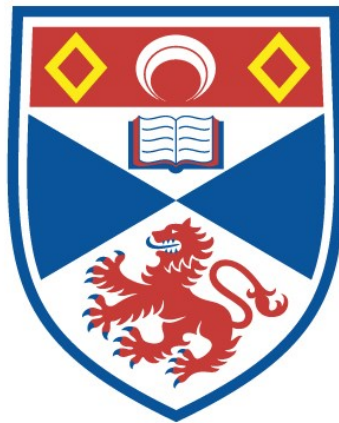# Smuggling and conflict complexity in Mali : a socio-economic approach

Thomas Hinkel

A thesis submitted for the degree of PhD
at the
University of St Andrews

2024

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Abstract

Mali's conflict landscape has undergone a significant increase in complexity over the last six decades. While the conflict initiated in 2012 was preceded by similar iterations of rebellions from the north against the Malian state in the south, none of these previous conflicts matched its scale, both in terms of the multiplicity of actors involved, and the diversity of aims, interests, and goals pursued by them. Indeed, the demands of the conflicting parties seem to reflect a changing atmosphere of contention that has swept the region over the past two decades. These range from regional autonomy to much more severe demands for complete secession or the realisation of a radical eschatological religious ideology put forth by various Islamist groups. This thesis ties these developments to changes in the region's smuggling economy that have promoted a more fragmented conflict landscape by increasing the capacities of marginalized actors to pursue their own courses, mainly by developing independent resource bases free from the control of prevailing power structures. This has led to the erosion of traditional social hierarchies, particularly within the Tuareg and Arab populations of the north, whose traditional nobility have faced unprecedented opposition from below as historically marginalized tribes have formed armed power bases in their own right. This stands as a novel contribution to the literature on the role of economic resources in armed group organization, arguing that resources are not simply channeled through pre-existing social networks but that they in fact reform and alter these very networks themselves. This presents an approach that moves beyond the debate over the structural primacy of either social or material force in armed group organizations, but rather considers the ways in which both mutually constitute the structures under which armed groups operate.

Acknowledgements

The completion of this project would not have been possible without the incredible support I received from people inside the School of International Relations. This begins with my supervisor, Dr Henning Tamm, whose encouragement and guidance throughout every phase of this process was beyond anything I could have hoped for. His incredibly keen eye for detail and demands for rigorous precision in my writing made this a better thesis and me a better academic researcher. His thoughtful guidance and suggestions broke me free of a number of writing and theorising ruts that snagged me along the way, and I feel immensely fortunate to have had him as my doctoral supervisor.

I am also very grateful to my secondary supervisor, Dr Peter Lehr, who was always approachable and helpful when I sought his guidance. His suggestions made many of these chapters better, and I again feel very fortunate to have had him on my team. I also want to acknowledge the incredible school administrative staff in the School of IR. Their professional competence, kindness, and tireless efforts always made navigating the school's bureaucratic procedures painless and straightforward. I never felt lost or unsupported in what is one of the largest academic schools at the university, and that is largely due to them.

Finally, I want to thank my friends and family picked me up and kept me going when the going got rough during these last five years. They know who they are, but I want to specifically name my sister Ellen and brother-in-law Patrick who opened their home to me this summer when I desperately needed a place to finish my writing. Of course the real heroes are my wee nephews William and Thomas who allowed me to use their play room as an office. I could not have completed this without their support, and I will be forever grateful.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

In January 2012, Tuareg rebels initiated a series of attacks against Malian military installations in the country's sparsely inhabited northern region. Throughout the next three months, they would drive state forces south and take control of the region's main population and commercial centres, declaring the independent state of Azawad on April 6th. At the time of writing eleven years on, the country's political unity and territorial integrity has yet to be restored, and questions arise as to what has happened in the region to lead to this situation.

At first glance, this rebellion, and the ensuing tumult, appears to be a simple re-iteration of a consistent cycle of violence between the Tuareg North and the South—based around the national capital of Bamako. Indeed, the present conflict has been dubbed the "Third Tuareg Rebellion" as similar outbreaks of conflict have punctuated Mali's modern history: namely in the 1960s and 90s, respectively (Bencherif & Campana, 2016). The similarities with the conflict of the 1990s are particularly stark, as Tuareg-led forces similarly rose up against the Malian state in a blitz that gained effective control over the North and initiated six years of violence that was eventually settled in 1996 (Lecocq, 2010). In addition, many of the major political and military players of the 1990s have been instrumental in the initiation and evolution of the present conflict, further underlining the reading that the current instability in Mali is but part two of a long historical battle between the North and South that was merely interrupted by a 30-year intermission.[1]

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[1] There were indeed outbreaks of conflict between these two periods, particularly in 2006, but nothing of a similar scale or scope.

However, there are many features of the current conflict that suggest what we are witnessing is characterized by some salient differences. The first is the sheer multiplicity of actors. During the conflict in the 1990s, there were approximately eight recognizably distinct armed groups that emerged throughout the period (Togo, 2002); while, in the current conflict, there are approximately 32 (Desgrais, Guichaoua, & Lebovich, 2018). Of course, both of these estimations should be taken as imprecise, but they do give a clear picture of a pronounced difference.

Secondly, the diversity of interests, aims, and goals of today's conflict actors is novel vis a vis the groups of the 1990s. While the political aims of the previous rebellion were broadly anchored in a coherent set of demands, mainly revolving around a more equitable distribution of national resources between the more developed south and neglected north, today's events seem to reflect a much broader constellation of aims and interests. From regional autonomy, community defence, and increased participation of northern populations in the national political process, to much more severe demands for complete secession or the realisation of a radical eschatological religious ideology put forth by various Islamist groups, the demands of the conflicting parties seem to reflect a changing atmosphere of contention that has swept the region over the past two decades.

Thus, the central problematique this thesis will revolve around is: how can we account for this increased complexity? Prevailing answers to this question revolve around many of the theoretical fault lines that will be discussed in chapter two regarding the importance of economic vs. social factors, and hence many accounts can be characterized as either over-

socialising or under-socialising the situation.[2] On the one hand, overly social accounts emphasise the identity-based differences between the north and south, as well as within the north, to account for broader conflict, as well as the increased fragmentation of the armed groups, respectively (Chauzel & van Damme, 2015; Sandor, 2017; Bencherif & Campana, 2018). Indeed, the north of Mali, as in the broader Saharo-Sahel region in general, is characterized by a complex array of rigid social hierarchies that mediate relations both within and between groups. Tuareg society in general has long been regarded as being hyper aware of class (caste) differences that form the structure of their social and political hierarchies. This says nothing of the Arab and various other ethnic groups that inhabit the region and also find themselves players in the northern Mali conflict. Processes of fragmentation, it is suggested, can thus be traced back to these social faultlines. Indeed, in a region of such complex and multiple social groupings and hierarchies, it is to be expected that armed groups emerging from such a diverse social fabric would be prone to splits along these lines (Sandor, 2017; Bencherif & Campana, 2018).

However, this largely neglects the degree to which these social relations are intertwined with material ones. Indeed, as will be outlined in chapter four, these social categories and boundary lines can be traced back to distinct economic functions and relations of (inter) dependence that are rooted in the history and ecology of the region. In turn, as the economic landscape changes, these social roles are consistently renegotiated and re-made, sometimes peacefully, other times through violence. Tracing these inter-relations between social relations and the economic functions/roles that mediate them allows us to account for an increasing set of fragmentations that have taken place throughout this conflict. Indeed,

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[2] As outlined in chapters two and three, I adopt this framework of critique from economic sociologist Mark Granovetter, who criticised the under-socialised and over-socialised nature of traditional economics and sociology, respectively, as he lays out an alternative theoretical approach defined by taking both economic and social forces seriously.

while many armed groups are formed around a distinct ethnic or tribal identity, others are not, or are emerging around a new set of faultlines that were not as salient 30 years ago.

On the other hand, there is a 'under-socialised' approach that emphasises the perverse roles of greed and organized crime in the north (de Sardan, 2012; ICG, 2018) . For instance, many highlight the role of 'ethnic-military' entrepreneurs in mobilizing these real grievances along ethnic or racial lines and instrumentally directing them towards violence against the state in order to gain what can only be taken in times of war. In his analysis of the "Tuareg question," namely, why Mali's history is plagued by an apparent cycle of Tuareg uprisings, de Sardan (2012) notes,

> As in often the case for uprisings based on ethnicity, the ethnic-military entrepreneurs have above all been driven by their own interests, or those of their circle of adepts, jumping from one alliance to another, using their capacity to cause nuisance for their personal promotion, and settling into the chains of corruption and misappropriation that the "post-rebellion cash" has aroused (p. 36).

This "greed" narrative in widespread, with one African Union official lamenting, "of course it is not about [lack of development] with these people. If it was, we wouldn't have all of these different groups fighting for power in the north, they would be united in negotiating on behalf of the people of the north." She goes on to point out the fact that it is many of the same actors from the conflict in the 1990s that are once again at the centre stage of fighting and peace negotiations. "It is the same groups…literally the *same people*!" (Personal interview, Bamako, 2017). In turn, these "ethnic military entrepreneurs', as de Sardan would call them, have a long history in the trans-Saharan smuggling economy, around which so much of the relations between complicit state authorities and northern elite revolved, especially since the conclusion of the rebellion of the 1990s. (Briscoe, 2014; Hinkel, 2018)

However, this perspective also represents an over-simplification with analytical consequences. As this thesis will argue, these 'criminal' enterprises, including the revenues derived from kidnapping ransoms and drug smuggling, are firmly embedded in the local social fabric, a social fabric that is evolving in line with broader changes in the resource environment. For instance, the drug smuggling industry has not involved all groups equally, but has been particularly lucrative to traditionally subservient Tuareg and Arab castes that have found it to be a precious source of social mobility and a means to challenge the prevailing power structures in the North. In turn, many of the fragmentations that have taken place throughout the conflict can be traced back to this contentious relationship between traditionally dominant, or 'noble', tribes and those traditionally subservient. In this case, an illicit resource—drugs—has altered the balance of power between these groups, thus undermining a prevailing hierarchy by weakening relations of dependency and opening new avenues of accumulation outside of the traditional power structure. This is but one example of how resources are not simply channeled through pre-existing social networks (as an 'over-socialised' approach would maintain) but how they re-form and alter these very networks themselves. This provides essential context for the emergence of new fault lines of conflict and avenues of fragmentation, as well as the activation of pre-existing divisions that had previously remained dormant or subdued.

In this way, the case of conflict in Mali over the past 30 years provides an opportunity for analysing how conflicts evolve. In some ways, we can indeed conceive the current conflict in Mali as a continuation of a broader conflict that stretches back decades, allowing us to hold constant a number of factors related to national politics, ecology, main political players, and the broad groupings of conflict actors to zero in on some key changes that explain a great deal of the new variations described above.

As the case study chapters will demonstrate, the unprecedented shift in complexity observed in Mali's conflict dynamics can be traced back to changes in the economic landscape which occurred throughout the early to mid 2000s, particularly those that took place within the smuggling economy. This has produced a more fragmented conflict landscape by increasing the capacities of marginalised and/or side-lined actors to persist in pursuing their own courses, mainly by developing independent resource bases free from the control of prevailing power structures. Therefore, the focus on the large scale clandestine smuggling industries and the complex social terrain of Northern Mali and the broader Sahara are very much justified, though relegating one to secondary importance is off-base. What is lacking is systematic analysis of how they have interacted with each other. Such an analysis will present a clear picture of the socio-economic environment in which conflict in Mali takes place, both today and in the past, and allow us to view how social and economic forces interact to drive the conflict.

The first step in this process is to historicise the salient social faultines in northern Mali. This will be done by tracing the socio-economic structures that have underpinned political relations in the region from pre-colonial times to independence. The implications of this broad and deep historical perspective for the purpose of understanding the present conflict dynamics of Mali are two fold: First, it reveals how the various group differences that are viewed as salient in the conflict do not come from nowhere, but are in fact contingent on the economic environment, and second, which follows from the previous, changes in this economic environment produces shifts in the distribution of power between them as prevailing relations of dependency are undermined. Tracing this process underlines this

thesis' main theoretical contention: namely, that economic resources alter and re-form the social networks of armed groups as they are funneled through them.

The chapters of this thesis will provide a broad history of these people in the Saharan space with specific focus on how their modes of subsistence, or livelihood's, evolved in line with larger changes in the environment that in turn altered their internal social hierarchies as well as interactions with their neighbors. This is a historical thread that will be taken up and carried through the rebellions of the current age, and will hence demonstrate how economic change, including the introduction of new resources, is not simply funneled through existing social structures but in fact re-forms them by undermining existing class hierarchies and creating new avenues of complementarity or conflict.

Methodological Framework: Thesis Development and a Transparent Approach Towards Presenting Research Methodology

In the concluding chapter to her book analysing the emergence of informal political order in post-war Liberia, Christine Cheng presents a novel approach towards the presentation of research methodology. Published scholarly research, she notes, often gives the impression of being "neatly and logically conceived in its entirety," an austere product of tight scientific reasoning that flows naturally from research question to methodology to findings (Cheng, 2018, p. 285). The inevitable challenges and struggles that punctuated the research process are often left out altogether or relegated to a minor discussion in the acknowledgments section or preface. Instead, she takes a more "analytically transparent and reflective approach", inviting her reader in as she describes the earlier iterations of her research project

and the challenges and obstacles that led it to change (ibid). From original research questions that were later judged as ill conceived, to research design choices that were found to be impractical, she shines a light on her project's cutting board to provide an illuminating and honest biography of her project. "Rather than discarding this foundational work as tangential, irrelevant, or as undermining the final result," she notes, "I propose that unveiling this scaffolding—in a way that explains how and why the project evolved—can provide an additional standalone contribution to understanding the subject matter" (ibid, p. 286).

She outlines three ways in which this more transparent approach can benefit the research project itself, and enrich the wider scholarly community in general. First, it forces reflexivity on the researcher by leading them to revisit core concepts and ideas that may have become so fully internalised by the end of the project that the researcher loses an ability to explain them, or perhaps even forgets their existence in the first place (ibid, 290). Second, "crossed out answers" or roads left untaken often stand as potential avenues for further research or offer an alternative way of answering the research question. This ultimately promotes a more holistic understanding of the subject matter and the multiple avenues of approaching it. Third, she argues that walking the reader through an honest accounting of the research process is important for the transparency of the findings and ability of other scholars to replicate them. Indeed, she argues that such transparency is essential to addressing the replicability issues that are besetting both the natural and social sciences (ibid, 291). Ultimately, Cheng—an academic at King's College London—has in mind an audience of students and "scholars-in-training" who would be well served to be exposed to the work behind the curtain that gives a clearer view of "research design scaffolding" that is so often hidden from them (ibid).

This reflective and transparent approach, and the issues it is placed to address, is particularly salient to a PhD project such as this that spread over five years, a global pandemic, and a number of iterations that have retreated into the long recesses of my memory. Absent such a commitment to radical reflexivity, these earlier iterations stand the risk of quickly disappearing into the ether, considered as they are embarrassing false starts or misguided avenues whose futility was eventually realised after a challenging process I would prefer not to remember, let alone share publicly with a wider scholarly community. This is particularly the case when imagining an audience of examiners or peer reviewers whose role is to spot any deficiencies in my work. Surely this is an instance where the incentive to present my project as cleanly as possible, inclusive of an origin story where its success and scientific integrity was ordained from the beginning, is at its highest. Indeed, the writing process often leads to an impression that the initial research question, hypothesis, theoretical framework, and research findings emerged organically and experienced little in the way of resistance as their inherent logical validity and true reflection of the data destined it for the final product that the reader is now reviewing.

In presenting the methodology and research design of this thesis, I am committed to following Cheng's example in presenting a transparent review of these earlier iterations and evolution of this project. Beyond aligning with the values of transparency and scholarly reflexivity, I find that it is impossible to give a full account of my methodological choices without diving into the history of the project to recount the context in which they were made. The same is true with this project's research question and argument. Indeed, the overarching argument of this project regarding the capacity of resources to reshape the social institutions of armed groups was arrived at, not despite these earlier iterations, but largely because of them. In this way, these earlier iterations—inclusive of hypotheses that were abandoned, and

research questions left on the cutting board—were essential to the process that ultimately produced this final project.

In many ways this is the natural process of scientific research and the ways of reasoning and thinking that animate it. We are inspired by events or topics, we dream up hypotheses about them, we test those hypotheses, we struggle to make them fit the data, we change them, we test again, and repeat the process until we find the alignment between the data and our hypothesis needed to render the latter into a theoretical argument. Despite the final presentation as a linear process following a logical progression, the actual process is fundamentally iterative.

This is particularly evident in the context of graduate work and the production of a doctoral dissertation. We are compelled to present a research question, hypothesis, and methodology in the early phases of our project, often in that particular order, and often conceive of these elements as essential prerequisites that must be present before we embark on our research. In reality, these are as much a product of our research as they are starting points. Certainly in my case, the emergence of my research question, hypothesis, and methodology were the product of a long, iterative process that developed and changed as I engaged with the literature and the many inspirations and challenges I encountered there. A traditional methodology section would simply present the outcome of this process, a product frozen in time at the moment of writing. However, this product bears the fingerprints of this long process, as my ideas, arguments, and modes of making them were outcomes of a theorising process that provides the essential context for why this project was produced the way it was.

It is my hope that telling the story of this process helps the reader understand where my arguments came from, why they developed the way they did, and why certain choices were made. In contrast to a traditional accounting that may give the impression these arguments and choices emerged naturally from some ideal plane of perfectly rational scientific thinking, this approach presents a more honest accounting of my thinking process. It is my hope that this in fact serves to make my arguments clearer, as my reasoning process will be laid bare for the reader to follow.

This following section will provide what I call a biography of the project. Inspired by Cheng's call for increased transparency and reflexivity, it recounts the origins of the project as an interest of the effects of the migrant smuggling economy of conflict in the MENA region, to a hypothesis that it was driving armed group fragmentation in northern Mali, then ultimately to a broader theoretical argument regarding the socio-economic structures of armed groups based on my analysis of the effects of illicit drug smuggling. The evolutions in the theoretical underpinnings of my argument, as well as the pivot in focus from migrant to drug smuggling, were driven both by my engagement with the literature as well as a global pandemic that limited my options for fieldwork and thus the type of empirical data that would be available to me. I hope my transparent explanation of this project helps the reader gain a better understanding of both my reasoning process as an author as well as the broader arguments I make throughout the subsequent chapters.

Project Biography

This project began in 2015 while I was pursuing my Master's degree in political science at the American University in Cairo. There were two things dominating the current events section of the news at that time: the post-Arab Spring instability and conflicts in the MENA

region, and Europe's migrant crisis. Naturally, these proved to be popular topics within our department, and they formed the most salient starting points for my own thinking of how to develop a timely and engaging PhD proposal. Migration studies were a draw, as well as various topics related to violent conflict and civil war. I began to think deeply about these topics, conflict and migration, how they were related, and how they represented something particularly new and vexing in the increasingly globalised world. At this point, this represented little more than an interest, a hunch that there was something important and interesting to be found here.

I was taking a course titled 'Conflict and Security in Global Politics', where I would find an avenue for fleshing out this hunch and begin seeing my admittedly half-baked intuitions articulated in scholarly arguments. One week found us covering the 'New Wars' literature of Mary Kaldor, where she wrote of the increased "blurring of the distinctions between war and organised crime" (Kaldor, 2012, p. 2). This was a moment of inspiration, as it seemed to perfectly encapsulate the vagaries and complexities of what I was following in the news, and what I and others were struggling to think about in terms of traditional categories and concepts encountered in the earliest iterations of political science theory. Beyond this, it ignited a powerful interest in organised crime and illicit economic activities as being somehow crucial in understanding how and why civil wars were fought. Indeed, this aligned with the contemporary current events, where the migrant crisis was elevating concerns over human smuggling and the increasingly sprawling network of traffickers who were facilitating the largest movement of people since World War II.

I thought that this must be related to the vexing complexity and intractability of the conflicts in the region, but not in the way most were discussing it. Indeed, the linear

relationship between conflict and migration, in the form of impelling refugee flows, was intuitive and well-trodden scholarly ground, but what if we think about the causation arrow also working in the other direction? Are these massive migration flows in some ways causing or exacerbating these conflicts via the involvement of organised criminal groups with an acute economic incentive to create and sustain these vast movements of people? This dynamic appealed to me at the theoretical level, as it touched on a directional relationship I had not encountered before. I reflected on the 'War Economies' literature of the 'New Wars' era and its findings regarding the roles of resources and illicit economic activities in creating and sustaining conflict: diamonds, timber, and oil (to name a few) in Africa, coca in South America (Ross, 2004; Collier & Hoeffler, 2004). Might migrant smuggling be a new conflict resource to add to the list? This appeared to me to have the potential to be an explosive and acutely relevant finding: the migrant crisis and vast sums of money generated by it were in fact being funnelled back into the conflicts from which they emerged, sustaining and intensifying them in a vicious positive feedback loop. Might this feedback loop explain both the vexing intractability of the conflict in Syria and the unprecedented scale of the migrant crisis? I would soon find some remnants of empirical validation in the form of news reports that ISIS was deliberately attacking refugee camps in western Syria in order to increase the flow of migrants through territories and checkpoints they taxed (Liang, 2016, p. 3). In the case of Libya as well, the grey literature was beginning to speak about an "underlying drive to control local trafficking routes" on the part of militias in the south, where the migrant smuggling economy was increasingly seen as "a reliable economic pillar" to the communities and armed groups of the region (Shaw & Mangan, 2014, p. 29).

Here I had the beginnings of a research question, and attendant hypothesis, that would take me through the conflict literature and the role of economic interests and activities in

conflict zones. This hypothesis was that the migrant smuggling economy was exacerbating the conflicts from which it was emerging by contributing to the interests and funding streams of armed groups, an argument I began to try to situate in the literature. The New Wars literature was a natural place to start, as it impelled my personal thinking and elevated discussion of the role of organised crime and economics in civil wars. This soon took me into the Greed and Grievance literature and research on War Economies that was prominent in the early 2000s, where the emphasis on the role of economic greed and organised criminal interests was summarised by David Keen's (2000) apt reformulation of the Clausewitzian axion that modern conflict was increasingly a "continuation of economics by other means" (pp.16-17). This was inspired and fortified by Malone and Berdal's (2000) Greed and Grievance: Economic Agendas in Civil Wars, which appeared to convincingly argue for the independent role of economic incentives and criminal actors in driving the post-Cold War spike in civil conflict. This led to the 'durable disorder' thesis of globalisation, according to which increasing interconnectivity and economic de-regulation across the globe facilitated local instability by empowering a growing demographic of actors with the means and incentives to challenge traditional political orders and pursue their interests with violent means (Duffield, 2000).

This literature spoke to the relationship I felt I was detecting in the conflicts in Syria and Libya and the ways in which the migrant smuggling economy was interacting with them. At this point, I was committed to pursuing it as a topic for my master's thesis, which required the formulation of a research question. This initial question was reverse-engineered from my guiding hypothesis that that the migrant smuggling economy was indeed contributing to the conflicts in the MENA region, proposing: how is the migrant smuggling economy contributing to conflicts in Libya and Mali? (I had foregone a focus on Syria for practical

reasons at the suggestion of my supervisor, who cautioned that the complexity of that particular conflict would make teasing out singular dynamics and relationships extremely difficult.) Formulating it as a 'how' question as opposed to the more straightforwardly answerable 'why' or 'is' formulations represented a challenge of which I was keenly aware from the beginning: namely the issues of 'begging the question' and avoiding an overly descriptive, analytically shallow answer.

The first issue I was less concerned with, as I was confident in an emerging consensus in the grey literature and journalistic reports that armed groups were indeed interacting with the migrant smuggling industries, and thus it was fair to take for granted that the industry was impacting the conflict dynamics in some way. I received no pushback on this point from my department; however, I envisioned a future in which I was the target of an "overselling the smuggling/conflict nexus" type piece, echoing articles like Wolfram Lacher's (2013) "Challenging the Myth of the Drug-Terror Nexus" and the contemporary debate over the role of organised crime and drug smuggling amongst scholars of Sahelian conflict. To my mind, producing an argument that was falsifiable/rebuttable in such a way would represent a contribution of some value and thus a worthwhile endeavour in the end, as opening new arenas of debate and discussion was a goal of most emerging scholars. The second issue, producing an argument that was analytically rich and not indistinguishable from mushy description, was perhaps the most paramount task of the entire project. Producing a thesis that outlined cases of armed groups engaging in smuggling activities and using the proceeds to finance their activities would be interesting as a journalistic piece or a grey literature report, but it would represent little in the way of theoretical value.

The first step I took was to formulate a hypothesis that was more specific and spoke to a particular feature of these conflicts that was salient and analysable. I set out to begin a process of 'grounded theorising', an inductive approach towards qualitative research that I felt was appropriate to this specific type of 'how' question. The goal of grounded theorising, as developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967), is to allow one's arguments/conclusions to emerge organically from the data, a firmly positivist epistemological approach wherein theoretically relevant relationships and dynamics exist within the empirics for the researcher to discover.

I began a review of conflicts in North Africa as well as the migrant smuggling economy in search of a connection that could form an initial hypothesis to guide my project. Establishing a hypothesis this early however was a risky endeavour, as it potentially violated a key principle of grounded theorising to approach the data free of any pre-conceived bias or expectation. So long as this early hypothesis was grounded in the data however, or emergent from it as I read it, this was an issue I felt I could avoid whilst maintaining sufficient scientific integrity. Besides, hypothesis testing is an important and valid element of scientific reasoning, and so long as we remain open to changing and altering these hypotheses in response to this testing, we can avoid the perils of 'verification' and confirmation bias that Glaser (1992) argued was the antithesis to good grounded theory. In turn, as many scholars such as Blumer (1969) and Yin (2014) argue, developing a hypothesis at the outset is important in giving a project focus and direction, two things I very much needed that that point.

Allowing a grounded hypothesis to emerge from my reading of the current literature required what Glaser (1978) described as theory sensitivity: a skill in which one is able to

notice patterns, recurring themes, and relevant variations within the data. This is a task that carries its own inherent challenges when researching illicit activities whose operations are clandestine, as the data surrounding them are often elusive and opaque. Beyond its difficulty in being generated, the data that does exist regarding organised criminal activities is also a charged political product reflecting the power and interests of those collecting it. In that sense, it is perhaps a problematic expectation that such data would 'speak' to me and produce a hypothesis reflecting an objective scientific reality devoid of the power hierarchies and constructed narratives around the migrant smuggling industry in Africa. Therefore, the nature of this topic, particularly the inherently political, contested, and opaque data associated with it, necessitated a degree of reflexivity from me as a researcher. This aligned with a more constructivist approach towards grounded theory developed by Charmaz (2006) that is sensitive to the social nature of data, as well as her more flexible and iterative approach towards theory development that retains a place for the hypothesis-driven process I was set to engage in. In turn, in regard to the specific challenges of organised crime research, Raineri & Strazzari (2023) argue that positivist approaches remain valid and useful, but encourage researchers to understand that the data does not in fact 'speak for itself', but requires an interpreter well attuned to the inherent political and social forces producing it.

With this in mind, I detected an early pattern and trend within the migrant smuggling literature that soon formed the kernels of a guiding hypothesis. One element of the migrant smuggling economy which appeared repeatedly was the absence of a centralised organising structure, or at least no detectable one, as researchers described a decentralised and often disjointed network of smuggling enterprises spanning the region. This aligned with another fact which seemed to be a structural feature of the conflict environments in southern Libya and northern Mali: fragmentation and decentralisation. May the decentralised character of the

smuggling economy be creating similar pressures of decentralisation into the conflict landscape? Here were the origins of my hypothesis that the migrant smuggling economy was contributing to armed group fragmentation in Libya and Mali.

