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## **Beyond institutional blueprints: hybrid security provision and democratic practice in Mali**

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## Chapter 5

### Decentralisation and democratisation

The functioning of a hybrid political institution at the local level.<sup>377</sup>  
(1999-2009)

#### INTRODUCTION

During the 1990s, the Malian government set out to transfer central state responsibilities and resources to newly established local municipal authorities supervised by locally elected councils. Thousands of villages and nomad fractions were regrouped into 703 municipalities after an extensive process of administrative and territorial restructuring.

These ambitious decentralisation reforms aimed to enhance state legitimacy and spearhead economic development by reinforcing democratic accountability at the local level. The literature on decentralisation and accountability – addressed in more detail below – predicts such positive outcome provided that: (1) elected officials at the local level (‘actors’); (2) obtain considerable influence (‘power’); (3) over essential policy areas (‘domains’); while (4) being held accountable by ordinary citizens (‘downward’ accountability).

Hence, a central research question concerning the actual implementation of decentralisation reforms in Mali is whether and to what extent it engendered downwardly accountable elected municipal actors with significant domains of discretionary power.

In addressing this research question, the analysis presented in this chapter moves beyond a merely institutional approach. Mali’s decentralisation reforms were obviously not implemented in a socio-cultural vacuum. The newly created municipal council encountered several informal power poles that played a leading role in local governance affairs long before the roll-out of the decentralisation programme in the 1990s. This included the influential council of elderly at village level, which legitimised its authority in very different ways than through a popular mandate obtained in elections. This chapter therefore addresses the research question from an anthropological perspective. It is based on in-depth fieldwork around the first (1999), second (2004) and third (2009) local elections in Karan, a village some 90 kilometres south of Mali’s capital Bamako. This longitudinal empirical research examined how patterns of interaction

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<sup>377</sup> This chapter is based on an earlier publication: Vliet, M. van (2011) ‘Family Matters: The Interplay between Formal and Informal Incentives for Accountability in Mali’s Local Communities’, in: Chirwa Danwoord and Lia Nijzink (eds.) (2011), *Accountable Governments in Africa: Perspectives from Public Law and Political Studies*. Cape Town: UCT Press. Several parts have been extended and adapted in the context of this thesis.

between both state and non-state actors and multiple sources of legitimacy shaped decentralised administration over a longer period.

The chapter starts with a short recap of the key concepts and theoretical framework presented in the general introduction to this thesis. The next section addresses a number of methodological considerations, most notably the considerable advantages and limitations of an in-depth case study. The central part of the chapter presents an empirical assessment structured around three consecutive local elections. The final part relates these empirical findings to the overarching research question and the expected benefits from decentralisation reforms according to the prevailing literature.

## 5.1. THEORIES AND CONCEPTS

### 5.1.1. Decentralisation

Decentralisation is any act whereby a central government formally cedes powers to actors and institutions at lower levels in a political-administrative and territorial hierarchy.<sup>378</sup> Efforts to redistribute state authority, responsibilities and resources to subnational units of the state can serve a wide variety of purposes. Previous experiences with decentralisation across the African continent reflected a desire to: better control the rural areas from the centre (in colonial times and during one-party rule); reduce national governments' expenditure (during the years of Structural Adjustment Programmes in the 1980s); or to improve political participation and the accountability of local governments (in the era of democratisation).<sup>379</sup> Indeed, this latter objective took centre stage in Mali during the 1990s. The chapter builds on the definition of democratic decentralisation as highlighted by Ribot (2002), which "occurs when powers and resources are transferred to authorities representative of and downwardly accountable to local populations."<sup>380</sup> Malian authorities were not short of ambition in this regard and designed a far-reaching reform programme, at least on paper.

First, the reforms envisaged a profound change in the relationship and power balance between central and decentral state institutions. The authorities did not opt for a process of

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<sup>378</sup> Rondinelli, D.A. (1981) 'Government Decentralisation in Comparative Perspective', *International Review of Administrative Sciences*, 47(2): 133-145.

<sup>379</sup> Olowu, B. (2001), 'African Decentralisation Policies and Practices from 1980s and Beyond', The Hague: ISS (Working Paper No. 334), pp. 6-11.

<sup>380</sup> Ribot, J.C. (2002), 'African Decentralisation: Actors, Powers and Accountability. Democracy, Governance and Human Rights', Geneva: UNRISD Programme (Working Paper No.8)', p. 2.

*deconcentration*, which would have entailed a transfer to the local level of centrally appointed personnel and agencies with continued reporting lines to their superiors in Bamako. In other words, through deconcentration, a national government merely represents itself at the local level but remains in control of policies and budgets, thereby maintaining a strong form of upwards accountability. Instead, Malian authorities envisaged a true process of *devolution*, which involved a real transfer of authority, responsibilities and resources to more autonomous subnational layers of government. The democratically elected political leadership replaced an authoritarian regime that had been in power for almost 25 years. They acknowledged that the need to restore state legitimacy and decentralisation became an important strategy in this respect.<sup>381</sup> The need to contain recurrent rebellions in the northern regions constituted another motive guiding the ambitious reforms. By allowing the northern regions greater autonomy, the territorial boundaries of the country could be safeguarded.<sup>382</sup>

In 1993, Malian authorities established the Mission de Décentralisation (MDD) with a mandate to develop a legal framework for the implementation of the ambitious decentralisation programme. It did not take long for the government to discuss tangible proposals envisaging: (1) a profound restructuration of Mali's administrative hierarchy; (2) the creation of elected bodies at regional, district and local level;<sup>383</sup> and (3) the exact mandate of the new municipal institutions.<sup>384</sup> The local administration teams included a mayor, three civil servants and secretaries to the municipality.<sup>385</sup> Following this preparatory legislative work, the authorities officially endorsed the creation of 683 new local municipalities – regrouping thousands of villages – in 1996.<sup>386</sup> They scheduled the first municipal elections in 1999. The discretionary authority of local governments included policy areas such as municipal policing, public health, sanitation, civil registration, local infrastructure, transport and tax collection.<sup>387</sup> These newly established municipalities encompassed multiple villages in order to reach a certain scale that improved administrative efficiency and ensured a solid (tax) income basis. However, in the case

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<sup>381</sup> Kassibo, B. (ed). (1997) 'La décentralisation au Mali. Etats des lieux', *Bulletin de l'APAD* 14; Sy, O. (1998) *La Décentralisation et les Réformes Institutionnelles au Mali. Le Cadre d'une Nouvelle Dynamique de Démocratisation et de Développement*, Bamako: MDRI; Traore, O. and Ganfoud, B.O.A. (1996) *Problématique Foncière et Décentralisation au Mali*, Bamako: Centre Djoliba.

