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The African Traditional Authority and Violent Conflict Nexus

Traditional authorities trapped in the middle between
a warring state, radical armed groups and
clashing communities in Central Mali



Kjeld van Wieringen

5501261

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Abstract

While traditional authority and violent conflict have both been characteristic for the African continent and studied frequently in academia, the relation between these two phenomena has remained profoundly under-researched. In recent years the Central Malian regions of Mopti and Ségou have become the theatre of intensifying violent conflict dynamics in which traditional authorities and their communities have increasingly become confronted with severe destabilization, insecurity and violence perpetrated by radical armed groups and communal militias. It is argued in this thesis that these traditional authorities have become caught in a difficult position between the state, radical armed groups, which both have posed physical threats and undermined their governance capacity, and inter-communal violence which they have been attempting to pacify. The main purpose of this thesis is to identify, analyze and theorize the ways in which traditional authorities in Central Mali have affected and been affected by these conflict dynamics since the start of Mali's crisis in 2012. In the search for these connections this thesis adopts Charles Tilly's relational mechanisms-processes framework. It is argued that traditional authorities are linked to the two main identified conflict processes, namely radical armed mobilization and inter-communal polarization, through the relational mechanisms of co-optation attempts, intra-communal brokerage, and inter-communal brokerage. The thesis explains how these concepts relate to the main identified ways in which traditional authorities in the region have suffered from, responded to and more generally been connected to violent conflict dynamics in Central Mali.

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Introduction

In 2012 an insurgency tore the vast region of northern Mali away from its fragile government. Soon afterwards radical armed groups effectively sidelined secular armed movements and swiftly established supremacy in the area (Chauzal & Van Damme 2015: 10-11). The French military operation 'Serval' followed up shortly in early 2013 and largely expelled the radical armed groups, thereby clearing the way for the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) and the French transnational counter-terrorism operation 'Barkhane' that both continue to this day (Gnanguênon & Tisseron 2017). Violence and conflict was initially largely confined to the northern regions of Timbuktu, Gao and Kidal. However, by 2015 increasing violence and destabilization had descended into the Central Malian regions of Ségou and Mopti (Tobie 2017: 1). With most violent events being observed in these regions in the last year (see Annex 1), the geographical centre of Mali has also become the country's centre of violence. Being surrounded by intensifying violent attacks and fighting between the state, radical armed groups and clashing communal militias, local traditional authorities are caught in the middle of this currently escalating conflict landscape.

The purpose of the study is to identify, analyze and theorize the relations that exist between traditional authorities and violent conflict dynamics in Central Mali since the crisis that erupted in 2012. The goal is to discover how traditional authorities in Central Mali are affected by, and how they in turn affect, those conflict dynamics. In short, this thesis serves to research the African traditional authority and violent conflict nexus in the Central Malian context. In order to do this, this thesis adopts Charles Tilly's relational mechanisms-processes approach. The central research question that follows is: *What are the relational mechanisms that have connected traditional authorities to the main violent conflict processes in Central Mali from 2012 to 2018?* This main question is broken up into two sub-questions. Firstly, what are the main conflict processes active in Central Mali from 2012 to 2018? Secondly, what are the relational mechanisms that have connected traditional authorities in the region to these processes? These questions are firstly researched using open sources including academic literature, reports from observers such as think-tanks, news articles and posts on social media. These open sources are supplemented by interview data gathered by the Conflict Research Unit of the Clingendael Institute during fieldwork in Mali. From the ensemble of these sources, the most prominent conflict processes in Central Mali and the identified relational mechanisms that link them to local traditional authorities are identified and explained.

While a great deal of authors have written on either the traditional authorities that still largely govern Africa at the local level or the relatively numerous violent conflicts that have ravaged the continent, remarkably little is known on the interactions between these two

widespread phenomena. This study will firstly add to the existing knowledge on traditional authorities in African conflict situations, a subject that has remained under-researched in despite of the significance and near omnipresence of traditional authority and armed conflict on the African continent. It will secondly add to our knowledge of the conflict situation in Central Mali, which needs to be closely monitored in light of the complex, dangerous and seemingly escalating dynamics taking place there. This research will therefore be valuable from both an academic as well as a policy point of view.

The first chapter firstly presents definitions and concepts regarding African traditional authorities and their colonial and postcolonial history in the Central Malian context. It secondly outlines Tilly's relational mechanisms-processes approach that is applied in this thesis. These two components form the basis of the theoretical framework of this thesis. The first chapter also clarifies the methodology of the research. The second chapter presents the main conflict processes that are identified in the Central Malian context. The third chapter presents the identified relational mechanisms that link local traditional authorities to these conflict processes. This chapter integrates interview data gathered by the Conflict Research Unit of the Clingendael Institute during fieldwork in Mali. Similarities with other cases in which African traditional authorities were confronted by armed conflict situations are also put forward in this chapter in order to demonstrate the broader relevance of some of the findings from Central Mali. The thesis finishes with a conclusion that includes a summary of the research findings, policy recommendations and suggestions for further research.

Image 1: Map of Central Mali (Mopti and Ségou)¹



¹ Source of map: John Emerson for Human Rights Watch (<https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/09/08/mali-unchecked-abuses-military-operations>).

1. Theoretical Framework and Methodology

1.1. African Traditional Authorities and their history in Central Mali

While African post-colonial authoritarian states have frequently attempted to eradicate or marginalize traditional authority in society, African traditional authorities have proven resilient due to their popular support and public legitimacy. There has been a resurgence, revalorisation, increase in state recognition and in some cases formalization of African traditional authority following the wave of democratization, decentralization and liberalisation on the continent in the 1990s (Ubink 2016: 10-14, 29; Logan 2013: 354-5, 372-3). African states have increasingly come to see the need to recognize traditional chieftaincy as a social reality that defines the structure and organization of society at the local level (Ubink 2016: 14). Janine Ubink, one of the leading experts on traditional authority and customary justice in Africa, defines traditional authority as “leadership whose *legitimacy* is rooted in history – either real or invented – and culture, often combined with religious, divine or sacred references” (2016: 9). Traditional domination, or power based on the submission to traditional norms and customs, was already categorized by Max Weber as one of the three central types of domination, next to legal-rational and charismatic domination (Médard 2014: 78-79). Max Weber perceives traditional authority from the perspective of legitimacy where the right to rule is based on the acceptance of tradition or custom (Cheka 2008: 72).

African traditional authorities cannot easily be characterized. Depending on the context and perspective they can be seen as cooperative agents of the state, as complementary governance actors where states are absent, or as competitors of the state (Wig & Kromrey 2017: 6). Furthermore, while traditional institutions are often firmly rooted in pre-colonial African history, they have also been maintained and integrated by colonial and post-colonial states (Wig & Kromrey 2017: 6). Cameroonian researcher Cosmas Cheka defines traditional authority as “an institution or power that is received and handed down or over from generation to generation” (Cheka 2008: 72). Indeed in Central Mali, as with many other African regions, the position of traditional authorities, at least in the case of customary chiefs, is derived from lineage. Those male seniors who descend from the founders (the first-comers) of the local community, or most effectively claim to be so, have the customary right to a chief’s position. They thereby own the responsibility for the management and distribution of essential local natural resources such as the land in and surrounding the village (Moorehead 1997: 278; Nijenhuis 2013: 44-47). According to Ubink traditional authorities can denote a wide range of figures including “kings, spiritual leaders, elders, heads of extended families, and other local ‘big men’” (2016: 9). Apart from customary chiefs, Central Malian communities have religious clergy such as imams and

marabouts. This group of spiritual community leaders are, because of their local historical, cultural and religious embeddedness, categorized in this thesis as another group of traditional authorities in the region.

Traditional authorities are highly important non-state governance actors. Thomas Risse, a leading expert on non-state governance, categorizes traditional authorities such as chiefs as one of the three main groups of non-state governance actors, the other two being civil society and the private sector (Risse 2012: 8-9). Risse defines governance as “institutionalized modes of social coordination to produce and implement collectively binding rules, or to provide collective goods” (2012: 7). The governance functions that traditional authorities generally perform include dispute settlement, natural resources management and local development (Ubink 2016: 7). Malian state structure, law and policies also reflect its reliance on local traditional authorities for local governance, justice provision, and the management of natural resources such as land. Traditional chiefs are formally integrated into the administrative structure of the state (Cotula & Cissé 2006: 14). Malian laws on land tenure recognize the validity of traditional rights (Bertheau 2007: 20). The *Loi portant sur le Foncier Agricole* (Legislation on the land tenure regime) that was passed in April 2017 provides clarification and guidance to traditional authorities on how to manage natural resources and has enabled the formalisation of their decisions (Ursu 2018: 6). When Malians present their land disputes directly before legal justice magistrates they are told to search the help of a traditional authority and come back only if they are not satisfied with his decision (Ursu 2018: 6). In this sense, Malian government arrangement could be interpreted as what Ken Menkhaus names the ‘mediated state’ in which African low-capacity states necessarily partner up with local non-state actors to bring governance and security to the country’s peripheries (2008:29-31).

The imposition of state structures in Central Mali that started in the colonial period and continued in the post-colonial period have harmed the legitimacy of local traditional authorities and eroded the original governance, conflict-mitigation and natural resources management systems that they have historically implemented (Cotula & Cissé 2006: 19, 23-24). French colonial rule starting in the early 20th century in the area of current day Central Mali imposed a state governance system that simultaneously utilized, competed with and undermined the pre-existing traditional governance system which was based on lineage and composed of chiefs and other traditional authorities. The French left traditional authorities in place but through state policies they significantly undermined their capacity to manage and control local natural resources as they had historically done (Moorehead 1997: 197, 203). In 1907 they installed parallel legal land tenure system next to the pre-existing customary system which significantly eroded the latter system (Moorehead 1997: 197-8, 213). Through the ‘*commandement indigène*’, local chiefs in the region became the auxiliaries of the colonial administration and were utilized

for forced-labour recruitment, military conscription and the collection of taxes. They thereby became associated in the eyes of locals with the most unpopular sides of French colonial rule. Traditional authorities thus became discredited and their traditional management systems were undermined as direct effects of the disliked colonial practices (Moorehead 1997: 200, 209, 212).

These processes continued after independence (Moorehead 1997: 212, 214). The post-colonial Malian state installed further parallel institutions, such as state forester services, alongside traditional management systems, which created more overlapping, inconsistent, and contradicting responsibilities. These further undermined the traditional authority system. From the local perspective, the post-colonial state effectively continued the exploitation of Central Mali, taking more monetary value out of the region through formal taxes and informal payments (bribes) than investing in it, and also made local traditional institutions subservient to state policies and aims (Moorehead 1997: 214-5). The village chief represented the post-colonial state at the village level. However, representation and ability of such traditional authorities to influence decisions within the higher levels of the administration was severely constrained (Moorehead 1997: 221, 223). The centrally-planned system of natural resources management installed by the post-colonial state ignored the foundations of the traditional regime, namely local right to access according to kinship and lineage, and instead reallocated natural resources according to external criteria (Moorehead 1997: 228). Experiences with services, practices and lacking investments by the state administration led locals to doubt the local benefit of government policies. The payment of taxes and other charges were perceived merely as gifts to the administration, that were subsequently exported from the region instead of invested locally for public benefit (Moorehead 1997: 234-5, 242, 247). It is thus safe to conclude that in the post-colonial period traditional authorities in Central continued to be integrated as the auxiliaries of a disliked state-system that has often been perceived locally as exploitative of the region and its inhabitants. The colonial and post-colonial legacy of traditional authorities has thus harmed their legitimacy by making them become affiliated to an unpopular state-system, that has also further limited their governance capacity through the introduction of competing and overlapping state institutions.

1.2. Violent Conflict

Conflicts can be understood as situations in which two or more parties perceive that they have mutually incompatible goals (Mitchel 1981: 17). Conflict behaviour, the actions undertaken by one party in conflict against another, can include violence. Violence can be defined as “physical damage to people and property” (Demmers 2017: 6-7). Studies on violent conflict have been plentiful and a wide variety of academic perspectives exist. Research on conflict can usually be

situated on one side of the ontological divide between structuralism, the idea that conflict primarily results from social structure or the organization of society, and individualism, the idea that conflict mainly results from individual choices and agency (Demmers 2017: 16, 18). Epistemologically, researchers can be divided in positivists, who believe that human action is subject to causal laws and regulations that can be explained, and interpretivists, who instead try to understand the meaning of action (Demmers 2017: 17-18).

This study could focus solely on structures that shape the conflict on Central Mali. One could for example examine the natural resources scarcity that is frequently identified as a main cause of conflict in the region. Another option would be to concentrate all efforts on examining the social organization of society in Central Mali in which traditional authorities take part. This project could also take on an individualist perspective and regard traditional authorities in Central Mali as rationalist actors in a conflict landscape. Such research could focus on the agency of the traditional authorities and other actors by studying the individual motivations, strategies and choices that determine their behaviours. However, in the last decades the divide between structure and agency has become blurred as a group of influential sociologists have come to believe that structural and individualist perspectives should be combined into more holistic frameworks for doing research on social phenomena such as conflict (Demmers 2017: 92). This thesis joins this strain of work and combines structure and agency in its approach. The next paragraph will discuss the relational framework of arguably the most prominent of these sociologists, namely Charles Tilly.

1.3. Charles Tilly's relational mechanisms and processes framework

Tilly has worked with his co-authors to design research approaches revolving around mechanisms and processes (Collins 2010: 8). The endeavour of Tilly and his co-authors has been to identify the set of explanatory mechanisms and processes that commonly shape a wide variety of both violent and non-violent conflicts ranging all the way from demonstrations to genocides (Demmers 2017: 92). The idea is not to search for (seemingly inexistent) law-like uniformities or general laws determining collective violent behaviour (Tilly 2001: 25; Tilly 2003: 22-23). It is rather to specify the recurring causal mechanisms and processes that operate similarly in violent conflict situations across wide ranges of circumstances, in various combinations and with radically diverse outcomes (Tilly 2001: 25; Tilly 2003: 22-23). Such 'mechanism-based approaches' as the one formulated by Tilly serve to connect structure and agency in the analysis of collective violence (Tilly, McAdam & Tarrow 2008: 308).

