Reflections on Azawad Crisis and Malian Democracy: The Statehood, its Deficiencies and Inclusion Failure

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Abstract

The 1992 decentralization reform in Mali failed to address the deficiencies embedded within the state. The resurgence of the Azawad crisis and the coup d'état of March 2012 have made these limits striking. After a brief account of the causes behind the century-long decay of Tuareg people, I will show that the 2013 elections may only represent an ephemeral solution unless strong policies of institution strengthening are deployed and the northern elites are put in condition to exert legitimate authority. The decentralization reform and peace agreements of the 1990s and 2000s have further increased the weakness of security forces. Moreover, they proved unable to provide northern elites with adequate means for securing legitimation and activating a process of institutional anchoring.

Keywords

Democratization, decentralization, institution anchoring, legitimacy, Azawad, Tuareg, African state

Introduction

Malian democracy has been representing a model of stability across the continent for almost two decades. The transition to democracy, which occurred in the 1990s, has ensured multiparty institutions and turnovers in power despite the separatist clashes that regularly swept the northern regions of Gao, Kidal and Timbuktu. However, the fall of the Gaddafi regime in mid-2011 supplied the rebels with renewed resources, which exacerbated tensions and caused a great loss of lives amongst the ranks of the Malian Army. Between 2011 and 2012 the tensions on political institutions paved the way for a coup d'état that ousted the government of Amadou Toumani Touré (ATT) on 22 March 2012.

Within a few days the *Mouvement National pour la Libération de l'Azawad* (MNLA) and Ansar Eddine seized the northern regions and declared, on 6 April, the independence of Azawad. The Malian army was unsuccessful in regaining control of the occupied territories until January 2013,

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when the separatists took control of the city of Konna and the Malian government openly invoked the aid of the French government. Paris responded on 10 January, launching operation 'SERVAL' in collaboration with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Barely 20 days later, French troops and the African contingent made their entry into Kidal, the last rebel stronghold. Outbreaks of guerrilla attacks continued until the peace agreement was signed on 18 June 2013 and the deployment, on 1 July, of the United Nations (UN) mission 'MINUSMA.'

The northern question is a long-standing wound in the process towards the country's national unity. Since independence, Gao, Timbuktu and Kidal have been affected by separatist outbreaks, which have been tackled by the central government with a strategy that combined use of force with mediation.[1] The 1992 Constitution institutionally established the compromise between the central government and the northern elites, which was conceived of over the course of the peace negotiations of 1991.[2] Despite the commitment in favour of a *Statut particulier* entailing a certain degree of autonomy that was included in the Accords of Tamanrasset,[3] southern delegates at the 1991 National conference proved recalcitrant and forced the government to back down in favour of a more symmetrical decentralization that was extended to the whole country.

Despite the fact that 1992 Constitution ensured a working multiparty democracy over the past two decades, it eventually failed to address the limits embedded within the Malian statehood. The inability of institutions to ensure political authority in the three northern regions contributed to a great extent to the weakening of the political elites, who in turn proved unable to ensure a suitable anchoring for, and to, political institutions. The elites who were co-opted into local-level institutions lacked adequate resources to exert effective leadership, ensure law enforcement and fully implement peace agreements.[4] The letter of these, for their part, went in the opposite direction, deepening the weakness of the Malian security services.

As a result, large portions of the north have been condemned to a condition of disorder and anomic behaviour incompatible with modern statehood. The dearth of authority has paved the way for a flourishing trade in every type of goods, which has further radicalized the instability. These limits, in addition to the long-lasting decay of the nomadic communities of the north, are fundamental to understanding the roots of the Azawad crisis and to finding a sustainable solution for the years to come. Much of the current debate on newspapers, mostly attracted by talk of development programmes, gives jubilant welcome to the recent elections of July 2013. Meanwhile, bomb attacks keep hitting the north, and the viability of the central government is put into question daily. According to a fundamental essay by Samuel P Huntington (1968: 8), authority must exist before it can be limited or questioned. Until this limit is faced up to by policies that are able to activate processes of democratic anchoring and institutional legitimation (Morlino, 2005), the Azawad crisis is still likely to protract for a long time.

State weakness in Africa is a question that is greatly debated by scholars, since institutions exert a meaningful influence on political processes and African states have often exhibited serious deficiencies in this respect.[5] Nevertheless, actual debate and, above all, public opinion campaigns hardly address the problem of a central authority's existence, which often seems to be something unrelated to democratization, so that donors appear more interested in third-sector initiatives rather than focusing on fundamentals. The mistake is evidently conceptual, since it demonstrates a lack of knowledge about the relationships within a political system, wherein the lack of a single legitimate authority is one of the most serious threats for its survival.[6] As long as the state is not the single recognized source of legitimate authority, every effort to democratize is bound to be ruinous.