<sup>382</sup> Seely, J.C. (2001). Sall, A. (1993) '*Le Pari de la Décentralisation au Mali. (1) Contribution, (2) Textes Fondamentaux (1955–1993)*', Bamako: Sodifi.

<sup>383</sup> Directly elected at the community level; indirectly at the district and regional level.

<sup>384</sup> N. 95-022, 95-34, 97-08.

<sup>385</sup> In larger communities more civil servants were envisaged.

<sup>386</sup> N. 96-059. This brings the total number of municipalities to 703.

<sup>387</sup> Centre Djoliba & KIT. (2003) *Soutenir La Mise en Oeuvre de la Décentralisation en Milieu Rural au Mali. Tome 1, Thème d'Actualité. Tome 2, Boîte à Outils.*, Amsterdam: KIT. 67 per cent of taxes were reserved for the municipal council, 15 per cent for the district council, 5 per cent for the regional council and 3 per cent for the association of municipal councils.

of Karan, the focus of this in-depth case study, the village constituted the new municipality by itself for reasons presented below.

Secondly, the decentralisation reforms envisioned far-reaching changes in the relationship between state authorities and Malian citizens. Political decentralisation and local multi-party elections accompanied the above institutional reforms. Following Ribot (2002), Hyden (2008) and Olowu (2001), three specific elements of democratic decentralisation are particularly important: These concern the *actors* that take control of decentralisation; the *power* they obtain; and the *domain* over which they acquire authority. When it comes to the *actors*, Olowu (2001) argued, “many traditional rulers in different parts of Africa have used decentralised power to obstruct development of their people by diverting decentralised resources to personal uses [...] because of their fear that these may break their hold on local power.”<sup>388</sup> Hyden (2008) underlined the importance of addressing *power* relations when studying the performance of institutions in Africa. Policy outcomes were not only the result of institutional changes, but also determined by informal power relations.<sup>389</sup>

Based on these three dimensions, Ribot (2002) noted that representatives of decentralised democratic institutions “must have a *domain* of discretionary decision-making powers, that is, one of local autonomy. It is with respect to this domain of powers that decentralised actors represent, are accountable to, and serve the local population.”<sup>390</sup> Reviewing much of the decentralisation literature, he concluded, “[d]ecentralisation is not taking the forms necessary to realise the benefits that theory predicts, because it fails to entrust downwardly accountable representative actors with significant domains of autonomous discretionary power.”<sup>391</sup>

Research conducted in subsequent years confirmed this finding and revealed the lack of a real transfer of authority, responsibilities, human and financial resources from the central level to the newly established municipal institutions.<sup>392</sup> Sears (2017) noted that agents of the central authority obstructed decentralisation as it entailed a “reduction of their powers and privileges to which they had become accustomed and felt entitled.”<sup>393</sup> It was under President Touré (2002–2012) that decentralisation *de facto* came to a standstill:

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<sup>388</sup> Olowu, B. (2001), p.17.

<sup>389</sup> Hyden, G. (2008). ‘Institutions, Power and Policy Outcomes in Africa’. London: ODI Africa Power and Politics Programme (Discussion Paper No. 2).

<sup>390</sup> Ribot, J.C. (2002), p. 25.

<sup>391</sup> *Ibid*, p. 3.

<sup>392</sup> IIED (2006) *Making Decentralisation Work for Sustainable Natural Resource Management in the Sahel: Lessons from a Programme of Action-Research, Policy Debate and Citizen Empowerment*, London: IIED, ch. 5.

<sup>393</sup> Sears, J. (2017) ‘Unmet Hopes to Govern Mali’s persistent Crisis’.; Centre FrancoPaix. p.12.

By around 2003, ATT abandoned genuine efforts at decentralization. He abolished centres created to provide training to local officials and kept power and money in central government institutions. This meant that decentralized institutions were deprived of the tools necessary to function autonomously from the central government, or even to function at all.<sup>394</sup>

Likewise, Baudais (2016) stipulated that the limited transfer of resources did not enable municipal governments to deliver services.<sup>395</sup> Wing and Kassibo (2014) also concluded that decentralisation in Mali merely reproduced a weak national government at the local level.<sup>396</sup> Chapter 6 of this thesis addresses these challenges related to the power balance between central state authorities and decentralised institutions in more detail.

This chapter focuses on the assertion of the decentralisation reforms to democratise the ties between municipal authorities and citizens at the local level. More precisely, to answer the question whether the reforms engendered new political representatives (“actors”), with a considerable influence (“power”) over central policy areas (“domain”) for which they were being held accountable by ordinary citizens (“downwards/upwards”).

### 5.1.2. Accountability

Accountability emerged as a prominent concept in both academic literature and donor policies in the decade that followed the many democratic transitions during the so-called third wave of democratisation. Together with political participation and representation, it constituted a key pillar under democracy’s main proposition to underpin these states with renewed popular legitimacy after decades of authoritarian rule. Various authors warned against what Lindberg (2009) referred to as the “inherent dangers of a Byzantine conceptual nightmare leading to [...] severe confusion about what the core meaning of accountability is.”<sup>397</sup> Accountability is, by definition, relational. An agent, for example a political representative, performs a number of tasks in response to expectations held by, say, another party or a group of citizens. The political representative is first required to inform, explain and justify his actions to these citizens. In other words, the first component of an accountable representative is *answerability* to citizens.

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<sup>394</sup> Lebovitch, A. (2017) ‘Reconstructing Local Orders in Mali: Historical Perspectives and Future Challenges’, Washington, DC: Brookings (Local orders paper series No. 7), p.8.

<sup>395</sup> Baudais, V. (2016).

<sup>396</sup> Wing, S.D. and Kassibo, B. (2014) ‘Mali: Incentives and Challenges for Decentralization’, in: Dickovick, T. and Wunsch, J. (eds.). *Decentralization in Africa*, Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, pp. 113-136.

<sup>397</sup> Lindberg, S. (2009) ‘Accountability: The Core Concept and Its Subtypes’, London: ODI Africa Power and Politics Programme. (Working paper No.1), p. 2.

Secondly, citizens must have the capacity to pass judgement and impose sanctions on the representative. Such *enforceability* constitutes the second major component of accountability.<sup>398</sup> In this chapter, the impact of the introduction and subsequent functioning of the new municipal councils on both answerability and enforceability aspects of the accountability relationship between local political representatives and citizens will be assessed.