Tilly defines mechanisms as "delimited events that change relations among specified sets of elements in identical or closely similar ways over a variety of situations" (Tilly & Tarrow

2007:29). In other words, mechanisms are events that produce virtually the same effects under widely different circumstances (Demmers 2017:93). They are “events that link effects to causes” (Tilly, McAdam & Tarrow 2008: 309). Such mechanisms can merge to create processes, which Tilly defines as “regular sequences of such mechanisms that produce similar (generally more complex and contingent) transformations of those elements” (Tilly & Tarrow 2007:29). Processes in which mechanisms are assembled can thereby produce greater effects than any mechanism could individually cause (Demmers 2017:93). It follows that a researcher can better understand observed processes by identifying and analyzing its constitutive parts, namely the mechanisms that are assembled within.

Tilly distinguishes between three types of mechanisms. *Environmental* mechanisms change relations between social circumstances and their external environment, such as drought affecting the agriculture on which actors rely. *Cognitive* mechanisms function through changes in individual and collective perceptions, for example regarding people as enemies or friends. *Relational* mechanisms change connections among social units such as people, groups and networks, such as allying, attacks, appeasement or subordination (Tilly 2001: 24; Tilly 2003: 20-21). Among these types of mechanisms, Tilly has focused on and emphasized the importance of the latter category in explaining collective violence. He therefore explicitly takes a *relational* ontological stance in his research (Tilly 2003: 7), thereby building a bridge between structure and agency while taking a positivist direction in the search for regularly recurring causal mechanisms.

Tilly states that social scientists model their approaches as if they were simplified versions of physics or engineering. They research how output variables such as violence vary with input variables such as ethnic fragmentation without explaining the causal connections in between the inputs and outputs (Tilly & Tarrow 2007: 29). Tilly claims that the mechanism-process approach on the contrary resembles more to biological reasoning. From this perspective mechanisms, such as courtship, sexual encounters, pregnancy, birth and nurturing, join into short-term processes such as reproduction or long-term ones such as evolution. Biologists do not stop at identifying crucial processes and correlating the inputs and outputs but they continue by elaborately examining these processes' constituent mechanisms (Tilly & Tarrow 2007: 29). In this vein, the Central Malian conflict landscape will be regarded as an ecosystem in which organisms, the actors present such as traditional authorities, behave to influence, react to and interact with the processes that importantly shape the dynamics in this ecosystem.

This research project serves to find and explain the links between a specified category of actors and certain conflict processes, to which Tilly's relational mechanisms framework lends itself excellently. In the search for connections between traditional authorities and conflict processes in Central Mali, this study will thus adopt Tilly's relational framework, including its

ontological position. Apart from being situated on the ontological breach between structure and agency, the approach of this thesis is also epistemologically balanced between positivism and interpretivism. While the purpose of this thesis is to explain causal relational mechanisms and processes, it namely also does so through a reinterpretation of local interpretations of actions, events and dynamics in the region under scrutiny. In the end, the goal is thus both explaining the causality of action (positivism) and understanding its meaning to respondents (interpretivism).

The adoption of Tilly's framework may structure and sharpen the analysis of this thesis and help to theorize the findings. The second chapter will be devoted to outlining the most prominent conflict processes that, as will be argued in this paper, have been operating in Central Mali. The third chapter is dedicated to identifying the recurring relational mechanisms outlined by Tilly that link local traditional authorities to these collective violent conflict processes. The conceptual contents of the processes that have been identified to be operating in Central Mali in this paper and the mechanisms that link them to local traditional authorities will not be explained here but instead in these chapters themselves. The reason for this is that the presentation of the findings will likely be most clear and logical if their order is in accordance with the chronology of the research. This means that in this case the observed empirical events and dynamics should be laid out before linking them to the conceptual mechanisms and processes that are argued to be most relevant in this paper.

1.4. Methodology

As explained above, during the research Tilly's relational mechanisms-processes framework was identified as the most logical and useful theoretic grid to systematically analyze observations and structure the study. For the second chapter the discourse on conflict and violence in Central Mali from academic literature, reports from think-tanks and news articles was analyzed for recurring patterns. The two most prevalent explanations for violence in the region, namely those resulting from increasing activity of radical armed groups and inter-communal tensions, were outlined based on the information from those sources and translated into processes from Tilly's framework. For the third chapter, any connections between Central Malian traditional authorities and the conflict processes in the second chapter that could be identified from open sources and interview data were synthesized into three main recurring phenomena. These were subsequently translated in relational mechanisms that feature in Tilly's framework. Because this thesis focuses above all on the links between traditional authorities and conflict processes in Central Mali, this chapter is the longest. When writing this chapter the literature and interview data revealed another important theme that could not be left out, namely the multiple ways in which traditional authorities have become trapped in between the state and radical armed

actors, all the while trying to pacify inter-communal violence for which their capacity has diminished because of this multi-faceted entrapment. This aspect has therefore been integrated into the thesis' narrative. The following sources have been utilized for the writing of this thesis:

Open sources: A vital part of the research consisted of desk research in which open sources relevant to the answering the research question are selected and analyzed. This included the monitoring of the activities of armed actors present in Central Mali and online information gathering on their relations and interactions with local traditional authorities. Open sources that are used include academic papers, news articles written by Malian and foreign journalists, reports from international observers, research institutes and think tanks, and posts from twitter accounts that monitor attacks and security developments in Mali.

CRU fieldwork interviews: The author realized this study in the same time-period as a research internship at the Conflict Research Unit of the Clingendael Institute in The Hague. The author assisted with multiple research projects of his internship supervisor at the Conflict Research Unit, Anca-Elena Ursu, who spent three weeks doing fieldwork in Mali during April and May 2018 which resulted in the publication titled 'Under the Gun: Resource conflicts and embattled traditional authorities in Central Mali' (Ursu, 2018). She and a local research assistant conducted around 70 semi-structured interviews with traditional authorities and other stakeholders from the region of Mopti. From those, notes from over 25 relevant interviews, most with traditional authorities, were selected to be integrated into this thesis. Because of the vulnerability of the respondents the interviews were conducted in relatively safe and discrete locations in order to prevent unwanted attention from potentially threatening actors. Because of the sensitivity of the information in the interviews and the severe vulnerability of the respondents, extreme diligence needed to be taken to protect their anonymity (Ursu, 2018: 65-6). No personal names or place names and virtually no direct quotes are therefore used when referring to the interview data. Respondents including interviewed traditional authorities often seemed to refer to the situation in their region as they interpreted it rather than to their own direct personal experiences. The interview data thus consists largely of interpretations of the Central Malian context by interviewed locals who are in turn reinterpreted by the author and integrated into the thesis. From a methodological point of view, one must be aware that this double interpretation is bound to limit the extent to which constructing an objective and entirely accurate representation of the situation on the ground is possible. However, this does not have to be seen as a great obstacle as local views on events are arguably as important and interesting for research purposes as the actual objective situation on the ground.

Data from other sources that are referred to in this thesis are gathered firstly from a conference on Malian customary justice that took place on the 10th of April 2018 in The Hague that the author assisted in organizing and documenting in the context of his internship at the

Conflict Research Unit. Additional integrated information was gathered secondly from interviews with researcher Anca-Elena Ursu at the Conflict Research Unit's office in The Hague.

2. Violent Conflict Processes in Central Mali

2.1. Radical armed mobilization

Radical armed groups have become progressively active and entrenched in Central Mali (Tobie 2017: 6). They have increasingly shifted their efforts to the fragile regions of Mopti and Ségou and use a mix of social services provision, coercion and ideological preaching to gain influence and control among the local population and undermine cooperation with the Malian state and external interveners (Sandor 2017: 13-18; ICG 2016: 10, 15). Katiba Macina, also known as the Macina Liberation Front, is a radical armed group that has risen to prominence in Central Mali. It exerts a strong influence in the rural areas of the Ségou and Mopti regions (Diallo 2017: 303). The group's leader is the infamous radicalized preacher Amadou Kouffa (Tobie 2017: 6). Radical armed groups or actors are broadly defined in this paper as armed groups that are affiliated to an extremist religious ideology, often referred to 'jihadists', 'Islamists' and 'terrorists' in the Malian context, to which the term 'radical armed groups' seems to be a less politically and emotionally charged alternative.

The centre of radical armed activity has clearly shifted from Northern to Central Mali. In December 2017 the UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres stated in a report that the situation in Central and Northern Mali is extremely worrying and "especially in the regions of Mopti and Ségou, where there have been more terrorist or terrorist-related acts than in the five northern regions combined" (Africa News 2018). The available data on radical armed attacks in Mali support this claim. According to the statistics of the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) and the author's online monitoring of attacks in Mali (see Annex 1) the regions Mopti and Ségou experienced the largest share of attacks on civilians, Malian soldiers and peacekeepers by radical armed groups in every single month at least from November 2017 to February 2018 (ACLED 2018; Annex 1). Amnesty International also confirmed in 2017 that the largest numbers of attacks were taking place in Mopti and Ségou (Amnesty International 2017). Malian soldiers, state officials, UN peacekeepers, and even defenceless civilians and schools have been regular targets for radical armed groups in Central Mali (Annex 1; Tobie 2017: 1). Compared to the years before March 2017, casualties from violent attacks in the region of Mopti increased with 1800% in the six months immediately afterwards. In this relatively small six-month period the region witnessed more attacks than in all the fifty preceding months combined (Caselli-Michael 2017).

Radical armed groups in Central Mali such as Katiba Macina have used the frustrations and grievances of certain communities, especially the nomads among the Fulani, related to state governance, corruption and nepotism to mobilize and recruit among the local population (Diallo

2017: 299, 302). The rising presence of and mounting attacks by radical armed groups in Central Mali demonstrate that these organizations have an increasing access to human, material and financial resources in the region. The increase in attacks and assassinations throughout 2016 and 2017 attributed to them indeed indicate that the power of radical armed groups has been on the rise (Campana 2018: 25). In other words, the observations above are attestations of a significant process of radical armed mobilization in Central Mali. Tilly defines the process of mobilizations as an “increase in the resources available to a political actor for collective making of claims” (Tilly & Tarrow 2007: 217). A primary mobilization strategy for radical armed movements in Mali is their local insertion paired with the installation of greater means for recruitment (Campana 2018: 24). Operation Serval forced them to embed themselves in the remote rural areas of Northern and Central Mali where they try to promote an alternative socio-political order through force and seduction (Campana 2018: 24). The mobilization of radical armed groups in Central Mali means that local rural communities in the region increasingly come into contact with and experience the presence of these radical armed movements, which embed themselves there for self-sustainment, recruitment and further mobilization. The next chapter explains what interactions between the radical armed groups, traditional authorities and their communities have emerged from this development based on open sources and interviews conducted in Central Mali.

2.2. Inter-communal polarization

Conflict within and between communities, often concerning the use of natural resources such as land, is a deadly and growing threat to peace and stability in Central Mali (Tobie 2017: 9; Caselli-Michael 2017; Sahelien 2017). Competition for land such as agricultural plots or pasture is significant and unregulated by the Malian state (Sandor 2017: 12). The Bozo (fishermen), Fulani (pastoralists), the Dogon and the Bambara (farmers) are the main ethnic communities of Central Mali, which compete for natural resources (Tobie 2017: 9; Bagayoko et al. 2017).² Since 2014, violent conflicts between Fulani herders and Bambara or Dogon farmers has intensified and become regular in the region of Mopti (Sandor 2017: 12; Diallo 2017: 302). Tensions between communities, the creation of self-defence militias and risk of escalating tit-for-tat retaliatory violence between them has also threatened the north of Ségou (Sandor 2017: 12). Communal conflicts can be defined as “violent confrontations between non-state actors where the cleavages largely fall along ethnic or tribal lines” (Wig & Kromrey 2017: 9). Within this type of conflict we can in turn distinguish inter-communal conflict between such groups and intra-

² These ethnic groups are often characterized as either being mainly fishermen, pastoralists or farmers but in reality the multiple of these and many other sustenance activities are practiced within each group.

communal conflict within them (Wig & Kromrey 2017: 9). In Central Mali conflicts for natural resources, such as between herders and farmers, occur both within and between communities. However, in the case of inter-communal natural resources conflict, locals become opposed and mobilized along ethnic lines including Fulani, Dogon and Bambara constituencies. As a result, conflicts become extended beyond the localities from which the disputes originated. So while intra- and inter-communal conflict for natural resources such as land are both well represented in Central Mali, the latter is claimed to have the greatest potential for escalation and the development of larger scale violent conflict (Brossier, Jourde & Cissé 2018: 26-28). A survey from 2017 reveals that insecurity between communities is regarded as either an important issue (22 percent) or very important issue (78) by the inhabitants of Mopti and Ségou (Tobie 2017a: 6). Competition for land in Central Mali has increased significantly because of demographic growth and agricultural intensification, often at the expense of pastoralist grazing areas (Tobie 2017: 9). Fulani herders, frustrated by the loss of pasture due to the expansion of agricultural land regularly come into conflict with Dogon farmers who accuse the herders of trampling their fields with their livestock. Such disputes have led to violent clashes between the groups in which dozens of lives are lost each time (ICG 2016: 3). Resulting communal tensions and land conflicts have led to the formation and armament of local militias that constitute both responses to and aggravators of insecurity in Mopti and Ségou (Tobie 2017: 11-12, 16).