In order for an authority to be consolidated, it requires strong institutions, which are defined as valuable and routinized patterns of behaviour (Thelen and Steinmo, 2012). The institutionalization of power largely depends on conducts put in place by relevant political actors, which perform an

intermediary role, and are able to provide institutions with legitimation and anchoring (Morlino, 2005). These two functions are largely dependent on local political elites and the degree of their achievement rests upon the elites' capacity to bind reference groups to themselves. The means at their disposal are various – ranging from patronage and personal prestige to policy performance – but they are all related to resources obtained through positions of power and accumulation, generally coinciding with public sector membership or access. For this very reason, it is extremely important that established power is not challenged by opposing counter-powers who are able to buy off popular support by providing alternative funding sources.

In the first section the transition process will be outlined, casting light on the achievement of elite consensus, with particular regard, firstly, to the role of political and administrative decentralization and, secondly, to the limits of the 1991 institutional arrangement. The second section will take into account the northern problem, stressing the role of local elites and explaining the reasons underlying their loss of leadership. The last section will address the limits of Malian statehood, the deficiencies of which have allowed the radicalization of the crisis in the north.

Historical background

In 1960 the Sudanese Republic and Senegal attained their independence as the Federation of Mali. Barely a year later, Senegal seceded and the former French Sudan became the Republic of Mali. In the aftermath of independence, the *Union Soudanaise*, led by Prime Minister Modibo Keïta, abolished the opposition parties making Mali a single-party regime (Zolberg, 1966: 103–106). The flare-up of the First Tuareg rebellion in the north (1962–1964) was brutally suppressed, while the power was gradually concentrated in the hands of the executive. Keita's scientific socialism further impoverished the State, engendering political instability and undermining the legitimacy of the government, until he was eventually deposed of by a coup in 1968 (Bennet, 1975: 249–252). The *Comité militaire de libération nationale* (CMLN) led by Lieutenant Colonel Moussa Traoré did not rescue the country from its spiral of decline and, at the end of the 1970s, the institutional reforms proved insufficient to recover legitimacy and prevent a condition of chronic instability (Chazan, 1982: 169–189).

In the late 1980s the government was forced to allow the emergence of political associations, which began to exert a rising pressure in favour of multiparty democracy. In March 1990, the outbreak of the Second Tuareg rebellion opened up a second front and forced Bamako to run for cover by signing the Tamanrasset Accords. In addition, the government had to cope with rising unrest coming from the civil society. The opposition began taking to the streets in early 1991, taking advantage of the crisis the government was facing up in the north. The repression of student demonstrations in March 1991 and the Air Force's refusal to bomb the opposition's headquarter anticipated, on 26 March, the arrest of Moussa Traoré by a moderate fringe of the government. The putschists – headed by Col. Tounami Amadou Touré – set up a transitional government aimed at re-establishing a multiparty democracy.[7] The legacy of the authoritarian rule and the autonomist crisis, which was still sweeping the north, made quite evident the need for a renewed compromise on the rules of the political game in order to keep the north and south together.

Following the liberalization of the political system, the public arena was entered into by a number of actors (e.g. political parties, unions, interest groups, independent radio stations and the print media), which gave voice to a heterogeneous set of interests, identities and powers. Such diversity stood in the way of the transitional coalition, whose unity risked being rapidly undermined after the demise of Traoré. The new institutions were in fact in urgent need of legitimacy and anchoring to civil society. Indeed, the growing number of *sensibilités politiques* seeking political space urged an institutional design capable of harmonizing the regionalisms and the national unity. All this,

Table 1. 12 January 1992 Constitutional Referendum. National and regional results (source: Diarrah, 1996).

Registered voters	Voter turnout	Yes	No
5,233,432	2,276,291	2,238,804	17,736
	43.58%	98.35%	1.65%
Regions	Yes (%)	No (%)	Voter turnout (%)
Kayes	98.3	1.26	45.55
Koulikoro	98.6	0.9	56.4
Sikasso	98.4	0.79	39.4
Ségou	97.8	1.2	38.4
Mopti	99.4	0.27	41.5
Timbuctu	99.7	0.08	41.8
Gao	99.4	0.29	16.29
Kidal	99.0	0.83	16.53
Bamako	96.5	2.43	38.29
Resident abroad	97.7	0.12	69.62

therefore, recalled the need for a workable compromise that the CTSP, mindful of the Benin's *Conférence Nationale des Forces Vives de la Nation*, pursued through the call for a National conference.[8]

From 29 July to August 13, delegates of civil bodies, political parties and northern autonomist factions attended the National Conference (Diarrah, 1996: 32–36). The assembly drafted a new constitution, which was approved by popular referendum in January 1992. The Conference also promulgated the Charter of the political parties that eventually sanctioned the formation of an elite consensus on the rules of the game (Nzouankeu, 1993: 44–50). The constitutional architecture was modelled on the French Fifth Republic and it envisaged a political decentralization based on three sub-levels of government (*region, cercle* and *commune*). This latter was the key feature of the national compromise, as the decentralization strategy was conceived of in order to anchor the new-born regime and to enhance its legitimacy, as well as to pacify the north through the inclusion of its political elites within government institutions.