The legislative framework that guided Mali's decentralisation policies offered many opportunities for ordinary citizens to be better informed by and seek justifications from local state representatives, either directly or indirectly, via the elected councilors (e.g. the *answerability* side of accountability). The legislative framework, for example, obliged the municipal authorities to draft the annual budget in a participatory manner and to present financial reports to citizens.<sup>399</sup> A majority of councilors could equally force the mayor to take specific actions or impose sanctions on the municipal authority ("*enforceability*").

Based on a substantive review of literature dealing with the concept of accountability, Lindberg (2009) identified three key dimensions: the *source* of accountability (are representatives being held accountable internally, within an institution, or externally, by citizens); the *degree of control* that people have over representatives (although difficult to quantify); and the *direction* of accountability (vertical upwards, vertical downwards or horizontal).<sup>400</sup> One of the central propositions of Mali's decentralisation reforms that takes centre stage in this chapter was the ambition to institute a *strong* degree of *downward* accountability of elected municipal representatives towards *local citizens*.

Before introducing the empirical analysis, the following section briefly recaps key notions of the theoretical outline provided in the introductory chapter that are relevant to the assessment of decentralisation in the wider context of Mali's heterarchical political order.

### 5.1.3. Decentralised administration in a heterarchical setting

A substantial group of scholars examined processes of democratisation by focusing on formal institutions.<sup>401</sup> Political and economic scientist Schumpeter constituted an important source of

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<sup>398</sup> Brinkerhoff, quoted in Ribot (2002), considers answerability to be the essence of accountability. Burnell (2003), however, clearly demonstrates that answerability is considerably reduced if the potential to sanction is limited: Burnell, P. (2003) 'Legislative-Executive Relations in Zambia: Parliamentary Reform on the Agenda', *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 21(1): 47-68.

<sup>399</sup> Sy, O. (1998).

<sup>400</sup> Lindberg, S. (2009), p. 11.

<sup>401</sup> Huntington, S.P. (1992); Diamond, L., Linz, J.J. & Lipset, S.M. (eds.) (1990) *Politics in Developing Countries: Comparing Experiences with Democracy*, Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers.



inspiration in this respect. He considered the mere presence of democratic institutions – most notably elections – to be the primary indicator of democracy. Many policy papers also focused on various institutional aspects of democratic consolidation and broader governance reforms in Africa.<sup>402</sup> A firm belief that development and democracy could be spearheaded through formal institutional change underpinned these approaches. Institutional thinking also inspired the roll-out of ambitious decentralisation programmes across the African continent. The basic idea was that new governance institutions could generate accountable political behaviour. Formal institutions, as defined in the introductory chapter, referred to the rules and procedures created, communicated and enforced through channels widely accepted as official and often codified in constitutions and legislation. The term official implies that the rules and procedures emanate from an authority, in this case the state. However, politicians are not solely embedded in a formal institutional setting. Their behaviour is equally shaped by a wide range of informal institutions, defined as socially shared values, usually unwritten, which are created and enforced outside officially sanctioned channels.<sup>403</sup>

Neo-patrimonialism emerged as a particularly influential paradigm in academic research dealing with the interplay between formal and informal institutions, certainly but not solely across the African continent. The neo-patrimonial paradigm, which has its roots in the 1970s and 1980s, guided many studies on the African state, politics and governance practices.<sup>404</sup> It demonstrated the prevalence of informal patrimonial forms of domination in the institutional setting of the state. In practice, state officials actually operated as so-called patrons and exchanged public resources in their particularistic networks of individual people (clientelism) or groups of dependents (patronage) in return for their loyalty and support. African state institutions were therefore re-conceptualised as hybrid institutions in which both impersonal rational-legal bureaucratic and personalised patrimonial forms of domination co-existed.<sup>405</sup> Scholars took different positions about the balance between these two forms of domination. However, the prevailing tendency in this research stream pointed at the overriding influence of patrimonial logic to the detriment of formal rational-legal procedures.

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<sup>402</sup> World Bank (1989) *Annual Report*, Washington, DC: The World Bank; *idem* (1993) *Annual Report* Washington, DC: The World Bank, available at: <https://www.worldbank.org/>; UNDP (1991) *Human Development Report: Financing Human Development*, available at: <https://www.undp.org/>.

<sup>403</sup> Levitsky, S. and Helmke, G. (2006), p.5.

<sup>404</sup> Eisenstadt, S.N. (1973) *Traditional Patrimonialism and Modern Neopatrimonialism*, Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications.

<sup>405</sup> Médard, J.F. (1982) 'The Underdeveloped State in Africa: Political Clientelism or Neo-Patrimonialism?', in: C. Clapham (ed.) *Private Patronage and Public Power: Political Clientelism and the Modern State*. London: Frances Pinter.

Several scholars challenged, or at least nuanced, the neo-patrimonial paradigm. Hagmann (2006) argued that neo-patrimonialism emerged into a “catch-all concept” used to explain political processes without always presenting the empirical evidence of the actual informal practices.<sup>406</sup> Others denounced its usage for putting too much emphasis on informal dynamics and not enough focus on the formal rules and regulations that did seem influential in practice.<sup>407</sup> Empirical studies also revealed that patronage was only one amongst many aspects characterising relations between African politicians or state officials and ordinary citizens.<sup>408</sup> The neo-patrimonial approach tended to overestimate the influence of money or other material advantages exchanged between political patrons and their clients.

The institutional and neo-patrimonial approaches have both been criticized for lacking a cultural-oriented perspective on democratic consolidation in Africa. Hyden (2008) underlined that institutions cannot be studied in isolation from the norms and values of the societies within which they develop.<sup>409</sup> Schaffer (1998) contended that democratic values that underpin specific institutions are not necessarily universal.<sup>410</sup> Based on extensive fieldwork in Senegal, he demonstrated that elections had a different meaning amongst Senegalese people compared to citizens in the United States. Reasoning along similar lines, Van Donge (2006) noted: “An emphasis on political culture should heighten awareness of the various forms which democratic values may take in different societies.”<sup>411</sup> Besides the notion that democratic values take different forms, political and historical anthropologists emphasised that “multi-party democracy [in Africa] has simply been assimilated into a broader range of thought.”<sup>412</sup> This thesis follows Chabal and Daloz’s (2006) call for an interpretative approach, focusing on popular beliefs that shape political agency, and to examine the meaning people themselves give to specific institutions.<sup>413</sup> This chapter therefore introduces existing cultural repertoires used

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<sup>406</sup> Hagmann, T. (2006) ‘Ethiopian Political Culture Strikes Back: A Rejoinder to J. Abbink’, *African Affairs*, 105(421): 605-612, pp. 605-7.

<sup>407</sup> Wiseman, J.A. (1999) ‘Book Review of Africa Works: Disorder as a Political Instrument’, *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 37(3): 560-562. Engel, U. & G.R. Olsen (eds.) (2005) *The African Exception: Contemporary Perspectives on Developing Societies*, Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited; Lindberg, S. (2006).

