are inferior, totally confined and isolated in the private sphere, and with limited freedom of movement and access to the public and political sphere.

The role of women in the armed conflict in Mali is as complex as that of men. Women who support or join an armed group do so in the context of supporting their sons, husbands, brothers, or fathers, in line with their ethnic group or class. While women and children have suffered enormously during and after the armed conflict, the role of women is much more than being victims of violence, or a force for peace. Women in the north are also a driving force as mobilisers, encouraging men to take up arms and providing support to the armed cause in different forms. Masculinity, and what it means to be a man, has also had an impact on the dynamics of the armed conflict, since armed groups offer opportunities to fulfil expectations linked to the male identity.

Marginalisation

The overwhelming result of this study is that its respondents are in unanimous agreement that the root causes of the violent conflict in Mali are marginalization and discrimination. The conflict is nurtured by the pervasive stratification between almost all groups in the society. The cleavages run between geographic locations, genders, ethnic groups, generations and classes, and enables hierarchies between those that dominate and those that are dominated. An example that has serious security dimensions, involves the Bellahs, who are at the very bottom of the social ladder because of their history as a slave class. Some families are still owned by a slave master, in spite of the fact that slavery was abolished in 1905. The Bellahs are a major group in the north and have considerable grievances, which can spark further rebellion and violent conflict, if their living conditions and human rights do not improve.

However, stratification of the Malian society is not only an issue of deprivation and injustice, it is also interlinked with the creation of the national identity, which is based on the Bambara culture. Although the populations in the north perceive themselves as marginalised and deprived of public services and livelihood, there is no consensus on moving closer to the central government as a way of improving the situation. For some groups, e.g., the Tuaregs and Arabs, moving closer to the centre would mean that they would have to give up what is perceived as their

cultural identity and embrace the Bambara culture. It would also mean that they would have to accept the leadership of the black population, which they resent. The general feeling is that the government has abandoned the north, which was reinforced when, in 2012, the government representatives and the army left the population unprotected from atrocities. They are still absent from many locations, for security reasons. Marginality has in many ways become a place of resistance for the northerners, especially separatist groups that seek an independent Azawad, free from Bambara domination. In line with Hooks' theory of marginality, the separatists have gained support since they promised a new society different from the current governmental approach. This motivates women in these groups to provide strong support, both morally and practically, since they hope for better living conditions.

Marginality also serves as a place of resistance for northern women in general – even those who do not support an independent Azawad – since many of them have grievances that are linked to their limited access to public services and human rights. They question the government's intention and willingness to support the north. For these women, marginality is a site of resistance that motivates them to mobilise men to take up arms against an unwilling government. They even express willingness to break with the traditional role as women and themselves take up arms against the government.

A complicating factor that impedes peace and stability are those groups that occupy powerful positions – whether as part of the central power or due to class, age or gender – since they are not willing to change the current structural injustices nor share influence and power. From a gender perspective, it means that men are not willing to make concessions to women; nor rich to poor; masters to slaves; or old to young, in order to share influence, power and access to resources. This is a potential detriment to stability and peace, and it raises ethical concerns with regard to the UN intervention. Is the UN contributing to the preservation of power structures that are detrimental to human rights and human security, through its support to the stability of the government of Mali? Should the international community, in exchange for the military intervention, demand structural reforms that aim at social justice for marginalised groups?

Islamists

It is noteworthy that not a single respondent pointed to Islamism as a root cause of the conflict. The Islamists are perceived as being groups that have exploited the vacuum left behind by the absent government, through their provision of services such as health care and employment. They have also used the stratification between social classes to gain the support of impoverished communities and offer some sort of social mobility to both poor women and men. Women's status and chances for survival are closely linked to matrimony, since a woman will have more social capital and influence in private life if she is a married women with children. She will also have a husband, and perhaps sons, who are obliged to

provide protection and livelihood. As a poor single woman, she will remain at the very bottom of the social ladder, both in the society and in her family. The Islamists offer young men opportunities to fulfil their obligations as husbands and sons, which is to provide for their families and their parents. They also offer a possibility for men from lower classes to enhance their status and social capital, since Islamists measure status based on religious righteousness and piety, rather than cultural class structures and age.

Islamist groups have also gained support from local populations through their ability to maintain law and order. In situations of pervasive violence, including sexual and gender-based violence, against the local population, they have offered to restore security in exchange for local support. Their own violence, such as extrajudicial killings, rape and amputations, is explained as a means of restoring justice. They justify them as punishments for violations of their interpretation of the Sharia law. The absence of the government and the official institutions that are responsible for law, order and security, contributed to the advancement of the Islamists. In some locations, the population had no other option than to extend their support in order to stop atrocities against civilians.

One way to analyse the Islamist societal program is as one where their objective is not necessarily to oppress women, but to preserve the underlying norm of masculinity that is considered a main pillar of their imagined society. This is done through disciplining women and ensuring that they maintain appropriate behaviour in accordance with the Islamist fraction's ideology. The ongoing Islamist radicalization, in both the northern and southern parts of the country, is a worrying trend and constitutes an impediment to women's rights and their participation in public life. However, this process is still in an early stage and may come to a halt if the population is offered possibilities for improving their living conditions and achieving social mobility, in combination with long-term interventions that secure and guarantee women's rights and their participation in the public sphere. This demand, though, requires a strong and honest commitment by the state.

Gender roles

It is obvious that the possibilities for women and men to fulfil the expectations deriving from their respective gender roles are fuelling the violent conflict. This situation motivates men to join armed groups, and women to mobilise men, against actors who are detrimental to their possibilities for caring for their families. The main reason for this dilemma is the lack of governmental support and public services in the north, which has paved the way for Islamist groups, and sustained separatist claims.