The decentralization: between legitimacy and anchoring

In order for it to be consolidated, a political regime requires its institutions to be anchored to civil society and perceived of as legitimate. In the course of regime change the new-born institutions are weak due to lack of autonomy and are barely adaptable to either external or internal threats (Huntington, 1968: 12–24). In fact, their survival depends to a greater extent on the political actors who are called upon to express legitimation and participation by competing for political power. Life expectancy of institutions therefore largely depends on the conduct of elites for both anchoring and legitimation. As reported in Table 1, the constitutional referendum picked up a 'Yes' vote percentage of around 99%. This ballot illustrated the amount of consensus bestowed upon the institutional design. Aspirations were naturally high and, as shown by Afrobarometer surveys, civil rule was considered the only legitimate form of government for a large part of the electorate (Bratton et al., 2000).

Legitimacy alone, however, is not sufficient in order to achieve consolidation. Strong institutional anchors are needed, especially when voter turnout remains low. Institutional anchoring is the

Table 2. Electoral alliances contesting the 1997 elections.

Alliance	Composition
Convergence Nationale pour la Démocratie et le Progrès (CNDP)	ADEMA, PARENA, ADES, CDS, MC-CDR, RAMAT, PDJ
Rassemblement des Forces Patriotiques (RFP)	BDIA, PDP, UDD (it then joined the FCD), PMDR, CNID, PSP, MPR, UFDP
Front pour le Changement et la démocratie (FCD)	MIRIA, US-RDA, RDP, UDD, PRDT, PMPS
Collectif des partis de l'opposition (COPPO)	Following the legislative election, RFP and FCD founded the COPPO, which boycotted the presidential round.

capacity of political institutions to involve social groups in the political process. A few months after taking office, the Konaré government launched its decentralization reform so as to promote the inclusion of local elites within the three level of sub-government. Konaré was particularly aware that its political fortunes were largely dependent on the survival of institutions. Decentralization undoubtedly offered the government the opportunity to reactivate the networks of patronage and, accordingly, the anchoring.[9]

The aforementioned electoral performance proved that the strategy was appropriate, as low levels of political conflict accompanied an overall respect for democratic procedures. ADEMA-PASJ[10] took up a dominant position in a highly fragmented arena for nearly a decade. Briefly, the 1992 presidential elections witnessed nine candidates and ten parties being awarded at least one seat in Parliament.[11] Between 1992 and 1997, more than 60 parties were created, although only eight won seats in Parliament. In 1997 ADEMA-PASJ again won the presidential round and accounted for the majority of seats. Decentralization was only fully implemented in 1999, as the Malians elected the members of local councils. ADEMA-PASJ again took all the urban communes as well as 59% of seats in rural constituencies. In 2004 the number of parties increased to 94, but only five could boast nation-wide organizations (ADEMA, URD, RPM, CNID, MPR),[12] whilst only the first three were likely to elect at least one representative from Kayes or Kidal. In the 2009 council-level elections ADEMA-PASJ won 3185 *conseillers municipaux* and obtained five *mairies* out of six in the district of Bamako. In 2012 ATT was concluding his second term and elections were scheduled for April. What followed is a well-known story.

Over the last 20 years, the political system in Mali has demonstrated its stability. It has stood the test of turnover in power and, despite some stress, electoral competition has been maintained within institutional constraints. The party system, although fragmented, was characterized by the absence of anti-systemic parties and exhibited a high degree of convergence. Broad evidence shows that a large number of low-institutionalized formations can pose a serious threat to the qualitative dimension of governance by encouraging malpractices that undermine legitimacy (OECD, 2010; Vengroff, 1995). Yet, patronage and multilevel governance have provided effective anchoring for the political system and have kept the cohesion of political forces tight. ADEMA has kept playing a pivotal role and electoral alliances have turned out to be a regular practice.

Table 2 illustrates the high propensity for electoral alliances displayed by Malian politics (Camara, 2008: 1–26). Since the 1997 elections, the electoral competition has been characterized by macro alliances, which have included between seven and eight formations on average.

Despite the high fragmentation and the volatility of the alliances suggesting a low institutionalization of parties, political parties were crucial to anchoring the institution to civil society since they

represented the sole vehicle for state penetration. Where the State institutions hold a greater part of the means of accumulation, and personal status is mainly a function of affluence and position of power (Bayart, 1989: 104), access to institutions is an important stimulus in maintaining a party's liquidity and consociationalism. It is undeniable that bandwagoning badly affects the popular perception of politics. Nevertheless, as long as the State feeds the traditional stratification of social authority – playing the role of inequality manufacturer, as Bayart (1989) argues – the system will keep standing on its feet. In short, political parties are functional in order to maintain the redistributive pre-eminence of local elites and to back their legitimacy, as their personal status is intimately linked to the degree of proximity to institutions.

In summary, decentralization was the rationale underlying the elite consensus. Despite the several instances of malpractice that plagued the management of the *res publica*, decentralization made the system cope successfully with the pressures coming from local interests and also addressed the growing political demands by those upon whose satisfaction the consolidation of the new-born regime depended. In other words, it brought all parties into the political process. As we shall see, however, such a mechanism failed to pacify the north.

The northern question

As noted above the northern problem originally encouraged the decentralization strategy, which, it was thought, would bring peace to the north through inclusion and development. Indeed, the political stability could not have been achieved without a viable solution for the northern question, the causes of which were deeply rooted in a tangle of historical, economic and environmental matters. The 2011 Tuareg rebellion only represents the last instance of a long-lasting strife, caused by the progressive political and economic decline that the northern communities have experienced since the late 19th century. Before delving into the issue, however, it must be clarified what lies behind it.