The next step was fleshing this argument out theoretically and situating it within the literature. This required a consideration of the ways in which armed groups interact with the economic realm. Much of the early iterations of the Greed and Grievance literature which impelled so much of my initial thinking was largely out of date at this point, as much of the literature had evolved beyond the simplistic economic reductionism which many considered that era of scholarship to represent. This posed an initial challenge for my thinking, as I was presenting a hypothesis that was perhaps reflective of this type of economic reductionism to which much of the literature had grown hostile. From this perspective, my argument would follow a sort of resource curse logic wherein fragmentation was occurring due to greed-based incentives on the part of actors within armed groups who were impelled to break away from prevailing command structures due to the opportunities afforded by the smuggling economy. This envisioned armed groups/actors in an exclusively economic framework, driven by rational, cost-benefits calculations and devoid of any social context. Indeed, this was a problematic ontological position given the more recent state of the literature on armed group fragmentation.

In response to the economic approaches represented by the Greed and Grievance research, the field of conflict studies experienced a 'social institutionalist' turn in the late 2000s which highlighted the role of social factors and institutions. This was particularly true with the state of literature on armed group fragmentation, the precise place in which I was seeking to situate my own argument. Two of the most prominent scholars in this area, Paul

Staniland (2014) and Jeremy Weinstein (2006), both presented frameworks that asserted the decisive nature of social factors (conceptualised as endowments/capital) in influencing the trajectories of armed group formation and fragmentation.[3] In fact, Staniland himself, perhaps the most influential scholar on the topic of armed group fragmentation, argued against the role of economic factors altogether, maintaining instead that material resources were funneled through social institutions that themselves stood as the primary structural determinants of armed group fragmentation. This would suggest a significantly diminished role for the migrant smuggling economy in the conflict landscape of the region, certainly in terms of any sort of structuring effect or ability to cause fragmentation.

This posed a fundamental challenge to the theoretical assumptions of my hypothesis. If I was really interested in explaining the conflict landscape, particularly fragmentation, the literature was driving me to a focus on social institutions. If, however, I was focused on the migrant smuggling economy, I naturally needed to be focused on economic institutions. The issue here was that I was interested in both, and in some ways trying to analyse a connection between them. If Staniland's approach was correct, this relationship was largely linear, with the economic institutions being of secondary importance to the social ones that stood structurally independent. This would again suggest the effects of the migrant smuggling economy to be less theoretically interesting than my hypothesis was suggesting. It was time to turn to the data to determine what it would allow me to say.

My initial expectations were that, with a conflict history spanning multiple decades and a number of rebellions, Mali provided an opportunity to interrogate the structural drivers of conflict dynamics and evaluate where these drivers fell within the economic vs social

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[3] Discussed further in chapter two.

ontological debate within the literature. This led to a longitudinal, comparative research design wherein the current conflict in Mali would be compared to previous iterations, particularly the Tuareg rebellion of the 1990s, to determine if changes in the degrees of fragmentation could be attributed to changes in the economic environment, namely the growth of the migrant smuggling economy. Within the parameters of this comparative method, social factors could largely be held constant, as the nature of the social institutions of northern Mali were common across each conflict. Therefore, if any change in the dependent variable, fragmentation, could be traced to the migrant smuggling economy, that would not only validate my hypothesis but also lead to a significant re-evaluation of our understanding of the ontology of armed groups and the factors that drive their formation and fragmentation.

However, what I would find would force me to re-evaluate both the theoretical underpinnings of my hypothesis and the empirical focus of my entire project. The conflict landscape of northern Mali was indeed fracturing along social faultlines, seemingly confirming the frameworks of the social institutionalist literature. However, rather than minimising the role of the smuggling economy or undermining a perspective committed to a more material ontology, this process could not be fully explained without incorporating the economic element, particularly the ways in which it was impacting the activation of these social faultlines. This was especially clear throughout the period of the early 2000s, in which changes in the smuggling economy in the form of the arrival of cocaine significantly altered the balance of power within and between rival social groups in a way that would carry acute implications for conflict processes down the line. As the work of anthropologist Judith Scheele (2009) highlights, these economic forces were putting stress on the social ties of the region. She notes how:

small [smuggling] networks do not explicitly rely on tribal links, but they nevertheless reproduce the major divisions to the extent that these determine everyday social ties, shared material interests and marriage alliances ... In contrast, drug trafficking is described as a means for an individual to get rich fast, to the detriment of wider solidarities (pp. 84-85).

Here was an instance where the data was speaking to an acute interrelation between the social and economic forces of the region, a revelation that I felt stood capable of making a significant theoretical contribution to the literature regarding armed group fragmentation. By highlighting the structural interrelations that social institutions retain with the economic realm, I felt my argument could nudge the literature towards a renewed focus on the material forces that impact armed group organisation. This in turn required a rethinking of the mechanics underlying my argument to focus on the ways in which the migrant smuggling economy was interacting with and reforming the social institutions of the region, then trace how the product of such interactions were manifesting in the conflict landscape.

With this theoretical framework becoming established, I set out to acquire resources to undertake fieldwork in northern Mali. As a newly emerging topic, I felt there was not sufficient data to make robust claims regarding the impact of the migrant smuggling economy. If I could fill in this gap, I could add this to the earlier work on drug smuggling to tell a more encompassing story of the socio-economic drivers of conflict in northern Mali and the development of the impacts of illicit economies on the region's social structures.

By the early spring of 2020, funding was secured and bags were literally being packed when the realities of the COVID-19 pandemic made clear this field research was not happening, at least within the time frame of this project. This required a significant reformulation of a project whose key empirical focus would now lack the data needed to present a robust argument. Fortunately, what I had at the point allowed for a pivot in the empirical focus of the project, rather than a dramatic reformulation, as the realities of the

drug smuggling economy that was so significant in driving the theoretical underpinnings of my new hypothesis stood as a sufficiently promising avenue of research to keep me going. Even more fortunate was the agreement of my supervisory team as to the ability of this re-focused project to produce a sufficiently valuable theoretical contribution to move forward as a focus of my doctoral dissertation.

In short, my project evolved from an interest in the impact of migrant smuggling on the conflict structures of the MENA region to a wider argument about the ontology of armed group organisation and the dual socio-economic drivers of armed group formation and fragmentation. It is my hope that detailing this process above will help the reader gain a clearer understanding of the project in its current form, in particular the reasonings and evolutions underpinning its arguments. By detailing at the outset the origins of these arguments in a transparent way, I hope the reader is able to better follow and understand them as they play out over the course of the subsequent chapters. Ultimately, I believe this renders the project more digestible both as a piece of social scientific research and as a contribution to our understanding of the role of economic forces in conflict processes.

Research Design and Methodology

In sum, this project maintains an altered form of my original thesis that the illicit smuggling economy in Mali has contributed to armed group fragmentation. However, in testing this hypothesis in relation to the theoretical literature and the empirical data, the original mechanisms envisioned were proven reductionist. As will be argued throughout the course of this work, rather than following a reductionist resource curse logic, the mechanisms at play require an analysis inclusive of the social institutions that retain an equally important role in how and why these fragmentations occur. To achieve this argument, this thesis follows

what can be described as a 'most similar case research design' (Yin, 2014), built upon a longitudinal analysis of a series of conflict's punctuated Mali's modern history. Such an approach allows for a focus on key causal threads, as a broad set of political, economic, and social factors can be held constant. The extent which the latter do evolve, particularly the balance of power between rival social groups in the north, the ensuing chapters trace these changes to concomitant changes in the regional smuggling economy. This method of process tracing is built on a credible set of secondary sources that are themselves built upon primary knowledge and interviews with key actors and informants on the ground, including the United Nations Panel of Experts on Mali, Special Reports commissioned by the UN Security Council, and scholars and international thinks tanks who have built their own qualitative research on key informant and expert interviews on the ground. This is supplemented by journalistic reports with direct quotes from leaders of salient armed groups and regional experts. This integrity and range of sources allows for a degree of triangulation and multiple data points speaking to the broader conclusion of this thesis regarding the role of the illicit smuggling economy in the processes of armed groups fragmentation in Mali. In this sense, it stands as an "explanatory case study" (Yin, 2014), that accounts for the increase in armed group fragmentation and complexity observed in Mali's conflict dynamics.

Chapter Outline

Chapter two provides a critical review of the literature on armed groups and their interaction with their economic environment, particularly in regard to the relative importance of either social or economic factors. It argues that this bifurcation is problematic and emerges from a larger debate between neo-classical economics and sociology. By demonstrating the economic contingencies associated with the social capital/endowments central to the social institutionalist literature on armed group formation, the chapter rejects this bifurcation and

instead lays the groundwork for a socio-economic approach that demonstrates how both social and economic structures mutually constitute the structures under which armed groups operate.

As this chapter leads to a theoretical perspective emphasising the need to view both social and economic factors in interaction with each other, chapter three lays out the mechanisms through which these interactions occur. It builds on insights from both principal-agent theory and network theory. The main argument is that economic environments and industries that allow traditionally subservient and marginalized actors to accumulate resources independently of the control of prevailing power structures will lead to a more fragmented conflict landscape. This is due to the fact that the armed group leaders (principals) lose their material/economic leverage over their subservients (agents), ultimately undermining social hierarchies and empowering marginalised actors to challenge traditional hierarchies.

Chapter four then begins the empirical section of the thesis. It begins with a broad history of the Tuareg in northern Mali, focusing on how their modes of subsistence, or livelihoods, evolved in line with larger changes in the environment that in turn altered their internal social hierarchies as well as interactions with their neighbours. It includes a comparative analysis of the 'first Tuareg rebellion' of the 1960s with the second in the 1990s, arguing that differences in the conflict dynamics can be traced to changes in the economic sphere that had taken place in the intervening decades. In particular, it argues that the erosion of the camel-based pastoral economy undermined the ability of the Ifoghas Tuareg to exercise control and justify their privileged status at the top of the social hierarchy that now was lacking an underlying material logic, highlighting the overarching argument of this thesis

that social bases from which armed groups organise are themselves contingent on the economic environment, and hence subject to change as this environment shifts.

Chapter five focuses on the years between the termination of the second Tuareg rebellion in 1996 through the arrival of Andean cocaine smuggling economy in the 2000s. As with the previous chapter, it argues that these intervening years and the dramatic economic change they contained further undermined the social relations of the region and, in turn, altered the power structures in the north of Mali. This dynamic is traced to particular features of cocaine as a commodity within the smuggling economy, specifically its low bulk and high value, and how this represented a qualitative shift in how it interacted with the surrounding social environment. I argue this represented a form of 'de-socialisation' within northern Mali's smuggling economy which carried acute implications in the subsequent conflict.

Chapter six then proceeds to lay out these implications by outlining how the main conflict actors, and the splits between them, were rooted in the varying levels of involvement that different communities had with the drug smuggling economy. These varying levels of involvement were themselves rooted in the structural position of these communities within the social hierarchies of northern Mali, particularly the formerly marginalised Arab and Tuareg castes, the Kounta and Imghad, respectively, who were selectively permitted to engage in the illicit trade as part of the Malian state's governance strategy against the traditional noble tribes of the north. This represents a further empirical validation of this thesis' theoretical argument regarding the structural interrelations of social and economic forces.

Chapter seven covers the later conflict period from the signing of the peace agreement in Algiers in June 2015 to the eventual installation of interim authorities in northern Mali in

2018. This point in 2018 represents a natural end point to the empirical time frame of focus, as it represented a watershed moment in both the conflict and the wider history of northern Mali. It stands as a moment of analytical clarity, demonstrating how the conflict had become detached from purely tribal enmities and historic rivalries, and developed to a territorialised competition between two 'emerging political subsets' rooted in distinct socio-economic extraction systems. It describes how these emerging political sub-sets in northern Mali centred around the power centres of the Coordination des Mouvements de l'Azawad (CMA) and the Plateforme, and how the territorialisation of the conflict around these two socio-economic blocs represented an inevitable evolution of the region's socio-political structures in response to fundamental changes in the economic environment. In turn, in situating the effects of the drug smuggling economy within the evolutions of this period, this chapter traces how the de-activation and re-activation of various competing local cleavages are rooted in a material logic that have produced these emerging political subsets. In this way, it not only sheds light on the dizzying complexity of armed group formation and alliance building in this phase of Mali's conflict, but also contributes to our wider understanding of the interaction between economic change and the dynamics of identity-based categories, such as tribal affiliation and ethnic identification, and how it relates to armed group formation.

The final, concluding chapter summarises the conflict history of Mali covered in the preceding four chapters with a focus on how the region's social and economic structures have evolved to produce a progressively more complex conflict landscape. It then moves to a discussion of the main theoretical takeaways from this thesis, mainly the dual socio-economic structures under which armed groups operate and the economic/material contingencies associated with social capital. This is situated within the social institutionalist literature on armed group formation and fragmentation in an effort to correct what I argue is it's 'over-

socialised' approach. This leads to a number of questions regarding the effects of economic change on conflict areas that such a perspective is placed to address.

It then moves to propose avenues of future research as well as initial, preliminary analyses that can serve as valuable starting points. The first is regards to migrant smuggling, and the ways it is re-enforcing or counter-acting the trends outlined in relation to drug smuggling. It presents an early hypothesis that the rapid growth in the migrant smuggling economy inaugurated a moment of socio-economic alignment that would work in favour of the Ifoghas and other traditionally dominant social actors. This is due to its nature as a traditionally low value trade, not requiring the type of start-up capital and state involvement that precluded them from the drug trade. In this way it more resembles the prevailing staples trade discussed in chapter five that aligns with traditional social structures.

It finally proposes an expansion of geographic focus to consider the effects of these dynamics in the smuggling economy to the conflict in Libya. Whilst outside the scope of this thesis, a comparison between dynamics in southern Libya and northern Mali could present a fruitful research agenda, particularly into the role of the state in mediating power relations in peripheral regions where cross border smuggling stands as a key economic pillar.

Chapter 2

Social Institutions, Economic Resources, and the Structural Determinants of Armed

Group Formation

As it becomes increasingly clear that various forms of smuggling activity form the central pillar of conflict financing in Mali and across the Sahara (Molenaar & El Kamouni-Janssen, 2017) scholars and policy-makers face the urgent task of unpacking the implications of this economic activity for the contemporary conflict landscape. While existing political economic approaches have indeed focused on the impact of specific resources on the dynamics of conflict (Ross, 2004; Lebillon, 2001,) they tend to neglect the social implications of these economic forces and vice versa. In other words, they view the economic realm as a static landscape of resources to be exploited by armed groups as opposed to a dynamic set of relationships between actors and their environment. However, in a region such as the Sahara, where economic activity is heavily embedded in social relations, this economic/social dichotomy is problematic. Hence, this chapter highlights the need to consider the ways in which social and economic factors align and interact to produce many observable effects in terms of the nature of conflicts and the armed actors within them.

As will be outlined below, the existing literature tends to emphasize either social or economic (material) factors in conditioning the capacities and organizational structures of armed groups (Collier & Hoeffler, 2004; Weinstein, 2006; Staniland, 2014). Indeed, while early political economic research emphasized the economic dimensions of conflict, and thus the primary role of resources in determining the nature and capacities of armed movements, later research has emphasized the need to consider the social institutions that filter and condition the effect these resources have, effects that can vary quite widely depending on the

strength of these *a priori* social structures (Staniland, 2014; Sarbahi 2014). However, the existing research into Saharan conflict as well as the illicit smuggling economy renders it increasingly difficult to consider social relations in isolation from their surrounding material environments, as social bases and hierarchies are largely held together by relationships of economic dependence (Scheele, 2012). In turn, economic activities emerge and thrive through their interaction with particular social classes positioned to take advantage of them.

Thus, this chapter will lead to an alternative theoretical approach that avoids the establishment of a structural primacy between social or material forces, but rather considers the ways in which both mutually constitute the structures under which armed groups operate. For this, it will draw heavily from the literatures of economic sociology and political anthropology that explicitly explore the ways in which economic and social forces interact. Aside from merely highlighting the interdependence of material and social factors in determining conflict landscapes, this socio-economic approach further allows for the development of conceptual frameworks that are better able to shed light on one of the guiding questions of conflict researchers; that is, the nature of the relationship between social structures and economic activities in conflict zones.

Conflict: Economic and Social Approaches

As the post-Cold War era intensified the trend towards internal (as opposed to inter-state) conflict, IR theorists began to grapple with the issue of organized violence at the societal level. This phenomenon was—by its very nature—highly complex, dynamic and resistant to the sort of parsimonious theoretical models that had such purchase in inter-state relations. At one level, such conflicts were indeed the realm of power and the violent pursuit

of survival and self-interested gain. As such, they seemed to be another historical iteration of Clausewitz's famous observation of warfare as a "continuation of politics by other means." However, this was also the realm of intimate social and economic relations; relations long recognized as fundamental bedrock of domestic politics. In turn, rather than a complete breakdown of social and economic systems, contemporary civil conflict appeared to represent the "emergence of an alternative system of profit, power, and even protection," or, as Keen aptly observes, "the continuation of *economics* by other means" (Keen, 2000, p. xx). Hence, a large amount of literature has emerged seeking to describe how these lead to, and articulate themselves in, civil warfare.

Economic approaches have primarily looked at the role of resources in creating the conditions conducive to conflict. A landmark analysis came from Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler's World Bank analysis on the causes of civil wars, which found a high correlation between countries with a high reliance on natural resource extraction and their likelihood to experience a civil conflict (Collier & Hoeffler, 2004). While many disputed the causal mechanisms (i.e.: whether it emanates from greed-based profit/power seeking or simply proxies for higher opportunities to mobilise the resources needed for rebellion) it nonetheless directed attention towards the role of the material environment in providing certain opportunity structures through which aggrieved groups may mobilize their demands through violence against the state. Ross later disaggregated this economic environment by arguing it is crucial to understand the nature of the resources themselves to gain a fine-grained account of the role of material factors in conflict. In other words, certain types of resources tended to lead to certain types of conflicts (Ross, 2004; Lebillon, 2005).

Indeed, this political economic approach led to a rich research program that gained a high degree of traction in the policy community. Nonetheless, these models merely represented ideal types of dyadic conflicts that resembled less and less the complex nature of contemporary conflict. Rather than a relatively coherent rebel movement mobilizing against a state, conflicts were increasingly characterized by a proliferating and diverse range of non-state actors (Bakke, Cunningham, & Seymour, 2012). Hence, rather than country level, macro-economic analyses, scholars began digging into the material underpinnings of individual armed groups themselves. By understanding the nature and organisational structure of groups, it is argued, we can answer the question of why some conflicts are characterized by fragmented insurgencies, while others are more (seemingly) orderly.

One of the most prominent works from this tradition came from Jeremy Weinstein (2006), who argued in his seminal book, *Organizing Insurgency*, that the organizational structure of an armed group depends heavily on their initial resource endowments. He observed that groups who enjoyed access to an abundance of highly valued resources, such as gemstones or drugs, trended towards fragmentation and ill-discipline. In contrast, groups that lacked early access to such resources were forced to build themselves upon what he deems 'social endowments' that were more conducive to cooperative relations both within the group and with the wider population. These social endowments, he describes, are akin to Robert Putnam's concept of 'social capital', or social institutions and norms that facilitate trust and repeated interaction amongst members of society (Putnam, as cited in Weinstein (2006), p. 49). Thus, to account for variation in group organization, Weinstein (pp. 47-50) disaggregates 'resources' into two idealized types: economic, or material/tangible, and social, and it is the relative influence of each type that structures the organizational path of the group—either cohesive and disciplined, or fragmented. While he notes that most groups fall somewhere

along a spectrum between these two organizational types—dependent on the relative composition of their initial endowments (either economic or social)—he treats these latter resource types as dichotomous and mutually exclusive (pp.165-167). In other words, social resources exist independently of economic ones and vice versa.

These two distinct forms of capital, economic and social, both can serve as an important means to organize and motivate recruits and grassroots support. However, it remains the case that there are certain functions that only economic capital can perform, such as paying soldiers and purchasing supplies. Of course, these transactions can be can easier in the context where social capital is also present, perhaps allowing some degree of flexibility around payments or prices and facilitating easier 'business' negotiations. This retains a certain degree of importance to economic capital in the functioning of an armed group, so long as it relies on acquiring resources from its environment, particularly via markets, a brute necessity facing all groups regardless of their stores of social capital. At best, these would be cases where social and economic endowments are complementary of each other; though any mechanisms of interaction remain under-theorised as Weinstein argues for the causative force of one or the other in structuring rebel organization (pp. 50-53).

However, establishing this primacy is a fraught exercise. What is the precise combination of social and economic endowments where one subsumes the other? Does the subsumed category cease to matter at all? What remains of the role of the economic environment in such highly socialized groups? What about the role of social ties in groups awash with natural resource riches? And finally, what are we to make of cases where an abundance of resource wealth is associated, not with ill-discipline and disintegration, but in fact the opposite?

For instance, we can compare Weinstein's application of the concept of the 'resource curse' in non-state armed groups to the broader resource curse literature that, while focused on states, argues that such easy abundance leads to highly centralized political systems and authoritarian control (Aslaksen, 2010; Goldberg, Wibbels, & Mvukiyehe, 2008; Ross 2001& 2009). Why resource abundance variably leads to centralized control on the one hand and the lack thereof on the other opens a broader range of inquiry into the mechanisms at play in the interaction between a rebel group and its environment, and the political economy of governance more generally. Setting aside the distinction between states and non-state armed groups—as Weinstein (2006, pp. 37-38) himself builds upon the broader literature of rebellion that conceptualizes rebel groups as proto-states seeking the mantle of legitimacy via the provision of public goods to the population—some have accounted for this variation by discounting the role of the resource environment altogether in favour of other factors: namely social institutions.

Indeed, while Weinstein treats economic resources and pre-existing social institutions as competing substitutes that fight for causal primacy in the organizational makeup of armed groups, recent work has addressed the relationship in more radical ways. For instance, Paul Staniland's work, *Networks of Rebellion*, eliminates the independent role of resources altogether, arguing that they are merely channeled through pre-existing social networks that themselves stand as the fundamental structure of armed groups. As he notes, "discipline and control are functions not of resource endowments, but instead of the ability of insurgent social networks and organizations to harness resources" (Staniland 2012, pp. 148-149). This is built on the earlier work of Sarbahi (2014) which found that an insurgent group's effectiveness and ability to extract concessions from a militarily superior state is heavily

influenced by their degree of 'social embeddness' within the surrounding population.[4] Like Staniland, Sarbahi maintains the superior power of such social forces to create a linear causal relationship with material resources, as he argues that "the ability of rebels to have an advantage from the exploitation of resources such as poppy cultivation and narco-trafficking varies with the degree of their social embeddedness" (p. 1476). This argument makes sense of the problem outlined earlier, namely the observation that groups or conflicts characterized by "identical resource profiles" nonetheless exhibit variation in group cohesion and organizational structure; however, we are left asking what becomes of an armed group's relationship with its economic environment in this case: does it cease to play any structural role?

This is a crucial theoretical question to answer before being able to determine the relevance of economic change on a region and its conflict dynamics. Were the answer to be yes, we would perhaps expect minimal change, or change of a limited type in the form of socially cohesive and established groups better positioned to capitalise on the changing landscape; a simple case of the rich getting richer. However, were the answer to be no, we would likely observe deeper, fundamental changes in the social landscape, the implications of which for the dynamics of conflict would be much more profound.

I argue that the economic environment does indeed continue to play a key structural role, not by discounting or dismissing the importance of a group's social institutions/capital, but via the role it plays in the formation and maintenance of these social ties themselves. For one, it is often difficult to speak about the social features of any particular group without

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[4] Sarbahi uses seven metrics to proxy for social embeddedness: origins in a political party, pre-war support base, pre-war political mobilization, ties with societal actors, leadership structure, and separation of political and military powers (p. 1483).

considering the economic ties that bind them both to each other and to other outside actors. This is immediately evident at the level of terminology, as many of the categorizing criteria Staniland uses to proxy for social ties also imply a direct material relation, such as caste, class, or even ethnic groups that often engage in highly socially embedded forms of trade. In turn, as the political economic conflict literature has shown, it is these material forces that largely determine the opportunity structures through which these groups will be able to potentially organize violence (Collier & Hoeffler, 2004; Ross, 2004).

Unpacking the 'Social': Resources and Categories

This raises the question of just what precise is meant by the term 'social', and how it is distinct from, or related to, the term 'economic'. At one level, it is used to describe a category of resources, i.e., social 'capital' or social 'endowments. These intangible resources function to overcome various problems of collective action by promoting trust, norm adherence, and mutual aid etc., and are generated through repeated interaction over long- and medium-term time horizons. Robert Putnam was a key populariser of the term, arguing that the presence of these social resources was crucial in driving varying institutional outcomes. His work, *Making Democracy Work*, argued that the pre-existing social institutions of northern Italy were a decisive explanatory factor in its comparative democratic and economic success in comparison to the less developed south (Putnam, 1993) . Since then, the influence of Putnam's work has become pervasive, as he's gone to garner over twenty thousand citations and, according to the Open Syllabus Project, he stands as the fourth most cited scholar in university political science syllabi (Open Syllabus Project, 2023). In fact, both Weinstein (2012, p. 49) and Staniland (2014, p. 36, p. 241) themselves cite Putnam in their discussions of value and influence of social endowments and/or bases. Thus, a great deal of conceptual

weight rests upon this work and the concept of social capital that it elevated. It is therefore worth revisiting.

In interrogating the origins of this resource, social capital, in the context of Italy, Putnam dives deep into the history of economic development beginning in the medieval period. He traces how social capital emerged and interacted with pressures emanating from the material environment, beginning with the emergence of 'civic republicanism' in medieval northern Italy, characterised by communes "formed when groups of neighbours swore personal oaths to render one another mutual assistance, to provide for common defence and economic cooperation" (ibid, p. 69). This laid the groundwork for a sort of quasi self-government and horizontal relations of cooperation and support in contrast to the more vertical relations of the feudal south.

In turn, these social and political developments would respond to and facilitate advancements in the economic realm, as this "expansion of civic republicanism…was intimately associated with a rapid growth in commerce" (ibid, p. 71), with ambitious merchants expanding their trade networks as civil order was established. This would facilitate the emergence of mercantile capitalism in the north which itself would represent a key point of divergence with the south.

> Unlike the wealth of the Sicilian kingdom, based on land, the growing prosperity of the northern Italian city-states was rooted in finance and commerce. Banking and long-distance trade depended on credit, and credit, if it were to be provided efficiently, required mutual trust and confidence that contracts and the laws governing them would be impartially enforced (ibid, p, 71).

This credit institution, indispensable in facilitating these long distance trade enterprises, represents "one of the great economic revolutions in world history, comparable

(according to some historians) only to the Neolithic emergence of permanent settlements and the later industrial revolution" (ibid, p. 71). In turn, it represents a clear expression of social capital, a formalised token of trust and commitment to future cooperation. It is hence both a social and economic resource, or a perfect distillation of a sort of intrinsically dual nature as a formalised inter-personal relationship emerging to fulfill an economic function, the repeated iteration of which feeds back to strengthen these inter-personal relations themselves.

Indeed, these relations would persist and react to changes in the economic environment through the coming centuries. For instance, "the first stirrings of the industrial revolution made the creation of new forms of organized social and economic solidarity even more urgent. To the ancestral hazards of illness, accident, and old age were now added the unaccustomed perils of unemployment and the unpleasant anonymity of the new industrial centers" (p. 137). Drawing on this past experience of civic associations, mutual aid societies and a whole host of economic cooperatives would emerge to face these emerging challenges presented by the economic environment.