For example, in May 2016 inter-communal tensions led to clashes between Bambara and Fulani armed groups that killed over 40 people (ICG 2016: ii). In February 2017 in Ségou, 21 Fulani were killed in their village by a Bambara self-defence militia in retaliation to the murder of a Bambara shopkeeper (HRW 2017). Again in August 2017, dozens of Dogon and Fulani lost their lives in Mopti in inter-communal clashes over natural resources that have become increasingly frequent (Reliefweb 2017). Recently on the 23rd of June 2018, a group of *Dozos* (traditional hunters active in militias, of ethnically mixed composition but most often associated with the Dogon community by observers) attacked the Fulani village of Koumaga in the region of Mopti twice and killed 37 of its inhabitants (RFI 2018b). Still a month later on the 25th of July 2018, a group of *Dozos* attacked the village of Somena in the region of Mopti killing 18 Fulani civilians (Reuters 2018). During late May 2018, a Fulani militia called *L'Alliance pour le salut au Sahel* was created to protect the Fulani population against threats such as the primarily Dogon militia *Dan na Amassagou* mostly comprised of *Dozos*, which also claim in turn that they are merely there to protect their Dogon community (RFI 2018). Attacks between the groups started already shortly after the creation of the new militia (RFI 2018). These are merely a few examples of violent attacks between communities in Central Mali that can be found in open sources, which are documented in Annex 1 for the past eleven months. However, an enormous part of the violence certainly remains unreported, undocumented and invisible to outside observers. One

teacher from the village of Bandiagara in the region of Mopti stated that clashes between Fulani, Dogon, Bambara and Bozo communities are frequent but remain uncovered (Tabital Pulaaku International 2018). Some respondents in the region speculate that as much as 80 lives or more are lost every day due to communal violence of which only a fraction is registered.³ Estimates suggest that violence between communities is responsible for far more deaths in Central Mali than attacks by radical armed groups (Caselli-Michael 2017). The reports on attacks and violence between communities in Central Mali are likely to merely be the tip of the iceberg.

Divisions between ethnic communities in Central Mali certainly seem to be becoming increasingly pronounced and violent. Polarization is a process outlined by Tilly in his framework to theorize the existence of such potentially violent antagonisms between social groups. About this process Tilly writes:

Polarization involves widening of political and social space between claimants in a contentious episode and gravitation of previously uncommitted or moderate actors toward one, the other, or both extremes. (...) Polarization generally promotes collective violence because it makes the us–them boundary more salient, hollows out the uncommitted middle, intensifies conflict across the boundary, raises the stakes of winning or losing, and enhances opportunities for leaders to initiate action against their enemies (Tilly 2003: 21-22).

Polarization as a process thus constitutes the loss of a moderate middle to the benefit of the extremes on the far sides of the socio-political spectrum. Inter-communal polarization, fuelled by natural resources scarcity, has been both a cause and a result of the escalating and increasingly deadly occurrences of collective violence between communities in Central Mali. As Tilly indicates, polarization promotes collective violence such as the clashes and attacks between communities killing dozens of militia members and innocent civilians at the time. Those violent events in the context of inter-communal conflict may force former moderate community members to also join self-defence militias and seek vengeance or protection, thereby further intensifying communal polarization which will in turn elevate the potential for further inter-communal violence. This vicious cycle of inter-communal polarization and violent conflict, fuelled by natural resources scarcity, arguably constitutes the essence of the escalatory inter-communal conflict dynamic in Central Mali that concerned observers have been trying to make sense of in recent years.

While community members may merely join militias with the sole goal of self-defence and protection, such militias constitute a threat and a source of distrust at the opposing community as it wields offensive as well as defensive military capacity. Furthermore, attacking

³ Interview with researcher Anca-Elena Ursu on 16 May 2018 at the Clingendael Conflict Research Unit's office in The Hague.

first may give the upper hand strategically. These two components, namely indistinguishable defensive and offensive military capability and the effectiveness of offense versus defence, constitute what scholars call the security dilemma (Posen 1993: 28-9). As the prefect of Bankass in the region of Mopti, seemingly aware of the local communal security dilemma, put it: “The creation of self-defense groups, vigilance brigades, these are the communal responses to real security problems, but the people must understand that taking up arms to defend themselves is not the solution. (...) These are dangerous solutions because if all groups, all communities are armed (...) that is the danger” (Interpeace & IMRAP 2017: 51 – *Translated from French by author*). Polarization brings the security dilemma and its risks closer as it undermines trust between groups and increases the willingness of group members and the opportunities of its leaders to engage in violent collective action against other groups.

2.3. Inter-enabling communal polarization and radical armed mobilization

Communal conflict is a key enabling factor for radical armed groups in Central Mali. It offers them entry points to position themselves in the security landscape as allies and providers of assistance, protection and mediation while for the government it means a loss of legitimacy due to its inability to offer security and resolve conflict (Sandor 2017: 16; Guéhenno 2017; Tobie 2017: 12-13 16; ICG 2016: 9-10, 24; Diallo 2017: 300). Radical armed elements therefore instrumentalize and benefit from inter-communal tensions as it offers them the opportunity to make themselves useful to locals suffering from insecurity and thereby to gain leverage and consolidate their positions (ICG 2016: 20; Diallo 2017: 303; Campana 2018: 27). For example, on the 12th of March 2018 a group of *Dozos* that had attacked Fulani villages a few days earlier was intercepted and eliminated by Katiba Macina forces (Annex 1), which could have been interpreted as a welcome act of protection by the threatened Fulani. Another form of security provision by radical armed actors practiced in Central Mali is the mitigation of disputes between individual herders by the followers of Kouffa in the rural zones of the region of Mopti (Sandor 2017: 16).

To a certain extent, this enabling relationship between radical armed actors and communal conflict also works the other way around. The increasing presence of radical armed groups in Central Mali and their recruitment among the local population has further deteriorated tensions between the Fulani, Bambara and Dogon communities and stimulated the growth of abusive self-defence militias (HRW 2017). The Fulani community in Central Mali experiences unjust victimization from the government and elements of other communities because it is believed to be affiliated with radical armed groups. As victims of “mistaken affinity” every Fulani is viewed as a “*de facto* jihadist” (Ibrahim & Zapata 2018: 30). In reaction to attacks

by radical armed groups, Dogon and Bambara self-defence militias have targeted Fulani civilians (Ibrahim & Zapata 2018: 30). Attacks by radical armed groups and the proliferation of negative and generalizing narratives of the Fulani community being associated with those groups thus further inflame inter-communal conflict and polarization in Central Mali. Some local Fulani armed self-defence groups in the region of Mopti that were created in 2012 in response to attacks by Dogon farmers allegedly subsequently joined Islamist armed groups in their conquest of northern Mali (Sandor 2017: 12). The processes of radical armed mobilization and inter-communal polarization thus operate in co-facilitating and inter-enabling ways. The next chapter demonstrates through which relational mechanisms these interdependent conflict processes are connected to traditional authorities in the region.

3. Relational Mechanisms and Traditional Authority

3.1. Co-optation attempts

It is remarkable that when one searches online for assassinations of village chiefs, imams and other traditional authorities in Africa in recent years, almost all cases that pop up seem to have taken place in either the region Mopti (most frequently) or the region of Ségou. This seems to suggest that the phenomenon of attacks on traditional authorities is more strongly represented in Central Mali, or at least more often reported on, than in any other African region currently experiencing violent conflict. Traditional authorities including village chiefs, imams and other religious figures have been frequent targets for attacks by radical armed groups, especially by Kouffa's Katiba Macina (Tobie 2017: 5, 7; Diallo 2017: 302). While formal local authorities such as mayors have been targeted for assassination, traditional and religious authorities have more frequently been the victims of Amadou Kouffa's followers (Mali7 2017). Below will follow a chronological overview of events, documented in news articles and reports, that involve the use of lethal violence by radical armed groups against traditional authorities in Central Mali. These descriptions are coupled with explanations and elaborations on the events whenever provided by these open sources. The purpose is not to present exact numbers of fatal attacks on traditional authorities by radical armed groups in Central Mali. Such statistics are unavailable and one cannot assume, as with inter-communal violence, that open sources cover all relevant events. The purpose is rather to demonstrate the frequency and some of the provided backgrounds of these attacks. The paragraphs afterwards present further explanations and interpretations of such violent events, this time provided by local respondents from the region of Mopti, many of them traditional authorities themselves. The Conflict Research Unit (CRU) of the Clingendael Institute conducted these interviews in Mali.

Open sources: reports of attacks on traditional authorities

On the 14th of August 2015, Aladji Sekou, the imam of Barkerou, a village in the region of Ségou, was assassinated. According to a local official the act was committed by men of Amadou Kouffa who had tried unsuccessfully to get the imam to back their cause in the months before the assassination. He had refused repeated attempts to be recruited by the radical armed group and was therefore targeted as an enemy (Jakarta Post 2015). The imam was moderate and preached for peace, unity and fraternity. He became the adversary of extremist group because he did not accept that they would indoctrinate the local population (RFI 2015). On April 2015, Amadou Issa Dicko, the village chief of Dogo located in the region of Mopti, was assassinated. The perpetrators were unidentified but suspected to be Kouffa's men (RFI 2015b). According to

sources within the village, members of Kouffa's group had visited the chief and ordered him to join them and apply Sharia law. The chief refused out of patriotism after which Kouffa's men harassed him and those close to him with all kinds of threats. The chief reported them to the Malian government forces and the radical followers were arrested but released again after two weeks for unknown reasons. They subsequently assassinated him, both for refusing to collaborate with them and for denouncing them to the authorities according to a relative of the victim (Malijet 2015).

In 2016, Fulani extremists, assumed to be Kouffa's men, assassinated the imam of the village Nampalari in the region of Ségou who had also refused to support their cause (Sandor 2017: 17; Hagberg et al. 2017: 30). In mid-September 2016, a marabout (religious teacher) from Sofara village in the region of Mopti was killed for his alleged relationship with the Malian armed forces. Witnesses state that on multiple occasions he had welcomed soldiers into his house that patrolled the zone, where Islamists had been active as well (HRW 2017b). On the 7th of November 2016, an alleged Islamist group executed Kola Kane Diallo, the village chief of Diaba in the region of Mopti. He was shot in front of his family. A villager believed that he had been killed as a warning to the rest of the community to not collaborate with the Malian army. Malian military forces had become more active in the area shortly before. A witness also stated that the assassinated chief had been threatened multiple times by the men but that he nevertheless refused to leave his village (HRW 2017c).

On the 26th of March 2017 Adry Ongoïba, the chief of Yirma (Mondoro), a Dogon village, was assassinated. Radical armed actors in the region are suspected to be the perpetrators (HRW 2017; Nord Sud Journal 2017). On the 28th of May 2017, Hira Diallo, the advisor of the village chief of Mougoukana (Mondoro), was assassinated. The perpetrators were not identified but members of Kouffa's Macina Liberation Front were suspected as they have been known to target anyone who collaborates with the Malian government army or international forces. However, it is also possible that the assassination simply concerned the settlement of a dispute as the zone has experienced communal tensions (MaliActu 2017b). Armed men assassinated the advisor of the village chief of Fatoma in the region of Mopti on November 2017 (NetAfrique 2017). On the 14th of February 2018, presumed militants of Kouffa's Katiba Macina assassinated an imam in Senegou in the region of Mopti. One of the assailants was wounded in the attack and captured by locals who lynched him (Nsaibia 2018). Three months later on the 15th of May 2018, another imam in the region of Mopti, this time from the village of Toupéré, was assassinated by armed assailants (Nsaibia 2018b).

The information above gathered from open sources confirms that traditional authorities including village chiefs and religious clergy have regularly been targeted and killed by radical armed groups in Central Mali, at least since 2015. There were explanations as to the probable

motivations behind the violence were provided, it appeared that traditional authorities in Central Mali were killed in the first place for resisting, refusing to collaborate with, to be recruited by, or to support the cause of a radical armed group in the region, namely Kouffa's Katiba Macina. Other explanations that were given was retaliation for allegedly collaborating or affiliation with the state's security forces. In another case the act was interpreted as an attempt to prevent the community from collaborating with the state's security forces, where their presence had intensified, by killing the local traditional authority as a threat towards the rest of the population. While these openly accessible accounts demonstrate the cases in which the interactions between traditional authorities and radical armed actors led to the death of the former, they do not provide much insight into interactions between the two that have not (yet) resulted in the use of lethal violence. The accounts from the interviews presented below provide further information on the relations between radical armed actors and traditional authorities in Central Mali. The interviews evoke two intertwined patterns, namely the forced co-operation and marginalization of traditional authorities by radical armed groups.

Interview pattern 1: traditional authorities forced to co-operate

An interviewed chief from the region of Mopti stated that fear reigns everywhere that chiefs will be attacked by jihadists.⁴ A Demobilization, Disarmament and Reintegration implementer expressed that chiefs in the region have all been attacked in one way or another.⁵ The following accounts, that are paraphrased and only referred to with utmost diligence for the protection the respondents' identities and whereabouts, sketch a pattern in which traditional authorities in Central Mali are commonly forced to co-operate with radical armed actors. From the perspective of the respondents, local chiefs, imams and other traditional authorities are often pressured and threatened into doing the bidding of radical armed actors and to act in correspondence with their will. The respondents repeatedly stated that they and/or their families are killed, abused, abducted, exiled or bereft of their belongings in cases of non-compliance.

One chief from the region of Mopti stated that jihadists approach chiefs such as him and ask them to collaborate, to offer them accommodation and to furnish them with people as soldiers. If one refuses, they are killed. Abductions and subsequent killings of chiefs have become habitual stated the interviewed chief.⁶ A local mayor in the region of Mopti stated that the village chiefs who give judgments when mitigating local conflicts that correspond with the will of the

⁴ CRU Interview with a local chief from the region of Mopti. Conducted by researcher Anca-Elena Ursu in Mali. April or May, 2018. See A. E. Ursu (2018) 'Under the gun: Resource conflicts and embattled traditional authorities in Central Mali', *Netherlands Institute of International Relations 'Clingendael'*.

⁵ CRU Interview with a DDR official from the region of Mopti. Conducted by researcher Anca-Elena Ursu in Mali. April or May, 2018. See Ursu (2018) 'Under the gun'.

