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Views and perceptions that bare a responsibility

An analysis of the views and perceptions of two UN Secretary-Generals on the causes and challenges of the Mali conflict since 2013



*[[1]](#footnote-1)*

**Abstract**

At its core, this research is partly an attempt at unveiling the influence Secretary-Generals have on UN peacekeeping missions. The basis of argumentation hereof constitutes the influence that Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and Guterres have had on the UN peacekeeping mission in Mali: MINUSMA. With Mali being the case study at hand this thesis also strived to provide an in depth analysis of the views and perceptions of both Secretary-Generals on the causes and challenges of the Mali conflict. These views and perceptions are subsequently categorized into the following categories: political, economic, cultural and social. Following a *process-tracing* based methodological approach the principal conclusion arrived at is that Secretary-General Guterres saw the conflict through more of a variety of disciplinary lenses than Ban Ki-moon did. Where Ban Ki-moon mainly focalized on the political and economic aspects of the conflict, Guterres brought to the fore the importance of addressing root causes, grievances and other cultural and social aspects not mentioned by Ban Ki-moon

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**Acronyms and Abbreviations**

AFISMA African-led International Support Mission to Mali

AQIM al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb

EPON Effectiveness of Peace Operation Network

MDSF Malian Defence and Security Forces

MINUSMA United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in

 Mali

MNLA Mouvement national pour la libération de l’Azawad

MUJAOU Mouvement pour l’Unicité et le Jihad en Afrique de l’Ouest

PoC Protection of Civilians

R2P Responsibility to Protect Mandate

SG Secretary-General

UN United Nations

USA United States of America

**Introduction**

*"Timbuktu became like a prison under the Islamists, we thought Mopti would be safe," said the young man wearing a striped shirt and blue jeans. "Mopti was full of refugees from the north like me, but when the fighting started in Douentza and Konna, I could not stay there.”””[[2]](#footnote-2)*

As they took the city of Konna the day before, nothing stood between them and the capital.[[3]](#footnote-3) On the 10th of Januari 2013 just south of the Niger River, a large amount of pickup trucks filled with jihadists and Tuareg rebels were on a mission to conquer Bamako, the capital of Mali.[[4]](#footnote-4) This caused for a large panic across the country, where, just like the young man in the quote above left his hometown of Timbuktu, people were just as quickly leaving the capital. Luckily a day later, just before the rebels entered the capital, the citizens of Bamako were saved by the French, who had immediately reacted to the situation with a military intervention. Since this intervention in 2013 there have been many more international attempts to resolve the rather complicated conflict that has been taking place in Mali. The most significant one is the United Nations peacekeeping mission MINUSMA (United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali), which had been authorized by the United Nations Security Council in March 2013 and is still active today.[[5]](#footnote-5) *“…MINUSMA – established in 2013, has come to represent the emerging practice of deploying peacekeeping operations to asymmetric conflicts, where there are on-going counter-terrorist operations, and no peace to keep.”*[[6]](#footnote-6) This particular peacekeeping mission is allowed by the UN Security Council to use all means necessary to achieve its goals. But despite that, tragically, the death toll in Mali has neither declined nor stagnated since the start of the mission in 2013.[[7]](#footnote-7) This is not to mention the human rights abuses and violations that have been taking place, which recently became even worse than they already were. [[8]](#footnote-8) Why is it then that the UN peacekeeping mission hasn’t been able to better Mali’s situation? This is a question that has no short answer. Therefore, instead of trying to answer this convoluted question, this thesis will be an attempt at analyzing the perceptions and ideas of some of the actors that have played an active role in Mali’s peace achievement process. To be more specific, the two actors in reference are South-Korean diplomat and politician Ban Ki-moon, and Portuguese politician António Guterres. In other words, the former UN Secretary-General (SG) and the current UN Secretary-General. When attempting to analyze the views and perceptions of both Secretary-Generals, knowledge of the root causes of the conflict can offer us a broader perspective. In their report on the history of the Mali conflict MINUSMA described a total of twelve root causes as follows:

*“The crisis stems from long-standing structural conditions such as weak State institutions; ineffective governance; fragile social cohesion; deep-seated feelings among communities in the north of being neglected, marginalized and unfairly treated by the central Government; a weak and externally dependent, albeit vibrant, civil society; and the effects of environmental degradation, climate change and economic shocks. These conditions were exacerbated by more recent factors of instability, including corruption, nepotism, abuse of power, internal strife and deteriorating capacity of the national army.”[[9]](#footnote-9)*

Kassim Koné, professor in Anthropology and Sociology at the State University of New York at Cortland and expert on Malian culture and society believes that the intervention of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and its ideological associates—including Ansâr ud-Dîn, the Tuareg Islamist group (part of the Tuareg ethnic group mostly resided in the North of Mali), Boko Haram, and the Mouvement pour l’Unicité et le Jihad en Afrique de l’Ouest (MUJAO), all with agents on the ground—in combination with the fall of the Gaddafi regime, which destabilized the region, and the financing of Islamists by Saudi Arabia and Qatar—had forced Mali onto a global stage it was little prepared for”.[[10]](#footnote-10) What we can understand from this is that these external factors and actors Koné mentioned, together with the long-standing structural conditions that were stated above by MINUSMA, are root causes of the conflict. This provides us with pre-knowledge of the conflict and gives us an indication of the causes and challenges we may expect the Secretary-Generals to communicate in their reports.

**Objective and Focus of the Study**

Due to the nature and the complexity of the conflict and the fact that it is also partly tied to more or less borderless threats, there is no doubt that the challenges to peace in Mali are significant.[[11]](#footnote-11) Therefore the challenges MINUSMA face are equally as serious. When it comes to United Nations Secretary-Generals they have more of an influence on UN peacekeeping missions than may be known to most historians. Indeed, part of the decisions taken by the UN Security Council on the course of action of different peacekeeping missions are based on observations and recommendations made by the Secretary-General. The conditions under which Malian peace ought to be achieved by MINUSMA requires a particular framework where understanding of the conflict and it’s root causes are key. These root causes are partly embedded in Mali’s ethnical and cultural diversity. This cultural and ethnic diversity has always been a root cause of intercommunal conflict in Mali. For example almost all the armed conflicts of the past fifty years in Mali were originated by people of a single ethnic group, called the Tuareg.[[12]](#footnote-12) A lack of knowledge of the root causes could be one of the reasons why the UN’s peacekeeping mission has failed so far. That being said it is important to state that the Secretary-General writes an extensive report on the current situation and developments of six of the twelve conflict areas the UN have deployed peacekeeping missions at, every three months.[[13]](#footnote-13) This forces the Secretary-General to continuously have profound knowledge of all six complex and multilayered conflicts and their developments in order to write the most in-depth and structured report possible for each of them. Not knowing whether this affects the extensiveness, integrity and quality of the reports or not, in conjunction with getting a better understanding of the causes of the Mali conflict and the nature of the challenges that are being faced in it, this thesis will be an attempt at investigating the role of a Secretary-General in a UN peacekeeping mission. With Mali being the case study, it will be important to shed light on the similarities and dissimilarities between the different reports of both Secretary-Generals. Accordingly, the research is guided by the following overarching research question: **What are the different ideas and perceptions of current and former Secretary-General’s António Guterres and Ban Ki-moon on the causes and challenges of the Malian conflict, and do these found causes and challenges appear to be to a greater extent of political, economic or cultural nature?** In order to effectively tackle the research question, this thesis will consist of two chapters each focusing on specific aspects. Chapter one will be an exploration of the political and economic aspects while chapter two will be an attempt at analyzing the views and perceptions from a social and cultural perspective.