> Just as the earliest medieval self-help associations represented voluntary cooperation to address the elemental insecurity of that age—the threat of physical violence—so mutual aid societies represented collective solidarity in the face of the economic insecurities peculiar to the modern age (ibid, 75-76).

It is these self help associations and mutual aid societies that served as the generators of social capital that was so crucial in facilitating economic developments from the age of mercantile capitalism to the Industrial Revolution. As such, this underlines the nature of social capital as a resource that is emergent from, reactive to, and contingent on circumstances in the material environment.

In terms of the causality of this relationship between social capital and economic circumstances, Putnam himself engages in a debate that echoes the division in the conflict literature discussed above. He rebuts prominent critiques, rooted in economic determinism, that maintain it is in fact economic development which produces social capital, rendering the latter as a mere epiphenomenal product of the former (Putnam, 1993). This would undermine the developmental, structural importance of social capital, rendering it a secondary by-product that merely correlates with the real, economic drivers of social and political development. Putnam's analysis proceeds to convincingly show this is not the case: the civic associationism that he uses as a proxy for social capital exists and impacts political and economic developments independently.

However, he maintains a cautious approach towards making overly ambitious causal claims. "We regard these discoveries about the cultural antecedents of economic development as provocative, rather than conclusive. It would be ridiculous to suppose that the civic traditions we have sketched in this chapter are the only—or even the most important—determinant of economic prosperity" (ibid, 87). Instead, he adopts a position of mutual, intertwined development and re-enforcement, quoting British historical geographers John Langton and R.J. Morris that "whether cultural inheritance [social capital] or economic development is constructed to be an independent element will depend very much on the time-scale within which the historical process is conceived. It is obvious that they interact to change one another. There was no cause and effect but a dialectical process of reciprocation" (ibid, p. 87).

In sum, this conception of the 'social' as a category of resources describes a set of intangible goods that not only stands to facilitate economic interaction and needs, but bears

the fingerprints of past economic environments in its origins and development. The story of the development of social capital in northern Italy is inseparable from the story of the development of commercial mercantilism in the early city-states and their need to formalise trust relations to facilitate long distance trade. In turn, the Industrial Revolution created the need and circumstances to form mutual aid organisations and economic cooperatives: institutions that generated their own social capital, which in turn facilitated further economic development and change. We are hence describing a set of resources, economic and social, that are in a state of mutual re-enforcement and co-creation.

Aside from 'the social' as a category of resources, the term is also used to categorise people in groups and describe the boundaries between them. As such, it likewise pervades the literature on group conflict, as well as the wider discussion of political relations in general so long as group identity and boundaries are considered salient (Harff, 2004; Sen, 2006; Huntington, 2011). However, this carries its own challenges and ambiguities I argue are also rooted in losing site of the relations these boundary lines retain with the economic environment they emerge from. For instance, the issues of identity and group boundaries that are so essential in delineating certain social groups from one another appear difficult to pin down. For one, ethnic identities—a primary conduit for social categories— appear to evolve in line with changes in livelihood, as Haaland (1969) observed when the sedentary Fur people of Sudan would adopt new cultural traits when they adopted pastoralism—even to the point of being considered a part of the Baggara ethnic group by these nomadic pastoralists themselves. Similar observations by Fredrich Barth (1969) amongst the Pathun and Baluch tribes in Pakistan, as well as Kandre's (1967) work on the Yao people of southern China and their assimilation of non-Yao people in their culture further underlined the permeability of ethnic identities. This led to Barth to develop a theory of ethnic boundary creation and

maintenance that highlighted how, in contrast to the primordialist view, ethnic groups were ecologically, historically, and economically contingent (Barth, 1969). This was not only true at the individual level, such as the Fur farmer who becomes a seasonal Baggara, but Barth later went on to describe how these broader range of environmental factors also impact the relations of neighboring groups and whether they become interdependent and cooperative, or competitive and rivalrous (ibid).

Indeed, the contingent nature of ethnic boundaries and the shift from interdependent to conflictual relations plays heavily in accounts of Darfur's conflict history, as well as accounts across the broader Sahelian region that often cite competing livelihoods as sources of violent conflict (Nielsen, 2008; Shettima & Tar, 2008). As Nielson writes of Barth's insight within the context of the Darfur, " [i]nherent in his theory was the idea that ethnic boundaries could change very rapidly and were tied to historical, economic and cultural circumstance...If we start by recognizing the relationships of relative symbiosis, or at least toleration, which existed between 'non-Arab' cultivators and 'Arab' pastoralists, we can begin to trace the origins of the conflict" (p. 439). Nielson then goes on to outline a series of environmental changes in the wider political economy of the region: the push towards industrial capitalism by the post-independence administrative state that formalized ethnic boundaries and organized groups along economic sectors of production, the introduction of the money economy and its disproportionate effects across groups and sectors, and the Sahelian drought of the 1980s which increased resource competition and "militarized ethnic boundaries between tribes and clans who then began identifying themselves as 'Arab' or 'non-Arab'" (ibid, p. 439).

We are thus left with a concept, the 'social', that whether used to describe a category of people or resources, retains within it some inherent relation with the economic, material realm. This forms the conceptual basis to challenge the conception that the social bases/institutions of armed groups are largely divorced from their economic context and wider resource environment. In this way, this thesis ties this question of the interaction of social and economic forces in conflict environments to a larger debate that has been waged between sociologists and economists.

Thus, the following section will introduce the literature on economic sociology, a field that has long grappled with the issue of the relative importance of social vs. material factors in the emergence and behaviour of firms and describe how it represented a break from traditional neoclassical economic frameworks that—like the literature described above— often assumed away the structural interrelations of the social institutions of society with the economic realm. It takes up the conceptual discussion above of the dual socio-economic nature of social groups/ resources and fleshes out its implications across a range of circumstances While this field has been plagued by many similar ontological fault lines as the conflict literature, mainly the structural primacy of either social or economic phenomena, a trip through this literature will serve to introduce a range of concepts and considerations that can help guide an analysis of the impact of economic change on regions where social and material life is heavily intertwined. In turn, by highlighting the interactive and dialectical nature of social and economic relations, it suggests a path to understanding how social institutions and economic environments exist in a continuous state of co-construction and mutual reinforcement. This shifts our focus away from social ties and economic resources and towards the interactions between them.

Great Transformations: Embedded socio-economic systems and tumultuous change

First coined by Max Weber and Emile Durkheim, the term economic sociology describes a field of inquire broadly defined by a sociological approach to economic phenomena (Smelser & Swedberg, 2010). In contrast to mainstream economics, which takes social systems as *a priori* structures within which economic activity takes place, economic sociologists generally view social and economic activity as interactive, or 'embedded', processes. Karl Polanyi was an early pillar in this tradition and, like Putnam, his work is worth revisiting in some detail given its persistent influence. His writings such *The Great Transformation* (1944), which analyzed the social causes and consequences of the development of capitalism in England, as well as his contribution to the essay volume *Trade and Markets in Early Empires* (1957), attacked the heart of classical assumptions on the nature of relations between the economy and society. The world, they argued, was not composed of socially autonomous individuals navigating a passive, exogenously-given economic realm in pursuit of their own self-interest. Rather, human beings were innately social creatures who utilised material resources and created markets in the pursuit of fundamentally social goals, such as the establishment of continuous exchange relations, redistribution schemes, and signals of prestige and cooperation (Polanyi, 1944, pp. 45-57). This implied that economic relations emerged out of social ones, and that the 'economy', as an entity, was a construct of human culture and sociality. By being so 'embedded' within social relations, economic institutions must thus be understood in full view of their cultural and historical contexts. This was a fundamental challenge to the mainstream view of markets: namely, that they existed in a self-regulating fashion, were driven by purely economic goals, and belonged to a separate realm of human life than that of social relations. In fact, mainstream economics held that one of the few ways

in which economic markets could be driven out of their self-regulating equilibrium was if

social relations—such as favoritism towards kin or acquaintances, preference for familiar

buyers or sellers, or any other practice that substituted for the price mechanism—somehow

reared themselves in the pure realm of impersonal economic transactions (Granovetter, 1985,

p. 506).

Polanyi's essential insight was not only to encourage a more holistic view of the

economy/ society relationship, but to describe the relationship between the individual and

their environment as based largely upon the type of functionalism and survivalist principles

that undergirded traditional conceptions of the social and economic worlds. While

mainstream economics could be seen to some degree as an extension of a Hobbesian/

Smithian political economic theory wherein individuals interacted based on their own self-

interest and learned to cooperate in pursuit of their own security and material gain, Polanyian

political economy highlighted how individual survival was also tied up in one's social support

systems (Dobbin, 2015, p. 319). He argues that, while interactions in the marketplace are

fleeting and impersonal, "[t]he maintenance of social ties, on the other hand, is

crucial...because by disregarding the accepted code of honor, or generosity, the individual

cuts himself off from the community and becomes an outcast (Polanyi, 1944, p. 45)." In

many environments, this designation as an outcast could be fatal, as one is deprived of social

support networks and subject to the brutalities of nature. Like an unwanted child left to the

judgment of the gods outside of Sparta, this individual hence succumbs to 'social exposure',

or the physical and psychological degradation associated with being separated from his or her

social world (ibid).

Again, this was not a social world uncoupled from the wider economy, but intrinsically intertwined with it. In fact, to some degree, the social world in this sense simply describes the system in which economic resources are distributed. To illustrate, Polanyi argued it was essential to understand the true nature of an economy, or the system in which resources circulated in a society, of which the modern market-based economy was but one type. In traditional societies, he observed, the vast majority of the exchange and circulation of resources took place within the context of reciprocal giving and centralized redistribution via the anointed chief or political authority of the group (ibid, 49-51). Hence, the social ties that held together a society, as well as mediated their relations with their neighbors, were undergirded by material exchanges that promoted repeated interaction, trust, mutual dependency, and the overall health of the society via the spreading of risk and wealth. In turn, these economic flows were facilitated by the social relations that defined the group, such as the reciprocal duties of leaders and subordinates, and gift-giving to neighbors and potential allies. These overlapping social and economic threads formed the fabric of a stable and prosperous society, while any perturbation could inaugurate great upheaval and transformational change. This was precisely the 'great transformation' Polanyi describes in his *magnus opus*, as the emergence of machine-driven production and associated form of market capitalism, identified by impersonal exchange between two individuals whose mutual social bonds (if any) played no role, severed the traditional ties that held together Europe's socio-economic system—indeed the system that prevailed across all human societies—up until that point in history (ibid, 35-41).

Ultimately, Polanyi acknowledged that the mainstream economic view was correct, but only for specific types of economies; namely, the form of market capitalism that emerged out of 15th century England. Here, the principle of impersonal exchange in the market had

overtaken other forms of the economic relations that were firmly embedded in social life. For Polanyi and other contemporaries, this was precisely the horrors of capitalism, as well as one of the primary drivers of history as societies mobilised in order to protect themselves from the impending social exposure. We may critique Polanyi's tendency to idealise past societies, however his observations draw attention to the fact economic change is socially disruptive in very fundamental and structural ways, as the socio-economic ties adapted to the previous system come undone. This is a recurring story of transformative economic, political and social change that will be revisited below.

While Polanyi drew a line between the modern form of the capitalist economy and earlier forms of material exchange embedded in social relations, the field of economic sociology has more recently produced an array of research demonstrating the extent to which modern economic actors are in fact still embedded within social relations. A fundamental work in this regard came from Mark Granovetter in 1985 who attacked the hegemony of neoclassical economists on the one hand, and the more traditional sociologists on the other. Criticising the 'under-socialized' conceptions of the former, and 'over-socialized' accounts of the latter, Granovetter attempted to re-orient the field towards a more sophisticated approach that acknowledged the ongoing effect of social relations in advanced capitalist societies—such as inter-and intra-firm relations as well as in the dynamics of the labour market (Granovetter, 1985). Later work, maintaining the view of the firm as an inherently social unit, demonstrated the role of regional economies in fostering competitive advantages to local firms via "complex networks of social relationships within and between firms and between firms and local institutions" (Saxenian, 1996, p. 57). As Saxenian notes in her classic analysis of the rise of Silicon Valley, this relational approach to economic analysis "highlights the analytical leverage gained by treating regions as networks of relationships rather than as

collections of atomistic firms" (ibid). Other works have built on this connection between firms and their surrounding social structures, and additionally highlighted the role of the wider economic environment in determining certain levels of success. For instance, working within organisational theory, Burt highlights the extent to which organisations depend on their links to the broader environment in order to survive. His conclusion that organizations with higher degrees of "structural autonomy"; that is, multiple suppliers and buyers, and few competitors, are more successful echoes a number of other theoretical approaches towards conflict analysis (Burt, 1983)..

While most work in the mainstream of economic sociology has focused on highlighting the social and relational underpinnings of economic systems, other strains of work have highlighted the material underpinnings of social systems. This has largely developed from Marx's materialism and has continued to inform contemporary theoretical frameworks such as World Systems and Dependency theory (Cardoso & Faletto, 1979; Wallerstein, 2004; Stone, 2010. In addition, beyond the explicitly Marxist framework, anthropologists often speak of the role regional economic relations in determining the nature of group relations. For instance, inter-communal trade and 'complementarities of economies' have been described as fundamental to fostering "a climate of tolerance and cooperation among potentially hostile ethnic groups living in proximity to each other" (Gremont et al., 2004, p. 84).[5] In Mali, and Sahara-Sahelian region in general, this material interdependence (namely between sedentary agriculturalists and pastoralists as well as traders from different ecological regions) dates back to ancient times and thrived well into the modern era in a way

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[5] For a more recent and detailed account of the symbiotic relations between pastoralism and sedentarism in Mali, see Gremont, 2014.

that allowed great human civilisations to arise and flourish in one of the most inhospitable geographies on Earth (ibid; Ehret, 2002; Scheele, 2012).[6]

Hence, just as we must consider the ways economies are embedded within wider social systems, we must also avoid viewing social actors in isolation from their economic environment. This moves us closer to a holistic, Polanyian conception of the intertwined and mutually constitutive nature of social and economic relations in a society. Political Anthropologists have often narrowed in on the ways 'primitive' or 'traditional' political groupings, such as tribes, bands, and other pre-industrial societies maintain organisational structures that are particularly adapted to their environment. As Lewellen (2003) notes, "the relationship between society and environment is one of constant feed-back; people not only adapt to their surroundings but also change their physical and social worlds to meet their own needs" (p. 19). Two points of emphasis emerge from this observation. One, to acknowledge the relationship between social structures and the wider material environment, and two, the need to view the nature of this relationship as not simply causal in a linear sense, but rather dialectical, or "structurally interrelated...so that the specification of one element can predict other elements (ibid)."This is a way of addressing the causal problems outlined earlier, whereas 'predict' in this case refers to "think[ing] in terms the sense that one element logically implies another" (ibid). In turn, this is not to be overly deterministic as to the relations that can emerge from such systemic interactions, as Lewellen emphasises thinking in terms of only "statistical probabilities" that encompass a range of variation that are inherent in complex systems. "In contrast to strictly materialist theories," he notes, "environment and technology do not seem so much to *determine* social structure and ideology as to *limit* the range of possibilities" [emphasis in original] (ibid).

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[6] See discussion in chapter four.

Indeed, a broad array of anthropological research attests to the need to view the social and political institutions of a society in full view of their environmental context. This is not to succumb to temptations of geographic determinism—a common reflexive charge leveled at such a consideration—as a rich degree of cultural variation exists across all societies; however, this variation exists within a set of limits that are defined by the available resources and environmental possibilities (Diamond, 2019). Lewellen himself proceeds to present a typology that broadly connects the social traits and political organization of groups with their mode of subsistence, i.e., bands and tribes gradually give way to chiefdoms and states as agricultural production and animal domestication intensifies (Lewellen, 2003). While such a rough typology fails to account for the complexity and overlap that exists between such ideal types, it represents a broad consensus in political ecology (a field of study that examines the dynamic interactions between economic and social systems and their environment) that economic, social, and political complexity all generally track together (Robbins, 2012).

Below this broader relationship however, questions of the precise nature of socio-economic relations remains unclear. By historicizing the origins of salient groupings of conflict actors, we can hence trace how social institutions have evolved in line with changes in the economic environment. In turn, while a great deal of conflict research focuses on how this economic environment affects the capacities different groups have to pursue their interests (LeBillon 2014; Coller & Sambinis, 2005), this anthropological literature demonstrates the possibility that this environment in fact conditions these interests themselves, as well as the strength and nature of group boundaries. The degree to which the very constitutive tissue of social institutions, common identity and interests, are themselves contingent on economic forces is perhaps the most fundamental critique of the social/economic dichotomy that is possible. However, a great deal of work lies ahead in order to put

this fresh perspective to work in making better sense of the dynamics of conflict. For the purpose of tracing the effect of an economic change on a conflict, this broader conception of the interaction of economic and social forces opens up a host of new avenues through which an economic resource can impact a conflict be re-altering the socio-economic landscape from which armed groups emerge and operate. Whether these socio-economic changes result in new alliances, new rivalries, or indeed new institutions that form new groups and interests is a broad question that this perspective is well placed to enter.

Ultimately, the value of the aforementioned literature is its emphasis on the relational underpinnings of economic forces and vice versa. In turn, it underlines the productive character of shifting towards a perspective that interrogates the structural relations between the economic and social realms. As this has led to new sub-fields of economic and sociology, so has it advanced theorising in other related fields. This has been the case in International Relations, particularly in the development of theoretical schools of neoliberalism and social constructivism that have been so prominent in advancing understanding the post-World War II global order, as well as wider issues of conflict, cooperation, war and peace.

For instance, neoliberalism, aka neoliberal institutionalism, takes the view that economic and social ties are fundamental factors in promoting either cooperation or competition amongst states. Keohane and Nye's conception of 'complex interdependence', which has come to form the bedrock of neoliberal IR theory, maintains that informal (social) ties, formal (political) relations, and economic exchange arrangements between states significantly decrease the likelihood of conflict between them (Keohane & Nye, 1977).While realists have generally criticised the causal power of this concept, maintaining that such models of interaction are only appropriate to domestic or societal contexts (Mearsheimer,

1994) it has been enormously powerful in explaining the relationship between trade, regime types, and the likelihood of international conflict (McMillan, 1997; Russett & O'Neal, 2001).

Indeed, the guiding principle of the post World War II global order has been to enmesh as many countries as possible into a global network of interdependent trade relations that would encourage cooperation and disincentivize conflict. The more states become reliant on others for their material lifeblood, it has been reasoned, the more likely they would be to actively work towards maintaining cooperative relations with their neighbours and adopting an approach towards international relations based on mutual benefit. In such a system, zero-sum conflict is simpler a non-starter (Rosecrance, 1986; 1992.) While this set off vigorous debates about the precise nature of economic ties that promoted either conflict or peace, there is an array of empirical research that indeed suggests these issues are highly correlated (Barbieri, 1996; McMillan, 1997; Russett & O'Neal, 2001). Hence, in these models, and the broader conceptual frameworks of mainstream IR theory, the realm of economics is seen as composed of relational forces as opposed to simple static resource profiles. In this way, we may describe the neoliberal perspective as being akin to the Barthian model discussed in the previous section wherein mutually interdependent economic niches promote stable relations between neighbouring ethnic groups.

While neoliberalism acknowledged the capacity of certain social and material ties to bind states together, Alexander Wendt's *Social Theory of International Politics* took it a step further. Much like the economic sociologist's critique of neoclassical economists, Wendt maintained that the prevailing mainstream IR approaches (including neoliberalism) were under-socialised; or failed to recognise the extent to which state interaction was dictated by social norms and relations (Wendt, 1999). While neoliberals maintain that material and social

ties affect state interaction via changing cost structures, i.e. the cost of cooperation vs. conflict, and information exchange, Wendt's social constructivism asserts that these ties actually seep into the deep social core of states to change their very identities and ways of viewing other actors within the system. Like the political anthropology literature cited above, Wendt argued that states, like other social institutions, were not a priori structures removed from their environment, but were in fact contingent on their relations and experiences with other states. Indeed, their identities and perceived interests were malleable and liable to change in line with significant shifts in the wider environment.

These two traditions are perhaps best situated to shed light on the dynamism of international relations and how the conflict terrain evolves. While realism generally envisions that states interact under a very inert international structure, and that fundamental change is a long-term process, focusing on interactive social and economic mechanisms reveals a more dynamic system. This is essential, as a system with highly embedded socio-economic forces will experience deep and fundamental change if there is a significant shift in the economic landscape; for example, the sudden arrival of a new lucrative resource. This will not only lead to the empowerment of one group over the other, as a more straight-forward realist framework would expect,[7] but it will lead to the emergence of new forces and powers as old systems of (inter) dependency are destroyed and new ones emerge. How this process unfolds depends on the nature of the new resource and its interaction with the prevailing social order. In turn, it must be stressed that this process is dialectical and not necessarily linear, as the new economic environment will begin to create new structural pressures on existing social relationships, while other social relations and traits will continue to constrain access to the new resource environment. Indeed, as Barth notes, "ethnic identity implies a series of

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[7] This may align with Staniland's position on the primacy of social ties.

constraints on the kinds of roles an individual is allowed to play, and the partners he may choose for different kinds of transactions" (Barth, 1969, pp. 17).

Making sense of the new socio-economic landscape that emerges requires taking both of these forces—and particularly their interaction—seriously. Indeed, from economic sociology to International Relations, we observe a sort of natural evolutionary process of debate wherein arguments over the structural primary of material vs. social relations eventually lead to new approaches that emphasise mutual co-constitution and dialectical re-enforcement. This thesis intends to nudge conflict researchers towards this position. Despite a large literature focusing on the economic dimensions of civil conflict, the vast majority of this work neglects the relational implications of these variables. In turn, while recent work has emerged that does attempt to take social bonds seriously, I argue that it remains "over-socialized" and thus fails to account for the material dimensions at play in the construction and maintenance of social structures.

Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed how the existing literature tends to emphasize either social or economic (material) factors in conditioning the capacities and organizational structures of armed groups. By discussing the limitations and challenges associated with both these 'over-socialised' or 'under-socialised' approaches, respectively, it instead argues for a more dialectical approach that avoids the establishment of a structural primacy between social or material forces. By exploring the literatures of economic sociology and political anthropology that explicitly explore the ways in which economic and social forces interact, this chapter has led to an alternative ontological framework that considers the ways in which both mutually constitute the structures under which armed groups operate. This 'socio-economic approach'

emphasises the interdependence of material and social factors in determining conflict landscapes, and in turn stands better able to shed light on one of the guiding questions of conflict researchers; that is, the nature of the relationship between social structures and economic activities in conflict zones.

The following chapter will move to explore these inter-relations in more detail, identifying the mechanisms that ties these forces together to create the dynamic sets of relationships between actors and their environment. These mechanisms, namely principal-agent relations and network effects, will then be empirically elucidated in the case of conflict in Mali in the chapters that follow.

Chapter 3

The Economic Contingencies of Social Capital & The Socio-Economic Structures of Armed Groups

The previous chapter outlined the economic contingencies embedded within social institutions and the social capital that sustains them. This leads us to consider the inherent interrelations of the social and economic spheres and the implications this has on conflict environments, particularly the way in which changes in the economic landscape can undermine and re-shape social and political power relationships. As such, this chapter will proceed to move beyond the exclusive focus on either resource profiles or social institutions, and instead outline the mechanisms that ties these forces together to create the dynamic sets of relationships between actors and their environment.

It will first establish the argument that economic factors matter in the maintenance and formation of social institutions, leading to the fact that economic changes carry deep structural implications for the social relations that tie armed groups together. This is achieved through grounded theory building, analysing a geographically and ideologically diverse set of armed groups (the LTTE in Sri Lanka, the Taliban in Afghanistan, and the LURD of Liberia), to outline the ways in which their ability to control resources were integral to their maintenance of group cohesion, rendering the latter vulnerable to changes in the resource environment.

It will then ground these observations in theory, turning to the political economy literature which discusses the ways in which institutions, be it a state or armed group, exist in a symbiotic relationship with the economic realm. It highlights primarily the relationship

between centralised political and economic power, and how systems of power and control are undermined by changes in the material environment. It will then conclude by discussing two particularly salient concepts, principal-agent relations and embedded social networks, that house the mechanisms through which economic and social relations interact, mainly through their role in mediating the material leverage leaders hold over their subordinates.

These concepts will help guide an analysis of the impact of economic change in northern Mali, a region where social and material life is heavily intertwined. In turn, it will provide a conceptual framework for explaining the alliance structures and fragmentations that have occurred in the conflict, arguing that they are rooted in economic changes that have undermined the traditional power relations that have structured the region's social landscape for decades. Finally, by highlighting the interactive and dialectical nature of social and economic relations, we come to understand that social institutions and economic environments exist in a continuous state of co-construction and mutual reinforcement.

The Socio-Economic Structures of Armed Groups

This thesis argues that economic resources retain a structural role in the maintenance and formation of social institutions. This shifts our focus away from social ties and economic resources and towards the interactions between them. This perspective aligns with Le Billon and the broader 'political ecological' approach in holding that there is no such thing as a 'resource profile', but rather a set of material exchange and production relations that tie together various social groups within and across armed groups. This leads to observing a broader constellation of relationships and effects between armed groups and their economic environment that was summarised in Le Billon's acclaimed book, *Wars of Plunder*, where he

laid out 'three dimensions' of analysis to understand the role of resources in conflict. The first is 'vulnerability', which captures the 'resource curse' perspective that dependency on resources undermines institutional development and renders societies vulnerable to conflict. At the armed group level, Weinstein's approach clearly falls within this dimension. The second is "risk", which captures the earlier 'greed' approach of Collier and others that resources serve as a conflict motivator as actors contest access, production, extraction and/or distribution. Thirdly, there is the 'opportunity' dimension, which speaks to the capacity of resources to condition the opportunities and courses of action available to belligerents or (would be) rebels.

This is a broad and encompassing framework, one in which all armed groups will find themselves interfacing at some level, even those which are highly socialised and fortified with large amounts of social capital. This interface can often be observed in the third, 'opportunity' dimension which highlights how armed groups utilise the opportunities afforded to them from access to resources to achieve their goals. However, as the operationalisation of this dimension has often been viewed as the competition between armed groups being mediated by opportunity structures within conflict zones, it again takes the social bases of these groups for granted and neglects considering the ways these resource-related opportunity structures condition and influence these social bases themselves.

Indeed, thinking of social actors more broadly, this is a key mechanism through which social institutions themselves are reshaped by resources, as marginalised sub-groups are able to challenge prevailing hierarchies by developing and extracting from alternative economic networks. Thus, armed groups enter the conflict arena after a long and historically rooted

process that has produced the hierarchies and social relations that animate their leadership and organisational structure.

As a case in point, we may take the LTTE of Sri Lanka, a militant group Staniland uses to illustrate the pre-eminence of social ties in creating a cohesive military organisation. He draws particular attention to the Karaiyar—a staunchly independent caste drawing much of their livelihood from seafaring trade and smuggling—from which the LTTE drew the bulk of their leadership. The existence of a common caste lineage amongst the organisational leadership was enough for Staniland to conclude that the organisational success of the LTTE was simply a story of these common social bonds. However, it fails to answer the question of why this particular caste (the Karaiyar)? Indeed, there were many other distinct caste groups in the region with the motivation to be the vanguards of the Tamil movement, and indeed many tried only to be eliminated by the LTTE machine (Wilson, 2000). For this, we must grapple with the opportunity structures through which this particular subgroup was able to achieve their goals and better organise violence than their competitors.

