UCLA
UCLA Electronic Theses and Dissertations

Title

National Identity, Military Rule and French Intervention in Mali's Recent Political Crisis

Permalink

https://escholarship.org/uc/item/4zj907mg

Author

Smith, Christine Rebecca

Publication Date

2014

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

National Identity, Military Rule and French

Intervention in Mali's Recent Political Crisis

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction

of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts

in African Studies

by

Christine Rebecca Smith

2014

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

National Identity, Military Rule and French Intervention in Mali's Recent Political Crisis

by

Christine Rebecca Smith

Master of Arts in African Studies

University of California, Los Angeles, 2014

Professor Ghislaine Lydon, Chair

In current discourse on the political state of Mali and the country's recent coup in 2012, little attention is paid to the connection between former French colonial rule and Mali's ongoing national identity challenges. Specifically, are the motivations for the most recent coup in Mali and actions by the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) a desire for ethnic/regional unification, or are both related to the continuing impact of Mali's colonial past? If the latter, what does it mean, then, for France to intervene under the premise of seeking to "restore order"? And will it ever be possible to satisfy all Malian ethnic groups, including those, such as the Kel Tamasheq, that call for a separate state? Relying on op-eds, newspaper articles, books, and other relevant literature, this paper will reflect upon Mali's political history and the legacy of ethnic/cultural identities. Additionally, it will address how former French colonial rule and the 1947 shift in Mali's borders impacted Mali as well as ethnic and national contestation within Mali. In other words, I will consider how the actions of the MNLA in the aftermath of the

2012 coup explain the above questions and shed light on the events surrounding Mali's recent coup and how they are linked to Mali's ongoing national identity development. Finally, the paper's conclusion will reflect upon whether or not the 2012 coup has created a stronger sense of Malian national identity and whether or not Mali will ever be able to become a completely united state.

The thesis of Christine Rebecca Smith is approved.

Stephen Commins

Michael Lofchie

Ghislaine Lydon, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2012

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

I.   Introduction

Since the 1800s, when Europeans sought to expand their empires on the African continent to access its valuable resources, Africans have been forced to frequently defend their land, culture, and identities. The Belgians in the Congo sought to dominate their colonial subjects by imposing forced labor systems. The Portuguese in Angola, Mozambique, and Guinea-Bissau, likewise, repressed and ruthlessly controlled their subjects, but did so in an effort to reinforce their political power. On the contrary, the British allowed for the preservation of some African traditions in the rule of its colonies. Lastly, the French took a unique, culture-influenced approach to governing their African colonies. Rather than preserve and incorporate African practices and identities into local rule, the French instead chose to implement French customs, language, and ideology in order to foster the assimilation of their subjects to French culture and fulfill their mission of civilizing non-Europeans.[1] However, despite some Francophone Africans willingly adopting French traditions in order to rise within society and its hierarchy, many vehemently opposed forced assimilation and consequently clung tighter to ethnic and cultural identities during and especially after French colonial rule.

By forcing multiple ethnic groups, such as the Kel Tamasheq, the Dogon, the Songhai, and the Fulani, and cultures, mainly Arabs or non-blacks and blacks, to live within their colonial territories under one colonial state, the French and other members of the Berlin Conference created a situation in which ethnic and cultural identities were eventually bound to become intermixed with politics.[2] One such example is the former French colony of Mali. A country colonized by the French in 1892 under the notion of expanding France's military presence

---

[1] B. Oletunji Oloruntimehin, "The French Estate in West Africa, 1890-1918," *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 7.3 (1974): 451.
[2] Bruce Hall, *A History of Race in Muslim West Africa, 1600-1960* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 5.

throughout West Africa, French Soudan quickly became a country of politically-marginalized subjects ruled by a controlling colonial administration that feared Muslim jihads and resistance movements.

After all, even before the arrival of the French, 23 Malian ethnic groups with varying ethnic languages and livelihoods existed.[3] The Fulani, for example, are primarily Muslim pastoralists and agriculturalists who can be found throughout West Africa.[4] Then there are the Dogon, an ethnic group that lives primarily in the central plateau region of Mali and Burkina Faso, that consists mostly of agriculturalists and craftsmen and historically lacked a centralized system of government.[5] Another ethnic group within the country is the Bambara, who live in southern Mali, belong to the largest ethno-linguistic group the Mande, live primarily as agriculturalists, and dominate Malian politics.[6] The Songhai, who are best known for their affiliation with the 1375-1591 Songhai Empire and for noted Timbuktu historian Ahmad Baba al Massufi, also live within Mali as fishermen and traders.[7] Additionally, there are the Moors, an ethnic group that lives throughout the Sahel as nomads and speaks one of the Arab-based, Hassaniya dialects.[8] And unlike most of their countrymen, the Kel Tamasheq (or Tuaregs) live throughout the Sahara, including northern Mali, as Muslim nomads and speak the Berber language of Tamasheq.[9] Other groups include the Malinké, the Soninke, and the Bozo, each of which also have varying languages, governing traditions, and livelihoods.

---

[3] "Society and Custom," *La Republique du Mali*, 2004, http://www.ambamali-jp.org/en/e01-01.html .
[4] Thomas J. Bassett, "Fulani Herd Movements," *Geographical Review* 76 (1986): 235.
[5] Thad Dunning and Lauren Harrison, "Cross-cutting Cleavages and Ethnic Voting: An Experimental Study of Cousinage in Mali," *The American Political Science Review* 104.1 (2012): 25.
[6] Hippolyte Bazin, "Les Bambara et leur langue," *Anthropos* 1.4 (1906): 681.
[7] Paul Stoller, "Sound in Songhay Cultural Experience," *American Ethnologist* 11.3 (1984): 560.
[8] H. T. Norris, "The Wind of Change in the Western Sahara," *The Geographical Journal* 130.1 (1964): 1.
[9] Baz, Lecocq, *Disputed Desert: Decolonization, Competing Nationalisms, and Tuareg Rebellions in Northern Mali* (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2010), 4.

Consequently, once the French arrived, Malian ethnic groups quickly became unequally treated based on their religious affiliations and tendencies for revolt in order to comply with French interests. It is hardly surprising, then, that ethnic and racial divisions transitioned into post-independent Mali and intensified politically during and after independence out of a need for Malians to guarantee themselves and their kinsmen access to resources and political power. As a result, some Muslim ethnic groups, such as the Kel Tamasheq and the Moors, felt isolated from their fellow countrymen, so much so that secession became a worthy cause to fight for. Others, such as Malian Muslim extremists, or practitioners of literal, rather than fluid and modern, interpretations of the Quran who choose any means necessary (including violence) to implement Sharia law, have resorted to igniting regional violence and implementing national political overthrows, such as the coup that ousted Mali's democratically-elected president Amadou Toumani Touré in 2012. The part identities play in the country's most recent coup and ongoing nation-building struggles, therefore, must not be overlooked.

Because all European colonizers, including the French, were intent on dividing and ruling their colonies, colonial authorities took advantage of existing ethnic and cultural differences in order to strengthen their political control within their colonies. This reinforcement of ethnic and cultural differences by the colonizers partly explains why ethnicity and culture are still used as essential elements of many Africans' identities today. It is hardly surprising, then, that individual identity groups, such as Muslim extremists, would go to such lengths as to implement a coup in order to emphasize the strength of Arabs and northern ethnic groups within the country. However, particular groups cannot be wrongly presumed to be predisposed towards violence or solely blamed for the ongoing political instability plaguing the country. Instead, the lack of a strong national identity, as opposed to those created in post-independence Tanzania, post-

genocide Rwanda, and post-Apartheid South Africa, must be considered. By examining Mali's colonial history and the creation of its borders, its lack of national identity formation, and the prevalence of identity tensions in political, economic, and social events, it will become apparent just how divided the Malian state is and how exceedingly difficult it will be for the country to strengthen its sovereignty and national identity and become one united political state that is completely separate from France.

II.   Colonial West Africa and Mali's Political History

A diverse region that includes hundreds of ethnic and linguistic groups, multiple religions, and varying political histories, French colonial West Africa possesses a multifaceted history. This history helps explain Mali and other West African countries' struggles to create consistently thriving national economies and transition peacefully into strong democratic political systems. Elements of Mali's colonial past are certainly relevant for understanding recent events in the country's history. Consequently, the following historical overview focuses exclusively on the history of Mali during and after French colonization and how the political landscape and country's national identity has evolved over time. This focus on the country's national identity, or lack thereof, will be discussed further in later chapters.

a. French Colonial Rule

Even though ethnic and cultural identities, or the socially-constructed, appearance and culture-based associations that are attached to a particular group of individuals, were a significant aspect of pre-colonial Malian kingdoms such as the Malinké kingdom of Kangaba (1050-1235), the Mali Empire (1235-1645), and the Tukulor Empire (1854-1894), highlighting ethnic and racial differences so as to divide the region as opposed to unifying it did not emerge until the French officially permeated and set up colonial administrations in West Africa during

the 1890s.[10] After suffering several military blows by Prussia during the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-1871, France was determined to eliminate foreign threats by expanding and strengthening the French Empire through increasing its global political influence and acquiring more resources to fuel its endeavors.[11] Consequently, France participated in Europe's inter-continental competition for Africa. Known most commonly as the Scramble for Africa, the division and conquering of Africa began after the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885 in order to secure official European legitimization of its presence in West Africa before the turn of the century.[12] France then sought to consolidate its administrative authority throughout its West African territories. After all, France had been present in the region for centuries; in 1659, the French established a trading post in Saint-Louis, Senegal, while in 1830, France seized Algiers, Algeria from the crumbling Ottoman Empire during the final days of Charles X's Bourbon Restoration.[13] Knowing that the region was only partially ruled by the Ottoman Empire due to local Arab and Berber leaders maintaining control over much of the territory, Charles X saw conquering Algeria as a great attempt to increase his popularity throughout post-Napoleon France.[14] Once present in the area, France sought to expand further into the African interior.[15] Thus, when the country was recognized by Europe as the official administrative authority in West Africa, it sought to consolidate its territories into one federation. This was achieved in 1895 when France's Ministry of Overseas Territories appointed a Governor-General to oversee Sénégal (Senegal), Mauritanie (Mauritania), Soudan Française (French Soudan), Guinée (French Guinea), Côte d'Ivoire (Ivory

---

[10] B. Oletunji Oloruntimehin, "Theories and Realities in the Administration of Colonial French West Africa from 1890 to the First World War," *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 6.3 (1972): 295.