Mali is one of the largest states on the continent and it consists of three distinct climatic zones: a fertile south, the semi-arid Sahel in the centre and the Sahara desert in the north.[13] The southern regions are covered by savannah, while in the north the land becomes slightly wavy and the desert is the predominant feature. The regions of Gao, Kidal and Timbuktu occupy almost 800,000 square kilometres (about two-thirds of Mali) and have a population of 1,200,000 inhabitants divided among Tamasheq (Tuaregs), Arabs (Maures), Songhais, Peuls or Fulani, Bambara and Bozos. Songhai is the largest group while Tamasheq speakers account for about 32% and Maures only 4%.[14] The environment is arid, under-populated and so marginal as to be completely de-institutionalized (Herbst, 2000: 152–154). According to Herbst such a condition depends on three factors: the spatial extent, the morphological and climatic conditions, and the relative stability of the political borders. Following the author's main argument, the central government has never had enough incentives to extend its authority over desert areas, which are under-populated and where sovereignty is not an issue.

Sedentary and nomadic communities have together inhabited this area for centuries, but since the Colonial age the nomadic prominence has gradually been undermined. Tuareg and Maures constitute heterogeneous groups, which exhibit a horizontal segmentation that has made their interaction with central government particularly difficult. Fortes and Evans-Pritchard (1950: 12) pointed out how the lack of a single and recognizable authority makes groups politically weak and, hence, unable to act cohesively as a single political actor. The small size of these groups weakened even more their political relevance. Given such circumstances, these communities have always had shaky relationships with the central power, which gradually condemned the northern communities to a condition of marginalization.

Over the centuries the flourishing trans-Saharan routes had made the nomadic communities prosper across the region. Their predatory economy – based on raids and collection of tributes by uncoordinated groups – ensured easy access for cattle breeders to resources alongside the Niger River, and enabled nomadic traders to expand to throughout the Saharan space (Olivier de Sardan, 2012: 30). Since the late 19th century, however, the centre of gravity of the entire region has moved into the hands of southern ethnic groups, upsetting the traditional balance of power between north and south. During the 20th century, the downturn in rainfall led to an overall impoverishment and communities fell deeper into disgrace.

The independence of Mali did not reverse this trend, and since the beginning of the 1960s the nomadic populations have shown strong intolerance towards Bamako's government, which was perceived as being the heir of the Colonial power. Their claims for independence were quelled by militarily means and the northern problem was ousted from the governing agenda (Grémont, 2010: 103–106). This repression was accompanied by the tendency – widespread in most African states at the time – to adopt highly centralized forms of government in which the small scale of the nomadic and pastoral communities was considered largely irrelevant (Gentili, 2008: 7–23; Zolberg, 1966: 9). Growth models based on forced modernization exacerbated the contrasts, relegating the interests of the nomads in the background – disparagingly called *le Mali inutile*.

The primary consequence of such a decline was an overall impoverishment that reverberated on the social structure and, thus, compromised the strength of the traditional leadership. The drop in status experienced by the noble families undermined the basis of their authority. The turmoil within the social hierarchy was exacerbated by the massive migration caused by the droughts following the decreases in rainfall of 1972–1974 and 1984–1985 (Bruijn and von Dijk, 2005). Due to climatic difficulties, the herdsmen began to push their cattle southward causing growing frictions with the sedentary world.[15] In Africa the land issue has always been at the centre of exhausting mediations and conflicts, whose outcome depended on the degree of complementarity and balance of power amongst dominant groups. In this case, the scarcity of resources made the centuries-old conflict even more striking. The youth, bereft of both jobs and hope, left their communities and were drawn to either Malian urban centres or to following the promises broadcasted by neighbouring countries such as Algeria and Libya, where some of them came into contact with revolutionary ideologies or filled the ranks of the Islamic Legion. In the urban contexts, as well as abroad, they were exposed to modern values, whose assimilation determined – as was evident once they were sent back home late in the 1980s – a deeper weakening of tradition hierarchy.

Political marginalization and poverty have therefore torn apart the traditional community, fuelling a growing division with regard to the national body and inside the same local communities. Social malaise and rising frustration suddenly exploded. After the rebellion occurred in the aftermath of independence (1962–1964), the regions of Timbuktu, Gao and Kidal witnessed three armed uprising between 1990 and 2013 (1990–1995, 2005–2009, 2012–2013), which over time deepened the inter-communitarian cleavage.[16] If the rebellions that had followed independence were bloodily suppressed, the 1990s witnessed the enhanced capacity of offensive capability, which enabled the separatist groups to reach the negotiating tables. Both the Accords of Tamanrasset and the National Pact insisted on the autonomist goal, demanding more inclusion in national government and further developmental funding for the north.