A key distinguishing characteristic of the Karaiyar was that "their strength lay in their independent economic activity, unrelated to the lands and its rules" (ibid, p. 19). This independent economic base freed them from any material leverage the state, or other competing groups, may have been able to use to constrain their behaviour. In turn, the nature of this economic activity, over-seas-based trading and smuggling, allowed them to create resilient resource flows that were not only unlikely to be disrupted by the outbreak of conflict, but actually stood to be increased by it. For instance, due to their control over north facing smuggling routes, the LTTE was uniquely positioned to profit from the mass exodus of Tamil refugees throughout the 1980s and 1990s (Smarasinghe, 2003, pp. 53-58).

How important was this access to an independent resource base in allowing the Karaiyar-led LTTE to succeed where other groups failed? Was it more or less important than their strong social ties? Was it this resource base that created these tight social bonds, or was there something about the social structure of the caste that allowed them to centralize and direct resources? An OECD report on the security risks associated with maritime transport seemed to suggest the latter, as they highlighted the LTTE's formidable 'arms procurement network' that was 'highly sophisticated and depend[ent] on extensive knowledge of maritime trading practices and procedures" (OECD, 2003, p. 14). Were we to place the Karaiyar in a slightly different economic and geographic context, say in the fertile plans of Sri Lanka's landed classes rather than the northern trading coast, it would be difficult imagining them emerging as the vanguards of the Tamil movement. Indeed, rather than a relatively minor historical footnote, this economic context actually played a major role in the LTTE's ability to organise into an integrated and potent fighting force.[8]

The same line of questions could be applied to the Afghan Taliban, whose resilience has been partly attributed both to their social cohesion on the one hand, and their embeddedness in the regional poppy trade on the other (Ruttig, 2012; Peters, 2010). Staniland of course would argue that it is their social cohesion, mainly based on Pashtun tribal bonds and shared ideological zeal, which has allowed the Taliban to harness such a sophisticated economic empire to fund their political and military goals. Once again, we are faced with a 'chicken or the egg' type question of which came first: their cohesive leadership structure or

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[8] Interestingly, human smuggling seems to have produced a large amount of capital for the LTTE. Inquiring into the role of the LTTE in facilitating the vast exodus of the Tamil diaspora could be very interesting, not only for the immediate revenues this smuggling produced, but for the LTTE's ability to later centralize the flows of remittances and diaspora funds. See for instance Smarasinghe, 2003, pp. 53-58).

centralized resource control? Indeed, the Taliban has been a remarkably cohesive group over the past two decades with little fragmentation or leadership turnover (Watkins, 2020).[9] However, it would be easy to conflate this lack of formal fragmentation with the absence of internal rivalry—and thus overplay the level of social cohesion. Indeed, defections occur as result of the right mix of both motivations and opportunities of potential defectors. It is not enough for an internal rival to wish to break away from the group, they must also possess the ability to do so (Tamm, 2016). Staniland's conception of social ties merely accounts for the former—in that such motivations to defect will be low in well integrated groups—but misses the latter. Thus, it is entirely plausible that the lack of turnover in the Taliban is largely a result of a material environment that constrains the ability of potential rivals to set out and establish an independent resource base. Instances of leadership challenges that fail or schisms that go nowhere would indicate this to be the case; in other words, they would reveal that, despite the appearance of social cohesion, some ambient level of grievance does operate inside the organisation that, nonetheless, quite literally has no place to go. While such evidence is hard to come by, enough instances of expulsions and internal purges indicate that the Taliban is not immune to internal tumult. As Rubin notes, "[t]here have been dissident individuals who left or were expelled from the organisation, but once they were expelled or left, they lost all influence" (Qarazadeh, 2015).

Similar dynamics are seen in the rise and fall of the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD)—a rebel group fundamental in the effort of overthrowing Charles Taylor from the late 90s to early 2000s (Geddes, 2013) . At the height

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[9] There was of course leadership turnover following the death of Mullah Omar, though this was more a natural effect of this sudden leadership vacuum than any structural fragility at the top (Watkins, 2020).

of its strength, Geddes draws a direct link between their inner cohesion and central control over the group's resource flows, noting:

> intra-LURD processes of negotiation, coordination and decision-making worked relatively well. Further, Conneh had been made Chairman on insistence of the Guinean president. The channeling of Guinean support through him allowed maintaining central control and coherence of LURD when factional tendencies (cf. ICG 2003b, 3–5) threatened to weaken the group, and Conneh could maintain a core of loyal commanders (ibid, 169). [Note: internal citations from original source.]

Indeed, despite being a loose coalition of competing ethnic groups, and possessing little in the way of a grand unifying ideology apart from combatting their common enemy—Charles Taylor—the group represented a relatively coherent fighting force.

> While LURD's political structure, leaving substantial powers to ambitious commanders, left the movement prone to factional splits, its economic patterns promoted central control. Guinea, likely supported by the US, was the 'LURD's primary source of direct military and financial support' (ICG 2002a, 11). Guinean assistance was centrally channeled through Aicha Conneh (ibid.),.), helping to control the troops once commanders did not have access to alternative sources of income. (Ibid, 171). [Note: internal citations from original source.]

Controlling resources was a conscious policy of the LURD leadership, not merely to support the overall war effort against Taylor's forces, but to maintain group control. In fact, after capturing land plotted with diamond mines, the group did *not* set out to exploit the lucrative resource, but rather banned it—all in an effort to prevent setting off the process of group fragmentation (ibid, p. 171).

Even when centrifugal pressures eventually got the better of the group's leadership following Taylor's resignation, the fragmentation process again largely followed an economic logic. Geddes writes:

These dynamics followed a general pattern of factions organizing themselves around sources of income. Coherence of LURD could not be maintained following exile of the common enemy and decreasing importance of Guinean support. Unity gave way to a decentralized neopatrimonialism fuelled by individual rebel's access to dispersed and not centrally controlled sources of income. These sources of income were of different kinds; most important were government positions in Monrovia and locally exploited natural resources in the hinterland. The dispersed nature of these sources of income partly explains factional tendencies within the former rebel groups. Competition for access to these sources entailed further splits (ibid, p. 183).

The LURD in fact represents merely one case of the role of resources or economic environments in keeping groups together despite internal fault lines.

This highlights the role of opportunity structures[10], not just in mediating an armed group's ability to challenge its external rivals, but in accounting for the emergence of particular groups within armed movements themselves, as well as the maintenance of group cohesion overtime. In terms of the Taliban, economic opportunity structures are important in accounting for an internal group structure was solid and sticky in a way that made it difficult for potential defectors to break away. Given, as Tamm (2016) notes, "[e]lite disagreements within rebel groups are the norm, not the exception" (p. 601), it is difficult to conclude that this is merely a reflection of internal harmony.[11] While a large part of the group's early financing was derived from state financing, primarily Pakistan,[12] it has recently become

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[10] Indeed, there is broad literature that has explained some element of political behavior in terms of the structural weak points that allows actors to free themselves of constraining institutions and chart their own path. Such work has been fruitful both at the individual level of analysis, such as Hoger Albrecht's work on military coups (Albrecht, 2015), as well in explaining the emergence of mass social movements in response to openings in the political environment that lower the cost of collective mobilization (Skocpol, 1979, 1994; Tarrow, 1992). In addition, early economic analyses of conflict, mentioned above, stressed the opportunity structures inherent in the material environment that lowered the cost of rebellion and thus increased the likelihood of civil conflict. (Collier, Hoeffler, & Sambinis, 2005; Fearon, 2004).

[11] Indeed scholars have increasingly looked to changes in the surrounding resource landscape in providing opportunity structures for ambitious rivals to act. For instance, Tamm demonstrated how armed organisational splits have often occurred in response to shifts in external state funding flows (Ibid), while Seymour showed a similar dynamic at play in the Sudanese government's strategies vis a vis the SPLMA and Darfur (Seymour, 2014).

[12] Tamm illustrates how external state sponsors can foster and maintain cohesion in a group by facilitating an imbalance of military power in favour of the leadership.

largely self-financing and "increasingly behaves like a traditional drug cartel" (Peters, 2012, p. ii). The overall resilience of its structural integrity in the face of changing financing schemes in turn directs attention to the capacity of 'bottom up' economies, as opposed to 'top down' funding streams from state actors, to nonetheless create the structural conditions for cohesion and high levels of elite control. Indeed, recent reports underline the degree to which the group's internal cohesion was not solely a reflection of social harmony, but rather highly related to the leadership's ability to control resources. As Peters (2012) notes:

> The Afghan Taliban...has reshuffled its command structure and issued a new Code of Conduct to exert control over unruly sub- commanders, streamline the flow of drug and other criminal funds and attempt to improve relations with Afghan civilians. These initiatives have not been entirely successful, although the QST does receive widespread praise for its shadow justice system, and for its practice [read: ability to] of punishing its own commanders...Taliban leaders now demand that money earned from extortion and narcotics flows direct into central coffers instead of being controlled by district-level commanders (p. ii).

Again, a line of questioning seeking to establish a hierarchy of importance, such as whether it is the group's strong social cohesion which allow them to centralise resource flows, or the whether the centralised resource flows promote the social cohesion is a difficult rabbit hole to that inevitably leads to some degree of circular reasoning. Surely the Taliban's social capital is an essential asset in allowing them to create this centralised structure and discipline those who would resist it; though it must also be the case that the centralised resource flows are crucial for the maintenance and preservation of the social institutions which animate the group's leadership.

Thus, the division within the literature regarding the relative importance of social or economic factors in structuring the nature of rebellion and the groups engaged in it is difficult to mend as coherent cases can often be made for the causal dominance of one over the other.

This is not simply a case of selective data collection and biased narrative construction on the part of scholars. Rather, it emerges from a theoretical perspective that treats social and economic factors as belonging to separate independent realms whose interaction can only be linear. On the one hand, it largely treats the social institutions of armed groups, for instance, as *a priori* structures whose development is largely independent of the surrounding economic environment. This is most clearly exhibited in Staniland's model which promotes the supremacy of the social institution in directing economic resources towards its own interest. However, it is limited in accounting for the nuanced ways in which war economies operate, in that it misses the ways these economic inputs actually reshape the social institution itself; for instance, by altering the balance of power within it, privileging different skills and knowledge sets, and changing the nature of its relations with other groups—to name a few.

In turn, Weinstein's model of competing social vs economic endowments likewise commits to this dichotomous division; for example, in the case described earlier of a group developing in the absence of abundant material resources. While he maintains that social resources—cooperation, communal bonds, etc.…—must necessarily emerge to fill this vacuum, where these social resources come from is unaddressed. Indeed, a resource vacuum does not in and of itself create these forces but simply the demand for them. Were we to view the role of the economic environments in promoting certain types of social institutions, however, this relationship could gain better coherence. As with the economic contingencies inhered in the formation and generation of social capital (Putnam, 1993), economic forces continue to play important structural roles in the formation of social institutions.

In turn, if we were to acknowledge that economic forces play some role in the formation of social systems, it makes little sense to focus on only one type of economic

system as relevant, i.e.: one characterized by natural resource wealth, and dismiss all others. Hence, Weinstein's socially endowed group does not exist independent of a wider economic system, but rather it bears the traces of it just as does the economically endowed group. These traces are different, however, as the economic ecosystem it emerged from creates different selection pressures and structural necessities to operate. In this way, the social endowments he describes are not so much *substitutes* for economic resources, but themselves *proxies* for an economic system that relies more on long term cooperation, repeated social interaction, and communal trust. If greed and ill-discipline are by-products of an economic environment characterized by easy access to highly valuable resources, then so may cooperation and cohesion emerge from systems built around more incremental and broadly-based production and exchange.

Here it is possible to layer the concept of opportunity structures, particularly in regard to their vertical impact within armed groups, to make sense of these organisational outcomes. In the case of Weinstein's resource rich group, discipline and cohesion is so difficult as there are simply too many opportunity structures through which sub-actors can by-pass leadership and slip out from under prevailing hierarchies. In contrast, resource poor groups, by definition, are characterised by fewer opportunity structures and thus higher levels of cooperation.

Considering these two types of groups, cohesive/ disciplined and non, as well as the underlying socio-economic forces propping up these outcomes, is a useful starting point in considering the role of economic forces in shaping social institutions more broadly, as well as the conflict dynamics in Mali. Indeed, as the proceeding chapters will describe, the trend in Mali towards more protracted and fragmented conflict is rooted in deeper socio-economic

shifts which occurred in the region as new economic forces emerged that opened up opportunity structures for previously marginalised actors that decreased their incentives to cooperate within the prevailing social hierarchies.

This essentially leads us to interrogate the origins of a group's social capital and the economic contingencies to which it is tied. Tracing these origins through the economic landscape would bring us a much more nuanced understanding of the role of resources in contemporary conflict. More specifically, it opens up a broader range of mechanisms through which economic changes could leave their mark on a conflict and where the relevant social institutions/ arrangements come from. While most scholarship tends to overlook the deep origins of armed groups, instead focusing on the proximate individuals, leaders, and relationships in order to construct a descriptive narrative of a particular group, this deeper view can speak to different set of questions about contemporary conflicts. Indeed, Le Billon argues that "thick' historical and geographical contextualisation" is key to unpacking the nuanced ways in which resources intersect with local social conditions to produce the relationships that emerge within a conflict scenario (Le Billon, 2012, p. 13).

Now that we have established the argument that economic factors matter in the maintenance and formation of social institutions, we are faced with the fact that that economic changes carry deep structural implications for the social relations that tie armed groups together. We can now move to unpacking how and why these changes unfold. The following section will turn to the political economy literature which discuss the ways in which institutions, be it a state or armed group, exist in a symbiotic relationship with the economic realm. It highlights primarily the relationship between centralised political and

economic power, and how systems of power and control undermined by changes in the material environment.

Institutional Monstrosities: Access Orders, Opportunity Structures, and Resource Types

The ability of political actors to wield power is inextricably linked to their ability to independently control resources. This is true at the level of armed groups, such as the LTTE's ability to construct a resilient resource base independent of their rivals and the Sri Lankan state, and the Taliban leadership's centralisation of resource flows to secure it from would be agitators lower down the ranks. The degree which these resource bases are centralised in turn conditions the ways in which those in power interact with others.

Douglass North has captured this relationship in his framework of open and limited access orders. He describes open access orders as a self-enforcing institutional condition wherein relatively free and open access to economic resources and opportunity promotes vibrant, fair, and peaceful political competition. Such an open political system, in turn, discourages rent-seeking and disproportionate market capture, keeping access to economic opportunity relatively open and re-affirming the open access order of the political economic system. In contrast, limited access to economic resources and opportunity allows actors to capture political power and further rig the game in their favour, excluding rivals from accumulating the resources necessary to challenge them (North et al., 2012).

This conception of an intertwined and mutually re-enforcing political economic system is a useful corollary to the debate described in the previous section regarding the relationship between social and economic factors, in particular how side-steps, or challenges, debates surrounding a hierarchy of importance.

> Open access political and economic systems cannot sustain themselves independently of the other system. A competitive political system cannot sustain itself by its own internal structure and institutions if it is in the midst of a limited access economy. Several mechanisms demonstrate the critical interaction of the two systems, in particular, how open access in the economy helps sustain open access in the polity. For instance, open access into the economy creates a wide range of organisatons that can mobilize against a governing coalition that seeks to create privilege and limited access (ibid, pp. 20-21).

Here he challenges the "exogeneity assumptions of both economics and political science" which often neglect the relational implications of economic variables with political ones and vice versa (North et al., 2007, p. 19). This is a critique relevant to the debates discussed above regarding the role of social or economic variables in the formation of armed groups, particularly the exogeneity assumptions often carried with discussions of their social bases and institutions. Like the interlocking and mutually re-enforcing political economic system of North's access orders, armed groups operate in a socio-economic system that is mutually constituted and self-re-enforcing.

These political/social -economic systems represent a state that is in a sort of equilibrium, wherein the material and social realms are tied together and mutually supportive of each other. This is indicative of an instance wherein the leadership of an armed group has successfully centralised resources, which further re-enforces their leadership position and, with it, their ability to control the economic realm. This then leads to questions of change, or how a fully endogenous system loses equilibrium and is disrupted, an instance I argue leads to fragmentation within an armed group or movement.[13]

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[13] An alternative, though related, outcome is an internal coup/ takeover by an individual against the prevailing leadership that retains the structural integrity of the group afterward. First theorised by Christia (2012, p. 11), Tamm (2016) traces leadership takeover in the Congo Wars to shifts in the internal balance of resources.

For this we can consult a literature which focused on the systemic transitions which took place in the 1990s as the Cold War gave way to neoliberal globalisation, and how these disrupted previous political economic equilibriums in response to changing resource environments and the availability of new resources. William Reno (1998), in his seminal work *Warlord Politics and African States*, argued that the shift from Cold War era patronage regimes to the subsequent deregulation of global markets led to a disruption of many of the power relations undergirding African states. Working from the assumption that leaders are rational actors working to maintain power in an inherently competitive environment, he maintains that, in the context of weak or un-institutionalized states, the nature of state revenues available to leaders heavily impacts their strategies and success in maintaining and consolidating power. "The Cold War shifted the distribution of opportunities available to African rulers," he argues, "whose old strengths and vulnerabilities were altered as they responded to these changing external conditions" (p. 45). Previously, African leaders could rely on relatively consistent and dependable sources of external support to fuel the internal patronage regimes that supported their rule.

While this support was not completely without conditions, the wider global context of superpower aid at the time allowed rulers to manipulate their vaunted status as sovereign to build internal coercive institutions geared towards conditioning and controlling potential rivals (Ayubi, 1995; Reno, 1998). The success of these systems largely rested upon the nature of the principal resource, external state support in this case, as a centralisable, controllable, and excludable resource. This support, or 'aid', often came in the form of direct cash transfers to state treasuries—accessible to a select number of cronies—or military equipment that was carefully delivered with particular care to exclude it from the wrong hands (ibid).

In other words, substantial foreign aid to weak states created a relatively closed economic system wherein access to resources was heavily controlled by a select number of cronies around the leadership. This in turn closed the political system as it limited the abilities of potential rivals to accrue the resources necessary to present a challenge. Reno illustrates this general relationship, as he observes, "[h]eads of factions emerge when it is easy to become a military or commercial entrepreneur. From their regional bases, these entrepreneurs try to assemble and control resources and convert them to their own political advantage" (Reno, 1998, p. 30). However, in such a closed system, there was considerable difficulty in mobilizing a challenge against the prevailing power structure, or becoming a 'political or commercial entrepreneur'. Whatever economic resources or activities available to those outside the political system were greatly inferior to the those that were exclusively available to the sovereign leader, promoting a highly centralized political system that aligned with a highly uneven topography of economic opportunity.

Nonetheless, such a system was temporary, and whatever sort of equilibrium that existed was vulnerable to a number of factors that could swiftly undermine the delicate balance of forces and create the type of shock that would shake the landscape and re-distribute opportunities. He describes how "the loss of aid from superpower allies and the end of preferential treatment by multilateral creditors undermined internal patronage networks" (Reno, 1998, p. 220), and forced leaders to look for alternative sources of income. Unfortunately for them, and this is a key point, these sources of income and wealth carried structural traits that rendered them less amenable to centralisation and exclusion. As the deregulation of global markets and privatisation schemes emanated across the continent, it was "as if a great tidal wave swept away key elements of an established political accommodation and social control, bringing in its wake new resources and opportunities

strongmen could more easily appropriate than weak-state rulers could immediately control"

(ibid).

While Reno focused himself on the situation of African states, this dynamic ties in to wider observations of the centrifugal pressures wrought by globalization upon political systems, marking a historical "shift from hierarchical patterns of government to the wider and more polyarchal networks, contracts and partnerships of governance" (Duffield, 2000, p. 23). This specific political economic approach critiqued the optimistic neoliberal assumptions of globalization, arguing that the spread of markets would not lead inexorably to increased order and prosperity, but rather the social changes this spread entailed would "encourage new and durable forms of division, inequality and instability" (Demmers, 2012, p. 22). This 'durable disorder' thesis of globalization highlighted the 'paradox of globalization'(ibid), wherein the spread of commercial relations and increasing economic interdependence appear to simultaneously encourage greater integration and fragmentation, a process Rosenau (2003) dubbed 'fragmegration'.

For issues of war and peace, this dynamic was thought to account for the inverse trends of decreasing inter-state wars on the one hand, and an increase in civil conflict on the other (Jung, 2003). As Mark Duffield (2003) observed, "[t]hough globalization has similarly affected the North and the South, the response of their respective ruling networks has been different. In the North, a trend toward the formation of regional alliances based on country and regional comparative advantage has emerged," while in the South, "globalization has helped many emerging governance complexes…to pursue new forms of political and economic advantage. Political actors have been able to control local economies and realize

their worth through the ability to forge new and flexible relations with liberalized global markets" (pp. 71-72).

This highlights two discontinuities. The first is temporal, as it observes an historic economic change brought about by a global system encouraging networked over hierarchical forms of political economic organisation. The second, geographic irregularity highlights the different degrees and implications of this challenge across various regions of the world. While both Reno and Duffield use the language of actor choice in accounting for this disparity, the institutional context is arguable more determinative. Again, Douglas North's model of access orders serves as a good framework for accounting for this geographic difference. While the relatively open political systems of liberal democracies encouraged higher levels of economic cooperation within and across northern states, the closed systems of the illiberal South exacerbated competition.

These alternative outcomes represent two points along a U-curve wherein the optimum balance between cooperation and conflict has been reached, or the point where a minimum degree of social order has emerged. For open access orders, this order is ensured by the fact that political elites know that in the context of open political competition, violence and fragrant exploitation carries a high cost, as retribution is likely in the very possible event political power changes hands in the future. In contrast, closed access orders ensure internal cooperation by essentially buying off the elite, ensuring that they have little reason to challenge the status quo. In turn, by closing the economic system, they ensure that those *with* an incentive to challenge this status quo never acquire the means to do so (North, 2013). Indeed, this essential insight regarding these two extremes of stability emanate throughout the comparative politics literature, particularly the consistent finding that countries moving

towards democratization are most prone to conflict (Mansfield, 1995; Hegre, 2001; Bremmer, 2006). The move from an authoritarian system to democracy exemplifies the shift from closed to open access order; though the process is often violent and conflictual as previously marginalised actors begin to acquire the means to challenge and seek retribution against former elites. This is precisely what makes democratization so difficult. Authoritarian leaders, and surrounding elite, often face an existential imperative to maintain power, and so long as their ability to close off the economic system remains intact, there is little possibility of a viable opposition forming (ibid).

This presents democratisation, and structural political change more broadly, as contingent on circumstances in the economic environment. The key dynamic captured in the democratization literature was the linear relationship between economic and political liberalisation, wherein the democracy (conceived as an open access political order) moved hand in hand with the open access economic order represented by free market capitalism.

North's institutional lens is indeed powerful in making sense of these institutional complementarities; however, it appears to hit a snag in one of the contemporary puzzles of comparative politics research; namely, the curious case of 'authoritarian durability' in the Arab World (Brownlee, 2007). Unlike many other regions of the world where the spread of market capitalism and democratization indeed went hand in hand, such as Latin America and many parts of East Asia and Africa, the post-war authoritarian regimes of the Arab world proved remarkably resilient, with the regimes of Syria and Egypt even seeming to defy death after many had written their obituaries during and immediately after the events of the Arab Spring. Their secret certainly did not lie in their ability to resist the spread of open market competition and preserve state control of the economy, as many of these authoritarian

holdouts did indeed initiate widespread economic liberalization and privatisation programs that firmly hitched their societies to the global market (Sassoon, 2016). How then did these regimes survive the wave of new resources and economic opportunity via globalization that washed so many other asunder and pushed others towards Reno's description of warlord politics? Indeed, it appears that the Arab World represented a sort of mutated institutional monstrosity: a closed political access order conjoined with an open economic one.

Jason Brownlee presents a convincing case for how this could be, arguing that these states have developed an institutional tool for rectifying this disjointed political economic situation: the political party (Brownlee, 2007). Building on the increasing focus on institutions within the authoritarianism literature (Geddes, 2005; Gandhi & Reuter, 2007; Gandhi, 2008), Brownlee outlines how these political party structures serve the classical institutional functions of establishing rules of the road, increasing certainty, and elongating the time horizon in which the games of politics are conducted. They function as mediating organisatons that manage elite conflict and crowd out opposition, and in many ways represent an impermeable zone around the levers of decision-making that incentivize elites to remain loyal and compliant (and thus within the zone) and keeps opposition weak and at a distance. Political parties thus represent a highly stable arena in which patronage networks and co-optation strategies can take hold and operate with a high degree of efficiency. Though this system of patronage, secured within the institutional structures of the ruling party, ran up against its limits in the upheavals of the Arab Spring, the fact that they persisted for as long as they did is a testament to their durability. As Brownlee eloquently states, "when the Communist Party and Mexico's Institutional Revolutionary Party lost power after ruling for nearly three-quarters of a century, they epitomized the durability, not the fragility, of party

regimes" (Brownlee, 2007, p. 42). To update this list, one may add the Egyptian NDP, Syrian Ba'ath, and the Tunisian Constitutional parties.

So then why do political parties form? If their existence is in some way associated with a higher degree of elite cooperation, what were the conditions that facilitated their development in the first place? We are once again faced with this question of the origin of social institutions. Is their emergence simply a matter of historical path dependence, wherein the immediate post-independence context locked in a certain institutional tendency? Brownlee's best attempt at an explanation appears to be firmly in the Social-Institutional camp,[14] wherein the immediate post-independence context locked in a certain institutional tendency. He writes:

> The years during which political regimes first emerge are formative for subsequent regime durability or instability...the conflicts and conditions surrounding party creation play a significant role in determining whether parties sustain coalitions in a self-reinforcing cycle of elite cohesion or disintegrate as disputes intensify...Whether elites decisively resolve their core conflicts during the period of regime formation, then, determines if a ruling party emerges and binds together a cohesive multifactional coalition (ibid, pp.35-37).

However, such an explanation appears to only tell part of the story, there are many cases of revolutions that emerged from party-like vanguards that nonetheless gave way to highly individualistic rule—and vice versa. One may simply compare the cases of the respective free officers' revolutions in Egypt (1952) and Libya (1969), that kicked off under broadly similar circumstances: both initiated by a cadre of young officers led by a young charismatic leader, Gamal Abdel Nasser and Muammar Ghaddafi, respectively, bent on overthrowing corrupt, foreign back leaders in favour of socialist republics (Alexander, 1981,

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[14] The Staniland Camp

p. 212). However, only Egypt would go on to form a stable and resilient party-led political system, as the National Democratic Party (previously the National Socialist Union) would dominate Egyptian politics for nearly five decades, surviving three separate presidents and both sides of the Cold War. Libya, on the other hand, would consolidate around the highly personalistic rule of Muammar Ghaddafi, who dissolved the fledgling ASU party shortly into his reign, and was eventually violently overthrown and executed 2011. Granted, his reign was nearly as long as the NDP's—surviving over four decades and a number of foreign interventions—however the post-Arab Spring trajectory of each country would underline Brownlee's point regarding the structural superiority of the Egyptian, party-based system. Indeed, Libya still mostly lacks a unitary sovereign state, while Egypt is reconsolidating, if not entrenching, an elite-led authoritarian system institutionally indistinguishable from the historical ruling party system.

This divergence then invites a broader consideration of the structural forces that constrains the choices of agents as they bargain over power in nascent political organisatons—again highlighting the relationship between resource control and centralized political authority. In turn, we may inquire as to the economic contingencies associated with the social capital these actors were wielding. This once again leads us to a more structuration approach.

