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

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INTRODUCTION

This Malian case study joins an expanding body of literature in the academic fields of political science, sociology, history, regional studies and anthropology that challenges prevailing state-centred and institutional approaches to both political authority and legitimacy.

The first part of the thesis deconstructed Malian *state authority*. Classical views in the literature portrayed the state as the supreme institutional locus of political power and authority in society. The state was on top of society and so it should be. Such a hierarchical order was required to prevent anarchy. In Mali, however, a heterarchical political order gradually emerged in which the state was but one of the institutions amongst many non-state equals involved in the exercise of public authority. This heterogeneous order became further anchored in the period that followed the profound 2012 crisis, despite considerable international support geared towards rebuilding the Malian state and the restoration of a democratic regime.

The core part of the thesis deconstructed Malian *state legitimacy* in two different ways. First, in responding to the overarching research question, this thesis revealed the limited contribution of key democratic institutions in underpinning state legitimacy. In fact, their performance seems to have weakened the position of the state vis-à-vis non-state power poles in Mali's heterarchical context. Secondly, the thesis showed that non-actors mobilised alternative sources of legitimacy beyond democracy that remained highly influential in society.

This chapter briefly summarises the main conclusions of the individual chapters in these two core areas of the thesis. On that basis, it ends with a short reflection on the need to move beyond state-centred institutional blueprints when analysing processes of *public authority* and *public legitimacy* in the context of a heterarchical order.

The first part of the thesis examined the gradual emergence of a heterarchical political order in Mali. This historical assessment warned against the static approach of "hybrid" political orders and revealed substantial patterns of change over time. The series of dramatic events in 2012 marked a change in the power balance between state and non-state actors involved in *public* authority rather than a sudden collapse of robust Malian *state* authority.

At independence, the state still constituted the hierarchically supreme institution that dominated all other power poles in society. Although lacking much capacity itself, the socialist regime left very little room for non-state actors in the socio-economic, political or religious realm and curtailed the position of the chieftaincy at the local level. Yet, after its demise in 1968, hybrid forms of authority soon emerged and anchored in society. The state first shared the exercise of public authority with non-state actors in the area of social service delivery and eventually relied on non-state power poles to assist in countering security threats. After the turn of the century, the power balance in this hybrid set-up progressively shifted in favour of non-state actors. The state was completely ousted from northern Mali in 2012 and has struggled to regain a foothold ever since. In fact, a heterarchical order in which the state was but one institution amongst many non-state equals had firmly anchored across both northern and central Mali by 2018.

This part of the thesis focused, in particular, on historical patterns of public service delivery in the security realm. The monopoly of the legitimate use of violence constituted a critical cornerstone of classical Westphalian notions of state authority. Up until the early 1990s, Malian Defence and Security forces indeed performed a leading role in this area. However, the state increasingly relied on informal channels of cooperation with loyal non-state armed groups to counter security threats in northern Mali ever since. While the material basis and physical presence of the state remained limited, armed groups expanded their authority based on the resources that became available through transnational networks. Armed groups significantly boosted their income and armoury through channels other than those provided by the state. They enlarged their sphere of influence and filled the void of the state, particularly across the rural areas. The Malian case study thereby illustrated the substantial impact of transnational networks in shaping the exercising of public authority in the public service.

I initially referred to the patterns of hybrid security provision in terms of a "*militia-tary" strategy* deployed by the Malian state. I considered the label justified as the interaction between

state and non-state actors persisted over time, evolved into a de facto institutionalised practice and was guided by a longer-term strategic objective to counter recurrent security threats.

To a certain extent, such an analysis holds true for explaining patterns of interaction between the central state and loyal non-state groups in northern Mali. Yet, there was little evidence of the systematic and large-scale cooperation encountered in several other countries in terms of training and the provision of logistical and material support. Furthermore, this way of conceptualising hybrid security provision was unsuitable for depicting the situation in central Mali where the state had even less influence over the myriad of local militias and self-defence groups active on the ground.