**Historiographical debate & Literature review**

Conflict is a situation in which two or more human beings desire goals which they perceive as being obtainable for one or the other *but not both.[[14]](#footnote-14)* This is how Christopher Mitchell, professor at George Mason’s Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution in Virginia, USA, defined the concept of conflict in his famous book ‘*The Structure of International Conflict*’. Today many policymakers and journalists make the assumption that causes of internal conflicts are simple and straightforward.[[15]](#footnote-15) The driving forces behind these violent conflicts are the ‘ancient hatreds’ that many ethnic and religious groups have for each other.[[16]](#footnote-16) Applying this logic to the Malian conflict, the conflict would have been caused by the long lasting hatred between the Tuareg and other ethnic groups in Mali. This simple and widely held view of the causes of internal conflict is not completely wrong, especially in the case of Mali, but is still rejected by serious scholars since it cannot explain why violent conflict have broken out in some places, but not others, and can also not explain why some conflicts are more violent and harder to resolve than others.[[17]](#footnote-17)

Historiographical debate surrounding peacekeeping has mostly been about the use of force, which used to be restricted in the early nineties and was therefore highly criticized. However, since 1999, the UN Security Council has authorized all UN multidimensional peacekeeping operations under Chapter VII of the UN Charter to use force when necessary.[[18]](#footnote-18) Today the peacekeeping debate still revolves, although in a different manner than before, largely around the use of force. For example, Lise M. Howard and A.K. Dayat demonstrate that since the shift of mandate in 1999, there has been a repetition of the new mandate that allows the use of force in every subsequent multidimensional peacekeeping mission.[[19]](#footnote-19) They argue that these mandates are not designed to genuinely protect civilians or end civil wars. Rather, they appear to be follow repetitions of a template.[[20]](#footnote-20) Dr. Mateja Peter, Lecturer in International Relations at the University of St Andrews, United Kingdom, calls this repeated use of force in peacekeeping ‘enforcement peacekeeping’.[[21]](#footnote-21) Which, as she argues, results in a schism between the basic principles of UN peacekeeping and the peacekeeping practiced on the ground. **This thesis will add to the debate by providing an analyses of individual actors that have the ability to influence the increase or decrease of the implementation of the use of force.** Which will hopefully offer a different insight on the influence and importance of individual actors on peacekeeping rather than to invariably focus on the UN as a whole.

Other scholarly debate surrounding peacekeeping revolves around which should prevail, state sovereignty, or international authority supported by the Responsibility to Protect mandate (R2P). Associate professor in international studies at the Royal Military College in Saint-Jean, Bruno Charbonneau, perceives this debate to be, in the case of Mali, less and less relevant in the face of the construction of a situation of permanent international military presence that has internationalized the trajectories of Malian institutions and political development.[[22]](#footnote-22) Even though this thesis doesn’t suggest that the debate is irrelevant, the findings of this thesis will unfortunately not add anything of constructive value to it.

Nevertheless, this thesis adds to a growing body of literature on the Mali conflict. The literature focuses on a variety of aspects of MINUSMA and the Malian conflict. While some research puts emphasis on the challenges MINUSMA faces or the degree to which it is failing to accomplish these challenges, other research highlights the complexity of the Malian conflict and use it to find explanations to MINUSMA’s failures.[[23]](#footnote-23) [[24]](#footnote-24) [[25]](#footnote-25) [[26]](#footnote-26) Research on individual actors within the UN and their impact on peacekeeping is still minimal. When it comes to Mali, perhaps the most extensive, detailed and overarching research on the UN’s peacekeeping mission in Mali is done by EPON (Effectiveness of Peace Operation Network). The research is carried out by several experts on peacekeeping and assesses every aspect of MINUSMA.[[27]](#footnote-27) This research, together with other secondary literature, provides us with a good basis of knowledge of the conflict and its complications. However, it is primary data gathered through a close reading of the Secretary-General reports that will serve as the main literature subject to analysis in this thesis. Starting with the first report before the creation of MINUSMA in March 2013 up until the most recent report of January 2021 there exist 31 reports in total that will be subject to analysis.