Regardless of the institutional context, systems of patronage are the key mechanisms through which leaders coopt rivals and secure loyalty from followers. This holds true at all levels of political authority, from states to individual armed groups. Presuming that inter-elite relations are often inherently competitive, a necessary function of any leadership structure is to create a system of resource distribution that ensures the loyalty of potential competitors.

This loyalty is largely predicated on these competitors believing it is in their best interest to maintain this status quo, as their rents and spoils depend upon this system continuing to function. This is precisely the system that Brownlee argues political parties facilitate within the smaller concentric circle of a closed political system.

For this, it is important to look into the nature of the economic activity that produces the spoils that are then distributed. Egypt is a particularly illustrative case here, as it often characterized by its high degree of crony capitalism and political clientelism. From the inception of the modern state in Egypt following the overthrow of the monarchy in 1952, the Egyptian state has been predominantly reliant on agriculture, productive industry, and other long term economic activities for revenue (Waterbury, 1983). As these revenue streams flowed through the state and into expansive patronage networks, the elites that received these spoils knew that continuation of this flow relied on long term investment and regime stability. It is within this economic context that "elites can envision their party bringing them medium- and long-term gains despite immediate setbacks" (Brownlee, 2007, p. 12). Likewise, the other states cited as cases of strong, party-led authoritarian regimes (Tunisia, Syria, Mexico, and Malaysia) also have economies primarily composed of agriculture, production, and services industries.

In contrast to this continual and constant accrual of spoils; the massive and often unpredictable windfalls derived from natural resource extraction generate a much different environment of elite interaction. The type of stable and broad-based patronage system that takes hold in other political economic contexts simply cannot be maintained, as elites have a much higher incentive to make a run at the levers of power, even if that means threatening the stability of the regime—which is not that important to the flow of resources in the first place.

One thinks of oil-rich Iran in this case, which Brownlee contrasts with Egypt as being particularly plagued by elite volatility (ibid, p. 4). Such a dynamic may also justify his treatment of Qaddafi's dissolution of the ASU as a historical footnote, as such a party system was never structurally feasible in Libya anyway. History does not allow for such counterfactuals, but one does wonder how readily Qaddafi could have disbanded the fledgling party and consolidated his highly personalist rule had he been compelled to extract his revenues from a broader base of industries that required stable and consistent farming.

This is a case where the structural traits of oil and natural resource extraction on the one hand, and agricultural/industrial production on the other carried different structural pressures that affected the feasibility, and thus emergence, of different institutional arrangements. Notice this flips around a crucial equation; instead of considering how the institutional context (ruling parties in this case) determines the nature of patronage systems (stable, cooperative, and oriented towards the long run), we can consider how the nature of the patronage system determines the institutional context. This is a question we can also transpose onto the work of Staniland, asking again how institutional context (defined by pre-existing strong or weak social bonds) determines the nature of the patronage system (characterized by the ability to centralize and control resource flows, or being ripped apart by the centrifugal force of the resource curse (Staniland, 2014). This allows us to inquire into the origins of these institutional conditions, rather than merely their effects, and more fully grapple with the structural forces that constrain the abilities and incentives of actors to create and sustain these arrangements in the first place.

Disruptive Openings: Empowerment at the Margins

As we have seen, the openness of the economic realm (i.e.: lack of centralisation) tends to promote a corollary openness in the political realm, and vice versa. In this way the economic realm imbues itself into the political, which suggests that changes in this economic environment invariably carry implications for the wielding and distribution of political power. In turn, the specifics of this change matter greatly, particularly the structural traits associated with the resources that are either gaining or losing prominence. Resources such as oil, gemstones, and other potent, high value resources have indeed garnered significant attention in their ability to structure the power relations around them, whether in the case of petro-dictatorships or Weinstein's groups of armed movements infected by lootable resource-induced fragility and disorder. These high value, highly lootable resources do not require the type of broad-based cooperation that promotes cooperative institutions geared towards stable, consistent farming of value over a longer term time horizon. However, this dynamic applies up and down the value chain, with lower value and less centralisable resources, often overlooked in the conflict resource literature,[15] challenging the ability of political actors to control (close) the economic environment in a way that allows them to solidify power and prevent their rivals' ability to marshal the means to challenge them.

David Seddon describes this dynamic in the context of Morocco from the 17th century onwards, arguing for the central role of European trading contacts in undermining the traditional Moroccan monarchy's grip on power and (by) reforming local social relations.

> While the monopoly of strategic imports, such as arms and munitions, served to strengthen the power of the state and the ruling class, in fact the ability of the state to monopolise international trade along the entire Atlantic and Mediterranean seaboard was limited and in areas remote from the authority of central government local rulers

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[15] One exception can be found in Weinstein's (2012) discussion of the Shining Path in Peru, noting their more inclusive governance strategy as a result of the need for sustained and widespread civilian labour to cultivate the local coca crop (pp. 192- 195).

and tribal chiefs could take advantage of the official encouragements given to trade with European merchants to develop their own (illegal) commerce, and so to reinforce and strengthen their own power base, and thereby weaken the state, both politically by posing a military threat and economically by withholding tribute and taxes that would otherwise feed the central treasury (Seddon, 1978, pp. 69-70).

He thus concludes that—at the turn of the 20th century—"it is no historical 'accident' that the final onslaught of European intervention and the ultimate disintegration of the Moroccan state should have been accompanied by the emergence throughout the countryside of local rulers and petty tyrants of exceptional power, some of whom even claimed the sultan's throne, as well as tribal rebellion and peasant uprisings" (ibid, p. 101). Indeed, the groundwork was laid centuries earlier as increased commercial intervention on the part of Europe created an increasingly open economic access order within which the traditionally closed political system could not sustain itself.

James Gluckman (1941) observed a similar dynamic vis-à-vis the British and local populations in Zambia throughout the middle of the 20th century. Becoming growingly involved in local political and economic life of the region due to their increasing mining activities, these interventions, and particularly the resources the British brought and opened up from the ground, reshaped social relations in a way that undermined the local king's ability to monopolize resources and thus secure political control. As the prevailing Lozi power structure depended upon control of heightened areas of land most suitable for agriculture ('mounds') the great economic changes that were occurring alongside British investment in the region were re-shuffling that landscape.

> Within Loziland, the new siting of social resources has undoubtedly lowered the structural importance of mound-ownership. Most missions, Government stations, and stores are at the Plain, raising its economic value in relation to the Bush, but in the Plain, since these white places are mostly on the margin, the value of those parts of the Margin is heightened. Moreover, most Margin gardens are best for vegetables and

fruits for sale to Whites. This and the importance of the labour flow has meant that though land ownership is still of great importance in the economy, the monopoly of Lozi power is taken from the mound owners. The field of Lozi economy now embraces white country where social resources are entirely different. The geographical expansion of Lozi settlement from Plain, to Plain and Margin, to Plain and one Margin of heightened value, to Plain and this margin and white country, has been accompanied by reduced importance of the mounds—the centres of Plain settlement (p. 122).

This opening of the economic system predictably led to the fall of the closed Lozi political system, as a series of national territorial elections straddling the independence period inaugurated the defeat of the traditional ruling class 'by a combination of traditional and new enemies' unleashed by decades of fundamental socio-economic change (Frankenberg, 1978, pp. 54-55). In conjunction with William Reno's discussion of the emergence of warlord politics in the context (or as a result) of the growth of global markets, it appears to be an almost historical regularity that the emergence of new modes of economic activity leads to the decomposition and re-composition of political regimes in Africa.

Invariably, this type of political re-composition is characterized by the empowerment of formerly marginalised actors via a change in the distribution of resources and an associated increase in their ability to mobilize resistance. Nowhere is this most starkly expressed in the case of black slavery in the Caribbean and Americas. Here the social, political, and economic subjugation of the marginalised (slave class) was most explicit, held in place under a set of economic, ideological, and imperial systems that persisted for centuries. Here, Mimi Sheller (2000), building on the work of Arthur Stinchcombe before her, again highlights the declining economic power of the planter class as the sugar wave passed its peak. As Stinchcombe tied this variable to an increased capacity of slaves to mobilize, she discusses the post-independence period, noting how "peasant landholding as an alternative to sugar monoculture became the key terrain for wrestling economic control from the planters, and with it political

and civil power as well" (p. 44). Ultimately, "the increasing fragmentation of the ruling class and the growing threat from subalterns created precisely the conditions necessary for popular empowerment and possibly greater democratization" (ibid, 55).

A familiar theme indeed that crosses a number of levels of analysis: the breakdown of elite cooperation with the decline of the underlying economic system that incentivized such cooperation (sugar), and the growing empowerment of the marginalised as this decline opened up new opportunities (literally new land) for the independent cultivation of resources. This once again highlights the ability to control resources as an essential element to maintaining power. While this builds on this insight that the cohesion of armed groups is largely dependent on the control over resources and the attendant distribution of power it promotes, it expands on it however by looking beyond one type of resource, (high-value, lootable), to the broader economic landscape that serves as a group's resource base. This suggests a consideration into a sort of typology of resources, wherein different resources lend themselves to different degrees of control depending on the capital and knowledge required to exploit and/or utilize it. For example, external state sponsorship appears to be a highly salient resource type on which to focus in the context of conflict given its high degree of centralisability. Given its highly technical nature—often sophisticated weaponry or other military equipment—and high incentives to ensure deliveries arrive to the desired actor, external state sponsorship is unlikely to have decentralizing effect, unless this is precisely the desired effect by the sponsor (even it this case, this would not be so much a general decentralisation, but a shift from one center of power to another).[16] This makes external state sponsorship a highly excludable resource that tends to promote centralisation of political authority within an armed group. In institutional terms, shifts in external state sponsorship do

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[16] See Tamm, 2016.

not result in a change in the openness or closure of the system, but merely those within the center of power.

Contrast this with other resources, such as revenues resulting from smuggling activity, privatisation (Reno, 1998), or land reform (Sheller, 2000). These are generally un-targeted, non-excludable resources that are open to a wide range of actors and thus promote more open economic systems. This opening of the economic system pries open the closed political order, though often in painful, contentious, and violent ways. Indeed, as Tarrow (2011) concludes, "contention increases when people gain access to external resources that convince them that they can end injustices and find opportunities in which to use these resources" (p. 160; Albrecht, 2015). At the armed group level, I argue this often manifests in fragmentation and a general decentralisation of the conflict environment as a widened array of conflict actors gain access to resources whilst being unable to deprive their rivals. The clear implication is that resources indeed matter. In turn, it also suggests that—counter-intuitively given the existing political economic conflict literature—lower value, non-excludable resources not only matter, but may in fact have a more destabilizing impact than higher value resources that are more easily controlled.

Changes in this resource landscape can occur in a number of ways :a new resource or mode of economic activity is discovered or arises locally, such as the discovery of a new lode of precious minerals; the demand for an existing resource or service changes as a result of a change in the global market, like the sudden demand for uranium at the advent of the nuclear age; or a resource enters from outside the region and embeds itself in within the local economy, perhaps through the diversion of a smuggling route through a territory.

This thesis will argue that current protracted conflict in Mali can in part be explained as result of this third event—that is, a new resource (drug flows) have entered the area from outside via the regional transborder trade networks, and thus transformed the previously existing war economy to favour a more protracted and factionalized state of conflict. Yet then how do these general environmental pressures imbue themselves into the structure of armed groups? What are the mechanisms through which resource landscapes condition and alter the social structures in which armed actors find themselves? For this, we must consider the tensions inherent in the organisational structures of armed groups.

Patrick Johnston directed attention towards such tensions by mobilizing a principal–agent framework in his analysis of Sierra Leone and Liberia. He presented evidence regarding the impact of geography and technology on insurgent organisations, particularly the ways in which they increased or decreased the costs of governance and defection that are endemic to geographic expansion. Borrowing from the literature on corporate organisation, he conceptualizes armed groups in two organisational forms, centralized and non-centralized (Johnson, 2009). He posited that as insurgencies expand and capture more territory, they are pressured to delegate more authority to sub-commanders who are charged with controlling and maintaining their growing territorial base (ibid). In essence, expansion raises governance costs, which leads to delegation and decentralisation. This in turn decreases the cost of defection from the point of view of these sub-commanders or other agents, as such acts are difficult to detect and even more difficult to punish given the distance. This can be mitigated however by access to communications and information technology that allows the leadership to maintain close monitoring of their subordinates and ensure a regular flow of information from top to bottom, and vice versa. This effectively reduces the governance costs associated with expansion on the part of leadership and maintains the cost of defection on the part of

subordinates as the leadership is in effect hovering much closer than would otherwise be the case.

Attaining breathing room from an organisation's leadership is one permissive cause that can allow subordinates to act independently. However, in order to be able to fully defect and mobilize an alternative support base that can eventually form a splintering faction, such divergent actors must have the means to support themselves and their budding sub-movements independent of any patronage ties with the main organisation. This is the point where resources and economic landscapes come in. Fragmentation occurs precisely because divergent actors have both the breathing space from above and the material base from below in order to successfully defect and embark on their own independent action. The extent to which the economic landscape from which the organisation extracts revenues is centralized, whether in hierarchical form or horizontally integrated around a central and essential node (presumably the existing rebel leadership), will determine the ease through with divergent actors can develop their own funding activities without the need to answer to or even cooperate with the leadership. [17]

This leads us to the role of networks and how control and cohesion are maintained under a decentralized organisational structure. This issue lay at the heart of what Shapiro (2013) describes as "the terrorist's dilemma" wherein the act of disciplining subordinates risks exposing the group's leadership to state or international intelligence agencies. Aside from this, terror groups often employ individuals with their own capacities and affinities for violence, meaning any attempt at coercion or violent disciplining risks retribution. While

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[17] See Lidow (2016, pp. 6-12) for a valuable theorisation of the agency problems created when mid-level commanders possess access to lootable resources.

Shapiro's work focuses exclusively on terrorist groups and presents a number of unique features he argues places them in a stand-alone analytical category (such as these pressures from global intelligence agencies), I argue there are generally applicable insights here that pertain to all armed groups that are rooted in the logic of principal -agent relations. Indeed, as Johnston noted, all armed organisations are presented with the fundamental challenge that principal are limited in their capacity to control the agent via their inability to punish them for non-compliance.

Shapiro notes that it is the groups that are able to employ more subtle, social forms of control and discipline that are most successful in mitigating these challenges, and hence more successful overall in avoiding detection by intelligence agencies or retribution from their subordinates. This predominately takes the form of "implicit threats of exclusion from valued social networks," though, of course, this loses its potential efficacy if "the operatives are not embedded in [these] dense social networks..." (ibid, 33).

While this reference to the coercive influence of social networks does not play a fundamental role in Shapiro's work, this is precisely the crucial point where the rubber meets the road in terms of the interactions of social and economic relations. As has been argued throughout, and will be demonstrated below, these 'social networks' are heavily intertwined, or often synonymous with, economic relations. Indeed, Shapiro draws on the work of Berman (2011) on Hamas and their extensive network of social services which form 'selective incentives' for loyalty and disincentives for agitators via disciplinary exclusion (p. 124). This 'Hamas model' has been held up as an exemplar of successful non-state organisation precisely due to the power of these networks to embed the group into wider socio-economic structures, a position which endows them with significant material leverage over its agents

and wider societal actors (ibid, pp. 121-156). This model was inspired by Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood decades earlier, whose network of clinics, hospitals, and other crucial social services have historically served as indispensable lifelines to poorer Egyptians. Aside from such charitable work, the Brotherhood's sprawling commercial empire, primarily in commodity trade and distribution, carries a mystique within Egyptian culture, an imposing totem whose shadow attests to the group's power and influence in the country's material landscape. Teasing out the boundary between reality and hyperbole/conspiracism regarding the brotherhood's economic assets and activities is characteristically challenging, though one estimate approximates 40 percent of the Egypt's private sector enterprises being in some way associated with the organisation (McMahon, 2016 p. 86).

In such embedded socio-economic systems (what Shapiro describes as 'dense social networks'), the leadership (principals) maintains an enormous amount material leverage over other agents in the system, as they possess the ability to deprive them of social mobility and the material resources they need. This is particularly effective for hierarchical organisations who draw recruits from such a networked social base, as leaders can leverage these wider social networks to enforce internal group discipline. This is the reality Polanyi touched upon in his observation that embeddedness within a social network is not just a source of psychological comfort, but a material necessity as most all production and trade were mediated via these social ties. For this reason, marginalised or subordinate actors are coerced to comply with the system and the dictates from those whom control it. One may imagine the force of such networks quietly yet powerfully pulsating its disciplinary power through the entrenched political party apparatuses or the Cold war patronage regimes described by Brownlee and Reno, respectively. To this we may also add the institutionalised and cohesive

armed groups discussed in the formation/fragmentation literature who have successfully wielded their material leverage to align the surrounding social arrangements in their favour.

However, certain changes in the economic environment can undermine this leverage, particularly if a new resource or economic activity emerges that functions outside of this prevailing social network. This was precisely what was observed in the succeeding analysis the case of conflict in Mali, as changes in the regional smuggling economy allowed subordinate actors (agents) an alternative means towards social mobility and resource accumulation. This in turn allowed them to assert their interests in the conflict by forming their own groups or breaking away from those created by the prevailing leadership. At this point in this thesis, this should sound like a familiar dynamic. Eliminating the material leverage between a principal and agent undermines the material logic of their power imbalance, the implications of which inevitably manifest themselves in one way or another.

Conclusion

The preceding two chapters have argued for an ontological perspective that views the material/economic and social realms as inherently intertwined. This derives from the fact that social capital and the institutions it creates and sustains is rooted in particular economic contingencies and contexts. In turn, shifts in these economic conditions often inaugurate great social and political upheavals. Indeed, from the great transformation to market capitalism described by Polanyi, to the shift from the Cold War to neoliberal globalization, economic change brings displacement and disorder as the institutional complementarity, described by North's Access Order model, has been broken, emanating like shock waves from a tectonic fault line that has shifted violently from its formerly interfacing neighbor. In some ways we

can understand this conflict and disorder as a natural process of a system trying to re-settle into equilibrium as the altered economic landscape has re-dealt the distribution of resources and opportunities.

This is the broader context to the conflict in Mali that, I argue, is but one chapter in a decades long story of social transformation in response to a changing economic landscape. However, to explain how this new equilibrium will settle, careful and contextual consideration must be directed towards the specific social features that will mediate access to this new resource landscape. This conceptual approach renders us better prepared to address the question of the impact of changes in the Saharan smuggling economy on conflict in Mali as we are placed to notice and explain a deeper array of transformations taking place in the region with acute implications for conflict. This begins by considering the economic contingencies associated with a group's social capital, as well as the economic logic undergirding their group boundaries and the positions it entails within surrounding hierarchies. As these economic circumstances and material logics change, relations between principals and agents degrade as do the vectors within an armed group's network.

As we will see in the coming chapters, these are precisely the dynamics driving the unprecedented complexity characterizing Mali's conflict landscape, as traditional social hierarchies are being undermined and novel opportunities for social mobility are creating a fertile breeding ground for defection.

Chapter 4

From Camel to Car Culture: Mali's changing Socio-economic Landscape through the First and Second Tuareg Rebellions

Like many African states, Mali's modern history is punctuated by bouts of conflict that have occurred with some regularity. Vast, diverse, and inheriting colonial inequalities which have exacerbated internal tensions, Mali has experienced a number of major conflagrations and cycles of violence between the Tuareg North and the South. (Bencherif & Campana, 2016). Indeed, the conflict and ensuing tumult of 2012 can be viewed at some level as a simple re-iteration of a consistent cycle of violence between the Tuareg North and the South---based around the national capital of Bamako—that is broken by occasional intermissions. However, there are many features of the current conflict that suggest what we are witnessing is characterized by some salient differences. The first is the sheer multiplicity of actors. Throughout the conflict in the 1990s, there were approximately eight recognizably distinct armed groups that emerged throughout the period (Togo, 2002); while, in the current conflict, there are approximately 32 (Desgrais, Guichaoua, & Lebovich, 2018) Of course, both of these estimations should be taken as imprecise, but they do give a clear picture of an incredibly pronounced difference.

Secondly, the diversity of interests, aims, and goals of today's conflict actors is novel vis a vis the groups of the 1990s. While the political aims of the previous rebellion were broadly anchored in a coherent set of demands, mainly revolving around a more equitable distribution of national resources between the more developed South and neglected North, today's events seem to reflect a much broader constellation of aims and interests. From regional autonomy, community defence, and increased participation of northern populations

in the national political process, to much more severe demands for complete secession or the realisation of a radical eschatological religious ideology put forth by various Islamist groups, the demands of the conflicting parties seem to reflect a changing atmosphere of contention that has swept the region over the past two decades.

Thus, a great deal of scholarly and policy attention has been devoted to accounting for this increased complexity. Prevailing answers to this question revolve around many of the theoretical fault lines discussed in the previous chapter regarding the importance of economic vs. social factors, and hence many accounts can be characterized as either over-socializing or under socializing the situation. On the one hand, [what I would dub] overly-social accounts emphasise the identity based differences between the North and South, as well as within the North, to account for broader conflict, as well as the increased fragmentation of the armed groups, respectively (Chauzel & van Damme, 2015; Sandor, 2017; Bencherif & Campana, 2018). Indeed, the North of Mali, as in the broader Saharo-Sahel region in general, is characterized by a complex array of rigid social hierarchies that mediate relations both within and between groups. Tuareg society in general has long been regarded as being hyper aware of class (caste) differences that form the structure of their social and political hierarchies. This says nothing of the Arab and various other ethnic groups that inhabit the region and also find themselves players in the northern Mali conflict. Processes of fragmentation, it would be argued, can thus be traced back to these social fault lines. Indeed, in a region of such complex and multiple social groupings and hierarchies, it is to be expected that armed groups emerging from such a diverse social fabric would be prone to splits along these lines.

However, as was argued in the previous chapter, this largely neglects the degree to which these social relations are intertwined with material ones. Indeed, as will be described

below, these social categories and boundary lines can be traced back to distinct economic functions and relations of (inter) dependence that are rooted in the history and ecology of the region. In turn, as the economic landscape changes, these social roles are consistently renegotiated and re-made, sometimes peacefully, other times through violence. Tracing these inter-relations between social ties and the economic functions/roles that mediate them allows us to account for an increasing set of fragmentations that have taken place throughout this conflict. Indeed, while many armed groups are formed around a distinct ethnic or tribal identity, others are not, or are emerging around a new set of faultlines that were not as salient 30 years ago.

On the other hand, there is an 'under-socialized' approach that emphasise the perverse roles of greed and organized crime in the north. For instance, many highlight the role of 'ethnic-military' entrepreneurs in mobilizing these real grievances along ethnic or racial lines, and instrumentally directing them towards violence against the state in order to gain what can only be taken in times of war. In his analysis of the "Tuareg question," namely, why Mali's history is plagued by an apparent cycle of Tuareg uprisings, Sardan notes,

> As in often the case for uprisings based on ethnicity, the ethnic-military entrepreneurs have above all been driven by their own interests, or those of their circle of adepts, jumping from one alliance to another, using their capacity to cause nuisance for their personal promotion, and settling into the chains of corruption and misappropriation that the "post-rebellion cash" has aroused. (de Sardan, 2012)

This "greed" narrative in widespread, even amongst international mediators, with one African Union official lamenting, "of course it is not about [lack of development] with these people. If it was, we wouldn't have all of these different groups fighting for power in the north, they would be united in negotiating on behalf of the people of the north." Many are also not blind to the fact it is many of the same actors from the conflict in the 1990s that are

once again at the centre stage of fighting and peace negotiating. "It is the same groups…literally the *same people*!" (Personal interview, Bamako, 2017). In turn, these "ethnic military entrepreneurs' as Sardan would call them have a long and sordid history in the trans-Saharan smuggling economy, around which so much of the relations between complicit state authorities and northern elite revolved, especially since the conclusion of the rebellion of the 1990s. (Briscoe, 2014)

However, this perspective also represents an over-simplification with analytical consequences. As this thesis will argue, these 'criminal' enterprises, including the revenues derived from kidnapping ransoms and drug smuggling, are firmly embedded in the local social fabric, a social fabric that is evolving in line with broader changes in the resource environment. For instance, the drug smuggling industry has not involved all groups equally, but has been particularly lucrative to traditionally subservient Tuareg and Arab castes that have found it to be a precious source of social mobility and a means to challenge the prevailing power structures in the North. In turn, many of the fragmentations that have taken place throughout the conflict can be traced back to this contentious relationship between traditionally dominant, or 'noble', tribes and those traditionally subservient. In this case, an illicit resource—drugs—has altered the balance of power between these groups, thus undermining a prevailing hierarchy by weakening relations of dependency and opening new avenues of accumulation outside of the traditional power structure. This is but one example of how resources are not simply channeled through pre-existing social networks, but how they re-form and alter these very networks themselves. This provides essential context for the emergence of new faultlines of conflict and avenues of fragmentation, as well as the activation of pre-existing divisions that had previously remained dormant or subdued.

In this way, the case of conflict in Mali over the past 30 years provides an opportunity for analysing how conflicts evolve. In some ways, we can indeed conceive the current conflict in Mali as a continuation of a broader conflict that stretches back decades, allowing us to hold constant a number of factors related to national politics, ecology, main political players, and the broad groupings of conflict actors to zero in on some key changes that explain a great deal of the new variations described above.

As the succeeding case study will demonstrate, the unprecedented shift in complexity observed in Mali's conflict dynamics can be traced back to changes in the economic landscape which occurred throughout the early to mid 2000s, particularly those that took place within the smuggling economy. Therefore, the focus on the large scale clandestine smuggling industries and the complex social terrain of Northern Mali and the broader Sahara are very much justified, though relegating one to secondary importance is off-base. What is lacking is systematic analysis of how they have interacted with each other. Such an analysis will present a clear picture of the socio-economic environment in which conflict in Mali takes place, both today and in the past, and allow us to view how social and economic forces interact to drive the conflict.

The first step in this process is to historicise the salient social faultines in northern Mali. This will be done by tracing the socio-economic structures that have underpinned political relations in the region from pre-colonial times to independence. In turn, it reveals the economic contingencies associated with the social capital animating the regional society, as well as the material logics underpinning group boundaries and hierarchies.

The implications of this broad and deep historical perspective for the purpose of understanding the present conflict dynamics of Mali are two fold: First, it reveals how the various group differences and that are viewed as salient in the conflict, as well as the social capital utilized by these groups, do not come from nowhere, but are in fact contingent on the economic environment, and two, which follows from the previous, changes in this economic environment produces shifts in the distribution of power between them as prevailing relations of dependency are undermined. Tracing this process underlines this thesis' main theoretical contention: namely, that economic resources alter and re-form the social networks of armed groups as they are funneled through them.

The following sections will provide a broad history of these people in the Saharan space with specific focus on how their modes of subsistence, or livelihoods, evolved in line with larger changes in the environment that in turn altered their internal social hierarchies as well as interactions with their neighbors. This approach aligns with LeBillon's argument that "thick' historical and geographical contextualisation" is key to unpacking the nuanced ways in which resources intersect with local social conditions to produce the relationships that emerge within a conflict scenario (LeBillon, 2012, p. 13). As such, this is a historical thread that will be taken up and carried through the rebellions of the 1960s and 1990s, the first and second Tuareg rebellions respectively, tracing how the changing nature of conflict in northern Mali has tracked with evolutions in the socio-economic landscape. It will hence demonstrate how economic change, including the introduction of new resources, is not simply funneled through existing social structures but in fact re-forms them by undermining existing class hierarchies and creating new avenues of complementarity or conflict.