⁶ CRU Interview with a local chief from the region of Mopti. Conducted by researcher Anca-Elena Ursu in Mali. April or May, 2018. See Ursu (2018) 'Under the gun'.

jihadists are allowed to stay in place. Others that manage their villages badly on the other hand are threatened and flee.⁷ Two Bozo chiefs expressed in an interview that the great majority of chiefs have fled to the south of the country but that those that stayed are obligated to collaborate with the extremist armed movements in order not to lose their livestock. In order to preserve their lives and those of their families they had to accept the dictates of the extremist movements.⁸ A chief's representative from the region of Mopti stated that the law of the jihadists reigns in all villages where the security forces are absent and that the traditional authorities are at their mercy.⁹ A report from a local reconciliation commission that was obtained through CRU's fieldwork in the region of Mopti stated that chiefs who have been kidnapped or killed were those that refused the principles of the jihadists, such as discrediting the state, adhering to their conservative ideology, or fulfilling their demands such as giving up their sons for recruitment. The report states as well that collaboration is effectuated by these groups through violence and that the chiefs are restrained in their actions.¹⁰ One village chief stated that his father, who at the time was the village chief, resisted the jihadists who came to impose Sharia. They therefore killed him, took power and dominated the village. He stated that traditional authorities are now at their mercy and are ordered by the jihadists to inform the villagers of their decisions on regulation, management and coordination in the village.¹¹ A local mayor also explained during an interview that jihadists tried to assure the adhesion of the customary chiefs and threatened them to accept or die. He stated that those that stayed in place had accepted superficially and as a result pacts emerged between the chiefs and the jihadists.¹²

Like village chiefs, religious figures have in some cases also been forced to co-operate and comply with the demands of radical armed groups in the region of Mopti according to the statements from local respondents. A local Malian researcher stated in an interview that religious leaders protect themselves by adhering to the jihadists, even if the radicals do not even seem to know the Koran to a reasonable extent.¹³ One village chief stated that imams and marabouts are targeted by radical armed actors who want them to preach and implement Sharia

⁷ CRU Interview with a local mayor from the region of Mopti. Conducted by researcher Anca-Elena Ursu in Mali. April or May, 2018. See Ursu (2018) 'Under the gun'.

⁸ CRU Interview with two Bozo chiefs from the region of Mopti. Conducted by researcher Anca-Elena Ursu in Mali. April or May, 2018. See Ursu (2018) 'Under the gun'.

⁹ CRU Interview with a chief's representative from the region of Mopti. Conducted by researcher Anca-Elena Ursu in Mali. April or May, 2018. See Ursu (2018) 'Under the gun'.

¹⁰ Reconciliation Commission Report. Retrieved in Mali. April or May, 2018.

¹¹ CRU Interview with a local chief from the region of Mopti. Conducted by researcher Anca-Elena Ursu in Mali. April or May, 2018. See Ursu (2018) 'Under the gun'.

¹² CRU Interview with a local mayor from the region of Mopti. Conducted by researcher Anca-Elena Ursu in Mali. April or May, 2018. See Ursu (2018) 'Under the gun'.

¹³ CRU Interview with a local researcher from the region of Mopti. Conducted by researcher Anca-Elena Ursu in Mali. April or May, 2018. See Ursu (2018) 'Under the gun'.

law.¹⁴ A local stated that imams and chiefs in Central Mali are obligated to collaborate with the radicals. However, he explained that this is often merely a superficial form of collaboration that is born out of the circumstances, a façade that they need to keep up, as they must remain quiet in order not to be exiled.¹⁵ A chief's representative from the region of Mopti stated that jihadists also tend to summon the imam by force and dictate their decisions onto him so that he in turn can inform the populations at the prayers.¹⁶

Interview pattern 2: traditional authorities marginalized

Respondents often expressed that radical armed groups have sought to impose their own order, manage the communities directly and provide justice themselves with no or minimal interference from the traditional authorities. This paragraph presents accounts from the perspective of the respondents on the ways in which traditional authorities have been removed completely or become marginalized under the rule of the radical armed actors. Respondents stated that radical armed actors took over some of the governance functions of traditional authorities such as the provision of justice. Some respondents felt that traditional authorities have often been reduced to the status of common citizens, losing much or all of their influence and governance capacity that they used to exercise before the arrival of the radical armed groups.

One interviewed chief from the region of Mopti stated that jihadists wanted to chase away customary and formal authorities where they wanted to take power so that they would be able to manage the populations to their own liking. He stated that having a powerful reputation in the village is therefore sufficient for becoming a target.¹⁷ The two Bozo chiefs expressed in the interview that the extremist groups ended traditional authority when they arrived in the centre of Mali as they took all their power. They appropriated all power concerning the management of water and fishing and became the sole masters.¹⁸ Another local confirmed as well that the arrival of Kouffa in the region coincided with a transfer of power and justice provision in the villages from the chiefs to the jihadists. Now they settle the cases and give judgments instead of the chiefs.¹⁹

¹⁴ CRU Interview with a local chief from the region of Mopti. Conducted by researcher Anca-Elena Ursu in Mali. April or May, 2018. See Ursu (2018) 'Under the gun'.

¹⁵ CRU Interview with a local inhabitant from the region of Mopti. Conducted by researcher Anca-Elena Ursu in Mali. April or May, 2018. See Ursu (2018) 'Under the gun'.

¹⁶ CRU Interview with a chief's representative from the region of Mopti. Conducted by researcher Anca-Elena Ursu in Mali. April or May, 2018. See Ursu (2018) 'Under the gun'.

¹⁷ CRU Interview with a local chief from the region of Mopti. Conducted by researcher Anca-Elena Ursu in Mali. April or May, 2018. See Ursu (2018) 'Under the gun'.

¹⁸ CRU Interview with two Bozo chiefs from the region of Mopti. Conducted by researcher Anca-Elena Ursu in Mali. April or May, 2018. See Ursu (2018) 'Under the gun'.

¹⁹ CRU Interview with a local inhabitant from the region of Mopti. Conducted by researcher Anca-Elena Ursu in Mali. April or May, 2018. See Ursu (2018) 'Under the gun'.

An interviewed communal advisor from the region of Mopti stated that chiefs have lost their authority. Extremist movements have taken total control and the decisions of traditional authorities, as well as those of local formal authorities, do not count anymore. Chiefs have become like all others, like simple civilians who suffer abuse and violations like the rest do.²⁰ A chief's representative from the region of Mopti explained that before the arrival of armed (radical) movements traditional authority was respected within the villages and that it regulated his village. But when they came they took the executive power from the traditional authorities and imposed decisions on them. They taxed harvests and animals and provided justice if there were disputes. The village chief and imam on the contrary no longer have any power and are treated like any other civilian.²¹ A chief's representative from the region of Mopti stated that traditional authorities have become like 'kings without crowns'. With the arrival of the jihadists they have lost their authority. They dictate their will onto the population.²²

Forced co-operation and marginalization in tandem

The repeatedly expressed phenomena of forced co-operation and marginalization of traditional authorities in areas controlled by radical armed actors as expressed by the respondents do not simply seem to occur separately but rather in tandem. For example, one interviewed chief from the region of Mopti explained that chiefs lost their authority with the arrival of the extremists in the sense that they took power and introduced new laws that were enforced through fear and coercion. He emphasizes that they did not contest their positions as chiefs but that they needed to act in accordance with the rules of Islam and that they were warned in case of violations of the extremists' rules and decisions. They warned them to be careful and that they could be killed if they opposed their decisions. The same interviewed chief also stated that many chiefs indeed received death threats because of their stance with regard to extremist movements and because of deeds that apparently displeased those groups.²³ Accounts by respondents of traditional authorities losing all power, becoming 'kings without crowns' or common civilians, often converged in this fashion with statements on traditional authorities being instrumentalized under the radical armed groups that manipulated their decisions, forced them to co-operate and used them for their own purposes. When interpreting the perspectives provided by the respondents, these two patterns thus seem to be intertwined and coexisting in the same local

²⁰ CRU Interview with a communal advisor from the region of Mopti. Conducted by researcher Anca-Elena Ursu in Mali. April or May, 2018. See Ursu (2018) 'Under the gun'.

²¹ CRU Interview with a chief's representative from the region of Mopti. Conducted by researcher Anca-Elena Ursu in Mali. April or May, 2018. See Ursu (2018) 'Under the gun'.

²² CRU Interview with a chief's representative from the region of Mopti. Conducted by researcher Anca-Elena Ursu in Mali. April or May, 2018. See Ursu (2018) 'Under the gun'.

²³ CRU Interview with a local chief from the region of Mopti. Conducted by researcher Anca-Elena Ursu in Mali. April or May, 2018. See Ursu (2018) 'Under the gun'.

contexts. It should still be emphasized that, as with all conclusions drawn from the interview data, this is merely the interpretation of the author rather than an objective truth.

It should be emphasized that multiple respondents seemed to express that any form of co-operation between radical armed groups and traditional authorities is effectuated through severe pressures and fear, resulting in façades of co-operation and superficial acceptance rather than active collaboration. This behaviour seems to correspond to the case of North and South Kivu in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo during the late 1990s where the *Rassemblement congolais pour la démocratie* (RCD), an armed group, sought to control the territory by coercively co-opting local traditional chiefs. Those chiefs responded to these co-optation attempts by complying with the RCD's demands to the minimal extent needed to retain their positions (Tull 2003: 438-9). This echoes the expressions of the interviewees on traditional authorities in Central Mali remaining silent or co-operating superficially with radical armed actors just in order to be able to remain in place, and to protect themselves, their families and their belongings.

Caught in the middle between the state and radical armed actors

Another theme that emerged during the interviews was the threat and pressure that traditional authorities experience from two sides, namely from the state and from radical armed actors. One chief from the Mopti region conveyed this situation in an interview when he stated that the chiefs in the region are 'caught in a vice' ("pris en étau") between the state and the extremist movements, with every party thinking they are on the other side.²⁴ Besides the open sources an interviewed local from the region of Mopti confirmed as well that chiefs are sometimes kidnapped or killed by radical armed actors because they collaborate with the state.²⁵ Furthermore, with the retreat of state officials, village chiefs in Central Mali are often simply the only state representatives left for radical armed actors to target.²⁶ Their affiliation with the state since colonial times has thus made contemporary traditional authorities in Central Mali vulnerable to targeting by radical armed actors. However, Malian security forces have also been known to target traditional authorities during their operations against radical armed actors in Central Mali. Human Rights Watch has documented at least two cases of village chiefs being arbitrarily detained and then killed by government soldiers conducting such operations, one on 19 December 2016 at Issèye in the region of Ségou and one on 21 February 2018 at Sokolo in the region of Mopti (HRW 2017c; HRW 2018). Ironically, the same chief from Issèye village was himself detained and tortured by radical armed forces before in 2015 (HRW 2017). To a certain

²⁴ CRU Interview with a local chief from the region of Mopti. Conducted by researcher Anca-Elena Ursu in Mali. April or May, 2018. See Ursu (2018) 'Under the gun'.

²⁵ CRU Interview with a local inhabitant from the region of Mopti. Conducted by researcher Anca-Elena Ursu in Mali. April or May, 2018. See Ursu (2018) 'Under the gun'.

²⁶ Interview with researcher Anca-Elena Ursu at the CRU office at The Hague on May 30, 2018.

extent, traditional authorities in Central Mali thus currently find themselves trapped in the middle of conflicting armed actors where suspicions of collaboration or affiliation with any of the parties in conflict has resulted in eliminations. This situation is comparable to Makoni district in Zimbabwe during the civil war in the 1970s. Here, traditional chiefs were caught in the middle of the fighting between the Rhodesian state and the rebels. Both parties in conflict suspected the chiefs of working together with the enemy and therefore targeted and killed them (Ranger 1982: 36). The widespread killing of traditional authorities decimated them in the region (Kriger 1988: 318). The physical threat of being killed by one of the parties in conflict also characterizes the fragile situation of traditional authorities in Central Mali.

In the case of Central Mali, another dimension can be added to this entrapment between the conflicting state and armed actors. In the first chapter, it was explained that colonial and post-colonial practices in which the unpopular state both integrated and substituted traditional institutions led to the erosion of the governance capacity and local legitimacy of traditional authorities in Central Mali. In line with these premises, one respondent from the region of Mopti stated that traditional authorities have indeed been losing their legitimacy because of their affiliation with the state and its levying of taxes.²⁷ From the statements in the interviews it appeared that radical armed actors in Central Mali are currently also both substituting the governance tasks of traditional authorities and obligating them to co-operate with them, resulting in their marginalization and the erosion of their decision-making power. According to one interviewed village chief from the Mopti region, the practices of radical armed actors in the region have caused some traditional authorities to flee and seek refuge in a city, resulting in a sense of abandonment among their communities and the erosion of their legitimacy.²⁸ Staying in place and co-operating to the necessary extent with occupying radical armed actors can just as well result in a loss of legitimacy. For example, after the occupation of 2012, the population allegedly mistrusted the *cadis* (religious judges) that had remained in place instead of fleeing as they were suspected of adhering to the ideology and policies of the extremists.²⁹ Were the state has retreated and radical armed actors have taken control, they thus seem to further erode the legitimacy and governance capacity of traditional authorities as colonial and post-colonial state administrations had already done before. In this sense, traditional authorities in Central Mali are caught in the middle between state and radical armed actors in two major ways. This double entrapment manifests itself in the combination of physical threats (killings, abuse, persecution

²⁷ CRU Interview with a local inhabitant from the region of Mopti. Conducted by researcher Anca-Elena Ursu in Mali. April or May, 2018. See Ursu (2018) 'Under the gun'.

²⁸ CRU Interview with a local chief from the region of Mopti. Conducted by researcher Anca-Elena Ursu in Mali. April or May, 2018. See Ursu (2018) 'Under the gun'.