<sup>408</sup> Hansen, K.F. (2003) ‘The Politics of Personal Relations: Beyond Neo-Patrimonial Practices in Northern Cameroon’, *Africa*, 73(2): 202-225; Therkildsen, O. (2005) ‘Understanding Public Management through Neo-Patrimonialism: A Paradigm for All African Seasons?’, in: Engel, U. & Olsen, G.R. (eds.) (2005).

<sup>409</sup> Hyden, G. (2008), p.3.

<sup>410</sup> Schaffer, F.C. (1998) *Democracy in Translation: Understanding Politics in an Unfamiliar Culture*, London and Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

<sup>411</sup> Donge, J-K. van. (2006), pp. 97-98.

<sup>412</sup> Abbink, J. & Hesselings, G. (eds.) (2000) *Election Observation and Democratisation in Africa*, Basingstoke and New York: Macmillan. Geschiere, P. (1997) *The Modernity of Witchcraft: Politics and the Occult in Postcolonial Africa*, Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press.

<sup>413</sup> Chabal, P. & Daloz, J.P. (2006).

locally to legitimise authority and shape accountability as well as influential cultural institutions at the local level before presenting an empirical assessment of the decentralisation in Karan.

A final point of critique, or at least nuance, to institutional and neo-patrimonial perspectives on decentralisation relates to the central position of the state in these approaches. In the context of a heterarchical political order, several power poles, both state and non-state, interact and jointly shape decentralised administration. The exercise of public authority in the public service involves multiple actors operating beyond or besides the state. In various chapters, this thesis revealed the central role of religious and traditional authorities in this regard, specifically in rural localities. Local communities, as underlined in the introductory chapter, should not be seen as a one-dimensional socio-political arena, but rather as an emerging public space in which different actors and modes of domination and legitimation confront one another.

This chapter therefore extends the patronage concept and uses “Patronage Plus” as an analytical lens to account for this multitude of actors and the multidimensional relationships between material and non-material resources at play. It empirically examines how interactions between formal and informal institutions, official and unofficial actors, and different legitimising repertoires shaped decentralised administration over a longer period. The study opted for an in-depth empirical assessment concentrated on a single case study. The next section briefly clarifies the advantages and limitations of that methodological choice.

## **5.2. METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

This chapter presents results based on extensive fieldwork conducted around the first (1999), second (2004) and third (2009) local elections in Karan, a village some 90 kilometres south of Mali’s capital city Bamako, close to the Guinean border. Karan is located in the second region of Mali, Koulikouro, in the district of Kangaba. In cultural terms, it is part of the *Mande* region, which extends over parts of Senegal, Gambia, Guinea and Mali.

Based on longitudinal empirical research in a single locality, the results are characterised by the well-known advantages and limitations of a case study. The method enabled a thorough contextualised analysis of the functioning of a democratic institution at the local level. It provided the possibility to move beyond formal institutional aspects of decentralisation reforms and take the sociocultural context in which political agency was shaped prominently into account. Recurrent and lengthy periods in the research area created relations of trust with key respondents. In-depth interviews enabled a nuanced understanding of socio-political dynamics and accountability mechanisms in practice. Moreover, the longitudinal perspective allowed for

a dynamic assessment of hybrid democratic practices over time. It thereby avoided a recurrent criticism of the hybrid political paradigm that it offers a static account that fails to account for change.

The research primarily relied on participant observation, which provided invaluable information on often sensitive matters. I attended and observed local campaign events, public meetings, informal discussions amongst local *grins* (groups of friends), the functioning of an unofficial local “policing” network and family group meetings. I often witnessed tensions between representatives of the newly created democratic institution and existing (informal) institutions. I used different research methods (e.g. questionnaires, open interviews, participants observation, focus groups) to enhance the validity of the research data.

Yet, the adopted research method inherently restricts the representativity of the data. This holds especially true for the case of Karan in the context of the decentralisation reforms. As a municipality comprising just one village, Karan constituted a rather exceptional case. The decentralisation reforms generally regrouped several villages into one municipality in order to achieve scale advantages and administrative efficiency. Nevertheless, Karan, for reasons clarified below, constituted an atypical case and did not merge with other villages into one municipality. The lack of representativity of the present case study also risks contributing to the prevailing “Mande-centric” appreciation of Malian politics that was highlighted in the introductory chapter of this thesis. The context in which the decentralised reforms were implemented in Karan greatly differed from that in many other parts of the country in terms of security, the role of religion, geographical distances vis-à-vis municipal and central state representatives, the financial means involved in decentralised administration and many more disparities. Notwithstanding these considerable limitations in terms of representativity, the conclusions derived from the in-depth case study do have relevance beyond the mere physical boundaries of the small municipality of Karan. This benefit lies, as highlighted in the introductory chapter and in line with Lijphart (1971), in the *process* of theory building.<sup>414</sup> This case study particularly contributes to a better understanding of the interplay between existing “traditional” political institutions, democratic institutions and different sources of legitimacy at the local level. It assesses how political agency is shaped by incentives generated through newly established formal institutions and socially accepted norms enforced outside official channels in the context of decentralised administration. While the outcome of this interplay varies from place to place, it constituted a central dynamic characterising the implementation of the

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<sup>414</sup> Lijphart, A. (1971) ‘Comparative Politics and the Comparative Method’, *American Political Science Review*, 65(3): 682-693, p. 691.

decentralisation reforms in many localities. The study thereby contributes to – and can be compared with – a wider body of empirical studies examining similar processes with diverse outcomes in different geographical settings.<sup>415</sup> Moreover, the geographical scope of this analysis is broadened in Chapter 6 of this thesis, which assesses the emerging role of non-state armed groups in decentralised administration in northern Mali.

### 5.3. EXISTING LOCAL ACCOUNTABILITY MECHANISMS

The short theoretical recap provided above noted that informal institutions that shape the incentive structures faced by political actors involved in decentralised administration are broader than resource-driven forms of patronage and are often culturally shaped. This section therefore introduces influential local cultural institutions, sources of political legitimacy and accountability mechanisms that existed in the research area before the creation of new municipal authorities and local elections in the context of the decentralisation reform package.