[11] Oloruntimehin, "The French Estate in West Africa," 458.

[12] Kwame Anthony Appiah and Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *Encyclopedia of Africa*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 405.

[13] Patrick Manning, *Francophone Sub-Saharan Africa 1880-1995* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 41.

[14] Ibid, 42.

[15] Ibid, 45.

Coast), Haute-Volta (Upper Volta), Dahomey, and Niger on behalf of the French government.[16] By 1904, these territories were officially joined together as the Afrique Occidentale Française (AOF).[17] However, French Soudan was incorporated into the Senegambie (later Upper Senegal) and Niger colonial administrative unit[18] and each unit of the federation, which was financially autonomous from the Governor-General, continued to function primarily as an independent entity.[19] Modern-day Mali and parts of Senegal and Mauritania were then renamed French Soudan in 1920.[20] This name and official colonial administrative unit remained, despite losing some districts in 1947 to the newly re-created colony of Upper Volta (present-day Burkina Faso) and Mauritania, until February 1949.[21] A decade later, the region renamed itself the Mali Federation within the Communauté Française in an effort to work towards gaining independence from France.[22] Finally, during the 16 February 1963 Treaty of Kayes, ongoing tensions about the areas surrounding the Mali-Mauritania boundary were settled when the Hodh region was officially recognized as Mauritanian territory.[23] In turn, Mali retained the villages of Diandioume, Gourdian, Gouguel, and Boulouli and gained several key wells throughout the southeastern border region.[24]

b. The emergence of party politics in pre-independence Mali

Throughout colonial French West Africa, three groups of non-administrative political participants arose: chiefs, teachers, and soldiers.[25] As was the case during the pre-colonial era,

---

[16] Oloruntimehin, õTheories and Realities,ö 296.
[17] Alfred Fierro, õAfrique Occidentale Française (A.O.F.),ö last modified June 8, 2014, http://www.universalis.fr/encyclopedie/afrique-occidentale-francaise/.
[18] Dorothea Schulz, *Culture and Customs of Mali* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2012), 57.
[19] Oloruntimehin, õTheories and Realities,ö 299.
[20] Schulz, *Culture and Customs of Mali,* 57.
[21] Melissa Payne, õHistory: French Conquest of the Western Sudan,ö *Virginia Department of Education*, 2002.
[22] Ibid.
[23] õInternational Boundary Study: Mali ó Mauritania Boundary,ö *U.S. Department of State*, 2005.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Lecocq, *Disputed Desert*, 30.

prior to World War II and independence, French Soudan's political landscape was dominated by

traditional African chiefs; during colonialism, these chiefs occupied their own space within the

colonial system.[26] Teachers, who were mostly French-educated colonial civil servants, organized

cultural associations and literary clubs, which acted as a space in which many post-war parties

emerged.[27] Soldiers, unlike the previous kinds of political actors, were absent during the later

years of the colonial era because they were called to fight during World War II on behalf of

France, yet participated extensively in local demands for rights at the end of the war and upon

their return from it.[28] Chiefs and teachers, likewise, partook in post-war politics. Chiefs from

various southern, predominantly non-Muslim ethnic groups, such as the Bambara, the Fulani, the

Soninké, and the Malinké, and teachers fought one another for political supremacy in the new,

post-war colonial system, but ultimately, the teachers and their desire to construct formal

political parties, which was supported by the soldiers, won.[29] Finally, following independence,

many soldiers participated in various coups d'état in order to gain political power and capital.[30]

However, while many actors within these categories did indeed fit the mold laid out above, it is

important to note that none of these groups were homogenous. Consequently, some members

acted differently than their peers in order to defend their interests. Nevertheless, soldiers,

teachers, and chiefs from various southern ethnic groups greatly influenced the establishment of

party politics in French Soudan.

Additionally, each ethnic group had slightly varied experiences with political organizing

prior to the establishment of political parties in the region. While most ethnic groups, including

---

[26] Ibid, 32.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Ibid, 31.
[29] Ibid, 33.
[30] Ibid.

the Malinké, the Songhai, the Bambara, and the Soninké, sought to gain political authority within the colonial administration by cooperating with French officials, serving as reliable soldiers for France during the World Wars, and participating more willingly in the French education system, nomadic groups, especially the Kel Tamasheq and the Moors, sought to politically organize separate of the French colonial administration.[31] Rather than accede to a lower anti-Muslim political status based primarily on differences in appearance,[32] the Kel Tamasheq chose to fight against a hierarchical, multi-ethnic colonial federation in favor of a sovereign, pro-Islam Tamasheq state.[33] As a result, the French fought considerably more with the Kel Tamasheq over succumbing to colonial authority than it did with any other ethnic group within the colony, and the Kel Tamasheq and the Moors politically organized separately from the colony's newly-formed political parties.[34] These Tamasheq separatist movements, which began during the colonial era as a means to achieve an independent Tamasheq state where no Tamasheq is seen as racially or ethnically inferior, will be discussed in further detail in the next chapter.

After the foundation for political parties was laid by the previously-mentioned French-educated political actors of the region, political parties materialized in French Soudan in February 1946.[35] Even though the first party, the Parti Progressiste du Soudan (PSP), did little to separate itself from the colonial regime because the colonial administration openly supported the party, PSP put in motion the trend for two or multi-party participation in colonial activities and later, in post-independence politics.[36] The Rassemblement Démocratique Africaine (RDA), on the contrary, sought to separate itself from the French government by uniting regional

[31] Morten Boas and Liv Elen Torheim, "The Trouble in Mali – corruption, collusion, resistance," *Third World Quarterly* 34.7 (2013): 1283.
[32] Audrey Smedley, "'Race' and the Construction of Human Identity," *American Anthropologist* 100.3 (1998): 693.
[33] Hall, *A History of Race in Muslim West Africa*, 115.
[34] Ibid, 116.
[35] Manning, *Francophone Sub-Saharan Africa,* 146.
[36] Lecocq, *Disputed Desert*, 39.

communist parties throughout Francophone Africa in an effort to actively promote an anti-colonial, pan-African political platform.[37] Similarly, other parties, including the Parti Communistes, the Internationale Socialiste, and the Union Soudanais (US) successfully recruited Francophone Africans with their anti-colonial platforms.[38] However, despite an increase in political activism, voting turnout throughout French Soudan remained low. This low amount of political participation was due to a lack of universal suffrage, the organization of elections at the start of the rainy season when farmers and nomads were busiest, a lack of adequate resources and information for voters, and roughly 98 percent of the total pre-independence population being illiterate in French.[39] Despite such meager voter turnout statistics, French Soudan had little difficulty gaining independence from France, a fact that is necessary to point out when attempting to understand how the Malian state developed after independence.

     c. Post-independence Malian politics and the origin of Mali's national identity problem

Even though Mali's move in 1960 towards independence, like many Francophone African countries (minus Guinea, Algeria, and Morocco), did not bring about a long, violent, and bitter conflict with the colonial regime as a result of its lack of vested interest in those regions, Mali still suffered with regard to nation-building before, during, and after independence. Prior to colonization, multiple ethnic groups existed throughout the region, all of which have their own languages and traditions.[40] It is hardly surprising, then, that with the arbitrary creation of borders by Europeans and consequent territorial and political division between northern and southern ethnic groups, came an increased desire to protect and associate with one's ethnic identity. This

---

[37] Elizabeth Schmidt, "Cold War in Guinea: The Rassemblement Démocratique Africaine and the Struggle over Communism, 1950-1958," *The Journal of African History* 48.1 (2007): 98.
[38] Ibid, 100.
[39] Lecocq, *Disputed Desert*, 39.
[40] Schulz, *Culture and Customs of Mali*, 58.

ethnic association, which existed well before Malian citizenship, consequently trumped (and continues to trump) allegiances to the state.