²⁹ Paraphrased statement made by a credible expert during the HagueTalk on Malian customary justice of April 10, 2018 in The Hague.

etc.) and institutional decay (the loss of governance capacity and local legitimacy), the two of which have been effectuated from both state and extremist sides.

Conceptualization: Attempted co-optation and resulting broken negotiations

Tilly includes the concept of co-optation in his short register of identified mechanisms. He defines co-optation as “incorporation of a previously excluded political actor into some center of power” (Tilly & Tarrow 2007: 215). His colleagues Mark Irving Lichbach and Alan S. Zuckerman identify co-optation as one of the component mechanisms for the process of mobilization (Lichbach & Zuckerman 2009: 9). Maria Joshua, an author who has written extensively on co-optation strategies, emphasizes that “As to *co-optation*, traditional leaders or protagonists of traditional forces are at the center of attention” (2011: 7). This paragraph argues that this has been the case as well for the strategies with which radical armed actors in Central Mali have approached local traditional authorities. The sociologist Peter Selznick who devised the term co-optation in the late 1940s defined it as “the process of absorbing new elements into the leadership or policy-determining structure of an organization as a means of averting threats to its stability or existence” (1949: 13). After operation Serval, radical armed groups embedded themselves in Central Mali’s rural zones in order to sustain their organizations and continue mobilization (Campana 2018: 24). Co-opting of traditional authorities seems to have been one of the strategies that they attempted to implement in this process. The open sources and interview data seems to suggest that such co-optation strategies usually resulted in superficial forms of co-operation and compliance and often even resistance and non-compliance rather than effective integration of traditional authorities into the apparatus of radical armed groups. This relational mechanism is therefore put forward as *attempted* co-optation in correspondence with these findings.

The open sources and interviews analyzed above affirm that radical armed groups that infiltrated rural areas in Central Mali have approached, attempted to recruit and secure the support of local traditional authorities. Multiple sources from Central Mali claim that the demands of radical armed actors from traditional authorities have included the provisions of recruits.³⁰ This seems to suggest that the attempted co-optation of traditional authorities is indeed part of mobilization strategies of radical armed actors in Central Mali. This would not be the first case of traditional authorities being co-opted as a mobilization strategy of armed groups in Africa. In the 1990s, the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) even integrated local chiefs into their military hierarchy and forced them to extract the demanded quotas of food and child recruits from their communities (Leonardi 2007a: 402; Leonardi 2007b: 440-443).

³⁰ CRU Interview with a local chief from the region of Mopti. Conducted in Mali. April or May, 2018; Reconciliation Commission Report. Retrieved in Mali. April or May, 2018.

Instances of refusal, non-compliance and resistance that emerged from the co-optation attempts by radical armed actors in Central Mali have been met by threats, abductions and killings of traditional authorities. Tilly calls this type of violence 'broken negotiations', which he defines as "various forms of collective action generate resistance or rivalry to which one or more parties respond by actions that damage persons and/or objects (...) all of which frequently occur with no more than threats of violence yet sometimes produce physical damage" (Tilly 2003: 16). The interviews revealed that all traditional authorities in areas where radical armed groups had been active were threatened to obey and not to resist them. In a number of instances, including in the cases from the open sources, resistance and rivalry escalated into killings, sometimes interpreted by locals as a warning to the rest of the community. About one subclass of broken negotiations Tilly writes:

Some organizations specialize in controlling coercive means, threatening to use those means if necessary but seeking compliance without violence if possible. Examples include not only established agents of repression but also mafiosi, racketeers, extortionists, paramilitary forces, and perpetrators of military coups. When such specialists in coercive means encounter or anticipate resistance, they commonly mount ostentatious but selective displays of violence. (...) The strategy is most successful, ironically, when specialists in coercion never actually have to deploy their violent means (Tilly 2003: 198).

The many observed killings of traditional authorities in Central Mali could be interpreted as such forms of broken negotiations. Researcher Anca-Elena Ursu suggests that threats against traditional authorities by radical armed actors in Central Mali concretize in reaction to non-compliance of chiefs in time, or in reaction to frustration to military activities in the region.³¹ Both open sources and the interviews seem to suggest that radical armed groups in Central Mali are such specialists in coercive means that have resorted to selective displays of violence targeting traditional authorities in reaction to or anticipation of resistance or non-compliance from them or their communities. Co-optation attempts by radical armed actors in Central Mali can be regarded as the solicited recruitment or integration of traditional authorities followed by coercion and threats that often concretize into displays of violence (broken negotiations) in cases of perceived or anticipated non-compliance or similar frustrations. Radical armed actors in Central Mali frequently seem to pursue co-optation tactics in their interactions with local traditional authorities when infiltrating communities and seeking access to recruits and resources. Co-optation attempts of traditional authorities therefore seem to be part of their mobilization strategy in the region's rural areas. Co-optation attempts thus constitute a

³¹ Interview with researcher Anca-Elena Ursu at the CRU office at The Hague on May 30, 2018.

relational mechanism that links traditional authorities to the process of radical armed mobilization in Central Mali.

3.2. Intra-communal brokerage

A primary responsibility of traditional authorities is protecting the social cohesion within their community. They mitigate disputes between locals through the various customary justice practices that they implement. These traditional authorities that provide customary justice include community leaders such as village chiefs, religious figures such as imams, marabouts and cadis, traditional communicators such as griots, and other respected figures such as elderly sages (Goff, Diallo & Ursu 2017: 12). Customary justice practices implemented by these traditional authorities varies across Mali from locality to locality but in general they serve to preserve societal harmony and are most frequently called upon in cases of land conflict between community members (Goff, Diallo & Ursu 2017: 12, 36). These are the traditional governance practices that, according to the interviews, at various instances seem to be manipulated or supplanted by radical armed actors in the rural areas they occupied in Central Mali. The scholar who founded the discipline of sociology, Emile Durkheim, established his influential social solidarity theory. He perceived society as a social order in which people are restrained and contained through social facts, that are functional in the sense that they only exist if society somehow benefits from them. The widespread practices of mediation, arbitration and dispute resolution by African traditional authorities between community members can be viewed as one of those functional social facts that bear societal utility (Kariuki 2015: 2-3).

The protection of intra-communal harmony by African traditional authorities can in turn be interpreted as a manifestation of social capital. The sociologist Robert D. Putnam's influential social capital theory explains the formation and sustainment of communal societies. He suggested that people are bound together through social networks, bonds, reciprocity and trust that enable them to co-exist and guarantee the existence and effective functioning of society (Kariuki 2015: 2). The first of two types of social capital distinguished by Putnam, namely *bonding social capital*, secures ties between members of the same group. Dispute resolution by African traditional authorities can be understood as a manifestation of such bonding social capital (Kariuki 2015: 2). The rest of this paragraph will be devoted to how the bonding social capital of traditional authorities in Central Mali raises the potential for collective action of their communities, with both positive and negative consequences, and how this fits into Tilly's relational mechanisms-processes framework.

Ana Arjona, an expert on rebel governance, writes that legitimate and effective pre-existing local governance institutions, including traditional and religious authorities, greatly increase the likelihood of the emergence of resistance against the occupying non-state armed

actors that replace those governance institutions (Arjona 2014: 8-11). The pre-existence of such legitimate and effective local governance institutions namely gives the community a stake in their preservation and their protection against intruders. It secondly increases the extent to which community members have shared norms, conflict resolution, collective trust, reciprocity and organizational capacity, all of which are factors that determine the community's capacity for collective action and resistance against non-state armed groups (Arjona 2014: 11-13). Arjona thus indirectly describes how the bonding social capital of traditional authorities elevates their communities' potential for collective action and resistance against oppression by armed groups in conflict situations. African traditional authorities have demonstrated the capacity to mobilize their communities against threats posed by armed groups before in other contexts. In the 1990s civil war in Sierra Leone traditional chiefs were subject to targeted killings by the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) (Vincent 2012: 3, 11). In order to protect themselves and their communities against the brutal RUF attacks, local chiefs mobilized and financed militias called Civil Defence Forces to fight back. These traditional authorities levied taxes to provide funds and used social sanctions to promote participation in these militias which successfully provided defence against the RUF (Weinstein & Humphreys 2008: 441-3). The next case of Kouakourou, a village in the region of Mopti, demonstrates a case in which community members in Central Mali rallied around their traditional authorities to refuse and resist the dictates of radical armed groups that sought to dominate them.

The village of Kouakourou used to be occupied by the radical militants of Amadou Kouffa. In September 2017 a group of young people defiantly lighted fire crackers. They did this after the militants lashed a local old woman for not wearing a veil, as a form of protest against the harsh punishments implement against community members. In response the radical militants ordered the local village chief to hand over the people who set off the fire crackers. The village chief refused and he was swiftly supported by the inhabitants who collectively came out of their homes to confront the armed extremists. The militants therefore withdrew but threatened to abduct the village chief if their demands were not met within 24 hours (Sahelien 2017b). In the weeks following the incident, the village had become a symbol of resistance in the region but it became virtually besieged by the jihadists who remained to threaten its surroundings. The village has managed to survive through government aid and protection which the inhabitants need as they cannot go out to tend to their fields or cattle for fear of being killed. The chief remains with the fearful inhabitants in the village who no longer accept the harassment of the islamist militants. The local imam gives sermons to offer spiritual support to the community members in the dire situation (Magassa, Monjanel and Dine 2017).

The bonding social capital of traditional authorities thus seems to be able to buttress communal resilience and resistance against radical armed groups in Central Mali. However, the

corresponding increased capacity for collective action may also result in the formation of armed self-defence groups, that have aggravated the tensions, conflict and polarization between communities in the region. In the context of the creation of self-defence militias to supplement the weak presence of security forces in Central Mali, multiple Bambara chiefs declared to have taken matters into their own hands because the Malian forces had failed to protect their villages and goods (HRW 2017d). In 2016, the killings and assassination attempts of Bambara village chiefs in the region of Mopti motivated elements in the community to arm itself and massacre thirty people in the village of Malémana (Interpeace & IMRAP 2017: 30; Malijet 2016). In 2012 at the start of the crisis the Fulani chief of the village of Boulekessi, situated in the region of Mopti close to the border with Burkina Faso, joined MUJAO and recruited men in his zone for this radical armed group. He explained that he took up arms not to fight the state but to protect his community against other hostile armed elements in the region (Sangaré 2016: 9). In the Macina, an area within the region of Ségou bordering to the region of Mopti, Fulani village chiefs have been gathering since 2013 to raise funds, mobilize young people, and promote the idea among the government in Bamako of creating self-defence groups (ICG 2016: 18). In 2014 and 2015 delegations of village chiefs went to Bamako to publicly support the creation of self-defence brigades. They also held meetings to pass on the idea in the centre of the country. Some prominent individuals expressed criticism as they feared that taking up arms would aggravate local tensions (ICG 2016: 18). One interviewed chief from the region of Mopti also claimed that Fulani chiefs asked their community to arm themselves to protect the region at the start of Mali's crisis.³² It must be emphasized, however, that reports of traditional authorities forming or supporting self-defence militias in Central Mali are very limited. In the interviews traditional authorities criticised such practices. One village chief from the region of Mopti expressed for example that such self-defence groups could only provide superficial peace because armed populations are very dangerous.³³

Bonding social capital enables local community members to engage in challenging forms of collective action including development activities and responding to disaster situations (Ostrom & Ahn 2007: 10-11). Local development constitutes one of the main governance functions of African traditional authorities (Ubink 2016: 7). The communal capacity for collective action that traditional authorities in Central Mali and elsewhere in Africa elevate through their bonding social capital can manifest itself in various and disparate ways. These include local development, resistance against oppressive armed groups, and the formation of self-defence militias. The latter both constitutes a response to insecurity and inter-communal

³² CRU Interview with a local chief from the region of Mopti. Conducted by researcher Anca-Elena Ursu in Mali. April or May, 2018. See Ursu (2018) 'Under the gun'.

³³ CRU Interview with a local village chief from the region of Mopti. Conducted by researcher Anca-Elena Ursu in Mali. April or May, 2018. See Ursu (2018) 'Under the gun'.

conflict, and the means to deteriorate them further. This concern was relatively comprehensively expressed in a report on the security situation in Central Mali by Interpeace. It states that local leaders in the region of Mopti take their responsibility towards their communities to find solutions to the insecurity that they are exposed to in light of the incapacity of the state (Interpeace & IMRAP 2017: 52). They engage together in collective initiatives to ensure their own security. These social projects constitute a form of resilience and a unifying force. However, it depends whether this resilience remains positive and non-violent, or whether it will contribute to violence, steer towards a direction of armament and reinforce cleavages between opposed communities (Interpeace & IMRAP 2017: 52). Such resilience-building and unifying social processes guided by local leaders must thus be channelled in order to contribute to an appeased situation instead of leading up to the armament of communities and potential violent confrontations (Interpeace & IMRAP 2017: 52). In short, the case of Central Mali demonstrates both the profound ambiguity and great importance that is vested in the bonding social capacity of local community leaders including traditional authorities in conflict situations.

A relational mechanism identified by Tilly, that is remarkably similar or even synonymous to Putnam's social capital, is what he terms *brokerage*. Tilly defines the mechanism of brokerage as the action of "connecting at least two social sites more directly than they were previously connected" (Tilly 2003: 21). Both social capital and brokerage thus refer to the formation and reinforcement of social ties, bonds or connections between social actors. Tilly refers to the actors that are making the connections between other actors as brokers (Tilly 2003: 20). Traditional authorities in Central Mali can be viewed as such brokers that protect their communities' internal cohesion by brokering functional connections between members of the same community, for example when mediating conflicts between them. Such bonding social capital exercised by traditional authorities within Central Malian communities could be referred to as *intra-communal brokerage*. Tilly suggest that fragmentation results if brokers compete for control within the same group, at least until one broker eliminates the others (2003: 21). Respondents expressed in interviews that the arrival of radical armed groups has ripped up communities, destroying social cohesion and eroding their culture.³⁴ It also emerged from the interviews that while some community members continue to support the chiefs, whose legitimacy and position has increasingly become disputed and contested, others no longer respect them or rather appreciate the governance of the radical armed groups that replaced or substituted them.³⁵ These accounts thus suggest that the introduction of governing radical armed groups as competing brokers within communities has to some extent indeed damaged

³⁴ CRU Interviews with a communal advisor and the representative of an imam from the region of Mopti. Conducted by researcher Anca-Elena Ursu in Mali. April or May, 2018. See Ursu (2018) 'Under the gun'.