The rebel leadership, however, was not able to fulfil the terms of the agreements as the movement was split within itself along tribal and generational lines. Due to the balkanization of the front, the conflict underwent several escalations that led the crisis to the verge of a civil war, and eventually undermined the development initiatives of the peace agreements. The government was forced to give in to pressure from the rebels, who then nonetheless proved to be inclined to raise the stakes through the resumption of conflict. The weakness of the Malian state, the

mismanagement of the ATT government, and the consequent absence of an effective monopoly on violence over the territory, had left the north free from state authority, which is an anomic condition that can only bring about lawlessness and violence.

Peace through institutional inclusion

The decentralization strategy, aimed at strengthening the government institutions in the three northern regions, insisted on the principle of the national unity in exchange for self-government (Kirby and Murray, 2010: 109). This self-governance was thought to stimulate, similarly to the rest of the country, the processes of anchoring and legitimation. The decentralization strategy failed to bring the desired results with regard to either institutional strengthening or economic development. The literature on this topic has pointed out three main areas in which the decentralized institutions were lacking: the lack of staff with appropriate expertise, the lack of economic and financial resources and the lack of fair procedures that brought about an overlap of responsibilities between levels of government (Hesseling and van Dijk, 2005: 182; Maire and Idelman, 2010: 2–12). In addition, high levels of corruption and mismanagement have confined the municipalities, especially the rural ones, to underdevelopment and chronic poverty. It goes without saying that the scarcity of available resources weakened the *captured* political elites even further, since no effective resources were available for consensus building. On closer inspection, in fact, the claim for autonomy hid the attempt of local elites to regain pre-eminence and authority through decentralization, as it would have ensured them a renewed flow of funds and arenas of self-government with which they would have been able to hook up the territory to development.

In the early 1990s, the policies of conditionality deemed political decentralization as a vehicle of democracy, which was likely to improve governance and enhance the inclusion of marginal areas (Litvack and Seddon, 1999: 6–7). Indeed, the proximity of decision-making centres to local communities would have offered more opportunity to increase responsiveness and exert a more efficient allocation of resources. Unfortunately, a simple devolution of power does not sort out a lack of social cohesion and law enforcement; however, it may play a decisive role in the development of institutional anchors. According to Seely (2001: 499–524) the decentralization policy served to co-opt the northern elites into the political gears through power-sharing and elite capture. The chances of anchoring were there encapsulated: party system and patronage were the main devices.

If anchoring is a mechanical process based on the delivery of resources from the top to the bottom, then, conversely, legitimation takes root more gradually and it is unlikely to be activated by mere institutional solutions, as it requires agencies (for example, local political elites) capable of value making. Since power in Africa is not merely transformative, but also intimately related to consumption (Schatzberg, 1993), it goes without saying that power needs resources and redistribution in order for it to be effective.

As previously pointed out, the northern traditional elites were weak and divided among themselves, as some had over time emerged in opposition to Bamako. Indeed, the failure of the anchoring process lies in the weakness of local political elites, who were no longer capable of exerting mediation between government and groups of note. The reasons are as follows.

- Firstly, where the private sector is largely dependent on public funds, the co-opted elite represents a crucial *trait d'union* between civil society and state resources.
- Secondly, if resources are lacking, the co-opted elite becomes weaker.
- Thirdly, their legitimacy was disputed. Indeed the same elites had lost face in the signing of peace treaties, bearing prospects of development that were never fulfilled.

Table 3. Brief prospectus regarding rebel integration within state bodies between 1993 and 1996. (source: Keita and Henk, 1998).

Corp	Total personnel	Integrated personnel	%
Army	7000	1311	18.73
Navy	70	0	0
Air Force	450	0	0
Gendarmerie	1500	151	10
National Guard	700	348	50
Police	1000	150	15

In addition to this, a new source of financing arose in those years and exacerbated the tensions: large-scale smuggling, ranging from drugs to cigarettes, and illegal immigrants to weapons. By its very nature, this activity proliferates in de-institutionalized and autonomous contexts, away from the long arm of state control. Part of the traditional and modern elites of the north federated around the huge profits that trafficking generates. It is not coincidental that the resurgence of the fighting was fuelled by the large profits coming from it, which were copious enough to buy off popular consent and find recruitment amongst the poorest sections of the population (mostly youths and rebels who had previously been integrated into the regular Army).

The *nomos* of the state on the northern lands

The above-mentioned context facilitated the proliferation of armed groups out of Bamako's reach and independent from the traditional authorities. Yet, instead of re-establishing the control on the periphery, which is the only guarantee for the survival of political order, agreements have further weakened the authority by reducing the military device in the area. The peace agreements that have occurred – from Tamanrasset (1991) to Algiers (2006)[17] – have stated that there be partial demilitarization of the three regions, confining the garrisons to around major urban centres. The military and police corps are the primary tools for the exercise of the monopoly of violence and as such, they perform an essential function: ensuring the exclusive retention of authority on a given territory, supporting and protecting it from competing powers that could undermine its exercise. This is a necessary condition for a system to stand on its own feet, and consequently, the monopoly on force is the necessary requirement.