Additionally, during French colonial rule, Soudanese political elites lacked the will to completely challenge French authority and set aside ideological differences in order to create a united French Soudanese state. After all, some political parties, as previously alluded, supported some French interests as a means to secure their limited power.[41] Others, such as the US-RDA, envisioned a Pan-African federal political union rather than a smaller, independent Malian state.[42] As a result, it was not until Senegal left the Mali Federation in 1960 that Soudanese leaders were forced to agree on envisioning Mali as a singular state.[43] Even then, though, many Soudanese politicians found themselves clinging to the hope of one day reattempting a Pan-African federation.[44] Such a half-hearted desire by Malian politicians for one united Malian identity compounded with a lack of a nationwide event, such as a separatist war against France, helps shed light on why its national identity-building was not achieved before and during independence.

Shortly after creating a new name for the territory, the Mali Federation received official recognition by France as an independent federation within the Communauté Française.[45] Just two months later on 20 June 1960, the Mali Federation declared its complete independence from France, but the new independent state proved to be short-lived as a result of political conflict.[46] These disputes, stemming from differences in how the state should be governed, will be discussed below. Unable to compromise with his Marxist Socialist rival Modibo Keita of the

---

[41] Lecocq, *Disputed Desert,* 41.
[42] Manning, *Francophone Sub-Saharan Africa*, 146.
[43] Ibid, 147.
[44] Ibid.
[45] Donn M. Kurtz, õPolitical Integration in Africa: The Mali Federation,ö *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 8.3 (1970): 407.
[46] Ibid, 419.

Union Soudanaise ó Rassemblement Démocratique Africaine (US-RDA) party about how the new federal state should be governed, Léopold Sédar Senghor and the Senegalese Parti Démocratique Soudanais (PDS) declared Senegal an independent sovereign state and left the Mali Federation a mere seven days before elections were scheduled to take place on 27 August 1960.[47] As a result, on 22 September 1960, Keita and the US-RDA declared independence of the Soudanese Republic and renamed the territory the Republic of Mali.[48] From then on, the modern sovereign state of Mali existed.

After gaining independence in 1960, an attempt to establish one mostly united Malian identity (minus the northern part of the country and those ethnic groups living within it) was made with the hope of replacing the failed nationalist identity of the Mali Federation.[49] With an understanding of the great Mali Empire and its founder Sunjata Keita in mind, the country's first president, Modibo Keita, specifically chose the Republic of Mali as the new territory's name so as to forge a sense of national unity around southern Mali's proudest moments.[50] However, with remembrance and celebration of the strong empire through the new country's name also came a reiteration of the fall of the Malinké to other regional ethnic groups, such as the Kel Tamasheq and the Songhai, who capitalized on their opportunity to rebel against the crumbling empire after the loss of its ruler Mansa Musa in 1337.[51] Naming the country Mali with the hope of creating a unified state, according to Baz Lecocq, therefore backfired, for it not only included in its foundation the maintenance of different ethnic identities, but also implied that the Malinké, the Bambara, and other Mande ethnic groups were õtrue Maliansö who must be favored over all other ethnic groups within the state. The remaining ethnic groups, therefore, were viewed by

---

[47] Ibid, 421.
[48] Ibid.
[49] Lecocq, *Disputed Desert*, 69.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Ibid.

those within the government as holding a lower status in the state's social and political hierarchy, and so were not considered to be as deserving of state resources, political power, and respect as those ethnic groups that make up the Mande ethno-linguistic group. Starting a new nation under the premise of unequal citizenship is rarely a recipe for success, especially in a fragile, post-colonial African state.

Furthermore, following independence, Malian politicians were faced with the predicament of building a brand new state from scratch. In an effort to lessen the likelihood of revolt and prevent the Soudanese from qualifying for the highest administrative positions, the French limited the education of Soudanese subjects during its colonial rule. Consequently, after the French exited the country in 1960, the new Malian state was left with a few semi-educated individuals to run the country.[52] In addition to the lack of qualified leaders, the state also lacked adequate infrastructure. This was primarily a result of France seeing no benefit in leaving existing services, such as electricity, or investing extensively in certain basic necessities, such as roads and airports, that would not immediately financially benefit France now that it had exited the country.[53] As a result, building infrastructure so that the new nation could establish a strong government and economy trumped any profound interest in strengthening the state's identity as a whole. The weakened, long-term interest in identity-building will prove politically problematic as the state ages.

III.   Malian Ethnic and Racial Politics

Before any discourse about recent political events in Mali takes place, it is important to understand the diversity of ethnic groups within the region. At least 23 ethnic groups are known to exist within Mali's borders, most of which share few historic, cultural, and religious

---

[52] Ibid, 70.
[53] Ibid.

traditions.[54][55] However, some, such as the Kel Tamasheq and Moors, differ considerably more from their neighbors in terms of livelihoods and religious ideologies.[56] Satisfying all interests politically, as a result, has proven to be quite a challenge for Malian political figures. Ethnic and culture identities have greatly influenced Mali's political history. As a result, both will be deconstructed and analyzed in order to gain a better grasp of Mali's political atmosphere during the colonial and neo-colonial eras.

a. Ethnic and cultural identities during the colonial era

Prior to French colonization and the formation of French Soudan, Malian ethnic groups were, for the most part, a non-issue. Each ethnic group governed itself and functioned independently, so ethnic significance with regard to politics was not a considerable issue. Some ethnic tensions, however, did emerge, as evidenced in the Mali Empire's struggle to defend itself against conquests by the Susu, a Susu-dominated kingdom within the empire.[57] The Susu and their ruler, Sumanguru, became so successful at conquering surrounding kingdoms within the empire that it took Sundiata's, the Malinké ruler of the southern kingdom of Kangaba, refusal to submit to Sumanguru to ultimately dismantle Sumanguru's power and shift control of the empire to Kangaba.[58] The Mali Empire did eventually fall, though, after facing multiple attacks during the 1400s from the Kel Tamasheq, the Songhai, the Mossi of present-day Burkina Faso, and the Wolof of present-day Senegal.[59] Despite this ethnic tension within the pre-colonial era, ethnic identification became even more important after the region was claimed by the French. For instance, following the Berlin Conference, nomadic groups, such as the Kel Tamasheq, found

---

[54] Schulz, *Culture and Customs of Mali*, 60.
[55] õMali Country Overview,ö *Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada,* December 19, 2001.
[56] Ibid.
[57] Stephen Bühnen, õIn Quest of Susu,ö *History in Africa* 21 (1994): 5.
[58] Ibid, 20.
[59] Lecocq, *Disputed Desert*, 70.

themselves split across multiple arbitrary borders.[60] Specifically, the Kel Tamasheq no longer

existed in their own kingdom under Tamasheq political authority, but rather within five modern

states – Mali, Niger, Algeria, Libya, and Burkina Faso – that had different regional colonial

officials.[61] These groups, therefore, were forced to alter their nomadic lifestyles to fit a colonial

system in which they were divided and politically excluded.[62] Additionally, because all ethnic

groups were treated as "lesser beings" by the French, identifying with a particular ethnic group

became essential for securing a better status and more rights from the colonial administration.[63]

Consequently, rivalries between ethnic groups and ethnic allegiances became more violent and

less willing to equally coexist alongside one another.

Classifications based on skin color and physical attributes, likewise, existed in Mali

before the arrival of the French as a result of the region's active involvement in slavery. This is

most apparent in the pre-colonial Tamasheq language. Within the Tamasheq language, the word

for black, "koual," is used to refer to dark-skinned people with low social status, such as former

slaves and casted craftsmen.[64] However, the Kel Tamasheq term for white, "imoulan," is not

used in racial discourse.[65] Instead, the Kel Tamasheq use the terms red, "shaggaran," and bluish

black, "sattefen," to denote nobles and individuals of a particular phenotype.[66] Accurately

understanding Tamasheq race and culture through a Western concept of race that relies greatly

on skin color and physical differences, therefore, became a common problem for the French

---

[60] Shahrukh Khan, "Ancient Causes of a Modern Conflict in Mali," *Harvard Political Review*, March 23, 2014, http://harvardpolitics.com/world/ancient-causes-modern-conflict-mali/.
[61] Hall, *A History of Race in Muslim West Africa*, 125.
[62] Khan, "Ancient Causes of a Modern Conflict in Mali."
[63] Ibid.
[64] Lecocq, *Disputed Desert*, 48.
[65] Ibid.
[66] Ibid, 51.

during colonialism.[67] In fact, colonial administrators frequently misunderstood the differences between shaggaran and sattefen and, as a result, gradually influenced Tamasheq language so that by the end of World War II, Western visual classifications became more significant in racial categories amongst the Kel Tamasheq, and shaggaran surpassed sattefen in the ethnic group's cultural hierarchy.[68] The mixed definition of race amongst the Kel Tamasheq is still present today, as shown in the French translations of koual as õnoirö and shaggaran and sattefen as õblanc.ö[69] Race-based cultural classification, therefore, was present before the arrival of the French, but became increasingly more phenotypic in nature, with more emphasis on skin color in addition to preexisting distinctions in physical features, once the French came to the region. In other words, after the French arrived, blackness shifted from a general, derogatory term to one that was associated automatically with slaves and slavery.[70] Consequently, by the time the French left Mali after the country gained independence, perceptions of race and culture within Mali focused primarily on skin color and less on other phenotypic differences. Tamasheq and other northern Malians, as a result, became part of a non-black/Arab culture, while southern Malians were identified as being black. These cultural categories are still present in Mali and throughout the African continent.

b. **The significance of Mali's name, its weak institutions, and environmental factors**

Since independence, ethnic and cultural identities have maintained a prominent place within the political landscape of all African nations, including Mali. As previously mentioned, the country's first president, Modibo Keita, chose the name Mali for the new territory in honor of

---

[67] Ibid.
[68] Ibid.
[69] Ibid, 50.
[70] Hall, *A History of Race in Muslim West Africa*, 210.

the strongest Mande kingdom, the Mali Empire of 1230-1600.[71] An empire that at its height in 1300 encompassed all of the territory between the Atlantic Ocean and Lake Chad, the Mali Empire thrived as one of the largest empires in the world for more than 300 years.[72] Several of Mali's most famous rulers, including Sundiata Keita and Mansa Musa, were emperors of this empire.[73] Because of the empire's prominence, Mali became an important trading and intellectual center in West Africa.[74] Highlighting Mande strength by choosing Mali as the new country's name, therefore, added to the disenfranchisement of the Kel Tamasheq after independence, who responded with four rebellions that each demanded the formation of a separate Tamasheq state. These separatist movements, which occurred in 1962-1964, 1990-1996, 2006-2009, and 2012[75] and are a crucial component to Mali's current political instability, will be discussed further in the next section.