³⁵ CRU Interviews with a chief, a chief's representative, a marabout and a chief's advisor from the region of Mopti. Conducted by researcher Anca-Elena Ursu in Mali. April or May, 2018. See Ursu (2018) 'Under the gun'.

social cohesion and caused fragmentation as they compete with traditional authorities as brokers within the communities.

Tilly states that “if brokerage connects factions on each side of an us–them boundary without establishing new connections across the boundary, then it facilitates polarization of the two sides” (2003: 21). Tilly thus implies that brokerage within the same group (intra-communal brokerage) can bolster the process of (inter-communal) polarization if they do not coincide with brokerage between groups, or in this case *inter-communal brokerage*. This is the case when intra-communal brokerage results in the formation of communal self-defence militias that aggravate tensions, violence and polarization between communities in Central Mali. At the same time, intra-communal brokerage by traditional authorities in Central Mali reinforces the capacity for collective resistance and the resilience of local communities against the control of radical armed groups, thereby sometimes hindering their mobilization in the region. The relational mechanism of intra-communal brokerage, referring to the bonding social capital that facilitates social ties, cohesion and collective action within communities, thus connects traditional authorities in Central Mali to both the regional conflict processes of radical armed mobilization, which it could weaken, and inter-communal polarization, which it could reinforce.

3.3. Inter-communal brokerage

Traditional authorities in Central Mali have created and been implicated in initiatives to create dialogue and the peaceful mitigation of conflicts between their communities. On 7, 8 and 9 September 2017, 140 community representatives from the regions of Mopti and Ségou came together in the city of Ségou in order to promote dialogue, peace and reconciliation between communities in Central Mali (Dembele 2017). The participants were chosen based on their influence and implication in conflict management in their areas and were thus primarily composed of traditional authorities including village chiefs, religious leaders and traditional communicators. They represented Bambara, Fulani and Dogon communities from the Central Malian regions. This initiative accompanies similar dialogue meetings for peaceful coexistence organized at lower levels in the regions (Dembele 2017). In an interview a chief from the Mopti region expressed that traditional authorities such as him intervene to protect the peaceful coexistence and to peacefully regulate inter-communal disputes.³⁶ A report of a reconciliation commission in the region of Mopti explained a case in which a village chief convoked all other village chiefs to his house in order to prevent lethal violence between their communities.³⁷

³⁶ CRU Interview with a neighborhood chief from the region of Mopti. Conducted by researcher Anca-Elena Ursu in Mali. April or May, 2018. See Ursu (2018) ‘Under the gun’.

³⁷ Reconciliation Commission Report. Retrieved in Mali. April or May, 2018.

Another chief from the Mopti region explained as well that if there is violence between ethnicities, all chiefs are assembled to create dialogue between the groups and mitigate their conflicts.³⁸

Dozens of inter-communal dialogue initiatives have been established by traditional authorities in Central Mali as attempts to stop violence between communities in the region. While these initiatives have sometimes pacified or temporarily de-escalated inter-communal violence, they do not resolve them in the sense that solutions are found for the structural underlying causes of conflict (most importantly the natural resources competition).³⁹ This echoes the case of the Wajir-district in Kenya where during the first half of the 1990s the traditional authorities of conflicting communities came together to put an end to the escalating bloodshed. They managed to appease the situation but not to address the structural problems that originally caused the violent conflict to break out thus leaving a fragile peace (Menkhaus 2008 25-28). In spite of such dialogue efforts by traditional authorities in Central Mali, violent inter-communal conflict in the region have indeed persisted. One sequence of events in the region painfully made this clear. An inter-communal dialogue gathering in Koro in the region of Mopti on 28 February 2018 brought together 140 local authorities including village chiefs in order to find solutions to conflicts between Fulani and Dogon communities in the area (Nsaibia 2018c). However, hardly one week after the reconciliation event a group of Fulani gunmen attacked the nearby village of Sabere Darah, targeting local Dogon community members leading to the death of many and the burning of multiple homes. The peace agreement concluded by the communities' leaders at the event the week before thus did not hold, which is unfortunately not unusual in the region (Nsaibia 2018d).

Conflicts for natural resources between communities such as Fulani herders and Dogon farmers are usually resolved through community dialogues in the presence of local authority representatives (ICG 2016: 3). Central Malian authorities usually try to resolve troubles between communities through traditional means.⁴⁰ However, as the case above demonstrates as well, the capacity of local traditional authorities to resolve these conflicts and reach effective settlements has become increasingly limited (ICG 2016: 3). While chiefs have historically managed conflict between communities in Central Mali, the current risk of violence rises as the "traditional reconciliation system erodes in the absence of effective replacement" (Ibrahim & Zapata 2018: 30). The incapacity of traditional authorities in Central Mali to effectively resolve or even pacify inter-communal conflict seems to be caused mainly by a combination of increasing pressure on

³⁸ CRU Interview with a chief from the region of Mopti. Conducted by researcher Anca-Elena Ursu in Mali. April or May, 2018. See Ursu (2018) 'Under the gun'.

³⁹ Interview with researcher Anca-Elena Ursu at the CRU office at The Hague on May 30, 2018.

⁴⁰ Paraphrased statement made by a credible expert during the conference on Malian customary justice of April 10, 2018 in The Hague.

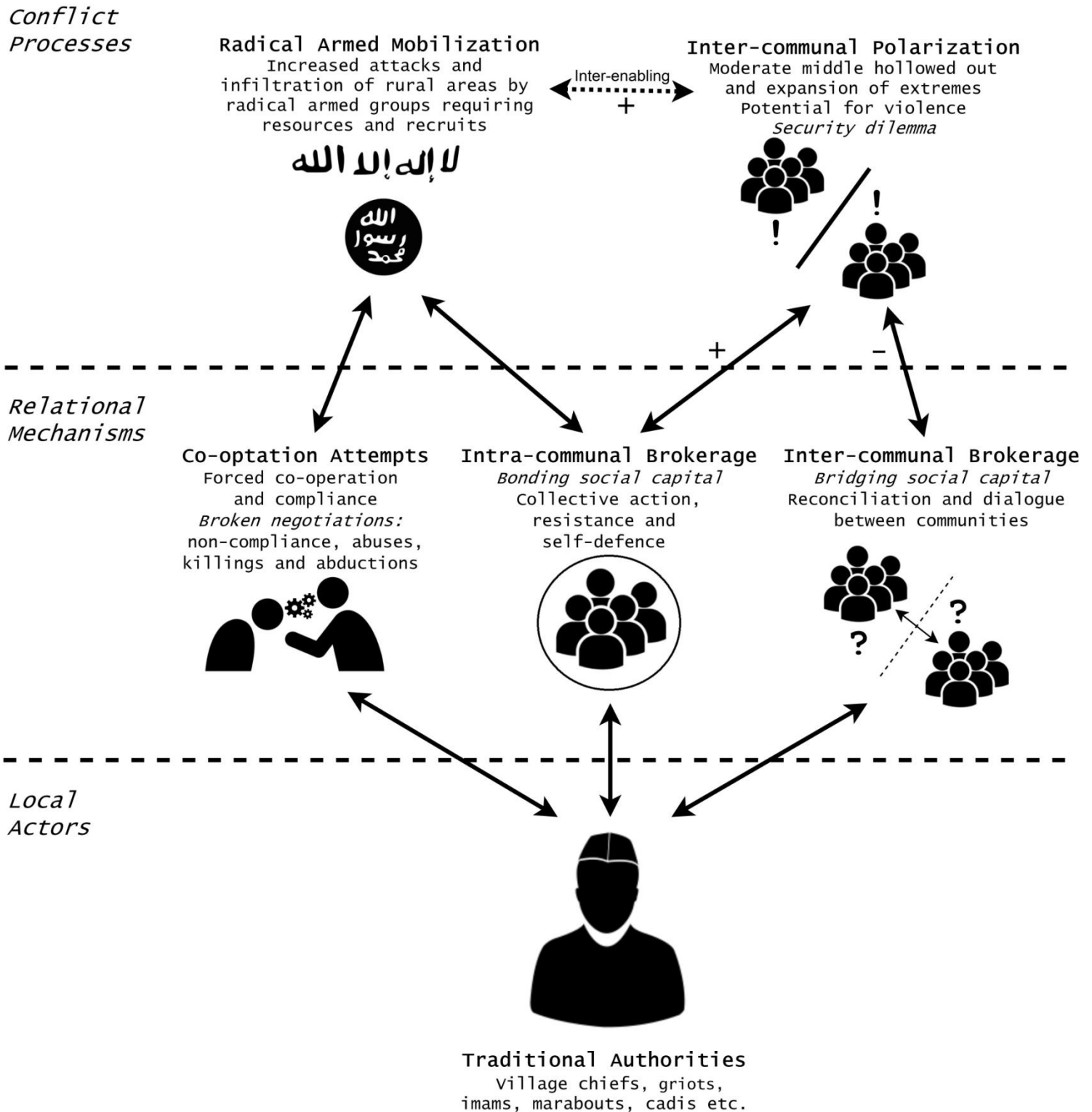
natural resources on the one hand, and the already discussed erosion of traditional authority on the other hand.

The historical and contemporary societal function of inter-communal dialogue for reconciliation in times of conflict that traditional authorities in Central Mali exercise can be interpreted as another Durkheimian social fact. The beneficial societal utility of this function entails the peaceful coexistence and social harmony between communities. The social fact of inter-communal dialogue for reconciliation falls under the second type of social capital distinguished by Putnam, namely *bridging social capital*. While bonding social capital binds individual group members, bridging social capital allows for inter-linkages between different social groups (Kariuki 2015: 2). This second form of social capital similarly applies to the functioning of traditional authorities within African societies (Kariuki 2015: 2). Risse and his colleague Tanja A. Börzel claim that the greater the ethnic, cultural, political, and economic diversity in society, the greater becomes the need for bridging social capital (2016: 153). The ethnic, farmer-herder and other divisions in Central Mali and the inter-communal conflicts that have erupted along those lines indeed attest to the need of the bridging social capital of traditional authorities.

The Tillian equivalent of bridging social capital is cross-boundary brokerage. As we saw in the previous paragraph, Tilly suggests that polarization will occur if brokerage is effectuated between parties of the same groups without brokerage taking place across the group boundaries. Cross-boundary brokerage between communities, which traditional authorities in Central Mali engage in when they attempt to create dialogue between communities to pacify their conflicts, could be referred to as inter-communal brokerage. This relational mechanism counters polarization, and thereby the potential polarizing side-effects of intra-communal brokerage. Risse and Börzel equate bridging social capital to generalized trust beyond group borders (2016: 153). It is safe to say that inter-communal brokerage by traditional authorities reduces polarization and its potential for violence. The establishment of connections between groups such as dialogue initiatives namely offers the opportunity for peaceful communication and trust-building between communities. This in turn limits the violent potential of the security dilemma that emerges from insecurity about the intentions of the other as communities can clarify their mutual commitments to peaceful coexistence to one another. As has been emphasized by observers, traditional authorities in Central Mali seem to be less and less able to successfully pacify inter-communal conflicts through such initiatives. Inter-communal brokerage can nevertheless be identified as a third relational mechanism that links Central Malian traditional authorities and inter-communal polarization. In this case the former attempts to reduce the latter principally by enabling dialogue between communities. The following

infographic illustrates the traditional authorities, conflict processes, relational mechanisms and their connections in Central Mali in one concise overview.

Image 2: Infographic of the identified conflict processes, relational mechanisms and linkages with traditional authorities



Conclusion

The goal of this thesis was to identify the relational mechanisms that link local traditional authorities to conflict processes in Central Mali, and thereby to find ways in which those traditional authorities affect and are affected by the conflict dynamics in the region. The corresponding research question was: *What are the relational mechanisms that have connected traditional authorities to the main violent conflict processes in Central Mali from 2012 to 2018?* Traditional authorities are key governance actors at the local level in Mali as well as elsewhere in Africa in the provision of justice, development and natural resources management. Traditional authority in Central Mali has at the same time been substituted, integrated and eroded by colonial and post-colonial state rule in the region. As the goal is to locate, describe and theorize the connections between these traditional authorities and conflict dynamics in Central Mali, Tilly's fitting relational mechanisms-processes framework was chosen and applied for this purpose. This study has been facilitated by the wealth of literature available on the Malian context and fortunate access to primary data gathered by Clingendael's Conflict Research Unit. However, at same time one should realize the limitations of this thesis. The conclusions put forth below simply remain personal interpretations and estimations, based on a diverse but limited number of sources, attempting to make sense of some aspects of a notoriously opaque, complex and dynamic conflict situation.

The first step in applying Tilly's framework and answering the research question was to find the most relevant conflict processes operational in Central Mali. It appeared from the second chapter that the main conflict processes taking place in Central Mali could be typified as radical armed mobilization and inter-communal polarization. Radical armed mobilization constitutes the growing amount of human and material resources that radical armed groups have access to as attested by the exponentially increasing amount of violent attacks that these organizations perpetrate in the region. After the military intervention of 2012 armed groups active in Central Mali had to seek refuge and find recruits in rural areas. Here they sustained and further developed their militant and extremist organizations and found remote populations, largely outside of the reach of the state and international interveners, where they could continue to recruit and impose their alternative socio-political order. The process of inter-communal polarization manifests itself by the increasing and escalating violence perpetrated between communities in Central Mali. Local Fulani, Bambara and Dogon communities have formed armed self-defence militias in response to the insecurity in the region. However, in the context of rising natural resources competition and rivalry between those communities, these militias have directed their arms against innocent civilians and other militias among opposing communities.