**Academic Relevancy**

There are multiple reasons why the case of Mali is particularly interesting and relevant in the broader spectrum of peacekeeping. The nature of the conflict itself is complex since it consists of different layers and is more or less borderless. *“The most troubling aspect of this conflict is its geopolitical complexities.”[[28]](#footnote-28)* That being said, the challenges of peacekeeping aren’t just being caused by a scattered conflict. Mali being a weak state adds to the already challenging factors which prohibit the achievement of peace and makes the Protection of Civilians (PoC) more difficult. Furthermore the recent increase in human right abuses (5.65% increase in comparison with violations and abuses documented in the previous quarter of 2020) and the increase in the attacks by extremist groups make it imperative to evaluate the work of MINUSMA and its shortcomings in the achievement of peace.[[29]](#footnote-29) Since the deployment of the UN’s volatile mission in Mali, it has been the deadliest of all current UN peacekeeping operations.[[30]](#footnote-30) Moreover, Mali’s large ethnic diversity and cultural differences which are part of the root causes of the conflict put together a true test of adaptation to the situation on the ground when attempting to keep peace. Considering all these factors, the case of Mali, because of its complexity in both causes and challenges, is most relevant in investigating the differences in ideas and perceptions of two Secretary-Generals.

**Theoretical Framework: The Copenhagen School**

One of the most important contributions to International relations since the 1990s has been the idea of securitization.[[31]](#footnote-31) Securitization shows us that security policies are not naturally formed, but are rather designed by politicians and policymakers. Securitization theory, developed by the Copenhagen School of Barry Buzan, Ole Wœver, Jaap de Wilde and others, focusses on how some things become a security problem, and others don’t.[[32]](#footnote-32) In an interview he gave in 2010, Barry Buzan explained how security threats are politically and socially constructed, and that the focus of the securitization theory lies there, rather than on what kinds of security threats objectively exist.[[33]](#footnote-33) He gave an example of the real possibility of asteroids hitting the earth, but no one securitizing the threat.[[34]](#footnote-34) Lesser threats on the other hand, are sometimes actively being securitized. This is, according to the Copenhagen school, because security is conceptualized as a speech act.[[35]](#footnote-35) Meaning that by verbally labeling something as a security threat , it becomes a security threat.[[36]](#footnote-36) The Copenhagen School is what will provide this study with a theoretical framework through which the importance of securitization and the role individual actors play in it can be highlighted.

**Methodology**

To arrive at a meaningful conclusion that provides an extensive answer to the research question, this thesis will be an exercise in process-tracing coupled by a comparative method. Process-tracing is a research method often used in social sciences for tracing causal mechanisms using detailed, within-case empirical analysis of how a causal process plays out in an actual case.[[37]](#footnote-37) This being said this thesis will not be using the conventional process-tracing method, but rather my own adaptation of it. This is for two reasons: 1) Process-tracing case studies are usually coupled by comparative methods to generalize about causal processes beyond the studied case.[[38]](#footnote-38) However since this thesis only analyzes the ideas and perceptions of two actors on the causal processes within the case study, there won’t be any generalizations about the causal processes themselves outside the studied case. 2) Process-tracing is conventionally used for tracing causal mechanisms of how a causal process plays out in an actual case. The problem with this is that it are not the causal mechanisms itself that will be analyzed, but rather the views and perceptions of two individuals on these causal mechanisms. Therefore, neither *theory-building* nor *theory-testing* will be used on the causal mechanisms of the conflict, as they are not useful for the type of research being conducted. Instead we will analyze the differences in the causal processes traced by the two Secretary-Generals. Essentially letting them do the process-tracing for us while we focus on analyzing the ideas and perceptions that arise from their process-tracing. The comparative method indicates the comparing of those different ideas and perceptions.

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**CHAPTER 1: Political and Economic front**

To get a clear understanding of the views and perceptions of both Secretary General’s on the conflict and it’s complexities we need to dissect their observations in a chronological manner. To do so we need to go back in time to the beginning of 2013, to 26 March to be precise. This is when the first of many official reports by a Secretary-General on the situation in Mali was released. Since MINUSMA’s first official resolution doesn’t date back further then April 2013, the report was submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution 2085 (2012) of 20 December 2012, in which the Council requested that Secretary General Ban Ki-moon reported on the implementation of resolution 2085.[[39]](#footnote-39) This resolution, in addition to requesting the Secretary-General to establish a “multidisciplinary United Nations presence in Mali”, essentially authorized the deployment of MINUSMA’s African-led Predecessor AFISMA.[[40]](#footnote-40) The 2013 SG report, in conclusion, summarizes major political and security developments in Mali since the adoption of the 2085 resolution and outlines the multidimensional response of the United Nations to the crisis.[[41]](#footnote-41)