Additionally, with weak institutions, severe weather conditions that have caused ongoing food security issues, and a poor economy, Malian politicians have used their power and limited resources to reinforce allegiances to ethnic and cultural identities. For example, due to a lack of substantial funding for roads and other transportation services, the Malian government has historically allocated the majority of its road creation and maintenance projects to the southern, predominantly Bambara part of the country where constituents and members of the politicians' social groups are located.[76][77]. Northern ethnic and racial groups, on the other hand, are marginalized politically and rarely benefit from federally-funded infrastructure and development

---

[71] Nawal Morcos Bell, "The Age of Mansa Musa of Mali: Problems in Succession and Chronology," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 5.2 (1972): 223.
[72] Ralph A. Austen and Jan Jansen, "History, Oral Transmission and Structure in Ibn Khaldun's Chronology of Mali Rulers," *History in Africa* 23 (1996): 19.
[73] Ibid, 22.
[74] Bell, "The Age of Mansa Musa of Mali," 230.
[75] Boas, "The Trouble in Mali," 1281.
[76] Figure 1, "Maps of Mali: Detailed road and other maps of Mali," *Vidiani.com*, 2011.
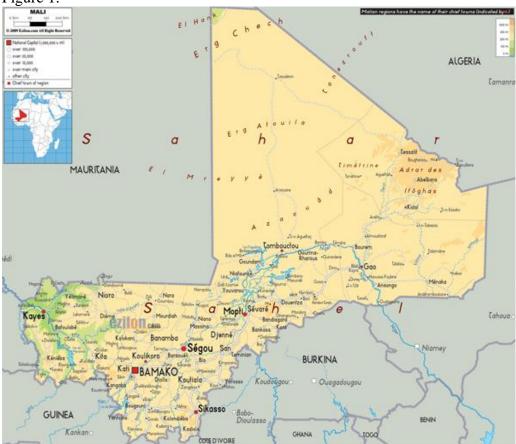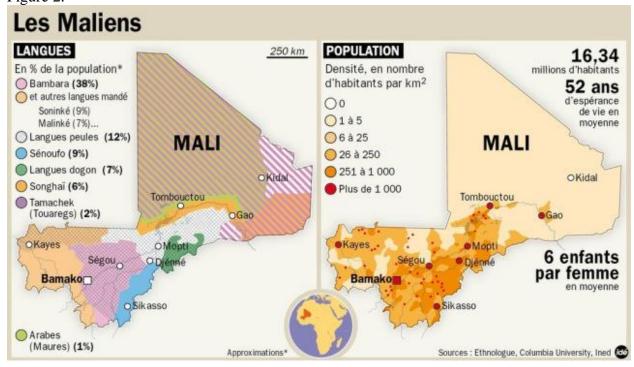[77] Figure 2, "Les Maliens," *Columbia University*, 2012.

Figure 1.

Figure 2.

projects, as evidenced in their lack of proportional political seats within the national government, the little to non-existent presence of NGOs in the north, and the absence of consistently-reliable basic services, including access to water and electricity.[78] Electricity, in fact, is so scarce in northern cities, such as Gao, that it is only available to citizens between 6:00pm and 3:00am, resulting in the inability to continuously run generators that pump already-limited water into the city.[79] Many outlying areas in the north do not even receive piped water, and instead must rely on shallow wells.[80] Consequently, these communities face a higher risk of cholera, guinea worm disease, diarrhea, and other life-threatening, water-related illnesses.[81] Northern Malians, as a result, have a greater distrust in national politicians and a weakened or non-existent allegiance to the state; this is evidenced through regularly-occurring protests throughout several northern towns.[82] This distrust in the state is apparent in each of the five coups and coup attempts that occurred since the country became independent, including Mali's most recent coup in 2012.[83]

c. Separatist movements: the Kel Tamasheq

Stretched across multiple countries, politically marginalized by national governments, and falsely stereotyped as Muslim extremists and as a "warrior tribe" by the West, the Kel Tamasheq have a long history of taking action to redraw country borders and create their own sovereign state.[84] Prior to official colonization of West Africa by the French, the Kel Tamasheq frequently resisted French penetration into the region. Hostilities between the French and the

---

[78] "Mali: Water and electricity still in short supply in northern cities," *IRCR*, May 14, 2013, http://www.icrc.org/eng/resources/documents/update/2013/05-14-mali-water-electricity.htm.
[79] "Wells Run Dry as Water Supplies Dwindle in Northern Mali," *Save the Children*, July 8, 2014, http://www.savethechildren.org/site/c.8rKLIXMGIpI4E/b.8114445/.
[80] Ibid.
[81] Ibid.
[82] "Mali: Reform or Relapse," *International Crisis Group*, January 10, 2014, http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/africa/west-africa/mali/210-mali-reform-or-relapse.aspx.
[83] Habiba Ben Barka and Mthuli Ncube, "Political Fragility in Africa: Are Military Coups d'Etat a Never-Ending Phenomenon?," *African Development Bank,* September 2012.
[84] Lecocq, *Disputed Desert*, 60.

Kel Tamasheq continued throughout the colonial era. The French regularly referred to the Kel Tamasheq as õthieves and bandits, as cruel and uncultured fanatics,ö successfully conquered Timbuktu in 1893-1894 prior to officially colonizing the region, and intentionally excluded the Kel Tamasheq from receiving a Western education despite allowing other ethnic groups to participate within the system.[85] The Kel Tamasheq, in response, sporadically lashed out via separatist movements from the start of French rule until the end of World War I.[86] One such movement was the French-Barabish Conflict of 1893-1900, a conflict that attempted to eliminate the Kel Tamasheq threat by aligning presumed enemies of the Kel Tamasheq, local Arabs known as the Barabish, with French military forces.[87] The alliance ultimately proved to be of little success, for it failed to remove the Kel Tamasheq from Timbuktu and made it more difficult for Barabish merchants to engage in local commerce.[88] After this conflict, the Kel Tamasheq continued to be distrusted and feared by the colonial administration, so much so that the French rarely ventured into the Sahara where they were prone to face resistance from the Kel Tamasheq.[89] In fact, at the start of French colonial rule in Mali, the French used any means necessary to systematically hunt down anti-French Tamasheq, including Alla ag Albachir, Inalaghen ag Dida, and Ahmed wan Egarew, in order to maintain law and order and eliminate the threat of a local uprising against the colonial regime.[90] However, over time, the colonial administration came to respect the Kel Tamasheqøs refusal to succumb to French rule.[91] As a result, the French attempted to create a separate Saharan space for the Kel Tamasheq in January

---

[85] Hall, *A History of Race in Muslim West Africa*, 130.
[86] Ibid.
[87] Ibid, 131.
[88] Ibid.
[89] Lecocq, *Disputed Desert*, 60.
[90] Ibid, 62.
[91] Hall, *A History of Race in Muslim West Africa*, 140.

1957.[92] This area, known as the Common Organisation of Saharan Regions (OCRS), would have brought the governments of Algeria, Mauritania, Mali, Chad, and Niger under a common political framework while uniting much of the Arab and Kel Tamasheq populations within the region.[93] Keita and other regional African leaders ultimately rejected the proposal,[94] which helped fuel Mali's first post-independence Tamasheq rebellion of the 1960s.

Since gaining independence in 1960, Mali has experienced multiple Tamasheq separatist movements. As previously mentioned, not long after the Republic of Mali was formed, the Kel Tamasheq lost an advocacy battle for the creation of a separate Tamasheq nation.[95] In addition to regular verbal requests for an independent state, following independence, four separatist movements in the 1960s, 1990s, 2000s, and 2012 have taken place.[96] During the Alfellga separatist movement of 1962-1964, violence erupted between Tamasheq communities and the national government over dissatisfaction with the new Modibo Keita regime.[97] This, alongside a desire to create a new sovereign Tamasheq state called Azawad in light of France's failed OCRS proposal, sparked Tamasheq calls for rebellion.[98] However, because of the Kel Tamasheq's poor coordination and leadership and the Malian army's swift and advanced counterinsurgency operations, the rebellion ended without the Kel Tamasheq successfully seceding.[99]

---

[92] Fouad Farhaoui, *The Great Power Struggle for Africa: The Crisis in Mali* (Ankara: USAK Publications, 2013), 13.
[93] Ibid.
[94] Ibid.
[95] "Crisis in the Sahel: Mali's Road from Stable Democracy to Extremist Safe Haven," *U.S. Department of State Diplomatic Security*, 2012.
[96] Ibid.
[97] Andrew F. Clark, "Imperialism, Independence, and Islam in Senegal and Mali," *Africa Today* 46.3 (1999): 151.
[98] Ibid.
[99] Ibid, 160.