Camel Culture

The region of North Africa and the Sahel has long resisted political centralization. Vast and unforgiving, political power in the Sahara Desert has long been as sparse as the region's resources. This is not to suggest such power has been lacking, but it is diffuse and articulates in many subtle ways that are not immediately evident when coming from a traditional, Weberian view of what political power looks like. As previous chapters have demonstrated, political structures lay over a substratum of socio-economic forces that hold them together. While at times it may appear that one mode of life-- for instance, the social or economic-- are determinative and thus worthy of a special exclusive analysis, the following analysis will demonstrate that political order across the region has been derivative of an articulation of socio-economic forces. In turn, political change can often be traced to evolutions in this socio-economic fabric.

Any description of something as complicated and nuanced as systems of social organisation is always prone to some degree of over-simplification—especially in a region as vast and diverse as the Sahara. The region is a transitionary boundary between different cultures that have long intermingled in the form of trade and occasional conflict but existed in broad isolation from each other as gateways to distinct continental civilizations. Some of the earliest anthropology, and subsequent ethno-linguistic and genetic research, reveals that Northern Africa and its southern hinterlands were the domain of the Berber ethnic group (Rasmussen, 1996). By the time of the Arab conquest in the 8th century, many of these groups were assimilated into the newly gestating Arab culture in the north, while others were pushed south into the desert. As these Berber pastoralists continued to push south, both pulled by a search for grazing land and pushed by successive waves of newcomers from the north, they began encountering more sedentary agriculturalists—as the landscape transitioned from sand

to grass--such as the Hausa, Fulani, Fur and other peoples in the northern fringes of Sub-Saharan Africa (Nicolaisen, 1963).

These encounters in the southern Sahara (Sahel) were characterized by a continuous process of negotiation and occasional conflict, as they sought ways to capitalise on the natural complementarity that is so often found between nomadic pastoralists and sedentary agriculturalists. The pastoralists would provide livestock, dairy products and goods from Mediterranean via North Africa in exchange for grain and other traded goods from the south, such as textiles and ivory (ibid.) In this way, resources and the various economic livelihoods that provided them were heavily embedded in socio-cultural fabric of the region, as what one did in terms of livelihood, or the goods one could bring to bear, often determined who one was.[18] In turn, these relations tied the fate of peoples together in relations of dependency, material leverage, or zero-sum competition (depending on the climatic conditions) that would broadly structure the political relations of the region.

To the north, the upper fringes of the Sahara were likewise characterized by systems of exchange and complementarities of livelihoods that governed the relations between different cultural groups. The North African economy persisted primarily on agriculture and trade—located as it was between the great commercial empires of the Mediterranean and sub-Saharan Africa. Saharan communities would again provide the fruits of their pastoral economy—livestock and their products—as well as goods received from the southern fringes of the desert—in exchange for various foodstuffs and desirable goods from Mediterranean trade networks. These ties with their northern neighbours were absolutely fundamental to desert life, as northern traders often provided the capital required to create and sustain the

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[18] See Barth and the Fur from previous chapter.

oasis settlements scattered across the Sahara without which the traditional caravan routes could not survive (Scheele, 2012).

Broadly speaking, there are two main cultural groups that have dominated the economic and political realm of the Sahara from the 900s until today. These are the Tuareg and Arab, and it is their internal social hierarchies and external relations with each other and other marginal groups that provide a concrete scaffolding within which to understand the political history of the broader region—and Northern Mali specifically. As this thesis has argued, these internal and external group relations are mediated by economic ones, as both are variably held together by systems of domination, exploitation, and complementarity of livelihoods.

The social and political structures of the Tuareg in particular have been uniquely adapted for survival in the vast and sparse desert environment. As this environment has changed, so has their social system adapted in response to these changing pressures. These pressures range from altering climatic conditions such as drought, to political events such as European colonialism that altered their ability to move freely across newly drawn borders and shifted the regional balance of power against one group or another (Alesbury, 2013; Boilley, 1999; Gremont, 2021).[19] Tracing these concomitant evolutions underscores this thesis's argument that the nature and boundaries of social groups are environmentally contingent, which serves as a crucial insight that will allow us to make sense of the proliferating set of conflict actors currently vying for power in Northern Mali.

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[19] For the more expansive account of the role of French colonialism in calcifying and the mid-century Tuareg social system in the Sahara, see in particular Boilley, 1999 & Gremont, 2021.

The deep origin of the Tuareg people is opaque, however we know they were recognized as a distinct group inhabiting the Sahara by the travels of Ibn Battuta (1304-1369) and other early explorers of the region (Nicolaisen, 1963). Further, more recent anthropological endeavors revealed the broader political organizations that mediated relations between Tuareg sub-groups. At the broadest level, the Saharan Tuareg population is divided into eight main groups which represent the largest political unit. These federations or "drum groups" as they are often called, are led by an Amenukal, a Tamasheq word that appears to roughly translate to "owner of the land," but practically describes "a chief who is not subjected to any other chief." (Nicholaisen, 1963, p.393).These federations, each led by an Amenukul, constitute the horizontal relations of pre-colonial Tuareg society.

Internal to these federations, we witness a broad similarity in the mode of social and political organization. Each federation was built upon a caste-like hierarchy with the noble Ihaggaren, or Imageren, at the top, followed by a class of religious marabouts, or Ineslmen, followed by the Imrad, who are often referred to in the literature as "vassals" to the Ihaggaren, then finally the Iklan, or bellah, the class of slaves that were often captured in raids against the southern sedentarist population (Nicholaisen, 1963, 9-12)

Like all social categories, the precise boundaries and characteristics of these groups are hotly debated. Recent scholars, for instance, have challenged the early French accounts of Tuareg society as being animated by Feudal relations akin to those of Feudal Europe, particularly in over-emphasized the salience of ascriptive racial characteristics in identifying an individual in one group or another (Lecocq, 2010). However, it is broadly agreed upon that it is reasonable to present, with some caution, an ideal model of how internal Tuareg society

is organized, and how—as this thesis has repeatedly emphasised--these relations are heavily intertwined with, if not indistinguishable from, economic roles and functions.

Table 1: The associated clans and societal functions of the traditional Tuareg class structure

Tuareg class	Clans	Societal Functions
Ihaggaren	Ifoghas; Idnan	Warrior class; raiding
Ineslmen		Religious class
Imrad	Imghad; Kel Intesser; the Chemennamas; Ishidenaren; Dabakar; Daoussahak	Rearing of livestock
Iklan		Manual labour

The first to remark upon is the Ihaggaren, the warrior class who are acknowledged as resting atop the social hierarchy. Their origins, or at least the origination of their dominant social position, is colloquially justified on accounts of religious legitimacy via their status as sharafa, or descendants of the prophet Mohammad. However, it has generally been believed by anthropologists that their origins are rooted in a wave of migrations that took place following the Arab conquest of North Africa and have since been held in place by a distinctly socio-economic logic (Nicolaisen, 1963). The key to both the successful conquest the migration represented, as well has the enduring socio-economic relationship between the Ihaggaran and the Imrad, is the camel. The theory follows that the Ihaggaran came from a population of northern Berbers who were some of the first to successfully master the breeding and use of camels, a distinct advantage that allowed them to assert dominance over the (at the time) indigenous Berber populations further south in the Sahara. These latter Berber

populations were primarily goat herders who relied on trade and subsistence from the sedentary populations on the fringes of the Sahel to the south as well as the north. These latter groups are believed to broadly represent the populations from which the Imrad or subservient classes would emerge.

As important as camels were to the origins of this relationship (via conquest), it would remain so throughout the ensuing centuries as they would facilitate a more integrated regional economy based on both inter-Sahara and trans-Saharan trade, as well as periodic raiding parties that would form the basis of an internal patronage system as the warrior/raiders (Ihaggaran) would distribute their spoils amongst their vassals (Imrad) (Alesbury, 2013). Indeed, without a doubt, camels represented the most precious resource of the Saharan economy, and thus it is unsurprising that they would in turn represent key points of mediation between social classes. As the anthropologist Johannes Nicolaisen (1963) notes, control over the use of camels was a crucial concern of the noble classes (p. 436). This was a nuanced and subtle game, as vassals would often be tasked with caring for and rearing their camels while the nobility maintained exclusive right of use. Presumably, this did indeed form the basis of some feudal like arrangement wherein the nobility would reciprocate this labour by granting exclusive protection as well as distributing the fruits of their seasonal raids to their vassals. Naturally, maintenance of the boundary between camel users and goat users was paramount to this system, and it appears that this dynamic is deeply ingrained in the cultural history of these groups.

For one, Nicolason notes the etymology of the vassal term "Imrad" in fact refers to goat breeding itself through the term "kid." In turn, writing in the 1950s, he describes the salient role of the camel/ goat divide in Tuareg culture:

Even to-day there is a distinct cultural distinction between noble Tuareg and vassals…Rich noble Tuareg will whenever possible subsist on camel's milk, while vassals, although they may be rich in camels, attach much importance to the breeding of goats and the manufacture of butter and cheese. The noble Tuareg use camels for the transportation of tents during nomadic migrations, while even rich vassals will generally use donkeys. Noble women possess special riding saddles for camels, but they are unknown in th class of true vassals. Vassal women do not generally ride camels, but donkeys, which are never ridden by noble woman. (Nicolaisen, 1963, 436).

These facts, according to Nicholson, seem to be "in favour of the theory that the class-divisions, which forms the basis of most Tuareg political systems, arose as the result of the conquest by pastoral camel-breeders of nomads or semi-nomads subsisting mainly on goat breeding" ibid).

Thus, Ihaggaren and Imrad represent social categories with a distinctly economic logic. What could be often read as a pre-existing "cultural" feature of Tuareg society comes to resemble a mechanism of power maintenance between the Tuareg nobility and vassals. Thus, the Tuareg "camel culture" of the preceding centuries should be understood in light of its role in maintaining a broader socio-economic hierarchy that formed the basis of the Tuareg political system. As a pillar of this socio-economic system, any change in the economic environment that would affect the disproportionate reliance on camels for economic activity would perturb this broader social system in a way that would in turn carry political consequence in terms of the power relations between Tuareg social classes.

This would indeed occur with the advent of European colonialism which would augur the abolition of warfare and raiding, and "consequently," as Nicholason notes, "the breakdown of traditional political systems" (Nicolaisen, 1963, x [Roman numeral 10]). By attempting to install hard borders and criminalising raiding, the means of the internal

patronage regimes that maintained Tuareg social hierarchies were undermined. This also effectively cut off the only viable and culturally sanctioned mode of accumulating slaves, which further eroded "the traditional Tuareg structure through which the nobles had ruled for centuries" (Alesbury, 2013, p. 115).

This would prove to be a challenge for the French, as the imposition of control across the region was impeded by unrest, in particular a Tuareg rebellion in 1916 (Bourgeot, 1994). Indeed, it was game of refashioning modes of hierarchies to serve new interests. Tribute was no longer paid to traditional nobility, but rather took of the form of a direct tax collected by colonial authorities, whilst disputes were almost always settled in favour of agricularalists, accelerating the shift in the economic landscape away from camel based pastoralism and towards what was seen as the more productive agrarian lifestyle (Alesbury, 2013). However, hierarchies were not abolished all together, as the French would rule through a 'small number of amenable leaders', selected from the prevailing nobles, that would maintain order in return for flows of tax payments (Homewood, 2008, p. 28).This would be a strategy replicated by the Malian state itself from the post-independence period onwards (Boilley, 1999), with similar effect: previously marginalised actors would acquire the room to challenge their subordination, creating new avenues of contention and activating interests that had laid dormant for centuries as there lacked any effective means for realising them.

Indeed, the answer to the question of just how internalised their subjugation had been, or how accepted the prevailing social structure was viewed in the eyes of the Imrad as *a priori* element of their universe, appears to be 'not very'. This can be deduced by the almost immediate proclamations of grievance made against the nobles towards the newly arrived French authorities, as the colonial administration largely "reduced or abolished [noble]

control over other tribes, who complained about their exactions" (Bernus, 1990, p. 161). This underlines the need to view these groups as held together, or in relation to each other, by mechanisms of dependency and coercion that are themselves a product of the wider economic environment. Without their means of accumulating spoils to pump their patronage regimes, as well as their key role in protecting caravans and communities from the raiding practices of other groups (a task now performed by the French military), the Tuareg nobility's material leverage was severely eroded.

However, while the period of colonialism, and that leading into independence, would severely undermine the socio-economic basis of Tuareg society, it would not wipe it out entirely. As noted above, both French and later Malian authorities recognised that these relations of control and dependence were essential for the maintenance of order in Tuareg territory (Boilley, 1999). As such, they were careful to ensure that the mechanisms of control of their chosen proxy rulers, the Ihaggaren, were not undermined. This was the root cause of the French hesitance to actually see the abolition of slavery, as opposed to simply voicing nominal opposition to it, as it was viewed as too socially destabilising.

Thus, and as will be demonstrated below, the social and political structure of the Tuareg from pre-colonial times to today has never been completely demolished and rebuilt, but rather re-formed and re-drawn in ways to empower certain groups over others as the underlying economic environment shifted. This shifting landscape would carry implications into the ensuing Tuareg rebellions, which themselves would reveal and accelerate deeper social transformations as traditionally subservient classes began acquiring the means to challenge their status.

The First Tuareg Rebellion: 1962-1964

The first Tuareg rebellion was a momentous historical event, if not so much for the military outcome, indeed it was a rather short and one-sided affair, but in the way it would set the stage for endemic hostility, mistrust, and grievance that would the structure relations between the country's north and south in the decades to come.

For our purposes, it represents the case of a conflict in which the broad organisational structure of traditional Tuareg society (see table above) was largely intact despite showing the early signs of fraying, which would only intensify as technological advancement and globalisation hastened its grip. The rebels moved and attacked on camel-back, using their superior knowledge and survival skills to mitigate their severe technological disadvantages. As such, the conflict zone was almost exclusively relegated to the Adagh mountains in northeast Mali, the domain of the noble Ifoghas[20], where the jagged topography favoured the rebels and their traditional modes of movement (Lecocq, 2010, p. 193; Humphreys & Mohamed, 2005). Further east in the sandy flatlands, confrontation with motorised infantry of the Malian state was simply unviable.

The rebels relied on quick hit attacks, what Bourgeot (1995) described as "sandy guerrilla warfare" (p. 105), and were often able to frustrate the motorised forces of the Malian state as they struggled with the craggy terrain of the mountains. Rather than hit and run, the camel backed rebels adopted a mode of hit, retreat, then hit again, as the motorised squadrons struggled to position themselves and react to the incoming fire. At other times, rebels would simply run the Malian forces to the point of exhaustion and thirst, either by active pursuit, or indulging a chase. No matter who was chasing who, the Malian forces, less adapted to the

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[20] Of the Ihaggaren class. See table above.

harsh conditions of the desert, often gave up first (ibid). In a sign of where the technological playing field tilted, it was paradoxically the camel-mounted military units that proved most effective against the rebels; indeed, these proved the be the only forces they came to fear (Lecocq, 2010, p.199). As such, camel herds became vital resources and objects of contestation, with most rebel attacks being directed towards the herds to deprive their enemy of this precious means of combat and pursuit.

After months of struggling to get a handle on the rebellion, Malian forces adopted more brutal, scorched earth means. The poisoning of wells was perhaps the most effective, if devastating tactic, greatly depriving the rebels of their ability to move about their terrain and making the arid mountains of northeast Mali unliveable—even for the well adapted Tuareg (ibid, p. 207). Underlining the importance of camels as a military means as well as animal herds more generally for the maintenance of the rebels' social base, Malian forces directly targeted any herds they came across, massacring anything with hooves in a way that eliminated a crucial pillar of the Tuareg material economy. In one instance in November of 1963, over 400 cattle and 250 camels were massacred along with their herdsman near the border with Algeria (ibid, p.209).

Far beyond simply cramping their ability to fight, these measures devastated the wider population of the north (Bourgeot, 1995 ;Keita, 1998; Boilley, 1999). Thousands had fled to southern Algeria in a desperate attempt to find refuge, while those who stayed behind were internally displaced and concentrated in so called 'regrouping zones' (*zones de regroupement*). Any cattle husbandry that remained became unviable due to the poisoned wells and strict control of movement imposed by the military which did not allow for sufficient grazing space (Lecocq, 2010, pp. 209-211).

Inevitably, such measures broke the rebels' ability to fight, along with the material viability of most of the region's population. By August of 1964, most of the rebel leaders had been killed or captured (and often publicly executed in short order) and the rebellion was effectively over (ibid, pp. 213-219). However, the long-term effect and historical memory (a trauma in the realest sense of the word) would live on for the inhabitants of northern Mali as well as those who fled to neighbouring countries or to the south (Claudot-Hawad, 1990.) This proved a particular humiliation to the Tuaregs of noble lineage, as they were forced to seek refuge and material support amongst others whom they considered their social inferiors (ibid, 1993; Bourgeot, 1995). A decade later, a devastating drought would grip the region and pose a near existential challenge to these desert communities, the severity of which many tie to the environmental damage done by the Malian forces' slash and burn tactics some years earlier (ibid, p. 223).

Internally, the Tuareg would struggle to recover, as their societal structure had been stressed in a way that was perhaps irreversible. The camel culture that had structured Tuareg society was on its way out as the winds of change and technological advancement began to reach the Sahara. The collision with the Malian state simply hastened what was inevitable, and of course precipitated change in a much more violent and disruptive fashion than anyone could have imagined. However, the dynamics of the conflict revealed what was undoubtedly true about Tuareg society in the run up to it, the camel was a crucial means of material survival and social control.

The targeting of their herds and poisoning of wells reveals that the Malian state forces learned this quite quickly: without their camels, the great engine of Tuareg contestation

would simply peter out. Conversely, the fact that the majority of Tuareg rebel activity centred around the targeting of herds themselves show not just their own understanding of them as a vital military resource but reveals a deeper understanding of the Tuareg view of warfare itself. As Baz Lecocq (2010) notes, for the Tuareg of the time, "warfare is not about territorial conquest, but about people, material and honour" (p. 203). This is perhaps a logical reality for a pastoralist society where land has no inherent value and wealth is more directly drawn from the possession of animals. Of course, land is valuable in so much as it serves as a grazing or watering source for herds, but this is not a static reality, as seasons and weather patterns build in a certain inevitable variability of when and where a certain track of land is useful. This is predictable to an extent, but not so much as to make the permanent title of a certain tract of land anything more than an illogical and unenforceable burden.

In contrast, control over animal resources, particularly camels, was so heavily contested during the course of the conflict that many neutral non-combatants observed that the rebels could have easily been indistinguishable from simple cattle raiders. Indeed, this conflation of the conflict with mere banditry is pervasive throughout the historical memories of those who lived through it (Lecocq, 2010, p. 196). Of course, this may touch on a degree of opportunism by certain actors, however it more accurately reflects the reality that, in such a setting, control of camels and animal resources was a vital means to military victory. Therefore, it was not surprising that conflict in this period was nearly synonymous with fighting over camel herds, much as conflict today centres around control over key strategic resources. There also may have been an element of war-time propaganda by Malian military forces to dismiss and delegitimise the rebels as mere cattle bandits, papering over the fact that in this time and place, cattle banditry *was* warfare. In short, this is how the Tuareg fought, and this is how they established control.

As it was with external conflict with outside forces, so it was internally in the maintenance of the Tuareg social structure. Indeed, as was outlined above, the broad outlines of the Tuareg social class system flowed from the privileged access to camel use by the noble, or Ihaggaren, group which was itself both a cause and consequence of their role as the warrior class. Thus, it flowed naturally that the conflict unfolded as an essentially noble-led endeavor, as the noble Ifoghas of the Adagh mountains were prime players in the rebellion. In fact, it could be argued that it was exclusively Ifoghas led endeavor; a more or less noble revolt against the forces of change (in this case the forces of the newly emerging Malian state) that threatened to undermine the traditional Tuareg way of life and their privileged position atop it.

Such threat perception was very much rooted in the reality of where history was moving, as the first post-independence government, rooted in Marxist ideology, was committed to radical social transformation of the entire nation based on economic industrialisation and nation-building, a framework in which the traditionally trans-national pastoralists found themselves not just excluded, but a perceived threat to (Hazard, 1969; Lecocq, 2010, p. 152). Like the colonial period, but moreso, this entailed a diversion of taxes from local noble chiefs to agents of the state, as well as a heightened interest in border maintenance and commodification of the region's animal resources.

The threat this nation-building project posed to the noble Ifoghas and the Tuareg camel culture they presided over says a lot about *why* the rebellion occurred, but perhaps it says even more about *how*. As the group with control over the main resource needed to wage war (camels), it is natural that the Ifoghas would find themselves the centre of this conflict, a

fact that is almost synonymous with their acknowledged position as the warrior class. In terms of how this informed the social base from which this conflict was mobilized, it follows quite naturally that the social structure of the Tuareg in general mapped on to the social structure of the rebellion.

This aligns with Staniland's conception that it is indeed the pre-war social ties that inform and structure the social bases of armed groups (Staniland, 2014, p. 17); an alignment of pre-war social ties with war time organisational structures that generally reflect the social structures of the wider social environment at large: the noble Ifoghas at the top, mobilising and organising others within their social group. Notably (as it will contrast with later conflicts) there was not a pronounced active role for other social groups, as subordinate groups either maintained their neutrality or otherwise followed the Ifoghas lead, however limited their own resources.

As further analysis of future conflicts will show, this is not to suggest the lack of salient social faultlines separating groups with different interests and strongly felt grievances. Indeed, as noted above, traditionally subservient groups were complaining about noble Ifoghas exactions almost from the moment the French colonisers arrived (Bernus, 1990, p.161). What was lacking was the material capacity to mobilise independently in order to challenge the Ifoghas position and thereby enter the conflict arena to push for a preferential outcome for these other communities. As this conflict unfolded in a material environment in which the use and possession of camels was paramount, it was simply not possible to mobilise against the one social group whose mastery of the camel was unrivalled.

This situation would change with the outbreak of the so called 'Second Tuareg rebellion of the 1990s' as the conflict would witness the introduction of new groups who

simply did not exist as conflict actors in any meaningful way during the first rebellion. This would be a reflection of the changing socio-economic environment of the region over the intervening decades as the traditional camel culture widdled away and undermined the power hierarchies and relations of domination/subservience that existed within it. In essence, the social capital that greased the wheels of these hierarchies were losing power as the economic circumstances it was contingent upon changed. In turn, the social bases through which the Tuareg could mobilise violence had changed as the socio-economic structures that governed life in the region shifted. As these structures shifted, so too did the means through which political power and control could and would be exercised. No longer were the Ifoghas the only voice emanating from the Tuareg north, as traditionally subservient groups, in particular the Imghad, emerged as a prominent force, not only voicing their interests and demands during the rebellion in parallel to the Ifoghas, but also taking on the traditional warrior class directly, voicing often competing aims and being willing and capable of pursuing them with force.

As will be seen, it was this internecine warfare that would come to characterise so much of the second Tuareg rebellion in the 1990s, as what was once a directed attack on Malian government forces, largely viewed as an external force, gave way to what could be described as a Tuareg civil war (Lecocq, 2010, p.311). Like the first rebellion, these pronounced social changes brought by the conflict were but an acceleration of historical trends which had been slowly churning the social economy of the region beneath their feet, as the prevailing power structures struggled to maintain control and re-assert their traditional privileges as the means of mobilizing violence advanced beyond the simple use and control of camels, and thus beyond the traditional social base from which the first rebellion was launched and executed. Thus, as Baz Lecocq notes in reference to the second rebellion, "one

could argue, the 'revolution' in Tuareg society had taken place before 'the revolution' broke

out" (Lecocq, 2004, p. 109).

Indeed, the severe drought of the 1970s had precipitated a near collapse of the

pastoral economy. Mass migration took place as inhabitants of the region desperately sought

refuge elsewhere and a radical socio-economic transformation took hold as traditional

livelihoods and the traditional relations of dependency and control eroded (Claudot-Hawad,

1993). As Lecocq (2010) concludes of the period, Tuareg society:

> changed from a rural society to an urban society; from an economy based on pastoral
> household self-sufficiency and direct exchange of a limited range of goods to one of
> wage labour and the introduction of new consumer items. It also changed from a
> society living in a geographically limited (if large) and coherent region, to a scattered
> diaspora of community pockets around West Africa, the Maghreb and Europe. These
> major changes in location and economy brought about shifts in gender relations;
> cultural forms of expression; education; and politics (pp. 227-228).

These changes would auger a significant shift in the social bases from which the

ensuing conflict would flow. Networks of control and cohesion that existed previously were

simply gone as the privileged use of certain resources, mainly camels, lost their premium as

alternatives modes of trade and exchange opened up. Transport networks no longer flowed as

heavily through elite nodes, allowing subservient actors a certain freedom of movement and

exchange that did not exist previously.

Indeed, throughout the course of the conflict, a number of new distinct armed groups

would emerge, most of which were not present in the conflict arena of the 1960s. As will be

argued, this is a reflection of this altering socio-economic environment that was in the

process of undermining traditional internal hierarchies.

The Second Tuareg Rebllion: 1990-1995

The second Tuareg rebellion would begin the summer of 1990 as rebels staged a series of quick hit attacks on Malian military bases across the north. Unlike the first rebellion, the rebels were no longer mounted on camel back, but rather equipped with highly mobile 4x4s specifically adapted for desert transport (Klute, 2009). These altered vehicles, dubbed *tecnicals*, combined the resilience and nimbleness of camel transport, as they were packed with extra fuel and water tanks, with the speed and power of modern car technology (Humphreys & Mohamed, 2005; Klute, 2009; Lecocq, 2010, p. 301).

This early stages of the "car culture" of the north still placed local knowledge at a premium as mapping and GPS technology was still decades away, allowing the rebels to reap the advantages of fighting on their home field, namely their superior survival and navigation skills that can only result from local knowledge and experience. They were also better equipped and trained than their forebearers as many gained valuable experience fighting in Muammar Ghaddafi's foreign legions in Lebanon and Chad, bringing their knowledge, skills and weaponry home with them to turn against the Malian state (Lecocq, 2010).

In addition to these advancements in terms of technology and training, the rebels enjoyed an early unity that looked quite similar to the first Tuareg rebellion: a largely Ifoghas led movement that acted and spoke on behalf of the entire Tuareg population of the north. By October of that year, it was clear that the Malian military had no answer to the rebellion. Indeed, similar tactics of brutality from the first rebellion such as well-poisoning and containment zones were less effective as their vehicles gave the rebels a wider range of movement and operation (Klute, 2009; Lecocq, 2010, p. 301).

This, in combination with internal political pressures down south, drove the government of Moussa Traore to the negotiating table (Keita, 1998). This was indeed a high point of the rebellion, a victory in and of itself to bring the government to negotiations. Speaking of the sense of unity and purpose amongst the rebels of the time, former rebel Baye ag Alhassan boasted, "at that moment, there was no movement in the country, no way. There was only one thing: "The Tamasheq Revolution" (Lecocq, 2010, p. 302). However, this sense of unity amongst the rebels and various communities of the north would be short lived, as the movement would quickly split amongst ethnic and class lines in a way that underlines the reality that the true 'Tamesheq Revolution' had arrived some time before the first shots were fired in the summer of 1990.

The negotiations themselves would appear fruitful, as they led to a number of valuable concessions on the part of the government towards the northern communities in exchange for a commitment on the part of the titular leaders of the rebellion to lay down their arms and enter the peace process. The "Tamanrasset Agreement,' as it came to be called, consisted of a ceasefire, prisoner exchange, a commitment to a withdrawal of military resources from the north, decentralization of the administrative institutions of the region, and opportunities for the northern population to be integrated into the Malian civil service and armed forces, as well as the creation of a commission to enforce and monitor these commitments (Keita, 1998).