Ban Ki-moon’s first observations in the March 2013 report indicate that the challenges Mali faced were mostly political and heavily tied to the extremists and criminal activities in the North. *“Exacerbated by the scourge of transnational crime and terrorism, which has beset the entire Sahel region, these challenges have provided fertile ground for the rise of extremists and organized criminal networks.”*[[42]](#footnote-42)He here bespeaks that part of Mali’s problems are beyond their control and are caused by larger transnational crime and terrorism. However he also points out several political and economic aspects Mali was lacking in, which made the country an accessible breeding ground for conflict. An important one of those aspects was, and still is Mali’s very low army capacity.[[43]](#footnote-43) This aspect is part of Mali’s broader lack of effective and high performing security and law institutions. Which will therefore, according to Ban Ki-moon, be important to reform within the broader framework of national dialogue and reconciliation.[[44]](#footnote-44) As for Mali’s economic situation, the country was nothing more or less than a poor economy on the decline. Ban Ki-moon stated in early 2013 that key socioeconomic indicators and living conditions of the population continued to deteriorate, while Mali’s health and development indicators ranked among the worst in the world.[[45]](#footnote-45)

*“The crisis in Mali is complex and multilayered. Its impact on the everyday lives of people has been devastating. The humanitarian crisis continues to take a heavy toll on people across the country. Many of Mali’s citizens are still displaced in difficult living conditions, and reports of human rights violations are deeply disturbing. The current crisis has revealed a complex web of political, governance and security challenges.”[[46]](#footnote-46)*

These are the first official stated observations on the Malian conflict made back in 2013 by former UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon. He understood the conflict was complex and multilayered and that MINUSMA would be facing a number of peacekeeping challenges in Mali. Four years later, the current UN Secretary General, António Guterres, expressed his thoughts on Mali’s complex and multilayered crisis in a similar manner; *“MINUSMA continues to operate in an extremely challenging environment, constantly faced with threats of violent asymmetric attacks. Significant operational difficulties are likely to continue in the current political and security context marked by insecurity, drug trafficking and terrorism.”[[47]](#footnote-47)* In four years’ time there have been plenty of developments in the Malian conflict, but its threats to Malian political, economic and cultural stability are unmovingly present. In order for the UN to make the right adjustments to MINUSMA’s approach, the Secretary General is asked to compose a report on the current situation in Mali roughly every three months. These reports contain detailed documentations on the major political, economic, security and human rights developments as well as notations on cultural preservation. Although filled with objective information on key developments in Mali, these reports, on first sight, don’t provide a clear perspective on how MINUSMA should adapt and react to these developments. Because of this the Secretary-Generals add their own observations at the end of every report which include their views and perceptions on the current situation. To get a more comprehensive understanding of the Malian conflict and the challenges MINUSMA face in it, **this chapter strives to provide an in depth analysis of the views and perceptions of the current and former UN Secretary General’s António Guterres and Ban Ki-moon on the causes and challenges of the Malian conflict from a political and economic perspective.**

The first few observations Ban Ki-moon had made prior to the deployment of MINUSMA played an important role in the decision making process within the Security Council on the establishment of MINUSMA. By stating that the humanitarian crisis in Mali and the broader Sahel region required greater international attention as the risk of the spread of asymmetrical warfare increased, the Secretary General had labeled the situation in Mali as a security threat.[[48]](#footnote-48) After extensively labeling it as a security threat, he then provided the United Nations, in the same report, with two options on how to proceed to act upon this security threat. One of these options was the Multidimensional integrated United Nations stabilization mission under Chapter VII, now better known as MINUSMA.[[49]](#footnote-49) Evidently the UN took the options into consideration and chose for MINUSMA. To put it into other words, the Secretary General had, through speech act, labeled the Mali conflict as a security threat and had thereby amplified the urgence and willingness of the UN to securitize the situation. This is how the securitization theory of the Copenhagen school provides us with a framework of understanding why certain security threats are securitized and others not. In the case of Mali it gives us, among other things, a better feel for the importance of and influence that the two Secretary Generals have on the way MINUSMA operates, and what aspects of the conflict the Security Council focuses on and choose to securitize.