More fundamentally, the notion of a "militia-tary strategy" placed too strong an emphasis on the role and influence of the state. It still presented the state as a central, overarching and hierarchically superior institution that deliberately shaped and largely determined its relationship and partnership with non-state groups. Such a conceptualisation failed to grasp and adequately represent the power balance between state and non-state actors involved in public security provision in a heterarchical context. First, the material resource basis of centralised statehood in a place like Mali remained extremely restricted. It proved inherently challenging for any central institution to singlehandedly exercise its authority, let alone provide protection across all corners of such vast geographical area characterised by such profound security challenges. Secondly, influential factors beyond the state clearly shaped hybrid security patterns and how these evolved over time. Multiple networks became available that enabled non-state armed groups to increase their authority, as already noted in the above. International military actors equally strongly influenced the power balance in Mali's heterarchical setting. Hence, the exercise of public authority in general and security provision in particular could not be reduced or understood in terms of a strategy by the state alone in the context of a heterarchial political setting. In such a setting, a single actor did not exclusively shape hybrid patterns of security provision. These patterns relied on the motives and capabilities of multiple actors and proved much more diffuse than the concept of a strategy suggests.

The second part of this thesis then examined the expected contribution by a number of key democratic institutions in enhancing state legitimacy in this particularly heterogeneous context.

Since the early 1990s, Mali has constituted a leading example of democracy on the African continent. Successive leaders respected political and civic rights, the level of press freedom was substantial and associational life truly blossomed. The country embarked on one of the most ambitious decentralisation reforms across the African continent. Power was handed over peacefully from one president to another in the 2002 polls. Mali was even on the verge of becoming a fully consolidated democracy according to Huntington's (1991) "two-turn over test" in the 2012 elections when a military coup abruptly ended President Touré's term in office.[555]

In this context, democratisation was expected to boost the popular legitimacy of the Malian state and to help it expand its position in society over other power poles. The core part of this thesis examined the performance of a selected number of democratic institutions in underpinning this so-called input side of state legitimacy. It assessed the contribution of: (1) Malian political parties and the party system; (2) the legislature; and (3) municipal democratic institutions in shaping political participation, representation and accountability. Each individual chapter combined a political-institutional approach with a wider socio-cultural analytical perspective. The analysis reveals that the democratic institutions examined in this thesis have not enhanced state legitimacy in line with their official mandate and as expected from theory. Quite to the contrary, the democratic structure seems to have weakened the position of the state vis-à-vis other power poles in Mali's heterarchical context.

Malian democratic institutions remained poorly rooted into Malian society. The institutions did not succeed in performing one the most fundamental functions of a democratic regime, that of ensuring popular participation into the political process and connecting people to the choices made by state representatives. Only a small minority of citizens participated in successive elections or maintained contact with (elected) political representatives. Very basic but influential factors such as language, education and religion consolidated the wide divide between the democratic system and the Malian *demos*. The vast majority of citizens did not speak or write the official language of government. Religion played a central role in people's private life and the public sphere but was formally kept outside the political system in accordance with the French notion of *laicité*. Initially, influential traditional institutions were largely ignored in the decentralisation reforms.

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[555] Huntington took a minimalist and procedural take on democratic consolidation, which he considered to be achived if two peaceful transfers of power in successive elections occurred. CF. Huntington, S. P. (1992).

In practice, political mobilisation and representation centred on exclusive networks between national political elites, local power brokers and a small minority of citizens. Patrimonial sources of legitimacy and a logic of personal proximity guided these ties. People supported political actors from their own vicinity and expected a redistribution of national resources to their home area. Patrons prevailed over policies and personal ties trumped institutionalised partisan politics. These exclusive patterns of representation connected a few privileged to the state but alienated most citizens from the political centre. Popular dissatisfaction with the functioning of democracy increased together with widespread frustration with the country's political elites and the expanding levels of corruption.