Although avoiding another rebellion for decades, an additional Tamasheq separatist movement occurred 30 years later from 1990-1996.[100] Motivated by ongoing desertification and drought during the 1970s and 1980s, many Tamasheq communities fled across borders to Algeria and Libyan refugee camps hoping to receive much-needed emergency food aid.[101] While in these camps, Tamasheq men learned of the Moussa Traoré regime's embezzlement of drought relief funds designed to provide short-term relief to affected communities. Consequently, many joined together in newly-formed rebel groups and carried out attacks in Niger and Mali starting on 28 June 1990.[102] While able to oust Traoré a mere nine months later on 26 March 1991, after years of poor control over the national army, newly-elected president Alpha Oumar Konaré reshuffled the armed forces and regained control over his soldiers.[103] As a result, grassroots peace negotiations flourished and successfully ended the violence on 27 March 1996.[104]

After ten years of relatively peaceful yet politically-tense circumstances, Mali underwent a third Tamasheq separatist movement in 2006-2009.[105] Initially started on 23 May 2006, disgruntled Tamasheq ex-combatants of the Malian Armed Forces collaborated with Libya's Muammar Qadhafi regime with the hope of securing a sovereign Tamasheq extension of Libya.[106] Led by the Democratic Alliance for Change (ADC), ex-combatants launched several attacks against the Malian army for three years.[107] Eventually, the conflict came to a halt in August 2008 after Malian government officials and rebels reached a ceasefire.[108] However, rebel

---

[100] Tor A. Benjaminsen, "Does Supply-Induced Scarcity Drive Violent Conflicts in the African Sahel? The Case of the Tuareg Rebellion in Northern Mali," *Journal of Peace Research* 45.6 (2008): 819.
[101] Ibid.
[102] Ibid, 830.
[103] Ibid, 831.
[104] Ibid.
[105] Jeremy Keenan, "Turning the Sahel on its Head: The 'Truth' behind the Headlines," *Review of African Political Economy* 33.110 (2006): 763.
[106] Ibid, 764.
[107] Ibid.
[108] Ibid, 765.

attacks began again just four months later. Once again, peace negotiations began between the warring parties, and as a result, a peace deal was reached in May 2009.[109] Despite resolving this conflict, similar calls for a sovereign Tamasheq state would reemerge three years later during Mali's most recent separatist movement of 2012.

Even though multiple attempts were made by the Kel Tamasheq to secede, creation of an independent Tamasheq state failed to materialize out of each of these rebellions. However, in an effort to temporarily appease the Kel Tamasheq, the Malian government offered employment opportunities and financial incentives in-between each rebellion, few of which were honored.[110] Consequently, once a rebellion ends, tensions between the Kel Tamasheq and Malian government reappear. The separatist movement cycle is yet again put into motion. Eventually, this reoccurring cycle would morph into the Malian coup of 2012.

IV.   The Malian Coup of 2012

Since Mali's post-independence separatist movements, the political landscape inside Mali and throughout the African continent has transitioned from one of rudimentary coup attempts and calls for underrepresented ethnic groups to self-govern and receive a fair share of national resources to one of extremely active, sophisticated, and often violent demands for sovereignty and rights. It is hardly surprising, then, that Kel Tamasheq separatist movements within Mali have become more violent, organized, and transnational in recent years. Tensions, in fact, between the Kel Tamasheq and the Malian government have increased so much that eventually, a tolerance threshold was bound to be crossed. In 2012, this breaking point was reached, resulting in the successful execution of a coup d'état in Mali.

---

[109] Ibid, 766.
[110] "Crisis in the Sahel."

a. Mounting political tensions and events preceding the coup

Before considering the events of the 2012 coup in Mali, it is necessary to first understand the political circumstances of the region during the 2000s. After the end of the country's latest Tamasheq separatist movement in 2009, during which time the Kel Tamasheq failed to create an autonomous Tamasheq state, appeasement of the Kel Tamasheq's grievances, as stated in the last chapter, were virtually non-existent due to the Malian government's refusal to honor peace accord promises.[111] Consequently, following the conflict's end, Tamasheq separatist fighters retreated to Libya to reconnect with Tamasheq separatist sympathizers.[112] A new political movement, the National Movement of Azawad (MNA), formed simultaneously within Mali in order to accomplish what the 2006-2009 rebellion had failed to achieve: the creation of an independent Tamasheq state.[113] Inside Libya, many West Africans, including Malians, received training in Libyan military camps. Additionally, French, American, and British-backed rebels, known as the National Transitional Council (NTC), forced open Qadhafi's weapons arsenals, resulting in a regional scramble by rebel groups to lay claim to the caches.[114] Disgruntled Tamasheq and a Malian militant group, the Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), were just some to gain access to these weapons.[115] Northern Mali, as a result, received an influx of weapons during a period of mounting hostilities between the Malian government and Tamasheq separatists.

---

[111] Ibid.

[112] Baz Lecocq et al, "One Hippopotamus and Eight Blind Analysts: A ultivocal analysis of the 2012 political crisis in the divided Republic of Mali," *Review of African Political Economy*, 137 (2013): 5.

[113] Ibid.

[114] Ibid, 6.

[115] Ibid.

While Malian separatists acquired more weapons from Libya, thousands of Tamasheq living in Libya returned to Mali after the 2011 overthrow of Qadhafi.[116] Eager to remain involved with military organizations and rebel groups, these Malians joined the Malian military or separatist movements according to ethnic loyalties.[117] Many of these former Malians who fought in Libya, linked up with the newly-formed MNA and several experienced Tamasheq politicians.[118] Thus, a new organization, the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA), was born in October 2011.[119] Inspired by the recent independence of South Sudan and the desire to gain global recognition in order to further Tamasheq interests, the MNLA justified demands for a referendum-based vote for secession by referencing international human rights discourse.[120] The MNLA, therefore, claimed any means, including violence, were acceptable for achieving secession because the political rights of the Kel Tamasheq were continuously violated by the southern, Bambara-dominated, Malian government.[121]

Regional political developments, however, are not merely impacting Malian politics. In addition to the emergence of new internal organizations, numerous IED attacks on foreign convoys in 2006, several attacks on government buildings in early 2007, attacks on UN facilities in Algiers in late 2007, and the kidnapping of over 50 Europeans and Canadians and the murder of dozens more since 2004 by the AQIM brought about the collapse of Mali's tourism industry and the exit of dozens of international NGOs present in the region.[122] Because of this, two substantial sources of state income dried up and cause considerable financial strains for the

---

[116] Ibid.
[117] Ibid, 7.
[118] Ibid, 9.
[119] Ibid, 7.
[120] Baz Lecocq and Nadia Belalimat, "The Tuareg: between armed uprising and drought," *African Arguments*, February 28, 2012, http://africanarguments.org/2012/02/28/the-tuareg-between-armed-uprising-and-drought-baz-lecocq-and-nadia-belalimat/.
[121] Ibid.
[122] Ibid.

Malian government.[123] Furthermore, ongoing drought and poor food security in a region historically lead to increased dissatisfaction with the current administration and stronger nationalist sentiments. Such is evidenced in late 2011 Mali, where food shortages and a lack of effective national and international responses created growing government disapproval and support for the MNLA.[124] A perfect storm of drought, a weak national economy, and mounting political tensions between a faltering national government and an organized, heavily-armed Tamasheq separatist group, consequently, generated the ideal circumstances for carrying out abrupt, radical change in Mali's political system. Thus, the Malian coup of 2012 began.

b. The details of the coup

On 17 January 2012, members of northern Mali's MNLA put their demands for a new, independent state of Azawad into action by attacking the northern towns of Ménaka, Aguelhok, and Tessalit.[125] Due to local military officials' lack of adequate resources and motivation to defeat the attacks in the north, the MNLA successfully pushed the Malian national army out of the region.[126] Angered by their defeat by the rebel group, Malian military officials and their families, consequently, protested in February throughout southern Mali.[127] The protests eventually culminated in a soldiers' and junior officers' mutiny against President Amadou Tormani Touré, which removed him from office on 22 March 2012, and installed the coup leaders' National Committee for the Restoration of Democracy and Rule of Law (CNRDRE) in his place.[128] However, just days after the coup, much of the Malian army collapsed, resulting in

---

[123] Ibid.
[124] Ibid.
[125] Alexander Thurston and Andrew Lebovich, "A Handbook on Mali's 2012-2013 Crisis," *Institute for the Study of Islamic Thought in Africa (ISITA) Working Paper Series* 13 (2013), 1.
[126] Ibid.
[127] Ibid.
[128] Gregory Mann, "The Mess in Mali: How the war on terror ruined a success story in West Africa," *Foreign Policy*, April 5, 2012, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2012/04/05/the_mess_in_mali.

the MNLAøs capture of roughly two-thirds of the country.[129] An MNLA spokesperson in Paris

declared the independence of the Azawad Republic on 6 April, but this independence would

prove to be premature.[130]