The most important political institution at the local level was the council of elderly. This village council met on a weekly basis in the vestibule of the village headman and managed all local economic, political and social affairs. Political representation and access to representative positions was based on a number of criteria: (1) claims of autochthony expressed through stories of origin; (2) patronymics (*jamuw*);<sup>416</sup> (3) *kabilaw*;<sup>417</sup> (4) hierarchical status groups; (5) seniority; and (6) gender. These criteria should not be interpreted as “predetermined cultural/ancestral patterns” that, in an objective and static manner, easily determined who was entitled to local political representative functions and who was excluded.<sup>418</sup> Rather, different (groups of) people used these criteria to present their – often contradictory – authority claims. As claims of autochthony were important for gaining access to powerful positions, different (interest) groups portrayed themselves as the most autochthonous inhabitants of a particular village in order to claim their right to become a political representative.

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<sup>415</sup> Cf. Fay, C. (2006), for a broader collection of case studies.

<sup>416</sup> “Patronymic” refers to a person’s last name, but also to an historical figure. Patronymics have a strong social meaning in *Mande* and specific relations exist between patronymics. For example, a teasing relationship exists between certain patronymics that allows people to neglect certain moral codes and tell each other off.

<sup>417</sup> A *kabila* is one of the most important socio-political institutions at the local level. Its members work together on a communal field, put aside money collectively and meet on a regular basis to discuss internal and village affairs. A *kabila* groups together a number of families (and the migrants these host) that have a shared ancestor.

<sup>418</sup> Olivier de Sardan, J.-P. (2008) ‘Researching the Practical Norms of Real Governance in Africa’, London: ODI Africa Power and Politics Programme, (Discussion paper No.5), p. 3.

The origin of a *Mande* village tended to be presented (and, as such, still referred to by citizens today) as a pact between its first inhabitants and groups that arrived at a later stage. In Karan, the Keïta's were considered the most autochthonous inhabitants. According to their version of the "myth of origin", their ancestor founded Karan and met two other families, the Traore and Dumbia, with whom he established a pact.<sup>419</sup> Consistent with this pact, the function of village headman (*dugutigi*) was to be taken up by the Keïta, whereas the Traore and Dumbia would become mediators in the village (locally referred to as the *furugnoko*). Citizens frequently referred to this pact and the *furugnoko* indeed played a mediatory role. Although many other families arrived in the centuries following the establishment of Karan, these three most-autochthonous families with the patronymics (*jamuw*) Keïta, Traore and Dumbia monopolised the 11 village council seats. Claims of autochthony thus highly influenced one's access to representative functions. As Jansen (1995, 1996) underlined, oral traditions in *Mande* were much more than storytelling about some ancient past.<sup>420</sup> The stories were references shaping social life and justifying power relations.

Another criterion that influenced one's chances of becoming a member of the village council is the *kabila* to which one belongs.<sup>421</sup> In Karan, the sons and grandsons of the founder of the village established five different *kabilaw*. The selection of village council members was based on the different *kabilaw* in the village. In other words, the village council members represented their *kabila*. However, the number of representatives differed for the various *kabilaw*. The two *kabilaw* that were established by the sons of the village founder obtained three seats in the village council; those established by his grandsons obtained only two positions and the *kabila* founded by his great-grandson just one seat. Yet again, claims of autochthony expressed through genealogies appeared to be an important factor determining one's access to representative positions. The earlier a *kabila* was founded, the more autochthonous it was and the more representatives it received in the village council.<sup>422</sup>

The hierarchical set-up of *Mande* society, which echoed India's caste system, also influenced the access to representative functions. Society was divided into noble people (*hooronw*),

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<sup>419</sup> Many different versions of the origin story exist. The Traore and Dumbia, for example, claim that they had arrived in Karan before the Keïta but that the latter were more powerful, hence the Traore and Dumbia could not maintain the position of village headman themselves. These origin stories must not, therefore, be analysed as true accounts of some ancient past, but more as a reflection of actual power relations in local society. By presenting themselves as autochthonous inhabitants, different groups make status claims in local society.

<sup>420</sup> Jansen, J. (1995) *De Draaiende Put. Een Studie naar de Relatie tussen het Sunjata-epos en de Samenleving in de Haut-Niger (Mali)*, Leiden: CNWS; *idem*. (1996) 'The Younger Brother and the Stranger in Search of Status Discourse for Mande', *Cahiers d'Études Africaines*, 144 (46-4): 659-684.

<sup>421</sup> *Kabilaw* is plural and *kabila* singular.

<sup>422</sup> In 2009, the number of seats was augmented from 11 to 15 and equal representation amongst the five *kabilaw* was being considered.

followed by craftsmen – usually bards and smiths – (*nyamakalaw*) and former slaves (*jonw*).<sup>423</sup> Access to the village council was limited to noblemen only. Representatives of the *nyamakalaw* and *jonw* “caste” could not become village council members. Lastly, all council seats were reserved for relatively old men, many of whom had been members since the early 1960s.<sup>424</sup> Seniority was an important factor determining political authority. The village headman was the oldest Keïta amongst the oldest living generation. In daily life, norms prohibited people from publicly contradicting older brothers or fathers. The official political role of women was rather limited at the village level, although a number of women were very active in other domains of public life (such as in NGOs and women associations).

The *kare*, a generational group, constituted a last important and noteworthy local institution. A *kare* was formed by a generation of young boys collectively circumcised. They remained members of the same *kare* throughout their entire lives and donated funds to each other’s marriages, supported members if they fell ill and met on a regular basis to discuss local events. Whereas a *kabila* provided vertical lines of solidarity (family ties crossing generations), a *kare* constituted a horizontal solidarity group (generational ties crossing family lines). Although Karan’s village councillors did inform, consult with and justify their actions towards members of their *kabilaw* (and were thus answerable), the opportunity to hold village councillors accountable was restricted. It seemed almost impossible to pass judgement against or sanction village councillors who had been in office for 40 years. Hence, the enforceability side of accountability was limited and vertical downward accountability between village councillors, who obtained a wide sphere of influence, and local citizens was relatively weak.

The next section of this chapter examines the extent to which the introduction of Mali’s decentralisation programme adapted and strengthened local mechanisms of accountability over time as predicted by theory.

## **5.4. DECENTRALISATION REFORMS IMPLEMENTED: THE CASE OF KARAN**

### *5.4.1. The first local elections: Consensus-building instead of electoral competition*

Existing notions of political representation and participation greatly influenced the establishment and subsequent functioning of the first municipal council in Karan.

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<sup>423</sup> The social organisation is more flexible than in India as the social status of particular groups might change over time, as clarified in the introductory chapter.

<sup>424</sup> In 2009, an agreement was reached to renew the village council members.