The strict stratification between men and women in Mali confines and constricts women's participation to the private sphere. Being denied a place in the public sphere does not need to signify that women do not have the power to impact the conflict dynamics and the use of violence. As revealed in this

study, there is a dichotomy and contradiction in the fact that women with limited participation in the public sphere can claim that they also have the power to instigate violent conflict, as well as contribute to peace.

A way to understand this is via Haugaard's theory of power. In a gerontocratic society, older women have dispositional *power over* young men and adult sons, based on the age hierarchy, where older people are superior to younger. Although older women have no *power to* act they have indirect agency through young men, or sons. In addition, women can also gain *episodic power* and *power to* act, as happened during the crisis in 2012. Women gained *episodic power*, since many men left the region, or were confined to their homes. This left a temporary power vacuum that women could fill. Women, nevertheless, did not attain *systematic power,* since this is attributed to men who have explicit *power over* women and children, in the gender hierarchy system.

This is one of the explanations for why the traditional leaders in Gao did not acknowledge women's participation as mobilisers against the rebels. According to them, women's place is the home, where the man is the chief; outside the home, men and women are not equal. According to them, women and men have complementary roles in society. During the 2012 crisis, the gender hierarchy system was not reconstructed and men's *systematic power* was maintained intact. Men's and women's gender relations did not alter. Women seized an opportunity in the absence of adult men, and obtained *episodic power* and temporary agency in the public sphere. In spite of that, even if it was only for a limited period of time, it has contributed to a new political awareness, interest and activism among women in general. This is a development that needs to be sustained through both moral support and resources to women activists, especially at the local level.

Although women can have *dispositional power,* based on age and class, from a civic participation point of view it is problematic that they have no *systematic power.* Their power is only exercised indirectly, through their *power over* youth and adult sons, or episodically. The indirect influence exercised by women is a limitation, since it omits large groups of women and does not guarantee real and tangible influence and power in the society as a whole. Women without children, single women and disfranchised women have little or no influence over their lives and the society. Having only indirect influence means that positions and statements are filtered through another person's or group's experience, as intermediaries; it is limited by the ability and willingness of the intermediaries to convey the standpoint. Indirect influence also omits the possibility of exercising democratic rights, which is based on every person's right to participate in the public sphere, influence public decision-making and hold leaders accountable. Thus, it is pertinent to empower women and ensure that they have the possibility to participate and be represented in the public sphere, and to be granted formal power.

The power of older women over youth is in itself a reinforcement of the gerontocratic system, and an impediment to young people's possibilities for influencing the society and decision-making. The age hierarchy is also a notable grievance among young people, and has the potential to spark violent conflict against older and more powerful generations. In combination with the lack of opportunities and employment for young people, who are the majority of the population, it constitutes a dilemma that could also destabilize the south. Overcoming the lack of opportunity and powerlessness perceived by young people ought to be a central issue on a roadmap to sustainable peace for Mali.

Peace negotiations

In the context of peace negotiations, it is a complicating fact that women have no solid and influential representation, since they are a de facto actors with considerable impact on the possibility of peace. Leaving women outside peace negotiations, without having heard and included their grievances in the peace agreement, is an impediment to sustainable peace. As revealed in this study, women's grievances are not theirs alone. It is more often than not that their families and the entire community share grievances, since women are responsible for the tasks that are inevitable for human survival, e.g., water collection, food production, health care and child care. A series of studies of women's participation in peace processes around the world confirms this analysis. In those rare cases were women have played a significant role in a peace process, human rights, livelihood and access to services have been included in the negotiations.[184]

It is therefore of importance to develop methods on how to guarantee women's inclusion in peace negotiations. Given that women have limited participation in the public sphere, such methods need to be based on a *bottom up approach* which includes women at the local level and guarantee that their grievances are heard.

Public and private sphere

This analysis exposes a fundamental dilemma for the development of an inclusive, democratic state. Democracy is based on all citizens having access to the public sphere, their right to participate in decision-making and to hold leaders accountable. In traditional societies, such as the Malian, vast groups in the population have limited or no access to the public sphere, due to gender, class and age. However, in the private or informal sector, they can exercise *power over* groups inferior to themselves and act indirectly through those who do have access to the public.

Under these circumstances, there is a risk that democracy contributes to further marginalization of already marginalized groups, since mainly those who are resourceful, with *systematic power* – for example, older men from the elite classes

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[184] E.g. Chang, 2015.

– by tradition have access to the public space. Those marginalized from this space have few possibilities of exercising their democratic rights, since indirect power is not necessarily valid in democratic processes.

In order to develop an inclusive and functional democracy, it is necessary to establish a process whereby all groups can access the public sphere, regardless of geographic location, age, gender, ethnicity and class. This constitutes a major challenge in a society based on stratification and structural inequalities. This is especially pertinent in the context of armed conflict, since groups with only an indirect impact on armed conflict and peace are omitted from those political processes that have a direct effect on the root causes of the ongoing crisis.

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This study is a gender based conflict analysis of the armed conflict in northern Mali. It consists of interviews with people in Mali, at both the national and local level. The overwhelming result is that its respondents are in unanimous agreement that the root causes of the violent conflict in Mali are marginalization, discrimination and an absent government. A fact that has been exploited by the violent Islamists, through their provision of services such as health care and employment. Islamist groups have also gained support from local populations in situations of pervasive violence, including sexual and gender-based violence, and they have offered to restore security in exchange for local support.

Marginality serves as a place of resistance for many groups, also northern women since many of them have grievances that are linked to their limited access to public services and human rights. For these women, marginality is a site of resistance that motivates them to mobilise men to take up arms against an unwilling government.