Meanwhile, just a couple of days later, the Islamist coalition of Ansar al Din, AQIM, and

the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO) ó a group that split off from AQIM

after disagreements surrounding AQIMøs leadership and random distribution emerged ó

politically and militarily outmaneuvered the MNLA in northern Mali, causing the MNLA to lose

much of its control over its northern Malian cities.[131] The various Muslim organizations came

together in an effort to capture cities controlled by the MNLA and to expand their drug

trafficking operations and other economic endeavors across borders.[132] The CNRDRE junta, in

the interim, attempted to remove the core institutions of Maliøs Third Republic, suspended the

countryøs 1992 constitution, called for a sovereign national conference to determine the

countryøs future, and demanded action be taken against the MNLA and the north.[133][134] Due,

though, to stiff opposition from established regional political parties and economic sanctions

from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Commission, the CNRDRE

was left with no choice but to backpedal on its declarations.[135] As a result, the new state rulers

sought to make peace with the MNLA and disgruntled Tamasheq separatists, rescinded its new

constitution in favor of reinstating the 1992 version, cancelled the proposed national conference,

and agreed to transfer power to a civilian government.[136][137] Civilian rule in the south, however,

---

[129] Lecocq, õOne Hippopotamus and Eight Blind Analysts,ö 8.
[130] Ibid.
[131] Thurston, õA Handbook on Maliøs 2012-2013 Crisis,ö 2.
[132] Ibid.
[133] Lecocq, õOne Hippopotamus and Eight Blind Analysts,ö 10.
[134] Mann, õThe Mess in Mali.ö
[135] Lecocq, õOne Hippopotamus and Eight Blind Analysts,ö 9.
[136] Mann, õThe Mess in Mali.ö

proved to be just as chaotic as military rule and possessed little ability to regain control of the

MNLAøs partially-controlled northern cities.

Following the collapse of the Malian army in early 2012, the MNLA systematically

dismantled state bureaucracy in the north, especially those aspects that were symbolic of secular

Francophone rule.[138] In the city of Douentza, schools, prisons, medical centers, and banks were

closed from the arrival of the MNLA until they left in July 2012.[139] Upon their departure,

tensions between different ethnic groups ó Fulbe, Dogon, Songhay, and Tamasheq ó escalated as

large amounts of weapons were traded and official mediation was non-existent due to an absence

of security forces in the region and a consequent increase in the number of escaped northern

criminals looting Douentza.[140] Ethnic animosities were intensified further by fleeing MNLA

members who robbed civilians as they traveled.[141] Women, additionally, were forced into

seclusion or exile due to the enforcement of strict Sharia law by the MNLA, AQIM, and other

northern separatist power-holders.[142] Specifically, women were required to wear veils at all

times, working outside of the home was restricted, and forced marriages were increasingly likely

due to out-of-wedlock children, pregnancies, and relationships being condemned.[143]

Demonstrations in Bamako by predominantly Songhay citizens, meanwhile, occurred in an effort

to pressure the national government into retaking the north.[144] What remained of the Malian

army simultaneously sought to appease public outcries for action by incorporating local

---

[137] Lecocq, õOne Hippopotamus and Eight Blind Analysts,ö 10.
[138] Ibid.
[139] Ibid.
[140] Ibid.
[141] Ibid.
[142] Ibid, 11.
[143] Karimi, Faith, õFear grows as Mali extremists compile list of unmarried mothers,ö *CNN*, October 13, 2012, http://www.cnn.com/2012/10/12/world/africa/mali-women-lists/.
[144] Lecocq, õOne Hippopotamus and Eight Blind Analysts,ö 11.

ethnically-based militias (minus the MNLA) into the military.[145] These efforts, however, have had little success.

Recognizing the mounting security dilemma occurring in Mali, Western nations, including France, and neighboring nations, such as Algeria, Mauritania, and those who made up ECOWAS, sought to resolve the political instability.[146] Fearing threats from AQIM and the MNLA were legitimate, several African nations felt great pressure internally and externally to take military action.[147] However, regional rivalries between North African states, opposition by Algeria and Mauritania ó the two most influential states in northern Mali ó for ECOWAS military intervention, and internal leadership struggles within the African Union (AU), prevented the African continent from coming to an agreement about how to handle the crisis in Mali.[148] Most crucial to how outside parties responded to and influenced the situation in Mali, though, is how France and other European countries directly and indirectly intervened in the region.

c. French intervention in Mali

Eager to remove AQIM from northern Mali in order to silence anti-French sentiments, prevent the spread of extreme forms of Islam, protect economic interests, and keep Tamasheq separatists, who were historically marginalized by the French, from politically controlling the country, France ó which promised strengthened political allegiances and military protection ó eventually intervened militarily in Mali on 11 January 2013 after Maliøs interim president, Dioncounda Touré, asked France for military support and Franceøs Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius vowed to do everything necessary to save seven French hostages being held in the

---

[145] Ibid, 9.
[146] Ibid, 11.
[147] Ibid.
[148] Ibid, 12.

28

region.[149][150] This decision to become militarily involved in Mali came after refusing, throughout 2012, to intervene in the region out of the fear that another scenario reminiscent of the war in Afghanistan would develop.[151] Shortly after deploying ground troops, French and southern Malian forces recaptured multiple northern cities, including Timbuktu.[152] By 9 April, France started pulling out soldiers, but some troops still remain in the region despite õcredibleö ó as deemed by the West ó democratic elections which occurred on 28 July 2013.[153][154] During this most recent election, former Malian Prime Minister Ibrahim Boubacar Keita was elected. Surprisingly (or not), Keita and his main competition, ex-Finance Minister Soumaila Cisse, both earned advanced degrees in France; the election winner is also said to have been Franceøs preferred candidate.[155][156] One cannot help but wonder, then, how free and fair the 2013 elections actually were.

As previously suggested, Franceøs intervention in Mali and consequent actions in the region came after initial hesitation to become involved in a conflict, such as the one in Afghanistan, with no clear end date in sight. However, recognizing the opportunity to strengthen allegiances with the United States, Great Britain, and other countries within Europe and throughout Africa, France deemed the cause worthy of military intervention. The conflict additionally acted as a way to give the French military more on-the-ground experience.

---

[149] David J Francis, õThe regional impact of the armed conflict and French intervention in Mali,ö *NOREF: Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Centre*, April 2013.

[150] Thurston, õA Handbook on Maliøs 2012-2013 Crisis,ö 3.

[151] David Lewis, õAnalysis: Maliøs Islamist Groups United by War Threat,ö *Reuters*, January 15, 2013, http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/01/15/us-mali-rebels-analysis-idUSBRE90E0WQ20130115.

[152] Thurston, õA Handbook on Maliøs 2012-2013 Crisis,ö 4.

[153] AP, õFrench forces to remain in Mali until at least July,ö *CBC News World*, February 28, 2013, http://www.cbc.ca/news/world/french-forces-to-remain-in-mali-until-at-least-july-1.1394417.

[154] õKeita wins Mali election after rival concedes,ö *Al Jazeera*, August 13, 2013, http://www.aljazeera.com/news/africa/2013/08/201381222306327330.html.

[155] Thurston, õA Handbook on Maliøs 2012-2013 Crisis,ö 4.

[156] Bruce Hall et al, õMali: Which Way Forward?: A Chat with Bruce Hall, Baz Lecocq, Gregory Mann, and Bruce Whitehouse,ö *African Arguments*, April 26, 2013, http://africanarguments.org/2013/05/14/mali-which-way-forward-a-chat-with-bruce-hall-baz-lecocq-gregory-mann-and-bruce-whitehouse/.

Furthermore, by participating militarily in a conflict in which it was likely to succeed, France faced the realistic possibility of strengthening its diminished post-World War II political influence. Consequently, France saw intervention in Mali as a way to improve its global image. Furthermore, because the French do not support the Kel Tamasheq, efforts by the French to encourage national unity through the minimization of ethnic differences and political and social inclusion of the Kel Tamasheq, have been kept to a bare minimum.

d. Post-coup struggles and successes

Because Mali's post-coup administration has yet to be substantially tested, France continues to have a physical and diplomatic presence in the region with no clear departure date in sight. After all, until Mali can hold consecutive democratic elections and lessen the likelihood of another Tamasheq rebellion, France (and other involved countries) will not feel comfortable completely exiting the region. This was evident in France's hesitation to qualify how many troops it planned to withdraw throughout 2013, as well as its decision in May of 2014 to expand counter-terrorism military operations to Burkina Faso, Niger, and Chad.[157] Additionally, ethnic differences reinforced by the unequal treatment of all Malians are still present, adding to Mali's vulnerability. Until France completely exits the region and stops placing its personal interests over the well-being of Mali, the fragile country will continue to act at the will of France, much like it did during the colonial era. Weakening the state's sovereignty further is the last situation Mali needs, for it will do nothing but make attaining a united national identity even harder to achieve. Promoting a stronger allegiance to the nation over smaller ethnic groups is also a great challenge for the young government, especially because wounds between northern ethnic groups and southern ethnic groups are still fresh, and southern ethnic groups remain dominant in the

---

[157] "Map: France revamps military operations in Africa's Sahel," *France 24*, May 9, 2014, http://www.france24.com/en/20140508-infographic-france-military-in-africa-sahel-le-drian-mali-chad/.

new administration. Coups and political violence are likely to continue, though, if full physical and vocal representation of all ethnic groups within the political system is not adequately achieved, and so it must be a top priority for Mali moving forward.