The Tamanrasset Accords (1991) and the National Pact (1992) stressed the integration of irregular forces within the regular ones as a confidence-building measure. As shown in Table 3, 610 units were included in April 1993 and 1200 in October 1996, shared out among the Army, Gendarmerie and the National Guard. The integration process also involved the Public administration and the Police, which were gradually opened to non-Africans. In October 1996, 120 units were added to the ranks of the Public administration and 300 were assigned to Police forces (Police, Border Patrol Police and Forestry).

In addition, the agreements allowed ex-rebels and regular forces to team up to patrol the desert routes of the north. The inclusion of ex-rebels in the joint patrols has made the efficiency of the Malian military device even weaker and has compromised to a greater extent their ability to exercise effective control over the territory (Keita and Henk, 1998: 21). Moreover, the increase in corruption at all levels and the inaction of the political class did not prevent the slow deterioration of the Army, whose officials were rumoured to be heavily involved in every kind of trafficking. This has in turn conferred a large advantage to Tuareg 'conflict entrepreneurs' engaged in illegal

economic activity, whose profits depend on freedom of movement through unattended borders and the absence of law and order.[18] Along with the silence of the highest political authorities, not to mention the complicity of part of the local elites (tribal chiefs, notables of the regime and leaders of the separatist movements), smuggling activities thrived exponentially, generating huge profits but also undermining any effort towards peace. In this kind of business the incomes rise proportionally to the de-institutionalization and de-militarization of the territory, which in conclusion was made possible by the absence of an effective ruling class (Olivier de Sardan, 2012: 28–29).

The northern question is a crisis triggered by the genetic deficiencies of the state, which were only amplified by the incompetence of its leadership and the breakdown of the Libyan regime. The lack of identification between political order and judicial space – whose identity, according to Carl Schmitt, constitutes the basis of sovereignty – is proven by the emergence of competing counter-powers, who proclaimed independence by rejecting the legitimacy of Bamako. A state is by definition composed of three essential elements: a stable population, a given territory and the provision of effective government. The analyses of post-independence Africa have often focused on the conditions likely to produce political stability and effective government.[19] In a famous essay about how changing societies face modernity – 'Political Order in Changing Societies' by Samuel P Huntington (1968) – the author addressed the capacity of governments to exercise their prerogatives. Behind the Hobbesian question 'Government yes or government no?' the author identified the dividing line between order and chaos.

Analytically, the means of the exercise of power can be understood in terms of authority or right to govern (legitimacy) and power to govern (means of coercion). In this sense, research on African states has highlighted deficiencies regarding both these dimensions: firstly, concentration of authority (who governs?) and, secondly, the spatial dimension of government (where and to what extent does it governs?). In particular, the strength of government, the exclusive exercise of power and its spatial extent are the questions to which the institutional design of the African states, including Mali, are still seeking a suitable solution.

In the three northern regions of Mali, the spatial dimension of authority is uncertain. In fact, the further one moves away from the centre, the more the territory becomes de-institutionalized in compliance with the logic of concentric circles, in which the amount of authority gradually decreases. The State's absence in remote areas is a *topos* very common in the history of the continent, which is traditionally characterized by a low degree of the extension of political authority within boundaries that are only functionally conceived (Nugent, 1996: 1–14). The explanation for this involves a set of geographical and political circumstances that make it difficult for a government to extend its institutions across relatively under-resourced and under-populated areas and where sovereignty is fixed by international consensus (Herbst, 2000: 21–28; Jackson and Rosberg, 1982: 1–24). Mali displays areas in which the government exercises effective and exclusive control over the territory, and areas that are clearly de-institutionalized because they are too far from the centre to represent a real concern.

The three northern regions, especially Kidal's, not only lack an effective government over a recognized territorial space, but are also inhabited by people – the Arab clans (Maures) and the Tuareg confederations – who see themselves as distinct in their culture, history and institutions from the national body.[20] In the dialogue staged by Robert A Dahl in Democracy and Its Critics (Dahl, 1989), the author, dealing with the genesis of democracy, raises the following question: 'what demos?' With regard to Mali, the answer can only be 'several *demòi*'. The Tuareg groups of Kidal, Timbuctu and Menaka share a common language and a common culture, but they do not share the same traditions and historical references with the southern groups. The plurality of ethnic groups and their socio-cultural heterogeneity represent a burden looming over the political system, especially when some ethnic groups are subordinated to others and their position in the social

hierarchy coincides with lower social ranks; in other words, when social cleavages assume a political meaning (Horowitz, 1985: 21–24).

Moreover, Tuaregs and Maures communities were divided among themselves and despite parts of their elites playing a meaningful role in the national arena, a consistent segment of their reference groups were, and still are, marginalized. Despite 'captured' elites having acted cohesively within the political system, they have failed to provide the expected goods and services to their constituencies.[21] Accounts on Malian decentralization emphasize the structural weakness of local government. *Communes* suffered a chronic dearth of financial resources and were plagued by scarcity in human resources (Wing and Kassibo, 2010). Nevertheless, local politicians were re-elected and the same political parties kept holding the reins of political representation. It may be useful to observe the electoral trend. In both the 1992 and 1997 elections, the average turnout in the three northern regions was slightly above the national one, with ADEMA-PASJ leading in almost all the constituencies. In 2002, the northern regions recorded higher turnout than the national average and, as a demonstration of the positive trend coinciding with a period of relative peace, the turnout at the 2004 district elections reached 43% in Timbuktu, Gao and Kidal. Surprisingly, ADEMA-PASJ won more seats from Timbuktu and Gao than from other national constituencies. In 2006, however, new turbulences broke out throughout the north, dragging the conflict to the verge of civil strife.