However, the official democratic channels did not offer many opportunities to hold an increasingly discredited executive branch of government accountable. The thesis illustrated the continued concentration of power in the Malian presidency and considerable institutional imbalance between the different branches of government in the decades that followed the democratic transition. The prevalence of a single party or coalition dominating the political system and capturing state structures in the absence of a viable political opposition equally constituted a clear political pattern of continuity over time.

In practice, one of the most pivotal institutions in terms of shaping accountability, the Malian legislature, functioned more as an extension of the executive branch of government geared towards the redistribution of national resources to the geographically centred support base of its members. The national interest and the delivery of public goods played a marginal role as a by-product of prevailing personal or particularistic interests.

In the absence of accessible democratic channels, citizens relied on non-state actors beyond – and often in opposition to – the state. Therefore, while intended to enhance state legitimacy, the performance of the democratic institutions assessed in this thesis actually weakened the state and boosted non-state power poles in that way. Although not assessed in detail, the thesis showed that other sources than democratic legitimacy remained influential or gained more prominence in recent decades. Democracy certainly did not emerge as the only game in Mali's heterarchical town. Most citizens, certainly across rural areas, continued to rely on non-state power poles who legitimised their authority in reference to religious or indigenous sources of legitimacy. The ability to protect people became another critical basis of legitimacy as the security situation deteriorated.

The Malian case study thereby revealed the limitations of an institutional and state-centred perspective on legitimacy. Instead, an analytical approach that moves away from state legitimacy and focuses on public legitimacy captures the complex interplay between different actors and sources of legitimacy in the context of a heterarchical political order.

BEYOND STATE-CENTRED INSTITUTIONAL BLUEPRINTS

This thesis contributed to a wider body of literature that underlined the need to change the analytical perspective on processes of statehood and democratisation in Africa. Prevailing state-centred institutional approaches first portrayed Mali as a showcase of democracy as it ticked most of the institutional democratic boxes. After the 2012 crisis, Mali's status on the international scene changed as a "fragile" or "weak" state in comparison to the ideal type of a Westphalian state. The country was now assumed to be "in transition" towards becoming a modern state and democracy. Such normative perspective echoed historically contested modernisation theories, which assumed that countries and polities progressed along a single magic road towards modernity.

However, this thesis underlined the diversity of statehood trajectories and showed that the functioning of democratic institutions significantly differed from place to place and time to time. State formation (and deformation) as well as democratisation are clearly open-ended processes. In Mali, the exercise of public authority in the public service (decentralised administration, security provision, and legislation) was certainly not confined to state institutions. Instead, it involved both state and non-state actors in complex and multi-dimensional interrelationships. In Mali's heterarchical context, political authority and legitimacy was captured through the analytical lens of "Patronage Plus." Citizens relied on multiple patrons – both state and non-state actors – who legitimised their authority in a multidimensional way. Political legitimacy was established through the interplay between both material and immaterial resources.

This thesis thus revealed that understanding these dynamics requires an approach that centres on the interaction between state and non-state actors as well as the interplay between multiple sources of legitimacy. Hagmann and Péclard (2010) developed a heuristic framework that enables such an analytical perspective beyond institutional blueprints.[556]

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[556] Hagmann, T. and Péclard, D. (2010), pp. 539-562.

It offers a useful framework for studying diffused patterns of state formation and legitimisation. The model also enables researchers to better understand how local, national and transnational actors forge and remake the state through a process of negotiation and contestation.

Their framework is based on a heterogeneous group of *actors* that mobilise different sets of *resources* and *repertoires* to institute their authority. Resources thereby refer to the material basis that actors mobilise to institute their authority, while repertoires constitute the (symbolic) sources that they refer to in order to express and legitimise their authority. This provides a useful analytical perspective for continued research of multi-dimensional practices of public authority and legitimacy in Mali's heterarchical context.

Certainly, in light of the deteriorating situation in the country and wider region, such empirically grounded research is much needed and deserves full support.