Even though the above circumstances shape and add to the uncertainty surrounding Mali's future, some positive circumstances have come out of the 2012 coup. In particular, the country managed to hold a primarily democratic election on 28 July 2013, just 16 months after falling into political disarray. Certainly the peculiarities surrounding Keita and Cisse's connection to France, as previously mentioned, are cause for concern, but a democratic election did occur nonetheless. Mali is also on the path towards creating a stronger economy, primarily because the United States has agreed to resume bilateral development assistance to the state, but also due to increased economic production and the gradual return for civilians to their normal, pre-coup livelihoods.[158] However, the devastating consequences of the 2012 coup can still be felt, and the country's post-coup challenges still greatly surpass the couple of achievements it has had since.

V.   An Analysis of the Lack of Nationalism in Mali and its Role in the 2012 Coup

Before concluding remarks about the 2012 Malian coup can be made, one must re-evaluate the evolution of identity formation in Mali. While ethnic and cultural distinctions and loyalties to them existed prior to the French colonization of West Africa, with the arrival of the French came the intensification of ethnic and culural identity allegiances. Such allegiances continued after the region gained independence and have carried over into present-day political instability. Mali's future, therefore, greatly depends on which identities Malian citizens most

---

[158] Steve Wilson, "US restores some aid to Mali cut after coup," *The Telegraph*, September 7, 2013, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/mali/10292975/US-restores-some-aid-to-Mali-cut-after-coup.html.

associate with, and whether or not traditional ties can be set aside in favor of one stronger, united national identity.

a. Pre-coup political circumstances

Once Mali gained its independence from France in 1960, establishing an allegiance towards a Malian identity proved to be a minor priority of the Keita administration. For example, even though Keita attempted to unify the country by naming the republic after Mali's strongest empire – an empire in which northern ethnic groups were conquered – northern citizens are forced to constantly face the reality of their ethnic group not being worthy of national recognition and remembrance. This is despite the very empire being commemorated eventually facing defeat from northern ethnic groups. Therefore, the Keita administration, whether intentionally or not, chose to include in the new nation's foundation, an identity that embraces ethnic differences, rather than one that promotes national unity. However, during Alpha Konaré's presidency from 1992-2002, attempts were made to strengthen the state and appease Tamasheq grievances, although these improvements would prove to be short-lived.[159]

Throughout the neocolonial era, ethnic and cultural identities continued to factor into daily life, including politics. Historically, political officials were predominantly non-Arab and identified with southern ethnic groups. Because of this, northern residents, such as the Kel Tamasheq, received little to no national resources, possessed little to no political representation, and were seen as lesser citizens by other ethnic groups. The colonial preferential treatment of southern subjects to northern subjects, consequently, continued into post-independence politics. Aggravated by this continuous marginalization, the Kel Tamasheq began vocalizing their grievances and participated in multiple secessionist movements. Eventually, economic,

---

[159] "Mali."

32

environmental, and political circumstances worsened, so much so that identity tensions escalated and paved the way for the Malian coup of 2012. This strong association with a particular ethnic group continues to influence voting preferences, resource allocation, international stereotypes, and attitudes toward one another within Mali. An allegiance towards one's Malian heritage, consequently, remains non-existent despite becoming an independent nation 54 years ago.

b. France's role in Mali's nation-building struggles

In an effort to decrease revolution tendencies, the French divided ethnic groups when determining colonial borders and favored sedentary groups, like the non-Islamic ethnic groups of the south, over northern, predominantly Arab nomadic groups who resisted the French more than their southern counterparts. Northern ethnic groups and cultures during the early colonial years, as a result, received fewer advancement opportunities within the colonial system and gained fewer resources, such as roads, from the colonial administration than those groups living in the south. Resentment between groups naturally grew in response alongside increasing demands to reunite geographically separated Arabs and Tamasheq. France's proposed OCRS region, however, failed to reach fruition, resulting in the intensification of divisions between northern and southern ethnic groups by the time the Republic of Mali was formed. This resentment grew despite later French efforts to fiscally support Saharan communities; the aid given by France paved the way for the 4 February 1998 creation of the Communauté des Etats Sahélo-Sahariens (CEN-SAD), a regional economic community which implements regional community development plans that complement the local development plans of member states.[160] Such

---

[160] "CEN SAD," *African Union*, March 2002, http://www.au.int/en/recs/censad.

development plans focus on sustainable socio-economic advancement in the fields of agriculture, industry, energy, culture, and health.[161]

c. Comparative African cases of nation-building

In order to build a consistently stable democracy that equally represents, protects, and grants advancement opportunities for all members of the Malian electorate, Mali must work towards the creation of one, united Malian identity that trumps all ethnic, racial, and gender loyalties. This is certainly a difficult task to accomplish. However, by studying other African countries and how they have succeeded or failed to minimize the divisive nature of socially-based identity markers, Mali can at least weaken the significance placed on individual ethnic groups and cultures. For instance, in Tanzania, no particular identity marker takes precedence over one's national identity despite the presence of multiple ethnic, racial, and gender identities existing; this is primarily due to the national government's post-independence campaign to promote national desires for democracy over the preservation of traditional allegiances towards one's ethnicity or culture and make Kiswahili the only national language of the country.[162] Likewise, the post-Apartheid South African government incorporated a variety of Affirmative Action, nation-building programs, such as the Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) policy, to foster the inclusion of Black South Africans within South Africa's post-Apartheid economy and eliminate the prevalence of race allegiances.[163] Tanzania and South Africa certainly differ historically, geographically, and politically from Mali, but by taking a closer look at the nation-building process of other African nations, the Malian government can incorporate national unity strategies, like those used in Tanzania and South Africa, into its political agenda. Similarly, by

---

[161] Ibid.
[162] Bruce E. Heilman and Paul J. Kaiser, "Religion, Identity and Politics in Tanzania," *Third World Quarterly* 23.4 (2002), 697.
[163] Okechukwu C. Iheduru, "Black Economic Power and Nation-Building in Post-Apartheid South Africa," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 42.1 (2004), 5.

looking at the case of ethnically and religiously diverse Nigeria, the Keita administration can discover just how divisive unequal resource allocation and political corruption can be to strengthening a country's national identity. Mali, therefore, must take advantage of the numerous examples of nation-building around the African continent in order to gain a more well-rounded perspective on how to politically unite an ethnically and racially diverse country. Only with the minimization and eventual elimination of ethnic and racial identity allegiances can Mali become a stable, thriving democracy.

VI.   Conclusion

Throughout Mali's history, evidence of how important it is to consider ethnicity and culture when analyzing politics makes itself apparent. After all, prior to French colonization, Malians identified with particular ethnic groups and cultures, but were not forced to coexist under one government and regularly interact with one another. Once the French arrived, this dynamic drastically changed. In an effort to promote French culture while capitalizing on African resources, the French exploited ethnic and racial differences within its subjects. Doing so minimized the likelihood of revolt within the colonies, as well as increased tensions between Malians and reaffirmed racist European superiority over Africans. However, as time passed, the French became less discriminating towards particular ethnic groups, such as the Kel Tamasheq, as a result of their growing respect for these groups' persistence to gain their own sovereign state. In spite of these efforts by the French to lessen their tendency towards preferential treatment, ethnicity and culture became and continue to be intertwined with Malian nation-building in the post-independence state.

Despite gaining independence from the French Empire in 1960, socially-constructed identities continue to plague local and national politics. By keeping the French federalist system,

Malian political elites continue to participate in a system that historically favors non-Arabs who belong to southern ethnic groups. Because of this, northern, predominantly Arab ethnic groups, such as the Kel Tamasheq and the Moors, constantly lack a political voice, remain split across multiple country borders, and fall victim to ongoing marginalization from Malian society. It is hardly surprising, then, that northern ethnic groups have reacted by regularly participating in separatist movements, all the while distrusting southern ethnic groups and non-Arabs. Nevertheless, although several coups and coup attempts have occurred in Mali since gaining independence, the country has remained relatively stable. In fact, it has even been frequently referred to as õWest Africaøs success storyö because of its ability to regularly hold democratic elections and avoid resource conflict and overwhelming political corruption. However, the success story title quickly evaporated following the Malian coup of 2012.

After the 2012 coup, it became apparent just how important ethnic and cultural identities continue to be in Mali. Following the influx of Libyan weapons into northern Mali, the secession of South Sudan, and years of devastating drought conditions alongside ongoing calls by the north for a separate state and a lack of concrete effort by the Malian government to appease northern grievances, tensions between the north and south rapidly escalated. Ethnic loyalties, consequently, became more important than ever, as the MNLA sought to create a sovereign state for the Kel Tamasheq and as France and other African nations zeroed in on how to put an end to the situation. Ultimately, ethnic tensions intensified, although stability and democracy do appear to be at least temporarily reinstated.