It would not take long however for internal splits to emerge, as what was a seemingly united and coherent movement in the run up to the negotiations would become increasingly fragmented and disarrayed. First, unlike the previous conflict, there would be two initially

named groups within the larger northern movement, the MPA (Mouvement Populaire de l'Azawad) and the FIAA (Front Islamique Arabe de l'Azawad) representing the Tuareg and Arab communities, respectively. The leader of the rebels, Iyad ag Ghali, a Tuareg, would sign the Tamanrasset Agreement on behalf of both groups, indicating his legitimacy across the ethnic boundary (Lecocq, 2010, p. 311). However, the ensuing division and discontent would reveal the complex intersectional tensions that were straining the region's social fabric.

Indeed, any semblance of hope that the Tamanrasset agreement would temper the violence and create a glide path to peace were soon dashed after a series of rebel attacks west of the Adagh mountains along the Niger river in February of 1991, a mere month after the signing of the peace agreement. This event would signal a new phase of the conflict, what Lecocq (2010) would dub the 'confused rebellion' as the formerly united and coherent rebel movement that drew the government to the negotiating table seemed to lose its purpose (p. 311). The roots of this confusion and disarray were the internal division and contradictions within the movement, themselves reflections of the shifting social landscape of the region. Much of the consternation amongst the dissenting rebels revolved around the nature of the Tamanrasset Agreement and the perceived concessions made on the part of the rebels towards the state. In some sense, this represents classic spoiling behaviour on the part of hardliners within a movement (Stedman 1997; Pearlman, 2008); however, the key element of Tamanrasset Agreement lays less with the divisions it caused, rather than the divisions it revealed, and the ability of these hardliners to mobilise along them.

One of the first hard-line groups out the gate, which held responsibility for the post Tamanrasset attacks in February of 1991, was the Front Populaire de Liberation de l'Azawad (FPLA) (Lecocq, 2010, p. 311). Whereas the creation of the two Tamanrasset negotiating

groups, the MPA and FIAA, represented the broad ethnic inclusivity of the movement, the ensuing emergence of groups such as the FPLA would reveal its salient class and social divisions. The FPLA was broadly composed of traditionally subservient social groups, Kel Intesser, the Chemennamas, Ishidenaren, the Dabakar and the Daoussahak (ibid, p. 314). In addition to this lower social position, they largely inhabited areas east of the Adagh Mountains and along the plains of Azawad and Tamensa, regions which saw very little involvement during the first Tuareg rebellion of the 1960s. In terms of their specific aims and disagreements with the Tamanrasset Agreement, the group was composed of many hardliners opposed to any agreement short of complete independence, while it also attracted many more moderate Tuareg concerned that the provisions surrounding the autonomous administration of the north would empower and solidify the position of the Ifoghas at their expense.[21]

Months later, another split would occur, as the majority of the MPA fighters left to join the newly christened Armee Revolutionaire pour la Liberation de'Azawad (ARLA). Again, this split would occur along a social fault line both in makeup and in explicit justification as the ranks of ARLA members were committed to their "proclaimed vision on the need for change within Tamasheq society" (ibid, p. 316). Members of the ARLA, like those of the FPLA were not just resistant to the Ifoghas dominance within the armed movement and what this would mean for the distribution of the post-conflict peace dividends, but also, and relatedly, to the dominance of the Ifoghas and traditional nobility in Tuareg society in general. The group, and the wider societal movement they represented, advocated for a Tuareg society free of caste, class, tribe, and tribal chiefs, a sort of radical egalitarianism that undoubtedly borrowed a bit of inspiration from the socialist narratives dominating

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[21] One main provision of concern involved the creation of a third administrative unit, or Region, around Kidal which was the main area of the Ifoghas. This would relegate the Tuareg further east to the region of Gao which would bring them into electoral competition with a larger population of non-Tuareg.

politics in the south (ibid). Indeed, the previous Keita regime had promoted their status and declared them to represent the "oppressed masses" of the north, a rhetorical shot at the problematic Ifoghas, prone as they were to repeated bouts of rebellion against the Malian state, and the oppressive feudal system they lorded over (ibid).

Aside from the rhetoric, these divisions within the rebel movement and wider Tuareg society reflected a deeper, more fundamental, and unavoidable reality: the traditional Tuareg socio-economic system was no longer compatible with itself. The systems of caste and tribal hierarchies were vestiges of the past, rooted in material relations of dependence and specialisation that were no longer viable. The vehicle had replaced the camel as the main mode of transport in the region, undermining the material logic to the position of the nobility (and their mastery of the camel) at the top of the social hierarchy. Thus, the ability to trade and move across the desert was much less tied to the social networks which had facilitated it previously. Local chiefs and noble tribes through which so much of the traditional trade economy flowed were less relevant as technology replaced their valuable skills and local knowledge of the terrain. In addition, as a result of the brutal droughts in the 1970s, the pastoral economy was no longer the socio-economic engine it once was, creating large migrations to urban areas as former nomads, particularly their children, sought a position in more industrial trades less reliant on the vagaries of nature (ibid, pp. 238-239). What they found more often however was unemployment, lest they travel abroad to Libya to labour in the oil industry or join Ghaddafi's foreign legions (ibid; Keita, 1998). This created the basis of the *ishumar*, a term which is derived from the French *chomage* (unemployment), a cultural force of increasing power and influence throughout the 1970s and 80s as a new class of intellectuals sought to make sense of this revolution in Tuareg society and their place within it (Lecocq, 2010, p. 229).

Thus, this revolution was an all-encompassing cultural, political, social, and economic force that pre-dated the conflict. Rather than a cause, the conflict itself was a revelation. The social relations derived from the camel-based pastoral economy were severely undermined, if not severed all together, which would place pressures on prevailing hierarchies and modes of control. The breakaway rebel groups such as the ARLA and FPLA owed their existence to this reality. Seeing their interests not being perfectly represented by the prevailing Tuareg leadership, the Ifoghas, dissident rebels were quite naturally questioning of why they were in such a position of leadership to begin with. Such questions were not new or novel to the Tuareg, as it was established earlier that subservient Tuareg groups were complaining of Ifoghas exactions since the arrival of the French, a sentiment which probably pre-dates even that. What was novel however was their ability to do something about it, to organize and mobilise independently from them in a way that was simply not possible in the past. No longer was the consent and involvement of the camel masters necessary for the accumulation of resources as the economic base of so much of Tuareg society had shifted from camel-based pastoralism and desert trade. Whatever social capital the Ifoghas held previously was of much less value now.

Indeed, the ARLA, and their Imghad social base, was increasingly self confident and assertive. In line with the development of the *ishumar*, the concept of '*timgheda*', or behaviour of the Imghad, would emerge, emphasising and celebrating the industriousness of Imghad people in comparison with the laziness of the idle Ifoghas (ibid, 317). This was a cultural manifestation of just how the socio-economic terrain, and thus relations of dependency, had changed between the two groups. The previous notions of nobility/ sub-servitude that overlayed the traditional, pastoral camel economy was increasingly

anachronistic and lacking in any material logic. The Imghad, increasingly finding work in the

non-pastoral economy, no longer saw their material viability pass through the Ifoghas in the

form of grazing rights or protection from neighbouring camel/cattle raiders.

To the wider Tuareg communities of the north, this transition to a new economic

reality was refreshed almost at every meal, as Lecocq (2010) describes the shifting dietary

patterns of the period:

> To a pastoral Kel Tamasheq, the ideal repast consists of fresh milk and fat meat, with three glasses of sweet tea for dessert. When fresk milk and meat are scarce this diet is completed with dairy products, cheese, buttermilk and butter, wild or cultivated grains; dates and gathered fruits. Food taboos exist. Fish is out of the question even when available. Poultry is only eaten by children who hunt them in the bush. This ideal diet was abandoned during the droughts and again during the second rebellion, when the Kel Tamasheq were even forced to eat fish, as canned herrings were shipped to the desert as relief aid. But the diet also changed in exile. It can only be the irony of history that the Kel Tamasheq now adopted the det that they had at first refused when forced upon them by the Keita Regime. As fresh fruits and vegetables were available, they slowly adopted them. At present, many repatriated (if this is the correct term) youngsters in Kidal relish the memory of fresh apples and grapes, available at the markets of Algeria and Libya. Yams, potatoes, tomatoes, onions, cabbage and lettuce have found their way into Tamasheq dishes. Fresh dairy products were harder to get. Fresh milk powder and butter with olive or peanut oil. Even those Kel Tamasheq who stayed in Mali were now prepared to take up gardening (p. 47).

As the daily means of the population was increasingly derived from regional, or even

global markets, the masters of the pastoral economy, the Ifoghas, found their position grow

more and more tenuous (Claudot-Hawad, 1993; Bourgeot, 1995). This significantly curtailed

the material leverage they would have, losing the discipling power that their position atop this

socio-economic hierarchy used to entitle them to. Politically, this meant that their desires and

preferences had less sway, as the fear they could instil in their former vassals was grounded

in threats that had less bite, and the positive inducements and incentives they could offer had

less relevance. This in fact echoes the theoretical observations in chapter three regarding how

militant groups discipline and maintain control over their members through threatening to

exclude them from valuable social networks. However, as the value of these social networks decline to a certain group or individual, so does the value of any threat of exclusion (Shapiro, 2014, 33).

In sum, the political power of the Ifoghas, and traditional nobility more generally, had been disembedded from its socio-economic base, laying the groundwork for division and increased contention as Tuareg society sought to rebalance itself in light of this new material reality. This was the new reality that the emergence of the FPLA and ARLA represented, and it would continue to colour the conflict dynamics in the coming years as more cases of fragmentation and division amongst the communities of the north would render peace elusive. The division and social fault lines that were activated around the Tamanrasset Agreement would only intensify as the national political picture in Mali became more muddled and contested. In March of 1991, the government of Moussa Troure would fall to a military coup led by Colonel Amadou Toumani Toure, an airborne division commander based in Bamako (Keita, 1998). The coup would follow weeks of mass protests and demonstrations across all aspects of Malian society, as trade unionists, students, and other opposition forces agitated for an end to the previous regime and a move towards a more modern form of democratic representation (Lecocq, 2010, p. 319). Underlining all this tension was a palpable frustration with the competence (or lack thereof) of the previous regime in dealing with the northern rebellion, and as such led to a re-appraisal of the Tamanrasset Agreement which many opposition forces felt was too lenient and compromising towards the rebel parties. New negotiations were needed.

These would begin in December of 1991, first in the town of Golea across the border in Algeria, then a second round some weeks later in the Malian town of Mopti (ibid, p. 320).

Again, the true political realities of the north, or where the actual distribution of power set, would be forced to reveal itself. Now divided into four separate groups, the rebel movement would be pressured to unify for the purposes of negotiations. The MPA and FIAA, representing the traditionally noble tribes of the northern Tuareg and Arab, respectively, would join forces with the FPLA and ARLA, themselves formed earlier to represent the interests of the newly empowered non-noble tribes, to form the umbrella organisation of the Mouvements et Front Unfies de l'Azawad (MFUA). Direct negotiations would ensue for the next few months, finally culminating in the signing of the National Pact on April 11th, 1992 (ibid, p. 321).

Far more ambitious and detailed than the Tamanrasset Agreement, the National Pact would specify a special administrative status for the north, a number of efforts to promote the economic development and reconstruction of the region, and plans for the re-settlement of refugees as well as the integration of former rebels into the ranks of the Malian armed forces and state administrations (ibid, pp. 322-323). However, the implementation and peace-rendering effects of the Pact would ultimately fail, largely as a result of the failure of the MFUA to sell the agreement to the larger rebel community. The process of integration into the Malian armed forces was particularly fractious, with the various movements disagreeing with the precise number of rebels who should be integrated. The mixed patrols of Malian troops and rebels, meant to facilitate the integration process and restore a semblance of law and order in the north, would produce mixed results. At some point, it would amplify the divisions within the Tuareg rebel movement, as members of the ARLA would ambush a patrol in February of 1994, killing a high ranking MPA officer, Bilal Saloum. This would intensify the 'fratricidal war' between the 'traditionalist' MPA representing the noble Ifoghas, and the 'modernist' ARLA and their Imghad base (Lecocq, 2010, p. 332).

This would reach a high point in March of 1994, when ARLA troops invaded Kidal and kidnapped Intallah ag Attaher, the amenokol, or chief, of the Ifgohas Tuareg and symbol of their dominancy in the region (ibid, p. 333). This would incense the Ifoghas, a symbolic violation of the sacred ordering of their social universe that would not soon be forgotten. Reprisal attacks ensued in short order, with MPA forces killing three ARLA members and capturing their leader, Abderrahmane ag Galla, the following day. A hostage exchange would take place the next month, though bloody violence between the two Tuareg groups would continue throughout July and August (ibid).

Such internal strife would affect other Tuareg groups as well, as the FPLA (itself an earlier breakaway from the MPA) would result in the creation of two new groups: the Front National de Liberation de l'Azawad (FNLA) and the Front Unite de Liberation de l'Azawad. (FULA) (ibid, p. 334). Like the MPA-ARLA split, these divisions would also result from social tumult as various groups sought to renegotiate their positions within the social power hierarchy. Unlike the MPA however, the historical divisions here are less clear, largely due to the groups themselves contesting the historical legitimacy of prevailing hierarchies (ibid, p. 335). The FPLA was largely dominated by the Chemennamas, headquartered in their homebase in the eastern end of the Niger Bend. The Ishidenharen, Dabakar, and Dasussahak, inhabiting roughly the same territory as the Chememenamas, would withdraw from the group, with the latter two going on to form the FNLA (ibid, p.334).[22]

By this point in 1994, however, the conflict was losing steam. A lack of resources was pressuring rebel groups across the north, raising the costs of continuing hostilities and

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[22] These groups comprise of non-noble Tuareg tribes (see Table 1 above).

increasing the appeal of a negotiated settlement with the Malian state (Humphreys &

Mohamed, 2005). The MPA, the prime movers of the initial phases of the rebellion, had sided

with the government to finally put an end the conflict and implement the peace agreements

they previously signed. The internecine warfare between themselves and the ARLA would be

settled in their favour, while other 'dissident groups' such FPLA and FULA were similarly

defeated or forcibly integrated with the help of government forces (Lecocq, 2010, p. 356).

This (forced) integration of Tuareg groups would in turn target the last rebellious elements of

the Arab FIAA, forcing the latter to end their hostilities and state their commitment to peace

and the implementation of the National Pact.

Throughout the next year and a half, a series of highly effective Inter-community

meetings would take place to stitch the together the requisite social trust for a lasting peace in

the north. The stock of social capital, in dire need of re-supply, would in part be re-generated

here. On March 26, 1996, symbolic burning of weapons took place in Timbuktu, dubbed the

'flames of peace', which would finally see the region enter the post-conflict period after

nearly six years of instability and tumult (ibid, p. 363).

However, the social fault lines that were revealed and activated throughout the

conflict, particularly amongst the traditional nobility and subservient classes, would continue

to shift and drive the region's politics. This derived from changes in the economic

environment that changed social relations of dependency and control. Indeed, with hindsight,

we see the fact that what appeared to be a relatively united and cohesive movement in the

1960s was simply papering over a much more complex set of social divisions that were just

waiting for the material breathing room to become activated. This places a premium on the

role of resources, and the economic environment more generally, in shaping the structure of

armed groups and their ability to exercise material leverage over their social coalitions. The erosion of the camel-based pastoral economy undermined the ability of the Ifoghas Tuareg to exercise control and justify their privileged status at the top of a social hierarchy that now was lacking an underlining material logic. Allowing alternative actors, such as the Imghad, to organise independently created a more complex and crowded conflict arena as central control of resources was allusive and the conditioning effects of prior social networks lost their bite. These dynamics underscore this thesis' claim that the observed social bases from which armed groups organise are themselves contingent on the economic environment, and hence subject to change as this environment shifts.

Conclusion

This chapter has presented broad history of the Tuareg in northern Mali, focusing on how their modes of subsistence, or livelihoods, evolved in line with larger changes in the environment that in turn altered their internal social hierarchies as well as interactions with their neighbours. By conducting a comparative analysis of the 'first Tuareg rebellion' of the 1960s with the second in the 1990s, it has argued that differences in the conflict dynamics can be traced to changes in the economic sphere that had taken place in the intervening decades. In particular, it argued that the erosion of the camel-based pastoral economy undermined the ability of the Ifoghas Tuareg to exercise control and justify their privileged status at the top of the social hierarchy that now was lacking an underlying material logic, highlighting the overarching argument of this thesis that social bases from which armed groups organise are themselves contingent on the economic environment, and hence subject to change as this environment shifts.

The following chapter will proceed the historical narrative of conflict in the north of Mali, continuing to trace how changes in the economic environment, mainly in the smuggling economy, have continued to dramatically alter the socio-economic structures of the region, obliterating old systems of dependency and creating new avenues of contention. It will continue to show that, in the context of the theoretical debate outlined in chapter two, material resources are indeed channelled through existing social networks, however these networks are themselves re-shaped and altered in the process.

Chapter 5

Cars, Cousins, and Cocaine: The de-socialisation of Mali's smuggling economy in the run up to the third Tuareg Rebellion

As the embers of conflict settled across the north of Mali in the late 1990s, it initially appeared some semblance of equilibrium had finally taken hold following years of destabilising social transformation. The pastoralist economy that undergirded the Tuareg social structure had largely disintegrated, and new forms of production and exchange had arisen in its place. The imposition of hard borders across the Sahara, along with the scars of devastating drought, had promoted a trend towards sedentary urbanisation across the desert to a degree that had never happened before. Former oasis towns that served the ancient caravan trade took on a new importance, particularly on either side of a border, yet their functions in the larger rhythms of economic life had changed in the transition from camel to car culture. Nonetheless, peace held and Mali of the late 1990s and 2000s was held up as an exemplar of democratic success in Africa (Bingen et al., 2000; Pringle, 2006).

This would change however as new resources within pre-existing smuggling networks would challenge existing patterns of social interaction, redrawing the lines of connectivity that create relationships of dependency, complementarity, or conflict. With the arrival of 4x4s and modern navigational technologies, the traditional social fabric that facilitated the movement and exchange of goods had literally been driven over. As a result, Judith Scheele (2012) notes:

> regional Saharan trade has all but disappeared, or at least shifted to a few prominent trading posts, many of which are of recent construction, such as al-Khalīl , Bordj Badji Mokhtar , and the Sahelian quarters of Tamanrasset, Reggane, and Adrar…Access to water is now provided by technical infrastructure, such as drills and

motorised pumps provided by the state...and, more generally, all resources that matter and that enable a semblance of high status are controlled by the central administration (pp. 145-46).

Scheele's anthropological observation of this relationship between resources 'that matter' and high social status is a key insight that drives the theoretical contention of this thesis. As such, it will form a key part of this chapter, which describes how the continual renegotiation of social hierarchies and internal power dynamics in northern Mali changed in line with the wider resource environment throughout the period of the early 2000s. This is a continuation of changes which has been occurring over the past few decades as modernity introduced new resources and modes of economic circulation that displaced the previous socio-economic balance. Just as the erosion of the camel culture informed the movement structure of the conflict in the 1990s, the socio-economic changes of the late 90s and early 2000s would structure the nature of the conflict in 2012, promoting the emergence of new conflict actors with the independent organising ability to assert their own interests.

As will be described in this chapter, the winds of change that globalisation began to insert into the Sahara many decades ago would accelerate. The region became a hub for transnational smuggling enterprises that would introduce new resources into pre-existing trade networks and, in turn, alter the social networks that were embedded in them. These new resources would transform the socio-economic structures around the ever-vital trading networks of the desert, inaugurating a qualitative change which, as Scheele (2012) observed, promoted "unheard-of possibilities of social mobility, and has thereby put pressure on older ties of solidarity, dependency, and moral control" (p. 96).

This speaks to a key insight regarding how we conceptualise the role of resources in conflict. Rather than static, inert inputs which are simply filtered through social networks, some

classes of resources have the power to alter these networks themselves. As one Malian community member noted in an interview with Shaw and Tinti (2014), "the illicit economy is the issue, not the drugs…[it] changed the way everyone interacted with each other" (p. 12).

This chapter begins with a description of the state of play of the socio-economic structures immediately following the peace accords in 1996, namely the delicate balance of social and economic forces regulating the distribution of power and connectivity across northern Mali. This will necessarily be presented as both a snapshot in time as well as a dynamic process in the midst of tumultuous change. The threads of continuity and change with both the past and future will be highlighted to demonstrate how changes in the smuggling economy, particular the value of resources moving through it and the particular logistics associated with them, have altered the access and control over key resources and continued the erosion of traditional hierarchies via eliminating their ability to leverage the economic sphere.

This development has been concomitant with a general move away from local familial ties in binding together economic relationships, to more transactional relations of hired hands and recruitment based on desires for quick payoffs. In essence, this describes the process whereby the smuggling economy in the region has become de-socialised, or disembedded from the social ties which previously facilitated the circulation of resources. This would carry significant consequences, as it created the space for new actors to emerge, both locally and from bordering countries, that would upend northern Mali's politics and begin a new era of contention and conflict that is still reverberating to this day.

Shifting Sands: Structural Transformation & the Arrival of Narcotics

The previous chapter outlined how the contours of the conflict in the 1990s followed a social logic that was itself undergirded by material forces. The traditional nobility of northern Mali, the Ifhogas Tuareg, saw their hegemonic grip over the region's politics challenged for the first time as their historic subordinates split off to form their own armed groups to pursue their own interests not only vis-a-vis the Malian state but also regarding the internal power structure of local Tuareg politics. This was permitted due to the changes in the economic environment which loosened the hegemonic position of the noble Ifoghas and their prime position within camel-based trade, and thus opened up a new landscape of opportunities for alternative actors to organise and mobilise resources independently. As will be outlined below, this alteration in the socio-economic system was facilitated largely by technological changes, mainly the rise of vehicles as an alternative to camel transport, and with it the devaluing of the strategic position of the Ifoghas heartland along the Mali-Algerian border, their un-rivaled desert navigational and survival skills, and their social control over the access and use of camels.

However, whilst the story of the 1990s conflict saw a tumultuous middle period, the ending looked largely like the beginning in terms of the surface contours of Tuareg society and Northern Mali politics in general. The dominant coalition, the MPA, was formed largely of the Tuareg and Arab nobility, the Ifoghas and Kunta, respectively, which itself represented the pre-war state of play. Thus, on the surface, the internal machinations occurring within the internal politics of Northern Mali would be easy to dismiss or overlook all together. However, as the previous chapter's socio-economic analysis of the conflict outlined, such tumult was very much involved in driving the splits and coalition dynamics of the conflict.

But why did such changes fail to truly transform northern Mali politics, as evidenced by the ultimate defeat and subsummation of the emergent sub-altern groups such as the ARLA, FPLA, and FULA? How and why did these latter groups fail to displace the prevailing power structures and overturn the socio-political hierarchies they agitated against during the conflict? Indeed, finding themselves represented once again at the negotiation table by the same noble classes they sought to eliminate or replace must have been a bitter pill to swallow.

The answer lays largely within the resource environment of northern Mali at the time, particularly the nature of the trade networks which sustained economic life as well as the ability of armed actors to accumulate the resources needed to fight. While the introduction and distribution of 4x4s and modern navigational abilities gave the Imghad and other traditional subordinate groups more breathing room to move and organise independently of the Ifoghas, the majority of economic life and desert trade remained firmly embedded in traditional social ties—the very ties which secured the socio-political status quo. In other words, while the social ties which organised Tuareg society were stretched and stressed throughout the conflict in the 1990s, they were not broken. As Scheele describes, it was largely high bulk, low value staples such as powdered milk, pasta, semolina, and petrol which passed through the trade networks of the region and in turn sustained economic life (Scheele, 2012). Due to their high bulk, such trade created an economic system in which cooperation and close interaction were a structural necessity. The logistics of moving such large and bulky loads across the desert made it so, as it required the participation of many actors with a diverse array of skills, from drivers, navigators, laborers, and merchants to those with storage facilities.

The networks that formed the requisite nodes of the system were sustained and mediated by the social and familial ties that had sustained desert trade in the decades prior

(ibid). As such, these economic interactions generated their own forms of social capital that were particularly adapted to greasing the wheels of this specific type of system. This of course was the prevailing socio-economic system upon which the Ifoghas and other nobility relied on for their political power. Thus, as Scheele (2012) notes, 'despite the fact that transport infrastructure [had] changed radically with the spread almost everywhere of truck transport and four-wheel drive pick-ups…trade [continued] to be organised by regional networks and mediated by family connections." As such, "it operates within areas marked and maintained by intense social interactions, many of which have grown out of the older regions of heightened connectivity" (p. 96).

This broader resource environment mapped onto the conflict arena of the 1990s as well, contributing to a situation that, as Humpreys and Mohamed (2005) argue, was not conducive to a protracted conflict. The financing of the Tuareg groups, they note, "depended largely on lifting stocks of resources such as cattle and vehicles. Dwindling stocks left groups, including the leadership of the organizations, living increasingly from hand to mouth" (p. 278). And while the access and control of such resources did not generally require a centralised organisational structure, a situation which would seemingly favour subordinate, marginalised actors within the conflict arena (and, as has been argued, it did to an extent) these proved to be exhaustible resources with little ability to provide the degree of windfalls or continual access required to sustain longer term action.

This aligns with the observation in chapter three regarding the importance of a resource's structural traits in conditioning the degree to which it disrupts a particular power system. In this case, these low value resources that require a broad degree of cooperation to access, move, or manage (typically due to their large bulk) favour, if not construct, the

prevailing socio-economic status quo. This is illuminated by Scheele's observation that it is the pre-existing social ties which emerge to construct and sustain the economic networks that the logistics require (Scheele, 2012). In turn, it is the relatively low value of the resource that incentivises long term cooperation and stability to ensure a continual flow of marginal income, whilst disincentivising any action to disrupt this system from those within it. In terms of those actors at the margins of this system, or outside of it altogether, they would simply lack the ability to disrupt it as any attempt to seize resources would fail to provide the type of windfall needed to insulate themselves from the social consequences of such a transgression. This is of course conditional on the lack of any substantial alternative means to accumulate resources outside of this low value, stable system, which is precisely what would emerge in northern Mali through the 2000s. At this point, a new source of quick and exorbitant wealth emerged that would encourage the contestation of the system by those who felt marginalized by it.

Due to increased interdiction efforts in North America, Latin American drug cartels began looking towards Europe and Africa as alternative markets for their product. Authorities in West Africa seized 46 tons of cocaine between 2005 and 2008, with estimates from the UNODC figuring that this represented only a fraction of the total cocaine being transiting through the region, which was estimated to value nearly 1.8 billion USD (UNODC, 2013). "The share remaining in the hands of local African cartels is estimated at around 450 million USD per year, or 0.5 percent of overall West African GDP" (Raineri & Strazzari, 2015, p. 255).