This became apparent during the selection process of candidates in the run-up to the 1999 elections. Representatives of the *furugnoko*, the families that played a mediatory role according to the “pact of origin,” met with the village council, the principal unofficial political institution in Karan. They proposed to develop a consensus list comprising representatives from the various *kabilaw* instead of organising competitive elections based on party lists that could possibly generate conflict in the village.<sup>425</sup> The proposal was accepted and each *kabila* leader called for a meeting to identify representatives who would sit on the new official institution (the municipal council) on behalf of the *kabila*. The leadership of the five *kabilaw* put together a consensus list in accordance with the power-sharing arrangement between the different *kabilaw* in the village council. The list included only noble people and descendants from the three families that claimed to be the autochthonous inhabitants of Karan (Keïtas and *furugnoko*). Candidates were either Keïta, Traore or Dumbia. No other *jamuw* was represented on the list. On election day, Karanese citizens voted for the consensus list.

The newly elected (official) municipal council differed from the (unofficial) village council in two respects: seniority and gender. Karan’s municipal councillors were much younger than Karan’s village council members were and included a female representative. The age difference enabled the village council to secure control over their “younger brothers” in the municipal council, based on local seniority norms. In daily life, younger brothers were expected to conduct tasks away from home, whereas older brothers were responsible for internal (family) affairs.<sup>426</sup> This division of labour now applied as reference to guide the relationship and division of responsibilities between the two institutions. According to the law, the municipal council constituted the main institution governing local affairs. In practice, however, the municipal council only maintained contact with the state bureaucracy, produced official state documents (birth and marriage certificates) and tried to attract foreign NGOs to invest in Karan. The municipal council was, in other words, used as a gateway to the world outside the village. The (unofficial) village council continued to dominate all internal affairs, notably tax collection, conflict management and decision-making over a wide variety of internal matters. All major decisions were taken in the vestibule of the village headman, i.e. not in the municipal town hall.<sup>427</sup>

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<sup>425</sup> The 1997 national elections had generated considerable tensions in Karan between supporters of two rival candidates. Some people would no longer speak to each other, marriage proposals were refused on the basis of political affiliations and, for some time, the losing side refused to contribute to the development efforts of the village.

<sup>426</sup> Jansen, J. (1995); Vliet, van M. (2004).

<sup>427</sup> A local survey conducted in 2002 confirmed popular views on this division of labour between the two institutions.



Tensions between the village council of elderly and the newly created municipal council arose in the years after the local elections. The first elected mayor previously worked in the state bureaucracy and became frustrated with the gap between his official mandate and the limited authority he had in daily practice. The mayor was cut off from the two main local sources of finance: annual funds provided by the national cotton company and local tax collection. The village council continued to manage these funds. Yet, the village council had not kept up-to-date financial records and was unable to account for the manner in which it spent these funds in recent years. More than 3,000 euros were missing. The village councillors indicated that citizens had not yet paid their taxes, whereas many people indicated they had indeed paid the village council. No records were available for verification. The mayor continuously tried to persuade the village councillors and citizens to allow the municipal council to manage these funds, without which he could not execute most of his official responsibilities. He also frequently pointed to the existing lack of financial transparency, which greatly frustrated some of the village councillors. This issue would play an important role in the run-up to the second local elections in 2004.

Clearly, neither the 1999 elections, nor the new municipal council were able to shape local political behaviour according to their official mandate. Instead, the new formal structures were based on existing, informal power relations shaped around cultural notions of political representation, hierarchy and loyalty. The immediate impact of Mali's decentralisation programme on local accountability was therefore minimal. The new political actors did not obtain sufficient power to act according to their official mandate, obtained an external sphere of influence and were primarily held accountable by the village council, based on family ties and local norms of seniority, rather than ordinary citizens.

#### *5.4.2. Second elections in Karan: Informal power basis further reduces formal impact*

In the run-up to the second local elections in 2004, a *furugnoko* proposal to allow for another consensus list and a second mandate for the incumbent mayor was rejected. The mayor's ambition to control local financial resources irritated the head of the village council. He saw the elections as an opportunity to consolidate the supremacy of the village council over the municipal council. The head of the village council was also the leader of the largest *kabila* in Karan, called Dubala. Notably, young members of Dubala also dominated the local branch of

one of the main political parties, the Alliance for Democracy in Mali (ADEMA).<sup>428</sup> A pact was rapidly agreed upon: the head of the village council would mobilise the people of “his” *kabila* behind ADEMA while the party, once elected, would safeguard the interests of the village council. The incumbent mayor, in turn, tried to mobilise his own *kabila*, called Kurula, behind the Party for Democracy and Renewal (PDR) in his ambition to become re-elected.

The election results led to a stalemate in the municipal council with regard to the election of the mayor. Both PDR (with strong support from Kurula) and ADEMA (with a firm support basis in Dubala) obtained five seats. Adama Keïta secured the eleventh and last seat on behalf of the Union for the Republic and Democracy (URD). He had been able to secure support from his direct family and sections of the youth association in Karan. His vote for either ADEMA or PDR would determine which party secured the position of mayor.

Adama Keïta had been an active member and representative of the local branch of ADEMA in Karan. He had, however, left the party with two other rank-and-file members following a conflict with the local Secretary-General, Treasurer and Chairman of the party. Nevertheless, he supported ADEMA in the vote for the election of the second mayor of Karan:

I wanted to vote for PDR. Prior to the elections, I had even reached an agreement with their leader. I did not like the candidate from ADEMA nor the party. I had just broken away from it! After the elections, the leader of PDR offered me 250.000 Fcfa and a motorcycle in order to secure my support. As I come from the *kabila* Dubala, the leader of Dubala informed me that I would be suspended from the *kabila* if I did not vote in favour of ADEMA. What could I do? It would complicate the rest of my life if I lost support from my *kabila*. It is my family. My life. I wasn’t awarded a cent by ADEMA or Dubala, but I voted in favour of ADEMA.

Contrary to his own political preferences and despite the financial offers made to him, Adama Keïta voted in favour of ADEMA. This is just one example (of many) of the way in which informal ties and family (*kabila*) pressure continue to strongly influence the selection of political actors at the local level. Such culturally shaped power relations can thus be much more influential than pure patronage and money politics. As it turned out, the leader of the *kabila* Dubala played a determining role in Adama Keïta’s choice for an ADEMA mayor.