For now, Maliøs political future remains uncertain. While some war-torn regions are able to reunite and bounce back with a stronger sense of national pride than ever, so far, it appears this is not the case for Mali. Instead, the coup of 2012 appears to have divided the nation further;

the Kel Tamasheq remain marginalized by the rest of the country and politically

underrepresented, and demands for a separate Tamasheq state continue to be made. As a result,

one united, national Malian identity is still non-existent, and little effort has, so far, been made

politically to make it a priority moving forward. Unless a significant effort is made by the Keita

administration to minimize ethnic and cultural differences in favor of the creation of one

common identity, Mali is unlikely to prosper as a consistently stable democracy and reclaim its

title of being one of West Africaøs most successful nations.

LIST OF REFERENCES

Al Jazeera. õKeita wins Mali election after rival concedes.ö August 13, 2013. http://www.aljazeera.com/news/africa/2013/08/201381222306327330.html.

AP. õAfrica facing sharp rise in Islamic extremism.ö *Al Arabiya News*. July 6, 2012. http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/07/06/224784.html.

AP. õFrench forces to remain in Mali until at least July.ö *CBC News World*. February 28, 2013. http://www.cbc.ca/news/world/french-forces-to-remain-in-mali-until-at-least-july-1.1394417.

Appiah, Kwame Anthony, and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. *Encyclopedia of Africa*. Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2010.

Austen, Ralph A., and Jan Jansen. õHistory, Oral Transmission and Structure in Ibn Khaldunøs Chronology of Mali Rulers.ö *History in Africa* 23 (1996): 17-28.

Barka, Habiba Ben, and Mthuli Ncube. õPolitical Fragility in Africa: Are Military Coups døEtat a Never-Ending Phenomenon?ö *African Development Bank*. September 2012.

Bassett, Thomas J. õFulani Herd Movements.ö *Geographical Review* 76 (1986): 233-248.

Bazin, Hippolyte. õLes Bambara et leur langue.ö *Anthropos* 1.4 (1906): 681-694.

Bell, Nawal Morcos. õThe Age of Mansa Musa of Mali: Problems in Succession and Chronology.ö *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 5.2 (1972): 221-234.

Benjaminsen, Tor A. õDoes Supply-Induced Scarcity Drive Violent Conflicts in the African Sahel? The Case of the Tuareg Rebellion in Northern Mali.ö *Journal of Peace Research* 45.6 (2008): 819-836.

Boas, Morten, and Liv Elen Torheim. õThe Trouble in Mali ó corruption, collusion, resistance.ö *Third World Quarterly* 34.7 (2013): 1279-1292.

Boittin, Jennifer Anne, Christina Firpo, and Emily Musil Church. õHierarchies of Race and Gender in the French Colonial Empire, 1914-1946.ö *California Polytechnic State University*. 2014.

Bühnen, Stephen. õIn Quest of Susu.ö *History in Africa* 21 (1994): 1-47.

õCEN SAD.ö *African Union*. March 2002. http://www.au.int/en/recs/censad.

Clark, Andrew F. õImperialism, Independence, and Islam in Senegal and Mali.ö *Africa Today* 46.3 (1999): 149-167.

õCrisis in the Sahel: Maliøs Road from Stable Democracy to Extremist Safe Haven.ö *U.S. Department of State Diplomatic Security*. 2012.

Dunning, Thad, and Lauren Harrison. õCross-cutting Cleavages and Ethnic Voting: An Experimental Study of Cousinage in Mali.ö *The American Political Science Review* 104.1 (2012): 21-39.

Farhaoui, Fouad. *The Great Power Struggle for Africa: The Crisis in Mali.* Ankara, Turkey: USAK Publications, 2013.

Fierro, Alfred. Encyclopaedia Universalis. õAfrique-Occidentale Française (A.O.F.).ö Last modified June 8, 2014. http://www.universalis.fr/encyclopedie/afrique-occidentale-francaise/.

Figure 1. Large detailed physical map of Mali with all cities, roads, and airports. õMaps of Mali: Detailed road and other maps of Mali.ö *Vidiani.com*. 2011.

Figure 2. Maliøs various ethnic groups. õLes Maliens.ö *Columbia University*. April 7, 2012.

Francis, David J. õThe regional impact of the armed conflict and French intervention in Mali.ö *NOREF: Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Centre*. April 2013.

Hall, Bruce. *A History of Race in Muslim West Africa, 1600-1960*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011.

Hall, Bruce, Baz Lecocq, Gregory Mann, and Bruce Whitehouse. õMali: Which Way Forward?: A Chat with Bruce Hall, Baz Lecocq, Gregory Mann, and Bruce Whitehouse.ö *African Arguments*. April 26, 2013. http://africanarguments.org/2013/05/14/mali-which-way-forward-a-chat-with-bruce-hall-baz-lecocq-gregory-mann-and-bruce-whitehouse/.

Heilman, Bruce E., and Paul J. Kaiser. õReligion, Identity and Politics in Tanzania.ö *Third World Quarterly* 23.4 (2002): 691-709.

Iheduru, Okechukwu C. õBlack Economic Power and Nation-Building in Post-Apartheid South Africa.ö *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 42.1 (2004): 1-30.

õInternational Boundary Study: Mali ó Mauritania Boundary.ö *U.S. Department of State*, 2005.

Karimi, Faith. õFear grows as Mali extremists compile list of unmarried mothers.ö *CNN*. October 13, 2012. http://www.cnn.com/2012/10/12/world/africa/mali-women-lists/.

Keenan, Jeremy. "Turning the Sahel on its Head: The ─Truth'behind the Headlines." *Review of African Political Economy* 33.110 (2006): 761-769.

Khan, Shahrukh. "Ancient Causes of a Modern Conflict in Mali." *Harvard Political Review*. March 23, 2014. http://harvardpolitics.com/world/ancient-causes-modern-conflict-mali/.

Kurtz, Donn M. "Political Integration in Africa: The Mali Federation." *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 8.3 (1970): 405-424.

Lebovich, Andrew. "Northern Mali: the Politics of Ethnicity and Locality." *Think Africa Press*. December 7, 2012. http://thinkafricapress.com/mali/politics-ethnicity-locality-mali-mujao.

Lecocq, Baz, and Nadia Belalimat. "The Tuareg: between armed uprising and drought." *African Arguments*. February 28, 2012. http://africanarguments.org/2012/02/28/the-tuareg-between-armed-uprising-and-drought-baz-lecocq-and-nadia-belalimat/.

Lecocq, Baz. *Disputed Desert: Decolonization, Competing Nationalisms, and Tuareg Rebellions in Northern Mali*. Leiden, The Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2010.

Lecocq, Baz, Gregory Mann, et al. "One Hippopotamus and Eight Blind Analysts: A ultivocal analysis of the 2012 political crisis in the divided Republic of Mali." *Review of African Political Economy* 137 (2013): 1-16.

Lewis, David. "Analysis: Mali's Islamist Groups United by War Threat." *Reuters*. January 15, 2013. http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/01/15/us-mali-rebels-analysis-idUSBRE90E0WQ20130115.

"Mali Country Overview." *Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada*. December 19, 2011.

"Mali: Reform or Relapse." *International Crisis Group*. January 10, 2014. http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/africa/west-africa/mali/210-mali-reform-or-relapse.aspx.

"Mali: Water and electricity still in short supply in northern cities." *IRCR*. May 14, 2013, http://www.icrc.org/eng/resources/documents/update/2013/05-14-mali-water-electricity.htm.

Mann, Gregory. "The Mess in Mali: How the war on terror ruined a success story in West Africa." *Foreign Policy*. April 5, 2012. http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2012/04/05/the_mess_in_mali.

Manning, Patrick. *Francophone Sub-Saharan Africa 1880-1995*. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

"Map: France revamps military operations in Africa's Sahel." *France 24*. May 9, 2014. http://www.france24.com/en/20140508-infographic-france-military-in-africa-sahel-le-drian-mali-chad/.

Norris, H. T. "The Wind of Change in the Western Sahara." *The Geographical Journal* 130.1 (1964): 1-14.

Oloruntimehin, B. Oletunji. "The French Estate in West Africa, 1890-1918." *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 7.3 (1974): 447-463.

Oloruntimehin, B. Oletunji. "Theories and Realities in the Administration of Colonial French West Africa from 1890 to the First World War." *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 6.3 (1972): 289-312.

Payne, Melissa. "History: French Conquest of the Western Sudan." *Virginia Department of Education.* 2002.

Schmidt, Elizabeth. "Cold War in Guinea: The Rassemblement Démocratique Africaine and the Struggle over Communism, 1950-1958." *The Journal of African History* 48.1 (2007): 95-121.

Schulz, Dorothea. *Culture and Customs of Mali*. Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2012.

"Society and Custom." *La Republique du Mali*. 2004. http://www.ambamali-jp.org/en/e01-01.html

Stoller, Paul. "Sound in Songhay Cultural Experience." *American Ethnologist* 11.3 (1984): 559 570.

Thurston, Alexander, and Andrew Lebovich. "A Handbook on Mali's 2012-2013 Crisis." *Institute for the Study of Islamic Thought in Africa (ISITA) Working Paper Series* 13 (2013): 1-55.

"Wells Run Dry as Water Supplies Dwindle in Northern Mali." *Save the Children*. July 8, 2014. http://www.savethechildren.org/site/c.8rKLIXMGIpI4E/b.8114445/.

Wilson, Steve. "US restores some aid to Mali cut after coup." *The Telegraph*. September 7, 2013. http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/mali/10292975/US-restores-some-aid-to-Mali-cut-after-coup.html.