**Ban Ki-moon**

Since Ban Ki-moon’s first report in 2013 the Mali conflict continuously evolved and went through several up and down periods. In Ban Ki-moon’s second report (June 2013) he mentioned that the situation in Mali had improved since the beginning of 2013.[[50]](#footnote-50) On 18 June, in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, the transitional Government and the armed groups in the northern regions of Mali signed a preliminary agreement to hold the presidential election and inclusive peace talks in Mali.[[51]](#footnote-51)The presidential elections were successfully conducted and seen as a remarkable achievement by the Secretary General.[[52]](#footnote-52) However, according to Ban Ki-moon, the elections were only the first step on the long road towards the restoration of peace and stability in Mali.” [[53]](#footnote-53) While the situation in Mali seemed to be getting better, the country still had a boatload of problems that needed to be dealt with. The main problem being the continuity of insecurity and persisting tension in (mostly) Northern areas. [[54]](#footnote-54) To come closer to solving this major problem, Ban Ki-moon thought to first solve certain other political and economic problems. Since almost 4 million Malians suffered from food insecurity including 1.4 million that were in direct need of assistance, Mali’s economy needed stable growth to provide more security and less suffering for the Malian people. [[55]](#footnote-55) Equally important for Ban Ki-moon was the fight against corruption and organized crime and the need to strengthen accountability mechanisms. [[56]](#footnote-56)

In 2014, after a little over a half year of progressively trying to achieve peace and stability by the Malian government (with the help of foreign actors such as MINUSMA), the efforts to advance the political process were seriously disrupted when armed clashes between the Malian Defence and Security Forces (MDSF) and the Mouvement national pour la libération de l’Azawad (MNLA) together with associated armed groups took place in Kidal between 16 and 21 May 2014.[[57]](#footnote-57) In his report of June 2014 Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon expressed his deep concerns on the matter.[[58]](#footnote-58)

Subsequently to the clashes in Kidal, Ban Ki-moon encouraged the Security Council to renew MINUSMA’s mandate as he felt sustained political engagement by the Security Council remained essential to rapidly advance the political process. [[59]](#footnote-59) Even though concerned at the clashes in the North, he was also troubled by the continued food insecurity and malnutrition in Mali. [[60]](#footnote-60) This is being brought up because it is becoming clear that Ban Ki-Moon had been heavily focusing on the political and economic aspects of Mali’s situation.

**Guterres**

How do Ban Ki-moon’s views and perceptions compare to Guterres’ views and perceptions from the same political and economic viewpoint? In March 2018 Guterres stated that restoration and extension of State authority remained a priority for the effective protection of civilians and the delivery of long-awaited peace dividends to the conflict-affected communities*.*[[61]](#footnote-61)This statement resembles some of the earlier mentioned observations by Ban Ki-moon because it brings to the fore Mali’s weak state authority, a problem that needs to be fixed. Thus from a political, and even an economic viewpoint both Secretary Generals observations are (as far as possible due to the continues changes in Mali’s situation) consistent with each other. *“In conclusion, I wish to reiterate that the Agreement remains the cornerstone of the peace process in Mali, its potential to spur national dialogue and governance reform, with a beneficial impact beyond the northern regions, is undoubted…”*.*[[62]](#footnote-62)* To further confirm the similarity in observations from a political viewpoint, this statement above by Guterres forms (judging by the fact Ban Ki-moon made a similar statement) an example of insistence on political dialogue and compliance of the different parties to the signed peace agreements by both Secretary Generals. In his report of January 2020 Guterres stated that investing in economic development and providing opportunities would be critical in advancing the reforms envisaged under the signed peace agreements.[[63]](#footnote-63) As from an economic point of view, both Secretary Generals needless to say, perceive Mali’s low economic capacity and relatively high number of citizens under the poverty line as problematic.