Inter-communal polarization, referring to the violence-stimulating process in which the moderate middle is hollowed out to the benefit of conflicting extremes, has likewise augmented together with the inter-communal violence. After all, inter-communal violence has often targeted innocent community members instead of the militias that actually pose a threat. These two processes of radical armed mobilization and communal polarization are inter-enabling as they stimulate one another. They together constitute the main two conflict dynamics that local and international observers have repeatedly referred to when depicting the Central Malian conflict situation.

Traditional authorities have affected and been affected by these Central Malian conflict processes in significant ways. The phenomenon that stands out most at first glance is the widespread targeting and killing of traditional authorities by radical armed groups in the region. It was argued in this thesis that much of this violence seems to have been perpetrated in the context of the co-optation attempts of traditional authorities by radical armed actors. When those attempts were perceived as (or anticipated to be) unsuccessful, those radical armed actors would turn their frustrations into violence. Threats often concretized into violence when radical armed actors perceived they were not achieving the desired amount of co-operation and compliance among traditional authorities in despite of their coercive tactics to establish such relationships to better control and recruit from local communities. Tilly refers to acts of violence in response to resistance or non-compliance perpetrated by such specialists of coercion as broken negotiations. Co-optation attempts constitute a relational mechanism that links traditional authorities to radical armed mobilization in the context of Central Mali. According to the available sources, armed groups in the region namely seem to have frequently attempted to coercively seek the integration or at least the co-operation and compliance of traditional authorities in order to dominate their communities and facilitate mobilization within them.

A second relational mechanism that has been identified is intra-communal brokerage. Traditional authorities in Central Mali engage in intra-communal brokerage by exercising bonding social capital and promoting the in-group cohesion of their communities, for example by mitigating disputes between community members. This social cohesion translates into a community's elevated capacity for collective action. This can result in positive outcomes as it can effectuate more efficient collective development, improve resilience, and enable resistance against threats such as radical armed groups. However, in-group brokerage can also increase polarization between groups. This seems mainly the case in Central Mali when bonding social capital manifests itself in the formation of dangerous self-defence militias as responses to insecurity. Such militias can further polarize the relations between communities and have seen the involvement of traditional authorities in some cases. As intra-communal brokerage can thus both result in resistance against the control of radical armed groups and heighten tensions

between communities, this relational mechanism connects traditional authorities to both radical armed mobilization (in a disruptive way) and inter-communal polarization (in a stimulating way).

The third and last identified relational mechanism is inter-communal brokerage. Traditional authorities also exercise bridging social capital when trying to increase the social cohesion between (in- and out-) groups. This relational mechanism manifests itself above all in Central Mali through all the various inter-communal dialogue initiatives that traditional authorities in the region are engaged in. Such cross-boundary brokerage has the effect of reducing polarization between groups, thereby reducing the potential for violence. The relational mechanism of inter-communal brokerage thus connects traditional authorities in Central Mali to the process of inter-communal polarization in a disruptive way which thus counters the negative side-effects of intra-communal brokerage in this regard. In despite of the efforts of traditional authorities to effectuate inter-communal brokerage through the reconciliatory dialogue initiatives that they have engaged in, inter-communal polarization, conflict and violence in Central Mali continues. This partly seems to relate to the eroded governance capacity and legitimacy of traditional authorities in Central Mali as discussed below.

This thesis has demonstrated that traditional authority in Central Mali is caught between two exogenous pressures that have debilitated and eroded this indigenous institution for the management of natural resources, the implementation of justice and the provision of governance more generally. These introduced exogenous pressures are firstly and most historically comprised of the state, and secondly and more recently radical armed groups. The eroding pressures coming from these two exogenous powers manifest themselves in two main ways. Firstly, both the state and radical armed groups have posed a physical threat to the survival of traditional authorities as these have been targeted in the operations and activities of both state forces and radical armed groups in Central Mali. For example, as one chief in the region of Mopti put it in an interview, traditional authorities in central Mali are 'caught in a vice', with both the state and radicals persecuting chiefs for suspected collaboration with the opposing power. The many observed killings of traditional authorities by radical armed groups and the few reported cases of traditional authorities being eliminated during operations of state security forces attest to this fact. Secondly, both successive state administrations and radical armed groups in Central Mali, two types of coercive actors with questionable reputations among the local population, have seemingly partly replaced, substituted and attempted to co-opt (integrate) traditional authorities and their governance functions into their systems of power. Through these processes, these intrusive powers in the region arguably harmed the governance capacity and local legitimacy of traditional authorities, and thereby probably further limited their ability to effectively respond to increasing inter-communal violence and polarization in Central Mali. The

traditional authorities are thus trapped in between the state and radical armed groups. These two parties namely both threaten the sustainment and effective functioning of the traditional governance system in the region by simultaneously effectuating physical insecurity and institutional decay among local traditional authorities.

While this study has focused on the nexus between traditional authority and conflict in Central Mali, and many others have studied the relations between state governance and traditional governance, research needs to be done on the nexus between governance provided by traditional authorities and governance provided by armed groups in conflict situations. Armed groups exercising governance functions are a common and well-researched phenomenon (Terpstra & Frerks 2016: 2). Future research could focus on how such rebel governance and traditional forms of governance interact, coexist and compete in conflict situations. Further research should also be conducted on how armed conflict affects the governance capacity and legitimacy of African traditional authorities in order to better understand its effects on local governance in African conflict situations. At the time when military intelligence specialist Andrée Mulder wrote her master's thesis and visited MINUSMA in 2014, still little information was available on Key Leader Engagement (KLE) activities in Mali (Mulder 2014: 14). Researchers could examine how and to what extent international military, security and developmental interventions in Mali engage with local traditional authorities, and with which results. Policy research should more generally be devoted to what works and what does when engaging with traditional authorities in sub-Saharan Africa. After all, despite their struggles traditional authorities seem to remain primary stakeholders in the Central Malian crisis and seemingly in many other conflict situations on the African continent as well. In light of the severely limited Malian state capacity these figures may very well be, as observers have emphasized, the only realistic alternatives present on the ground to provide local justice and dialogue in order to help manage and de-escalate conflict in the region. When looking at African traditional authorities as possible entry-points for policies, international policymakers should simultaneously keep in mind their local embeddedness, multi-faceted vulnerability, and useful potential to exert influence over local communities, as have successive state administrations and radical armed groups in Central Mali.

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Annex 1: Violent attacks in Mali since Sep. 2017⁴¹

DATE	LOCALITY	REGION	PERPETRATOR	TARGET	EVENT
04-09-17	Kouakourou	Mopti	Jihadists	Locals	Violent clashes
05-09-17	Mamba	Mopti			Mass abduction
13-09-17	Kouakourou	Mopti	MLF militants	FAMa unit (la Garde Nationale)	Ambush
01-10-17	Koa	Mopti	MLF militants	Civilians?	Destruction of TVs and radios
02-10-17	Macina	Mopti		Marabout Komani Tanapo	IED attack
03-10-17	Saye (Ké-Macina)	Mopti		Gendarmerie vehicle	IED attack
03-10-17	Saye	Mopti	JNIM (a coalition of radical armed groups)	Gendarmerie vehicle	Mine detonation
06-10-17	Dounapen	Mopti	Unkown gunmen		Church burned
08-10-17	Fangasso	Ségou	Macina Liberation Front (MLF) militants	Employee Ministry of Environment	Shooting / killing
15-10-17	Kouakourou	Mopti	MLF militants	Malian Army patrol	Ambush
15-10-17	Dongal	Mopti	JNIM	FAMa gathering	Rocket attack
23-10-17	Dioro	Ségou	JNIM	Gendarmerie post	Attack and takeover
23-10-17	Ouan	Ségou	JNIM	Gendarmerie post	Attack and takeover
24-10-17	Soumpi - Niafunké	Timbuktu	JNIM	FAMa post in charge of SATOM surveillance	Attack
24-10-17	Tenenkou - Dia	Mopti	JNIM	FAMa vehicle	Mine detonation
25-10-17	Koro - Mondoro	Mopti		National Guard vehicle	IED attack
25-10-17	Dioungani	Mopti	JNIM	FAMa vehicle	Attack
29-10-17	Diankabou	Mopti	FAMa	Village chief	Arrest
31-10-17	Dia - Diaffarabé	Mopti		President of the High Court of Justice, FAMa soldiers	Ambush, IED attack
31-10-17	Dia - Diaffarabé	Mopti	JNIM	President of the High Court of Justice, FAMa soldiers	Ambush, IED attack
01-11-17	Dianweil & Piron	Mopti	MLF militants	School	Threatening and closing two schools

⁴¹ This overview of attacks in Mali from September 2017 to July 2018 has been compiled through the monitoring of the Malian security situation through social media at the Conflict Research Unit of the Clingendael Institute by Joyce Vijverberg and the author (both successive interns at the organization). Most of the data are gathered from reports by Héni Nsaibia, who is a Researcher at ACLED, the founder of the risk consultancy Menastream, and an intelligence analyst specialized in security-related issues, political violence and non-state actors in North Africa and the Sahel region.

05-11-17	Bla	Ségou	JNIM	Gendarmerie post	Assault, site and booty control
06-11-17	Soumpi - Niafunké	Mopti		Local authorities convoy	Mine detonation
06-11-17	Ngouma - Boré	Mopti		FAMa and MINUSMA convoy	Complex attack, vehicles on fire
06-11-17	Konna - Doro	Mopti	JNIM	FAMa escorted MINUSMA logistics convoy	Ambush
07-11-17	Fatoma	Mopti	Unknown armed men	Village chief advisor	Assassination
07-11-17	Famsala (Dia-Macina)	Mopti	JNIM	FAMa convoy	IED attack
08-11-17	Soumpi - Boni	Timbuktu, Mopti	JNIM	MINUSMA forces	IED + direct fire
09-11-17	Boni - Hombori	Mopti		MINUSMA convoy	IED attack
11-11-17	Kargué	Mopti	Presumed jihadists	Village chief	Assassination
16-11-17	Niono	Ségou		Judge of the Court of Instance	Kidnapping
17-11-17	Niono	Ségou	Unknown gunmen	President of the District Court	Abduction
18-11-17	Dioungani	Mopti	Presumed militants	FAMa patrol	Ambush
02-12-17	Gourti	Mopti	Katibat Macina (likely)	Secretary-general of the town hall of Dioungani	Assassination
04-12-17	Hombori	Mopti		National Guard unit	Ambush
04-12-17	Sougoulbé	Mopti	Suspected jihadists	Mayor	Abduction
09-12-17	Mourdiah	Koulikoro	JNIM	Convoy of the prefect of Nara	Armed attack, attempted kidnapping
09-12-17	Niono	Ségou	Peulh militants	Civilians	Abduction and execution
11-12-17	Dallah	Mopti		FAMa convoy	Ambush
12-12-17	Douentza	Mopti	JNIM	FAMa and MINUSMA convoy	IED explosion
17-12-17	Kouakourou	Mopti	JNIM / Katibat Macina	FAMa	Armed clash
21-12-17	Niono	Ségou	JNIM	FAMa gendarmerie post	Armed attack
21-12-17	Djenné	Mopti		National Guard unit	Ambush
26-12-17	Boni	Mopti	JNIM	FAMa vehicle	IED explosion
27-12-17	Koro	Mopti	Armed bandits	FAMa	Armed clash, bank robbery repelled
28-12-17	Boulkessi	Mopti	JNIM	FAMa convoy	IED explosion
31-12-17	Douna	Mopti	Gunmen	Dogon civilian	Abduction, shots fired in the air
02-01-18	Douentza	Mopti	JNIM	MINUSMA convoy	Armed attack
09-01-18	Djenné	Mopti	JNIM	National Guard unit	Ambush

11-01-18	Hombori	Mopti	JNIM	FAMa convoy	Complex ambush (IED + armed assault)
12-01-18	Boré	Mopti	JNIM	Regional director for agriculture	Armed attack
12-01-18	Ké-Macina	Ségou	JNIM / Katibat Macina	Gendarmerie post	Armed attack
17-01-18	Toko	Mopti	JNIM / Katibat Macina	Civilian man	Abduction
20-01-18	Boni	Mopti		MINUSMA peacekeepers	Complex attack (IED + gunfire)
20-01-18	Sérma	Mopti			Heavy explosions (IED or airstrike)
23-01-18	Yorouna	Mopti	Militants	Dozo community	Repelled attack
25-01-18	Gouma - Coura	Ségou	Presumed JNIM / Katibat Macina	FAMa positions	Armed attacks
25-01-18	Youwarou	Mopti	Presumed JNIM / Katibat Macina	FAMa positions	Armed attacks
25-01-18	Boni	Mopti		Civilian transport truck	IED detonation
27-01-18	Soumpi	Timbuktu	JNIM	FAMa camp	Armed attack (heavy weapons)
29-01-18	San	Ségou	Presumed JNIM militants	Checkpoint (toll booth)	Armed attack
02-02-18	Douna	Mopti	Ansaroul Islam members	Dogon militia	Armed clash
03-02-18	Mandiakuy	Ségou	Presumed JNIM / Katibat Macina	Gendarmerie post	Armed attack
8-2-2018	Tessalit	Kidal	JNIM	MINUSMA/Barkhane base Amachach	Mortar strike
14-02-18	Senegue - Ouroube Doude	Mopti	JNIM / Katiba Macina	Imam	Imam assassinated, captured jihadist lynched
15-02-18	Niangassadiou	Mopti	Gunmen (Peuls?)	Dogons	Attack
20-2-2018	Aoughat	Gao	GATIA / MSA	JNIM commander	Assassination
21-2-2018	In-Delimane	Gao	ISGS	French soldiers	Mine explosion
21-2-2018	Bourem-Inaly	Timbuktu	MAA	GATIA	Violent Clashes
27-2-2018	Douentza	Mopti	Youth assailant	Water & Forest agent	Killed by machete to steal his weapon
27-2-2018	Dioura - Diabaly	Mopti	Unknown	Malian soldiers	IED explosion, 6 soldiers killed
25/26-2-2018	Mali-Niger border		GATIA / MSA	ISGS	Violent Clashes
4-3-2018	Konna - Bore	Mopti	JNIM	Malian soldiers	attack with IED explosion and gunfire
5-3-2018	Dogofry	Ségou	IED planters	Unknown	IED explosion, two planters killed
6/7-03-2018	Ménaka	Gao	GATIA / MSA	EIGS	5 jihadists killed and 12 captured
8-3-2018	Sabere Darah	Mopti	Fulani gunmen	Dogon community, especially Dozos	Attack on village, homes burned, many dead