Once elected, the new ADEMA mayor indeed stopped the municipal council’s quest to gain control over local funds. He also avoided any competition with the village council, headed by

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<sup>428</sup> Cf. Chapter 3 for detailed information about ADEMA, the party that dominated Malian politics between 1992-2002.

the leader of his own *kabila*, and he did not criticise the village council for its failure to account for part of the tax money it had received from Karanese citizens. Under the new mayor, transparency of local affairs actually deteriorated. The mayor appointed young friends – mostly from ADEMA and Dubala – to head various local management boards. Although these boards were all officially required to report to the municipal council on a regular basis, they only reported informally to the mayor in person. Municipal councillors of rival parties were left in the dark. The mayor himself refused to report to ordinary citizens. During his mandate, tax collection reduced from 3.9 million Fcfa to 2.3 million Fcfa, leaving the municipality unable to pay the salaries of municipal staff. The vast majority of local people suspected a rise in corrupt practices but their biggest frustration was the lack of information provided by the mayor and his allies.<sup>429</sup> Public frustration with the performance of the mayor, certainly within the four other *kabilaw*, continued to mount. Interestingly, when asked why the police or regional authorities were not informed of the suspected corruption, almost all interviewees indicated that “relations between our families never end; they are more important than money. This is between us here in Karan.”<sup>430</sup> A local cultural institution (*kare*) then started to lead a call for improved local governance, albeit outside the official local governance legislative framework. In Karan, the Sobessi *kare* were considered the local police but they decided to use their mandate in a wider sense.<sup>431</sup> One of them expressed a commonly held feeling as follows:

Karan has fallen into a well. We, as Sobessi, need to get Karan back out of there. The elderly people in the village council and the current mayor have not managed the village well. Many projects that arrived in Karan already failed upon entry. They are responsible for Karan’s decay. We have to change.

The Sobessi managed to build popular support for the removal of the corrupt management board of the local infirmary. They then initiated an ultimately overambitious action to replace the members of the village council. The head of the village council started to put pressure on a

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<sup>429</sup> There were serious indications of corruption in the local health board, the management of the local granary and other institutions. The mayor also claimed to have lost more than 2 million Fcfa of public funds while driving with his motorcycle to a neighbouring village.

<sup>430</sup> The former mayor had informed the authorities over alleged corruption by the current mayor with respect to his management of the local granary, but this was condemned by almost everyone, even those who believed the current mayor to be highly corrupt. Only 90 kilometres from the capital city, formal state institutions such as the police seemed to have little impact in this situation.

<sup>431</sup> Members of the *kare* primarily mediate in conflicts between families, e.g. if crops are being eaten by someone else’s cattle.

number of Sobessi to stop their campaign for renewal. The case of Noumouri Keïta is illustrative:

Our quest for renewal of the village council as Sobessi was not easy. When we started our opposition against the current members of the village council, my wife was taken away from me. She had to return to her hamlet where she was born. The leader of my *kabila* was behind all this. That is how he put pressure on me and tried to stop me from supporting the quest for renewal of the village council.

The mayor indicated that the Sobessi had no formal mandate to remove the village councillors. He continued to support the head of the village council and the Sobessi finally dropped their case. Shortly after, the Malian Parliament passed a law that called for the renewal of village councils nationwide. This provided the formal grounds for renewal in Karan. Finally, in 2009, the village council was renewed. The mayor, however, refused to obtain the formal approval of the regional state authorities based on which the new village council could start operating and the elderly continued to influence local affairs.

Ten years after its introduction, the impact of Mali's decentralisation programme on local accountability continued to be limited. Although formal electoral competition had now taken place, the informal (*kabila*-based) power basis of the new mayor limited his influence sphere once elected. Family ties proved more influential than patronage politics in shaping political behaviour during the second electoral mandate. The municipal council's sphere of influence remained limited to external affairs and accountability relations were primarily oriented towards the village council to the detriment of ordinary citizens. An informal power arrangement between the mayor and the head of the village council also blocked the officially required renewal of the village council. The Sobessi *kare* held the village and municipal councils answerable for a lack of transparency and even enforced a renewal of the local infirmary board. Hence, a local cultural institution managed to realise some degree of downward accountability at the local level.

#### *5.4.3. Third local elections in Karan: Alternation of power*

Because of the informal deal between the head of the largest *kabila* Dubala and the mayor, opportunities for ordinary citizens to hold the poor-performing mayor accountable were limited during the second electoral mandate. The official requirement to organise another local election

in 2009 provided an opportunity to ensure an alternation of power. However, this required a campaign strategy based on culturally shaped tactics and informal patronage in order to succeed. In the run-up to the elections, two main competing blocks were formed. On the one hand, PDR representatives, who narrowly lost the 2004 elections, and other (smaller) local parties established the *ben kan* list.<sup>432</sup> The *kabila* Kurula, the *kare* Sobessi, the Karanese people residing in Bamako and the village mediators (*furugnoko*) constituted their primary support base. On the other hand, the ADEMA and URD parties, the head of the village council, the *kabila* Dubala and the younger *kare* Sankassi all supported the incumbent mayor. The *ben kan* list aimed to maintain the support from its own electoral bases, while mobilising support amongst the Sankassi *kare* and Dubala *kabila* during the campaign. They therefore put together their list of candidates in a strategic manner. The *kabila* Kurula, its main support base, obtained the two top positions on the electoral list, which also included representatives of the four other *kabilaw*.<sup>433</sup> The same applied to the different generational groups (*karew*). The list only included people considered to be “true autochthones.”<sup>434</sup> One’s personal financial means constituted another important criterion for being placed on the list. Two men residing in Bamako headed the *ben kan* list. The number one, Djibril Naman, worked as a director for the National Railway Company, often travelled to Europe and had sound political contacts. The campaign repeatedly underlined his personal wealth, as illustrated below. Djibril Naman was a member of the Sankassi *kare* and obtaining wide support within “his” *kare* as well as the other younger generations constituted a key priority during this campaign. According to one of the main campaign strategists:

We knew URD and ADEMA had strong support in the Sankassi *kare*. The second mayor had awarded numerous local management positions to its members. We therefore decided that the head of our list should be someone from the Sankassi *kare*. We organised various informal meetings with all Sankassi in order to secure their support for Djibril because he was one of them.

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<sup>432</sup> Because their list was supported by the village mediators (who had tried to mobilise everyone behind the list), they referred to their alliance as the *ben kan* list, meaning the list of consensus.

<sup>433</sup> As various group representatives explained: “If you propose a list with people from just one, two or three *kabilaw*, the people will not accept it. You need to keep every *kabila* on board.”

<sup>434</sup> A comment by one of the non-autochthones who presented himself as a candidate in 2004 and invested a lot of money during his campaigns is illustrative in this respect: “During the electoral campaigns in 2004, I offered local citizens a cow, 50 kilos of rice and spent 20.000 Fcfa for preparing the sauce. Some 150 people showed up and ate with me. Nevertheless, I only obtained 63 votes. My competitors had gone around the various hamlets saying that if I would be elected, I would take Karan’s money to my own native town. People here prefer local candidates.”