**CHAPTER 2: A Social and Cultural Perspective**

Now that the similarity in observations between both Secretary Generals on political and economic front are determined, let’s take a final critical look at the differences in observations from a social and cultural perspective. Accordingly, **this chapter strives to, using a comparative method, provide an in depth analysis of the views and perceptions of the current and former UN Secretary General’s António Guterres and Ban Ki-moon on the causes and challenges of the Malian conflict from a social and cultural perspective.**

In March 2015 Mali found itself at a turning point. A new peace agreement was being drawn up. Violence had been intensifying during the past couple of years and went even past the North.[[64]](#footnote-64) According to Ban Ki-moon there was no military solution to this violence; it could be effectively countered only through a viable political process that would yield implementable results*.*[[65]](#footnote-65)On 20 June 2015 the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali was signed and the political process Ban Ki-moon spoke of started to yield results. The violence didn’t come to a complete halt, but the remainder of Ban Ki-moon’s reports gave prominence to the progress made in the implementation of the peace agreement. Fast forwarded to mid-2017 the fighting in the North had again begun.

*“I am deeply concerned by recent developments in Mali, in particular the resumption of violent clashes between the signatory armed groups and the political turmoil surrounding the constitutional referendum. These developments are indicative of deeply rooted rifts within Malian society that need to be addressed in order to bring new momentum in the peace process. Regrettably, almost no progress was made in the implementation of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali.”[[66]](#footnote-66)*

One of the Secretary-Generals (as seen in the quote above) was yet again concerned at the resumption of violence. From a political and economic perspective Guterres’ observations don’t seem to differ a lot from Ban Ki-moon’s observations. Since this quote doesn’t touch upon the political and economic aspects discussed in the last chapter, there is no way of knowing which Secretary-General wrote it. However, as it was previously constated that Ban Ki-moon put a larger focus on the political and economic aspects of Mali’s situation than Guterres did, we now see this dissimilarity being balanced out by Guterres bringing a new element of analyses to the table. Namely a cultural element which appeared to be missing in Ban Ki-moon’s observations. Where Guterres saw the violent clashes as indicative of deeply rooted rifts within Malian society which needed to be addressed in order to advance in the peacemaking process, Ban Ki-moon saw the violent clashes as political conflict which arose due to economic and political factors that made a breeding ground for conflict, and he believed the violent clashes could only be countered trough a viable political process. Therefore the main difference between both observations is the addressing of the importance of taking the root causes of the conflict, which are partly cultural, into account when attempting to solve it, which is done by one Secretary General, but not the other. However, in order to avoid coming to precocious conclusions on the different observations between both Secretary Generals, it is necessary to further analyze their observations. In March 2018 Guterres strongly encouraged the Government to intensify its efforts to expand the delivery of basic social services in northern and central Mali and to advance gender equality.[[67]](#footnote-67) In Ban Ki-moon’s report of June 2016 he too encouraged the Government to sustain its efforts to expand the coverage of basic social services, but he didn’t touch upon the cultural problem of gender inequality.[[68]](#footnote-68) It are these small details that make their stated observations (even in the slightest way) different from each other. *“Intercommunal conflict, exacerbated by violent extremist groups, is fraying an already fragile social fabric and is deeply concerning.” [[69]](#footnote-69)* If we compare this statement in the quote above by Guterres to similar statements by Ban Ki-moon; *“I denounce the increase in intracommunal and intercommunal violence in the northern and central regions, which constitute obstacles to national reconciliation and peaceful cohabitation.”[[70]](#footnote-70)* or *“I am wary of the risk that fighting between armed groups may give way to intercommunal clashes similar to those that claimed many lives earlier this year, and which may ultimately derail the peace process.”[[71]](#footnote-71)*, we see that both the Secretary Generals took the intercommunal clashes, which can be explained from a cultural perspective, under serious regard. However, when Ban Ki-moon only expressed his concerns for the intercommunal clashes and the effect it could have on the peace process, Guterres went a step further and emphasized the effect those intercommunity clashes could have not only on the whole peace process, but also to the unstable social fabric which is part of the larger puzzle that the peace process tries to solve. In the end it can be concluded that Guterres pays more attention to the underlying structures of the causes of the conflict than Ban Ki-moon did. To give one last example hereof, let’s take a closer look at two different observations the Secretary Generals made on the course of action that should be taken to stabilize Mali’s situation. In his report of early 2020 Guterres stated that stabilizing the situation in Mali and combating terrorism would require addressing the grievances of the disenfranchised and the poor.[[72]](#footnote-72) While Guterres focalized on the need to address grievances for the greater purpose of attaining a modus vivendi, Ban Ki-moon put emphasis on (as seen again in the quote down below) the need for better securitization by the government and the enhancement or regional security cooperation:

*“The successful stabilization of Mali ultimately depends on the Government, which must step up its efforts, including by making progress on the revision of the 2014 strategy for security sector reform to ensure the participation of CMA and the Platform and by enhancing regional security cooperation.”[[73]](#footnote-73)*

The clear pattern that the different observations have shown us ensures that it can now be concluded that Ban Ki-moon looked at the causes of, and challenges to solving the conflict from a political standpoint, which contrasts with Guterres way of viewing the conflict since he ultimately saw the conflict through a more variety of disciplinary lenses.

**Conclusion**

When initiating this bachelors thesis, it aimed at demonstrating the sometimes overlooked influence individual actors can have on UN peacekeeping missions. Along with demonstrating this, the thesis attempted to find out more about the ideas and perceptions of some of these actors by trying to answer the main research question: **What are the different ideas and perceptions of current and former Secretary-General’s António Guterres and Ban Ki-moon on the causes and challenges of the Malian conflict, and do these found causes and challenges appear to be to a greater extent of political, economic or cultural nature?** It was noted that responding to this research question would require an appropriate method, and that pointing out the influence of the two individuals subject to analysis would require a specific theoretical framework. As a result we coupled an altered process-tracing case study approach with a comparative analyzing method. Furthermore, the Copenhagen School’s Securitization theory is what provided this thesis with a theoretical framework that made demonstrating the influence of the compared Secretary-Generals in this thesis possible. Regarding the research, the following results can be identified. In first place, the influence of a Secretary-General on the UN Security Council’s peacekeeping policies became clear when it was, by the use of Securitization theory, confirmed that Ban Ki-moon had through speech act put Mali’s situation on the map as a security threat. It was this labeling of the situation as a security threat in his March 26 report of 2013 that played an important role in the UN Security Council’s decision to transform African-led mission AFISMA to MINUSMA. Following the display of influence of a Secretary-General, the ideas and perceptions stated in 31 reports written by first Ban Ki-moon and later António Guterres were critically analyzed. Placing them in three categories; cultural, political and economic, a clear difference in disciplinary nature between the two Secretary-General’s observations was constated. The analysis of the perceptions and ideas of Ban Ki-moon showed that his observations had a strong focus on the political aspects of the causal mechanisms and challenges of the conflict, as well as sporadic mentioning of economic aspects. When compared to Guterres they had similar observations on political and economic front. Both Secretary-General’s saw Mali’s low army capacity, fragile economy and weak security and governmental institutions as problematic and brought up strategies to better them. The main difference in observations between both Secretary-Generals becomes apparent when analyzing the statements that are of cultural and social nature. Contrary to Ban Ki-moon there were multiple examples of Guterres mentioning Mali’s fragile social fabrics and tackling the importance of addressing grievances between communities. Where Guterres saw the violent clashes as indicative of deeply rooted rifts within Malian society which needed to be addressed in order to advance in the peacemaking process, Ban Ki-moon saw the violent clashes as political conflict which arose due to economic and political factors that made a breeding ground for conflict and could only be resolved through a viable political process. Not all observations of Guterres that differed from Ban Ki-moon’s observations can be labeled exclusively as being of cultural nature, but is still the category that showed the main difference in observations between the Secretary Generals. In conclusion Guterres saw Mali’s situation through more of a variety of disciplinary lenses than Ban Ki-moon did.

Further research could focus on what the findings of this thesis mean to policy, practice and theory in international peacekeeping. Do the differences in observations of both Secretary-Generals directly translate to differences in policy? If so, are those differences felt by peacekeeping personnel on the ground? How far reaching are the influences of the Secretary-Generals on peacekeeping missions? Is it dangerous for one individual to have that amount of influence on peacekeeping missions? These are all questions that have yet to be subject to extensive analyses and could therefore be the center of exploration in future research on peacekeeping and the implications of individual actors hereto.

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