8-3-2018	In-Delimane	Mopti	Terrorrists	Barkhane forces	Attack repelled, three terrorists killed
9-3-2018	Nantaka	Mopti	JNIM	Malian soldiers	IED explosion
9-3-2018	Dialloubé	Mopti	FAMA	JNIM base	offensive
10-3-2018	Bodewal	Mopti	Dozos	Fulani hamlet	Fulani hamlet burned and person killed
10-3-2018	Inekar ouest and Tin-Abalak	Mopti	GATIA / MSA	Unnamed armed group	Clash, targeted group defeated
11-3-2018	Diaou	Mopti	Dozos	Civilians	Attack on village
11-3-2018	Boni	Mopti	Unknown	Gendarme	Assassination
12-3-2018	Cercle of Djenné	Mopti	Katiba Macina	Dozos	Violent Clashes, 8-10 Dozos killed
15-3-2018	Nouhoun-Bozo, Djenné,	Mopti	Katiba Macina	Donzo leader	Assassination
15-3-2018	Tougéré-Coumbé (Téenkou)	Mopti	?	Civilian	IED
19-3-2018	Somadougou	Mopti	Katiba Macina	FAMA	FAMA post attacked and burned
19-3-2018	Niangassadiou	Mopti	?	?	IED
22-3-2018	Kidal	Kidal	JNIM	MINUSMA/Barkhane base	Mortar strike
22-3-2018	N'Doukala	Ségou	?	FAMa convoy	IED
22-3-2018	Macina	Ségou	?	Vehicule of Chinese asphalt company	IED
27-3-2018	entre Parandala et Nouh-Bozo, cercle de Djenné	Mopti	Unknown	Civilian (animal drawn) cart	IED, two civilians dead
28-3-2018	Bandiagara	Mopti	Armed assailants (jihadists/peuls?)	Hotel La Falaise	Attack on hotel
28-3-2018	route Boni-Douentza	Mopti	Armed assailants (jihadists/peuls?)	MINUSMA convoy	MINUSMA convoy attacked, one assailant killed, one IED detected and cleared.
28-3-2018	Entre Dia et Doity	Mopti	Unknown	garden cart (motoculteur)	IED
29-3-2018	Inaziène	Gao	Unkown	MSA / GATIA convoy	Ambush
30-3-2018	Amalawlaw - Ansongo,	Gao	Unknown gunmen	Plateforme combatants (presumably GATIA)	Ambush
1-4-2018	Akabar	Gao	ISGS	GATIA / MSA	Ambush
2-4-2018	Abaradjou	Timbuktu	Unknown gunmen	Malian soldier	Soldier assassinated and weapon seized
2-4-2018	Zambougou	Koulikoro	Katiba Macina	Gendarmerie post	Gendarmerie post burned and commander killed
2-4-2018	Daga	Mopti	Katiba Macina militants	Village chief and other notables	Abduction
2-4-2018	Timbuktu	Timbuktu	Unknown	FAMa corporal	Assassination

4-4-2018	Boky-Wéré	Ségou	Dozos	Fulani herdsmen	Abduction of 7 Fulani herdsmen for ransom
5-4-2018	Medina Coura	Mopti	Katiba Macina militants	Police post	Attack on policepost: ransacked
5-4-2018	Aguelhok	Kidal	Unknown	MINUSMA camp	Rocket attack
6-4-2018	Gao	Gao	Unknown gunmen	MINUSMA officer	MINUSMA officer killed
8-4-2018	Mondoro	Mopti	Unknown gunman	Member of Dogon community	Abduction
8-4-2018	Saba (Dialloubé),	Mopti	Katiba Macina	School	School ransacked in village
8-4-2018	Léré	Timbuktu	Unknown	FAMa	IED
8-4-2018	Kaka (Sofara)	Mopti	FAMa	Fulani shepherd	Killing
8-4-2018	Tessalit	Kidal	Unknown	Barkhane logistics vehicle	IED detonation
9-4-2018	Akabar	Gao	ISGS	MSA / GATIA	Attack during patrol
9-4-2018	Tabankort	Gao	Unknown	MINUSMA vehicle	IED detonation
11-4-2018	Tarkint	Gao	JNIM	MINUSMA supply convoy	Attack on supply convoy
14-4-2018	Poromani - Djenné	Mopti	Unknown	Gendarmerie convoy	Attack on convoy
14-4-2018	Timbuktu	Timbuktu	Unknown	MINUSMA/Barkhane base	Complex attack: bomb vehicles, rockets, disguises
15-4-2018	Gossi	Timbuktu	Unknown	GATIA commander	Assassination
15-4-2018	Inkadewane (Ménaka)	Gao	Unknown	MSA officer	Assassination
17-4-2018	Sokolo	Ségou	Unknown	Malian army vehicle	EID detonation
20-4-2018	Boughessa	Kidal	Presumably AnsarDine	Spy/informer	Arrestation (kidnapping)
22-4-2018	Timbuktu	Timbuktu	JNIM	MINUSMA/Barkhane base	Mortar/rocket strike
25-4-2018	Douentza	Mopti	Unkown gunmen	subprefect of Hombori	Abduction
26-4-2018	Aklize (Niger border)	Gao	Gunmen, possibly ISGS	Daoussahak camp	Attack
26-4-2018	Aklize (Niger border)	Gao	ISGS militants	MSA combatants	Violent clashes
27-4-2018	Efrakane (Niger, just accross border with Gao)	Just accross Niger border with Gao	MSA convoy	Fulani encampments and waterholes	Attack
27-4-2018	Awekassa (Niger border)	Gao	Presumed ISGS militants	Dahaoussahak camp	Attack on Daoussahak camp
29-4-2018	Between Labbezanga and Tassiga (on Niger border)	Gao	Unknown gunmen	Vehicle carrying market-goers	Attack on Daoussahak market-goers

29-4-2018	Gossi	Gao	Presumed militants	Subprefect of Gossi	Assassination
5-2-2018	Guiré	Koulikoro	Unknown	FAMa vehicle	IED
5-5-2018	Bombou	Mopti	Dozos	Fulani village	Attack
5-5-2018	Intaylalene	Gao	GATIA militamen	Civilians	Revenge killing
5-8-2018	between Djebock and Ahina	Gao	Unknown	Gatia militiamen	IED
5-9-2018	Amachach (Tessalit)	Kidal	Unknown	joint base	rocket/mortar attack on camp
15-11- 2018	Aguelhok	Kidal	Unknown	MINUSMA base	rocket/mortar attack on camp
5-12-2018	Takaghat	Gao	Unknown	Daoussahak camp	Attack
13-5-2018	Aguelhok	Kidal	Unknown	MINUSMA Peacekeepers	IED
13-5-2018	Amachach (Tessalit)	Kidal	Unknown	joint base	rocket/mortar attack on camp
14-5-2018	Koro, Madougou	Mopti	Radicals'	Marketgoers	Attack on civilians
15-5-2018	Diafarabé	Mopti	Katiba Macina militants	FAMa	Clashes
15-5-2018	Toupéré	Mopti	Unknown gunmen	Imam	Assassination
17-5-2018	between Kadial and Mopti	Mopti	presumed Katiba Macina militants	School teachers	Abduction
22-5-2018	Inazoul - Ménaka	Gao	GATIA-MSA	Unknown Arabs	Clashes
27-5-2018	Tikirkiwit	Gao	Suspected GATIA	Two Arabs	Abduction
26-5-2018	Afoharass - Talataye	Gao	Unknown	MSA temporary post and civilians	Attack
2-6-2018	Kidal	Kidal	JNIM	MINUSMA camp	attack
3-6-2018	Amadoua	Mopti	The Alliance for the Salvation of Sahel (ASS)	Dozos	Attack
3-6-2018	Bombou	Mopti	Dozos	Civilians	Attack
4-6-2018	Tabardé	Gao	MSA	ISGS	Clashes
4-6-2018	Tabardé (Ménaka)	Gao	GATIA-MSA	ISGS	Violent clashes
6-6-2018	Toïkana	Mopti	Unknown	Civilians	IED explosion
7-6-2018	Gossi	Timbuktu	Unknown gunmen	Two gendarmes	Attack
7-6-2018	Dioungani- Koro	Mopti	Unknown	FAMa convoy	IED explosion
8-6-2018	Gao	Gao	Unknown	MINUSMA supplier	Attack
8-6-2018	Ménaka	Gao	Unknown	Civilian vehicle	IED explosion
7-6-2018	Tagourou	Mopti	The Alliance for the Salvation of the Sahel	Dozos	Clashes

9-6-2018	Boni, Dala and Kadial	Mopti	Unkown	Malian soldiers	Three attacks
11-6-2018	Kani-Bonzon	Mopti	Unknown gunmen	Dogon village	Attack
16-6-2018	Talataye	Gao	MSA	CSCoM health worker	Execution
23-6-2018	Koumaga	Mopti	Dozos	Fulani village	Attack
26-6-2018	Tadaykarat-Terangit	Gao	Unknown gunmen	MSA/GATIA convoy	Ambush
26-6-2018	Tabrichat	Gao	Unknown	MINUSMA convoy	IED explosion
27-6-2018	Agoufou	Timbuktu	Unknown	Five people	Abduction
27-6-2018	Infoukaretane	Gao	Presumed ISGS	MSA/GATIA	Clashes
27-6-2018	N'Tillit	Gao	Unknown	GATIA vehicle	Attack
27-6-2018	Kidal	Kidal	JNIM	Barkhane vehicle	IED explosion
27-6-2018	Infoukaretane	Gao	Presumed jihadists	MSA/GATIA	Clashes
29-6-2018	Near Gao	Gao	Unknown	Checkpoint of militia group	Attack
29-6-2018	Tin Korazeyna	Gao	Unknown gunmen	Colonel of the Malian army and a child	Assassination
29-6-2018	Sévaré	Mopti	JNIM	G5Sahel-Force HQ	Attack
30-6-2018	Dioungani-Douna	Mopti	Unknown	Malian soldiers	IED explosion
30-6-2018	Djebock-Samayte	Gao	Unknown	Merchant	IED explosion
1-7-2018	Boumbou	Mopti	Dozos	Village	Village attacked and burned
1-7-2018	Gao	Gao	JNIM	Joint Barkhana/FAMa patrol	Suicide bombing against patrol
1-7-2018	Talataye	Gao	Unknown	MSA vehicle	IED explosion
4-7-2018	Niaouleni	Koulikoro	Armed men	Two gendarmes	Two gendarmes killed in attack
8-7-2018	Anchawadi	Gao	ISGS	Imghad camp	Attack on camp
9-7-2018	Djebock-Tamkoutat	Gao	GATIA	ISGS	Destruction of camp
14-7-2018	Togueré Coumbe	Mopti	Jihadists	Bozo community	Abduction of 5 community members
11-7-2018	Dala	Mopti	Terrorists	FAMa vehicle	IED explosion
11-7-2018	Hombori	Mopti	Presumed militants	FAMa	Ambush
14-7-2018	Togueré	Mopti	presumed jihadists	Bozos	Abduction of 5 people
15-7-2018	Injagalane	Gao	ISGS	Ibogalitane and Idarfane communities in village	Attack
16-7-2018	Tiena	Mopti	Dozos	Fulani herders	Attack
17-7-2018	Tin-Téhégrin	Gao	MSA/GATIA	ISGS	Armed clashes
17-7-2018	50km south of N'Tillit	Gao	Presumed ISGS militants	GATIA/FAMa forces	Ambush
19-7-2018	Tindinbawen	Gao	ISGS	Village	Attack

20-7-2018	Tazarghaft	Kidal	Unknown	Civilian vehicle	IED explosion
20-7-2018	Boni	Mopti	JNIM militants	FAMa	Mortar shelling and exchanges of gunfire
22-7-2018	between Soumouni and Séné-Bamanan	Mopti-Ségou	Presumed Katiba Macina militants	FAMa convoy	Ambush
23-7-2018	Amachach	Kidal	Unknown	MINUSMA / Barkhane base	Rocket/mortar strikes
23-7-2018	Koba	Mopti	Fulani militiamen	Dozo position	Attack
23-7-2018	Guiré	Koulikoro	Unknown	Convoy of electoral campaign management of presidential candidate	Attack
24-7-2018	Sevaré	Mopti	Unknown	Sevaré Airport	Rocket attack
24-7-2018	Sofara	Mopti	Unknown	Three civilian carts	IED explosion
25-7-2018	Somena	Mopti	Dozos	Fulani village	Attack on Fulani civilians in village
29-7-2018	Ouro Nema	Mopti	Jihadists	School director	Beat up and hospitalization
29-7-2018	Aguelhoc	Kidal	JNIM	MINUSMA camp	Rocket/mortar strikes
29-7-2018	Pignari, Kéréna, Gandamia, Débééré, Mariko, Diambakrou and Kobaka	Mopti	Katiba Macina militants or unreported	Voting offices	Ransacking of voting offices
29-7-2018	Souaraka Sinko	Ségou	Unknown	Village chief	Assassination
30-7-2018	Ménaka	Gao	Unknown gunmen	Vice-Chief of Staff of the MSA	Assassination
30-7-2018	Inadiatafane	Timbuktu	Unknown gunmen	Mayor's councilor	Abduction