Continued references to important cultural values constituted an important ingredient of the *ben kan*'s campaign strategy. They stressed that the *furugnoko* supported their list and that, according to Karan's pact of origin, people needed to respect the wish of their mediators.<sup>435</sup> In addition, the large network and wealth of leader of their list, Djibril Naman, was emphasised. During a rally, the campaign team stated:

If everyone votes for Djibril Naman, we will mobilise the rich Karanese people residing in Bamako to come and invest in Karan. You have to vote for someone who has the capacity to build something for the entire community. You have to vote for us. We will build a community radio station here in Karan. We will also build a house within which the youth can gather.

Djibril Naman generated huge cheers from the crowd when he promised that the local mosque, which the community had started to build, would be finished in no time if he was elected. The message was clear. You either vote for the incompetent incumbent mayor or for someone who has the capacity to act as a patron for Karan and can provide tangible support to the municipality. Members of the *ben kan* list also increased pressure on URD and ADEMA candidates not to campaign actively, by making use of informal (and powerful) family ties. A striking example, amongst many, concerned the ambition of Naman Sidibé to become the leader of the ADEMA list:

I wanted to become head of the list, but family pressure stopped me from doing so. The leader of my *kabila*, who supported the *ben kan* list, told me that I had to withdraw. My father told me the same. He said that if I did not, the family would not support me if I ever got in trouble. That I would learn what life is like if you are not supported by your family. My room for manoeuvring was therefore rather limited. I could maintain a lower position on the list, but could not openly campaign or head the list.

On election day, the results were clear. Out of the eleven seats available, the *ben kan* list secured eight seats, ADEMA just two and URD one. The leader of URD responded: "I invested so much money and received only one seat in return. If it were not in politics, people would be jailed for such an offence." When the new mayor took office, the financial records indeed showed many

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<sup>435</sup> Campaigning slogans used during their visits to the hamlets were: "*I fa boh ye*" (you respect the words of your father) and we are the group of *ben kan* or *ben makan* (consensus).

irregularities. The former mayor, together with one of his allies, was obliged to pay back a percentage of the funds that had disappeared. The new mayor paid the rest from his own pocket and refused to inform state authorities of the matter in order to “maintain social stability and avoid further tensions between families.” The mayor replaced management bodies of local institutions, who started to report on a regular basis to the municipal and village councils. The new municipal council also organised various public consultative meetings. Transparency thereby improved. The new municipal council agreed upon a division of labour with the village council. It would continue to focus on external matters and accepted the mandate of the village council to manage internal affairs “because they would otherwise feel marginalised which would create problems for us,” according to one of the municipal councillors. The municipal staff increased its influence sphere in the area of tax collection. However, it worked closely together with the *kare* Sobessi (regarded as the local police). The funds and network of the new mayor already proved valuable for Karan during the first six months of his mandate. He travelled to Spain to motivate the Karanese migrants living there to sponsor a Karanese development project. He also paid a large share of the repair costs of a dirt road connecting Karan to the main road and he took a friend working for the National Media Institute to Karan in order to secure state assistance for a local radio station.

Overall, the formal requirement to organise local elections in 2009 opened up the possibility for people to sanction the second mayor of Karan. His political adversaries were well aware that they had to come up with a culturally sensitive campaign strategy and present their candidate as a good patron for Karan. The patron had to obtain local cultural capital in order to win the elections. After the elections, the third mayor of Karan secured more power than his predecessors, primarily due to his own capital and network. In contrast to the competition between the municipal and village councils during the first mandate and the informal deal between the village headmen and the mayor, which negatively affected the provision of public goods during the second mandate, a constructive agreement was now reached between the new mayor and the new village council. The sphere of direct influence of the municipal council remained directed at Karan’s external relations. The new municipal council greatly improved information provision and public consultation, thereby allowing ordinary citizens to hold them answerable. However, the dependence on the funds and network of the mayor and the top-down nature of these patron-client relations did not leave much room for strong enforceability mechanisms. Thus, accountability only partially and gradually improved following the third elections and remained largely *upwards* rather than truly *downwards*. The provision of public

goods eventually saw a rapid and dramatic improvement but primarily thanks to the informal role of Karan's patron rather than the formal role of the municipality.

## 5.5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The case material presented here compels scholars and international development agents to be modest when it comes to promoting democratic accountability and thereby state legitimacy through institutional change. The new municipal institutions introduced by Mali's decentralisation policies encountered various existing power poles and were incorporated in informal ties that restricted their functioning at the local level. In practice, the powers, spheres of influence and degree of downward accountability of Karan's new municipal council considerably lagged behind its official mandate. This study thereby confirms Ribot's (2002) conclusion and that of subsequent research:

Decentralisation is not taking the form necessary to realise the benefits that theory predicts, because it fails to entrust downwardly accountable representative actors with significant domains of autonomous discretionary power.<sup>436</sup>

In other words, Mali's decentralisation programme did not affect the degree, source and direction of accountability in Karan in the ways its legal foundations stipulated.

Mali's decentralisation programme did contribute to improvements in the provision of public goods in Karan. Not because of the official powers assigned to the municipal council, but because of informal patron-client relations that penetrated the new institution. Local elections offered successful people in Bamako an opportunity to invest in their villages of origin and to start building a political support base. Based on these informal (family) ties, a wealthy Karanese entrepreneur living in Bamako decided to invest his private funds, time and network to improve the quality of life for the people in Karan. Yet, the empirical data presented above also underlined the need to further refine the neo-patrimonial paradigm that dominates academic literature on African political developments. Local political relationships appeared to be much more complex than an exchange of goods, money and other favours between so-called patrons and clients. Powerful positions at the local level were based on cultural values such as autochthony, seniority and family solidarity. Informal hierarchical family ties strongly influenced an individual's "political room for manoeuvre." Moreover, political support bases

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<sup>436</sup> Ribot, J.C. (2002), p.3.



were primarily built in cultural institutions, notably the *kabilaw* and *karew*. Even the “patron of Karan” had to run a culturally sophisticated campaign to secure victory during the third municipal elections.

In sum, the creation of a municipal council and introduction of local elections did not enhance state legitimacy in ways expected from and predicted by institutional theory in the context of Mali’s heterarchical political order. In practice, much more heterogeneous patterns of decentralised administration prevailed, which were best captured through the analytical lens of “patronage plus.” These involved multiple patrons – both state and non-state actors – who legitimised their authority in a multi-dimensional way. Political legitimacy was established through the interplay between both material and immaterial resources.

Thus far, the thesis has focused entirely on the gradual emergence of a heterarchical political order in Mali in the period that preceded the 2012 crisis. The next and final chapter examines the anchoring of Mali’s heterarchical order during the five years period that followed.