Despite the present work having considered the ADEMA's dominance in the north as a measure of anchoring, the re-emergence of the separatist conflict gives evidence that the mechanism has not properly worked as elsewhere. In order to explain the bias, it is appropriate to take into account what lies behind the low turnout in the north. Assuming that ADEMA was successful in involving a large share of the electorate within the political process, more than half of the entire Malian electorate seems to be disenfranchised. Consequently, it is clearly identifiable that there is a broad cleavage between those who participate (insiders) and those who are excluded or self-excluded (outsiders). The years of conflict, poverty, illiteracy and the physiological marginalization of people living in desert areas marks the dividing line among those who are exposed to the institutions and those who are not. Roughly assuming that captured elites mobilize their reference groups to vote (between 30% and 40% of the total electorate), where is the remaining 60–70% to be placed?

Afrobarometer's surveys pinpoint the bad reputation of rulers and social marginality as the major causes behind the low turnout at national level.[22] Thus, the distrust and/or indifference of the [national] outsiders appear to be oriented towards concrete political issues rather than to the institutions, given that national unity is perceived as 'the only game in town'. In the north, conversely, the rationale of abstention can only be made to be the object of suppositions due to the restrains within the Afrobarometer's sample, whose coverage of the north appears lacking. Based on the arguments stressed so far, it is likely that behind abstention lie disenfranchisement, anger and deep institutional delegitimation. Altogether they have caused the non-acceptance of Bamako's political authority for a sizable, although not countable, segment of the population.

A tentative conclusion

Decentralization has ensured political stability for almost two decades. The coup of March 2012 raised concern about the solidity of the national compromise and, hence, the effectiveness of decentralization in achieving expected outcomes. Doubts, however, should not distract from the good democratic performance that two thirds of the country have experienced in the past 20 years. In fact, the reasons behind the crisis, recall long-term causes that the 1991 Constitutions left unsolved. In the north the decentralization proved to be elusive for two fundamental reasons. Firstly, decentralization failed to strengthen the institutions, ensure transfer of authority and secure its exercise by coercive means. Secondly, decentralization failed to address development, due to

lack of resources and mismanagement. Local *communes* have suffered severe hardship caused by a scarcity of financial means and local political elites unsuccessfully bridged the gap between institutions and the private sector. In short, decentralization was unable to provide political elites with the resources likely to activate anchoring and legitimation. In addition to this, the lack of the rule of law paved the way for counter-elites who undermined every effort.

The Azawad war is thus the epilogue of a problem that has been left unsolved for decades. The recent elections seem to have signalled the end of the conflict and brought back to power an elected government. The north, nevertheless, was and still is a wellspring of political instability given the deep divides existing between southerners and northerners, settlers and nomads, radicals and laics, loyalists and insurgents. A durable peace should pass through a process of institutions strengthening, since their effectiveness constitutes the necessary basis for legal order, economic development and national reconciliation. As long as the 2500 French soldiers deployed in Mali leave the country, post-conflict policies shall benefit from this lesson. Effective institutions are the primary condition for ensuring stability, because elections and economic growth need solid ground in order to take off.

As long as the state does not provide law enforcement, no policy can really be effective. Even elections are useless when they do not take place in an institutional environment that is able to support whoever is holding office by assuring resources to manage mobilization and ensuring rule of law. However, effective institutions require authority and, as Huntington (1968: 8) points out, it has to exist before it can be limited (by elections or other means). The stability of a community primarily reflects the relationships between its political institutions and the social forces of which it is compromised, rather than the mere procedures of selecting who governs (Huntington, 1968: 10).

Here is the reason why separatist nationalism must be uprooted. Democratization does not prevent domestic strife when the nationalistic lever is being exploited at an elite level (Snyder, 2000: 31–32). Nationalism is a strategy that serves the interests of powerful groups and poses a serious threat to state legitimation and anchoring. It must be kept in mind that while democratic consolidation reduces ethnic conflicts, transition to democracy increases them in areas where institutions cannot successfully engage the growing mobilization. This, however, is not the case in Mali, as political mobilization is limited. Nonetheless unscrupulous politicians exist, and

> …the more the elites feels threatened by the arrival of democracy, the stronger is [their] incentive to use nationalist persuasion to lock electoral support…

with the result that democratization would be fatally compromised (Snyder, 2000: 37).

For this very reason, as long as counter-elites are not being neutralized, central authority is restored, and grassroots-institution legitimacy is adequately fed, democracy will always be threatened.

Funding

Notes

1. Separatist insurgencies occurred in 1962–1963, 1990–1996, 2006–2009, 2012–2013.
2. See the Appendix.
3. Signed on 6 January 1991 by the government of the Republic of Mali on the one side, and *the Mouvement Populaire de l'Azawad* and the *Front Islamique Arabe* on the other hand. The parts agreed on ceasing the hostilities, the demilitarization of the three northern regions and the concession of an autonomous status.

4. See the Appendix for a brief compendium of peace agreements between the 1990s and 2000s.
5. See Jackson and Rosberg (1982), Migdal (1988) and OECD (2010).
6. For a broader account of relations between state fragility and legitimacy see OECD's report prepared by the Fragile State Group (2010).
7. The *Comité de Transition pour la Salut du Peuple* (CTSP) consisted of 10 military personnel and 15 civilians, including three delegates from the north.
8. National conferences are a phenomenon spread throughout French-speaking Africa from the late 1980s to the early 1990s. Conferences were established in order to discuss situations of national crisis in the period of transition from authoritarian regimes to democratic regimes. They are usually unelected bodies composed of representatives nominated by a wide range of interests, and claiming to represent the nation in its entirely.
9. Patronage is an inbuilt feature of the African statehood; see Médard (1991b).
10. *Alliance pour la Démocratie au Mali-Parti Pan-Africain pour la Liberté, la Solidarité et la Justice* (ADEMA-PASJ). On 25 October 1990 opponents of Moussa Traoré joined together as ADEMA. This movement attracted many supporters with no previous political affiliation and also included activists from many political organizations: *Soudanaise - Rassemblement Démocratique Africain* (US-RDA), the party of the former president Modibo Keïta; the *Parti malien pour la révolution et la démocratie* (PMDR), the *Parti malien du travail* (PMT), a Marxist-Leninist organization; the *Front démocratique et populaire malien* (FDPM), composed primarily of Malian emigrants and political exiles.
11. Excluding the seven opposition parties that boycotted the polls in 1997.
12. Union pour la république et la démocratie (URD), Rassemblement pour le Mali (RPM), Congrés national d'initiative d'emocratique (CNID), Mouvement patriotique pour le renouveau (MPR).
13. Mali's territory is 1,241,300 m^2, 243 km of borders, its population density is about 10 units per km^2 around the Niger River and it decreases to 0.01 km^2 in northern territories.
14. See Government of Mali (2009).
15. The searching of pastures for herds caused conflicts over rights and obligations. Many animals died of thirst, hunger or fatigue during the long journey. Thousands of Tuareg drifted to the cities where they set up cowhide shelters and shanties on the fringes of town. For an in-depth perspective on the social impact of droughts, see Grémont et al. (2004), who have collected together a large number of interviews and commentaries.
16. For the social consequences of conflict, see Randall (2005: 12–27). For an in-depth analysis of 1990s' insurgency, see Poulton and Ag Youssouf (1998: 55–85). For a broader perspective on the conflict, see (Keita, 2002), Antil and Touati (2011: 59–69), and Olivier de Sardan (2012: 28–41). For an up-to-date analysis, see International Crisis Group (2012). The Appendix lists all the peace agreements since 1991.
17. See the Appendix. The last in order, the Accords of Alger, was signed on 4 July 2006 by the government of Mali and the delegates of the *Alliance Démocratique du 23 mai pour le changement* – a rebel group formed in 2006 by ex-combatants from the 1990s insurgency. A faction of the group rejected the accords and continued to operate until a new agreement was reached in 2008. The leader, Ibrahim ag Bahanga, after having fled to Libya was killed in Kidal on 26 August, 2011.
18. 'Conflict entrepreneur' refers to any group or individual whose profits depend on conditions that promote conflict.
19. See Zolberg (1966), Jackson and Rosberg (1982), Chabal (1986), Chabal (1992), Migdal (1988) and Médard (1991a).
20. This sentence recalls the conception of nationalism defined by Gellner as the doctrine that the political unit and the cultural unit should be congruent. For a more contemporary perspective on the relationship between nationalism and democratization, see Snyder (2000).
21. For a meaningful reflection on the basis of political legitimacy in Africa see Bayart (1989), Bayart et al. (1992) and Schatzberg (1993).
22. Afrobarometer Network conducted surveys over a nationally representative sample in 2001, 2002, 2005 and 2008. Reports and data are available at http://www.afrobarometer.org/data/data-by-country/mali.

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Appendix

Peace agreements between 1991 and 2013

1. Accords of Tamanrasset (6 January 1991): the agreement focuses on decentralization of the north and the reintegration of Tuareg troops.
2. National Pact (11 April 1992): the pact focuses on economic decentralization, development of the north, and integration of Tuaregs into military and civilian bodies.

3. Accords of Bourem (6 January 1995): the agreement marks a significant step in defusing inter-ethnic tensions between the *Movement patriotique Ganda Koy*, Songahi-based self-defence militia and the Tuareg rebels.
4. Flame of Peace (27 March 1996): ceremony held at Timbuktu. Hundreds of firearms are destroyed and Tuareg armed movements are formally dissolved, along with the Ganda Koy militia.
5. Accords of Algiers (4 July 2006): Peace agreement signed by government and ADC (see Note 11), to bring security and economic growth to Kidal's region.
6. Kidal peace ceremony (17 February 2009): disarmament ceremony marking the end of the uprising and the surrender of hundreds of weapons by Tuareg rebels and new arrangements for their incorporation into the armed forces.