Guinea Conakry is reportedly the main entry point for this regional illicit network after increased US-supported crackdowns on drug cartels in neighbouring Guinea Bissau. Here, "the business was moved to new and safer grounds, less in the spotlight," and would continue its clandestine journey through West Africa, through the Sahara Desert, and

on to the lucrative northern markets (ibid, p. 255). In Mali, reports indicate the witnessing of "Peruvian scouts" in the north as early as the early 2000s as they attempted to locate suitable navigation routes through the country (ibid). These routes would follow the paths of pre-existing networks that were structured around ethnic and kinship ties that have long facilitated the "connectivity" of the desert space that is essential to the movement of goods and people across it (Scheele, 2009, pp. 95-124). For example, it has been reported that most of the cocaine entering Mali moves through the Guinean port city of Labe, which has been described as the capital of the Fulani-Peul people who are spread across Guinea and Mali. In contrast to their traditional reputation as nomadic herders, the Fulani are known to control nearly 90% of the import/export trade between Guinea and Mali and are thus believed to have played a crucial role in the movement of narco-shipments through Bamako on to the regional of hub of Gao in the north (Raineri & Strazzari, 2015, p. 263).

North of Gao, the traditional *droits de passage* (rights of passage) traditionally came under the aegis of noble Arab and Tuareg tribes (ibid). It is at this point that the true Sahara begins, and where intensive and socially embedded knowledge of the terrain has been essential to survival and the successful maintenance of consistent trans-desert trading ties. However, the arrival of cocaine smuggling represented something different from goods that had animated the smuggling industry in the past. The structural necessities of such narco-trafficking were different from those of lower value goods previously, a fact which would put stress on the socio-economic equilibrium and traditional hierarchies of the region. As Scheele (2009) observes:

> small [non narco-smuggling] networks do not explicitly rely on tribal links, but they nevertheless reproduce the major divisions to the extent that these determine everyday social ties, shared material interests and marriage alliances .... In contrast, drug

trafficking is described as a means for an individual to get rich fast, to the detriment of wider solidarities (pp. 84-85).

The immense riches that could befell actors even in entry level roles were indeed dramatic. For instance, drivers who previously made a living transporting smuggled fuel or other subsidized goods from Algeria to Mali often made the switch to driving cocaine shipments. Raineri and Strazzari's (2015) research reveals the inner workings of the operation:

> drivers and *passeurs* are recruited locally and are paid—in advance—quite lavishly to transport the cargo, whose content they sometimes are unaware of, to a given location identified by GPS coordinates. Here the goods are either buried under the sand or directly handed over to the person in charge of the subsequent transport segment. Throughout the journey, drivers are to keep constant radio or satellite contact as a form of mutual insurance: armed "area controllers" ensure the security of the convoy while preventing it and its precious load from disappearing from surveillance. Each delivery is reportedly paid an amount estimated at between 3,000 US$6000. All sources agree that, after a certain number of successful journeys (three to five, depending on the source), drivers are allowed to keep the vehicle (p. 256).

These quick riches undermined the usual socio-economic relationships that facilitated the delegation of employment and resources, while the arrival of GPS navigation and communication technology allowed smugglers to circumvent the traditional (taxed) routes and rely less on the services of the 'masters of the land' (ibid). This undermined the traditional relations both within and between groups, as previously marginalized groups, castes, or even individuals were able to acquire an independent livelihood and source of income free from controlling power structures. This is illustrated by analysing the predominant ethnic, and sub-ethnic tribal groups that were active early on in the narco-smuggling industry. Indeed, it was not the existing elite or dominate tribes that absorbed this new industry, but vassal classes who were able to seize the opportunity to transform these riches into political power, and thus challenge the traditional order of things; again,

emphasising the complex interplay between particular social features and the resource environment.[23]

A significant portion of these narco shipments would pass through Gao towards Algeria via the Tilemsi valley, and area controlled by the Tilemsi Arabs, or else be directed through the other logistical hub of Timbuktu where Arabs of the Berabiche community would facilitate their transit north (ibid). While this would largely follow traditional routes long used to transport legal goods such as subsidized fuel and foodstuff, as well as cigarettes and migrants, the operations of these drug shipments took on a much different dynamic. The enormous profits to be gained from this high value, low volume (and thus easily transportable) commodity made the risk of theft much more acute. This often led upstream cartels in Latin America to demand up front cash payments as a form of insurance before handing over their precious cargo to Sahelian tribes for transport (Briscoe, 2014). These structural pressures served to increase the rate of inner communal violence as the value of control over smuggling routes suddenly skyrocketed, and the heightened cost of entry to the lucrative business (via upstream insurance payments) created incentives to acquire these start-up funds through any means necessary.

The introduction of these new resources within the pre-existing smuggling networks would carry major ramifications for the ensuing conflicts and politics of the region more broadly. By this period, a new constellation of actors, generally defined by their radical religious character, began to implant themselves in the political fabric of northern Mali. Whilst much attention has been granted this development, it is often presented within the larger context of the global spread of Jihadist terrorism, a natural step in Al Qaeda's growing

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[23] See discussion in chapter three.

trans-regional ambitions, rather than a reflection of the more local, yet profound, socio-economic transformations occurring across northern Mali and the Sahara more broadly in response to changes in the smuggling economy. This relationship is not only crucial for understanding the causes and dynamics of the growth of jihadism in the region and the disintegration of local socio-political orders, but also the broader theoretical relationship between resources and social orders that structure conflict dynamics. In particular, it planted the seed for a key organisational split between GSCPC and AQIM which would carry major implications not just for regional conflict dynamics, but also the global anti-terrorism efforts.

Mokhtar Belmokhtar and AQIM: The blurring of boundaries and a new constellation of actors

The split between the GSPCS (a precursor of Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb) and AQIM is rooted in dynamics emanating from changes in the local socio-economic landscape of northern Mali. As Alexander Thurston (2020) notes, "the GSPC's arrival in northern Mali coincided with shifts in the nature of smuggling in ways that favoured the GSPC/AQIM economically and politically" (p. 20). Fleshing out the theoretical logic of this observation can be told from two perspectives: one from the organisational dynamics of GSPC/AQIM, and the other through the local social dynamics that were being stressed under the weight of the drug smuggling economy.

In terms of the former, the role of this industry was crucial in providing the resources for GSPC agents, who had recently moved into northern Mali to expand the group's footprint into the Sahara, to gain the institutional breathing room needed to organise independently of the group's leadership based further north. A crucial figure in this regard was Mokhtar Belmokhtar, a key figure in the development of the GSPC hailing from the Algerian Sahara

town of Ghardaia. Nicknamed 'Mr. Marlboro' in light of his perceived central role in contraband smuggling (in which cigarettes were lucrative), he gained significant combat experience with the mujahadeen in Afghanistan in the early 1990s before returning home and establishing himself as a major player in the illicit smuggling market (ibid). The origins and essential accuracy of his 'Mr. Marlboro' nickname has recently come under scrutiny (some question the extent to which this was developed locally or a product of Western intelligence propaganda), it nonetheless underlines the acknowledgement that his political rise within the region was inseparable from his development of and instalment within crucial economic networks. As Thurston notes, it was "a combination of perceived toughness, local connections, and financial acumen [that] propelled [his] rise within the GIA, GSPC, and AQIM" (ibid, p. 77).

In 1995, the GIA named Balmokhtar their emir of the Sahara, upon which occasion he would name a fellow Algerian, Ibrahim Abu Ishak, as his deputy. This Algerian team would form a central pillar of the group's Saharan emirate for nearly a decade until Abu Ishak was killed in a 2005 raid in Mauritania (ibid). Belmokhtar would play a crucial role in not only expanding the group's operational reach southwards into the Sahara, but also aligning it with a broader global jihadist movement, hosting an Al-Qaeda emissary, Abu Muhammad al-Yamani, in a trip across northern Mali during which the GSPC would officially establish its first training camp in northern Mali. As Thurston notes, this 2001 visit "not only elevated Belmokhtar's reputation but also reflected his ability to navigate the Sahara in a geographical and political sense" (ibid, 78). This was undoubtedly facilitated by his involvement in regional smuggling networks (Black, 2009).

Indeed, throughout the early and mid 2000s, Belmokhtar positioned himself to cash in on the flows of Andean cocaine after settling in the town of Lerneb and marrying the daughter of a prominent Berabiche Arab (a traditionally low status tribe). From here, he was able to move up the smuggling value chain, a move that many suspect was facilitated by his ties to kidnappings, as he negotiated the release of 32 western hostages in 2003 in return for a 5 million Euro ransom (Thurston, 2020).

By this point, Belmohktar had established himself as a key pole of power within the internal dynamics of the GSPC, forming, as Thurston argues, a triad of authority with the traditional power centre to the north in Algeria and Abu Zayd and his Tariq ibn Ziyad Battalion to his east into Niger. In turn, this power arrangement became ever more unstable. "In theory, Droukdal [the titular head of the GSPC based in the north] had final word over decisions taken within AQIM's 'Saharan emirate,'" Thurston notes, "but in reality, he often struggled to impose his will, especially over Belmokhtar" (ibid, pp. 79-80). Indeed, rumours circulated by 2007 of tension between Droukdal and Belmokhtar (ibid, p. 80; Wojtanik, 2015).

Naturally, this follows the observational and theoretical logic that a central leadership's power and ability to control dissipates with geographical distance. Indeed, as Thurston observes, "geography…made the GSPC's own field commanders prone to assert independence" (ibid, p. 63). However, this is not a simple or straightforward dynamic. In fact, the cooperation between the central leadership and their battalion in Niger, similarly if not more distant from Droukdal's base in northern Algeria, seemed to strengthen in this period as the latter leaned heavily on the former to combat and balance Belmokhtar's increasing power and assertiveness (ibid, 80). Indeed, while Abu Zayd would remain loyal to the central

Algerian leadership until his death in 2013, Belmokhtar would eventually strike out on his own. As argued in chapter three, geographic distance is merely a pre-requisite for fragmentation until a would-be defector is able to generate an independent resource base. This is what Belmokthar would find in northern Mali.

To fully flesh out why this was the case, we must turn to the socio-economic conditions of northern Mali and Belmokhtar's place within them. Indeed, it was his ability to ride the wave of socio-political tumult caused by transformations in the smuggling economy that set him apart from his fellow Algerian counterparts and would ultimately send his GSPC/AQIM faction on a separate organisational path. This takes us to the second, local social dynamics and how the weight of the drug smuggling economy had stressed them in ways that favoured figures like Belmokhtar; or, perhaps, how figures like Belmokhtar favoured local figures in their socio-political conflicts.

These transformations in the smuggling economy in this time and consequential socio-political consequences played out in a series of steps whose sequencing is important. First, the rise in kidnappings that plagued the region beginning in 2003 provided a crucial source of rents that could open the doors to the lucrative narcotics trade.

> *katibas* of Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) would typically hand over ransom money they had received to drug traffickers as a form of investment. Depending on the situation and the source, up to half the profits generated from drug trafficking would be paid back in kind to the jihadis, via weapons, ammunition, four-wheel-drive vehicles, and other equipment. Traffickers would typically buy arms on behalf of terrorist groups, who could thereby avoid exposing themselves (Raineri & Strazzari, pp. 253-254.)

In this case the lines between terrorism and crime, the jihadist and the smuggler, become increasingly blurred as many of AQIM's leaders integrated themselves in the communities central to the trafficking of drugs (Lacher, 2014).

The early involvement of the Berabiche and Tilemsi Arabs in the drug smuggling trade not only served as an opening for foreign fighters such as Belmokhtar to infiltrate the social fabric of northern Mali, but it increasingly stressed the local socio-economic balance. As traditional vassal tribes, the economic empowerment of the Berabiche and Tilemsi posed a political threat to the ruling power structures, particularly the Arab Kunta tribe that, like the Ifoghas Tuareg, claim descent from the prophet and have held a dominant, tribute-extracting position in northern Mali since the start of the 20th century (Raineri & Strazzari, 2015). This tribal dividing line was also paralleled in the Tuareg community, where the involvement in narco-smuggling of the traditional vassal class, the Imghad, was tolerated by Bamako in order to offset the power of the Ifoghas nobles. "Unsurprisingly," Raineri and Strazzari (2015) note, "Kunta and Ifoghas have often joined forces in defense of the status quo among northern Mali's 'white' communities" (p. 260). Seeking to claim their share of the lucrative business and re-assert their claim over the *droits de passage*, the Ifoghas began an increasingly assertive campaign to collect taxes on the narco-shipments when and where they could. The situation grew increasingly explosive as violence became a prominent tool in this high stakes game of profit and control. As Shaw and Tinti (2014) note, "prior to the country's collapse [in 2012], much of northern Mali, specifically Kidal, was controlled by an increasingly complex patchwork of militias who sought to collect rents and levy taxes on goods passing through their territory" (p. 15).

Tension was indeed building, and by the mid 2000s the kidnapping and drug smuggling economies were intersecting both with each other as well as with the wider social balances that were groaning under their pressure. As much as the revenues from these trades gave figures such as Belmokhtar the permissive space to organise independently from the AQIM leadership further north, it was having a similar effect within the local social orders, as "involvement in the drug trade can be seen as a strategy for social mobility that appears especially attractive to subordinated groups seeking social recognition in the face of traditional and religious norms" (Raineri & Strazzari, 2015, p. 257). In a way, this is a continuation of the story told in the previous chapter of social dividing lines becoming activated by changes in the economic environment; however, a qualitative difference is at play given the nature of the resources driving this change.

In turn, Belmokhtar's success in infiltrating northern Mali attests to the pitfalls of essentialising ethnic categories or considering them in isolation from the economic networks in which they operate. Here is a story of an Algerian Arab who came to lead a group of Malian Arabs and Tuareg via inter-marriage and integration within the local smuggling economy. Like the pastoralist Fur people of Sudan described by Haaland in chapter two, Belmokhtar had, to a large extent, changed his ethnic identity by virtue of his economic activity. This was reflected in the constituencies which formed his armed power base. Unlike Abu Zayd in nearby Niger who relied on his fellow Algerians, Belmokhtar relied heavily on Malians. Thus, as Thurston (2020) reflects, "it appears that the divisions between Abu Zayd's network and Belmokhtar's were not just strategic but also ethnic" (p. 84). In other words, for

all intents and purposes, he *became* Malian, inheriting the 'cousins' he needed to navigate the social, political, and economic landscape of northern Mali.[24]

Whilst the transition away from the traditional camel culture had stressed social hierarchies, particularly the ties between the Ifoghas and Imghad Tuareg, the continuation of low value, high bulk trade prevented them from being broken all together. However, by 2006, the social and ethnic dividing lines that would define the conflict of 2012 onwards were beginning to take shape. These lines were largely aligned with one's structural position within the regional smuggling economy, particularly in reference high value, low bulk resources like narcotics and the major windfalls they produced.

From Trucks to 4x4s: "The door has been blown wide open"

In her seminal anthropological account of the region in the run-up to the conflict of 2012, Judith Scheele highlights the relationship between social status, privilege, and position within economic hierarchies. She argues that oasis political economies developed and persisted as 'imagined communities' wherein traditional elders are able to leverage their spiritual authority as '*sharafa*'—or descendants of the prophet—into material offerings and gifts (Scheele, 2012). Here again, social rank and economic privilege went hand in hand, as early Arab tribes were able to "transfor[m] their spiritual power into the tangible baraka ['blessing' in Arabic] of crops and flocks" (Scheele, 2012, p. 47). Indeed, much like the monasteries of medieval Europe, most Saharan oasis towns emerged as centres of religious *and* economic life, as offerings and tribute formed the material foundation for exchange and patronage, while plenty of young bodies, eager to learn at the helm of great spiritual masters, were

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[24] Thurston uses ethnic here denote nationality, though this may in fact be a useful heuristic for a deeper ethnic component. Malian Arabs speak a Berber dialect of Arabic called Hassaniya that more closely related to that spoken in Mauritania than Algeria. As such, ties between Mauritanian and Malian Arabs are historically quite strong relative to Algeria and are held together by dense familial ties and socio-economic networks.

simultaneously put to work as labourers to produce agricultural surplus (ibid). The development of these towns was in turn fundamental in the growth of regional and trans-regional trade, and thus it is clear to see how the most successful tribes in terms of trade and general economic power also claimed lineage from the prophet Muhammad (McDougall, 1986).

The true form of this 'social knowledge' was the control over genealogies—or stories of kinship relations centred around the gravitational centre of Muhammad. This introduces a moral hierarchy with clear material implications, not only due to the dynamic of offerings and gift-giving, but also "because their genealogies are conterminous with history; they encompass the entire world, and, as a result, they have 'cousins everywhere'" (Scheele, 2012, p. 138). These 'cousins' in turn become potential trading partners and allies with whom is shared a common bond of imagined kinship and shared nobility despite the very real chasms of geographic space, ecological fragility and political fragmentation that can make the Sahara a daunting commercial environment. In this way, control over social knowledge means control over the social world—over who has certain privileges and who is subservient, who possesses a proper moral orientation and who should not be trusted, and thus who ultimately stands atop the socio-economic hierarchy.

Unsurprisingly, these genealogies are often areas of contention themselves. Scheele (2012) describes one occasion in which she came into contact with one such genealogy in a way that illustrates their potency. She writes how, rather than a dull paper of names and dates, it is presented as:

> a piece of evidence of the region's "true" history. As such, it is understood to be both precious and subversive: it came into my possession in a rather underhand way, as a

photocopy of a manuscript , lent to me over the weekend by the assistant director of the Centre Ahmed Baba in Timbuktu, a relative of Muhammad Mahmud 's, who had it delivered "secretly" to the house where I was staying – which was also owned by an Arab. Hence, although the Kitab al-turjaman appears at first sight to be an obscure scholarly endeavour, accessible to the selected few, and of mainly antiquarian interest, as an attempt to fuli l the promise of permanence and completeness that is inherent in all genealogical endeavours, it is perceived to be inevitably dangerous, a potential source of conflict: an expression of deep-seated racism for some, and of "true knowledge" for others (p.144).

Despite its usual pretensions of a 'universal' historical account, it predictably focuses on the author's own family, tracing his own line of descent back to the companions of the prophet (ibid, p. 139). It was written down by someone who is described as 'the last representative of a long line of Arab scholars in the area'(ibid)-- Muhammad Mahmud—before he was arrested due to his antagonism to the newly independent Malian state in the 1960s. While there is much disagreement over the nature of Mahmud's character and the nature of his arrest, he was certainly seen as a subversive figure by the emerging power structures in the fledgling national capital to the south. What is at stake in the acceptance of these 'histories' into fully congealed social realities is nothing other than legitimate political authority itself and the social capital necessary to create and sustain the patronage networks that sustain it.

However, these are not static or linear structures, wherein social frameworks lay the fundamental groundwork for economic life. Rather, this again demonstrates the intertwined nature of the socio-economic life, as a shift in one field carries direct implications for the other. In arguing for the transient and dynamic nature of these hierarchies, Scheele (2012) notes:

> People have challenged their own individual position in the system and continue to do so, but this is mainly due to their economic success rather than a general questioning of status distinctions: people do not try to abolish local hierarchies, but rather struggle to better their position within them (p. 148).

This economic success has thus challenged existing patterns of social interaction, not so much erasing or replacing the social realm, but redrawing the lines of connectivity and interaction that create relationships of dependency, complementarity, or conflict. The ramifications of this new economic landscape have been stark for the descendants of the sherifian families, squeezed between traditional injunction against such 'noble' blood engaging in hard labour and their decreasing social relevance and concomitant decline in tributes and gifts. Scheele describes one such family who hosted her during her field visit to southern Algeria that are "struggling to survive on small salaries earned by the parents and the two eldest children, while the income they derive from their remaining landholdings, managed by the father's elder brother, is negligible…" (p. 148). While some degree of offerings continued to flow in at times, "these are only drops in the ocean" (ibid).

This is indeed the deeper context in which the social structures of the region were being stressed under the weight of economic change. The oasis economies and trade of traditional staples that had animated socio-economic life for decades was losing their structuring power as alternative modes and means of material sustenance were entering the landscape. The totalising nature of this change is reflected in the moral panic surrounding the narcotics trade. Whilst the region largely served as a transit zone rather than consumption market, the trade is "strongly rejected as haram (illicit) and inherently destructive both to society and to the traders and to the traders who engage in it" (Scheele, 2012, p. 96). Scheele further notes how "moral classifications" of transborder trade and its propriety can often be distilled down to the "kinds of vehicles used, the routes chosen, and the rhythm travelled at: inherently sociable and well-manned trans-Saharan trucks [generally carrying high bulk

staples] that ply routes known to all," versus the "fast and furtive four wheel drives that cross the desert by night with lone taciturn drivers" (ibid).

The 'inherent sociability' of the truck trade is illustrated through her observation of the rhythms of one such driver:

> Ighles invariably stops over at this mother's camp near Anefif, spends the night there with his cousins, and supplies her with basic stables, brought with him from Algeria: large bags of semolina, rice, powdered milk, and packets of biscuits. On every trip, he spends an afternoon at a Kunta shrine on the way, where he prays, makes offerings, and drinks tea with the resident Kunta family, leaving behind stores of basic foodstuffs (p. 100).

The necessity of such respect and offerings to local Kunta is repeatedly attested to by Arab drivers, underlining the role of the truck trade in maintaining the broader social hierarchies of the region. It also appears to have a social strengthening effect across ethnic and geographic boundaries, as Scheele recounts a journey she undertook:

> from al-Khalil to Gao on the back of a four wheel drive Toyota, owned by an Arab from the Tilemsi resident in Gao (SIC) whose brother ran a garaj in al-Khalil. The owner drove the car himself, with the help of his teenage Tuareg apprentice, who crouched in the back with the merchandise. For this particular trip, he had rented the carrying capacity of his car to Lahcene, a trader from Algiers…whose own charge consisted of pasta, biscuits, and packets of juice… He had sublet parts of the car's carrying capacity—and a seat in the cab—to a Malian lady from Tamanrasset, who had her own load of goods, mainly pasta, to be sold in Gao. Lahence had also sold eighteen passage to a very diverse crowd of migrants, including one woman, from Ghana, Guinea, Cameroon, Congo, and Nigeria on their way to Gao, and to three Malian Arabs and an elderly Tuareg from Libya (p. 106).

This sociability of the staples trade promoted the largely mutually re-enforcement of economic and social ties. Anybody with a bit of start-up capital and "enough cousins along the road" can enter and partake in the trade, whilst further ties and social capital would accrue

with repeated economic transactions (ibid). The same appeared true even with cigarette smuggling, in which "anybody with some capital, a car, and a few friends could apply to known central dealers, who would take them on trust because of their family's social capital and supply them with merchandise and credit, without trying to exercise undue control over their whereabouts or internal organisation" (ibid, p. 109).

Given this reliance on trust and social capital, trade in staples tended to reproduce and re-enforce existing social ties; however, this is not to suggest a lack of tension around the social-economic intersection of who one was and what one did.

> In some cases…traders who have grown rich in the Lahda or cigarette trade are loudly condemned, less for what they do than for who they are, or rather, who they used to be. Algerian traders often inter-married with nomadic Arab families from the Tilemsi of subordinate status. They employed their in-laws as peddlers and subsidiary traders, thereby allowing the latter to accumulate experience and at times considerable capital" (ibid, p. 110).

This trend accelerated throughout the 2000s as profit margins became squeezed as prices rose in Algeria, pushing out small operators in favour of larger, centralised operations that relied less on local social capital (ibid). With this devaluation of local social ties, the social hierarchies they supported were stressed as well. As the premium of local knowledge and familial ties decreased, Scheele's interlocutor's expressed grievances against this newly empowered commercial class that highlights the porosity of vertical social categories within the context of shifting economic structures. Far from having 'cousins everywhere', "they do not [even] know who their own grandparents are," one woman scoffs, "all they know is that they were the Kunta's slaves, they might have come from anywhere, and worse they do not care" (ibid, p. 111). This lack of supposed genealogical knowledge is not a passive piece of

ridicule animating otherwise idle gossip, but a major grievance speaking to the heart of the shifting landscape of relative economic power. "How can it be then they are so wealthy and Tangara [where many claim to hail from]is but a heap of mud, no house constructed there, no school?" (ibid, p. 112). This reflects the traditional understanding, and indeed past reality, that one's economic function is largely derived from where one is from, which itself is a proxy for one's ethnic or sub-ethnic membership (in this case, Kunta or other non-noble Arabs).

This was becoming decreasingly true due to the aforementioned structural changes in the staples trade in a way that was beginning to produce real political consequences at the local level. In the early 2000s, this newly emergent commercial class of Tangara Arabs refused to pay their traditional tribute ('*jiziya*') to the regional Kunta in return for their 'protection'. To compound the insult, they also defiantly stood their own candidate in the local elections and, --to really underscore the shifting landscape—that candidate won (ibid). Violence broke out in the aftermath of the elections between Kunta and non-Kunta Arabs as the former struggled to forcibly extract the *jiziya* to which their traditional social privileges entitled them. In the wake of the violence, many Kunta sought refuge in Kidal amongst the noble Tuaregs who were undoubtedly sympathetic to the plight of their neighbouring nobles struggling to maintain traditional power hierarchies in the face of a newly empowered and assertive subordinate class (ibid, p. 112).

Scheele tells one particular tale of the most 'notorious and publically condemned "Tangara [non-Kunta] Arab"' in Gao (ibid, p. 113). In addition to a large retail shop in Gao, he operates a host of petrol stations as well as a successful transport business that carries both goods and people across the region. The epitome of his success is perhaps his large conspicuous villa that encompasses an entire housing block, ringed by high walls that conceal

the goings on and restricts access to a select few. The purported origins of his vast wealth, derived from the transport and commercial staples trade, are not in and of themselves controversial or counter to any local norms of legitimate economic activity. Indeed, such trade is the lifeblood of the material and social life of the region as described above. However, the issue arises in who this man is; or rather, who he is not. How would a man of such 'low status' climb to find such material success? Who are these 'cousins everywhere' that would form the requisite social networks to facilitate these economic operations? By definition, as a low status Arab, this man does not have such an in-built social network.

In a traditional environment in which the expansiveness of social and economic networks are co-terminus, and wherein the former is necessary for the functioning and success of the latter and vice versa, these cases of economic success raise questions locally that go straight to the heart of the 'proper order of things'. An order where social and economic capital are two sides of the same coin, and the top of the social and economic hierarchies are occupied by the same people, undergirded by a moral scaffolding that makes sense of and justifies this arrangement as in tune with the broader divine order of the universe (via noble genealogical lineage rooted in sharifa descent.) Far beyond a simple case of envy, these instances of economic success by low status individuals represent a full-blown social crisis of existential proportions. This cues allegations of involvement in the illicit side of regional trade in the form of narcotics and migrant smuggling. Beyond this individual himself, such rumours beset the broader groups of Berabiche and Tilemsi Arabs who make up a large portion of the non-Kunta population of northern Mali.

The ethnographic details of just how this narcotics trade functions are understandably opaque given its illicit and criminal nature; however, we can glean insights from other

emergent trades that likely apply to its organisational and logistical operations. Indeed, cocaine exists on what may be viewed at the far end of a sliding scale of resources that becoming increasingly detached from local social ties and correspondingly more centralised and extra-regionalised. In opposition to "smaller smuggling groups or even tribal monopolies" which have traditionally facilitated the staples trade, these resources encourage a centralised operational structure and " 'modern' and very efficient division of labour" (Scheele, 2012, p. 117).

These include the smuggling of weapons and cars, similarly high value, if not more conspicuous, resources that locals report are controlled by 'mafias' (ibid). Guns come in from China through ports in Togo and Benin, where their movement through the region is facilitated by complicit border officials, whilst cars of dubious origin emerge from Mauritania and Algeria with 'official' legitimising paperwork from officials there (ibid). Drug shipments likewise require some form of state sanction to ensure protection and movement for the high value cargo (Raineri & Strazzari, 2015). In terms of drivers and other 'employees' of these operations, they are 'recruited on an individual basis…selected for their personal courage and bravery…irrespective of social origin" (Scheele, 2012, p. 117). This perfectly captures the process whereby the smuggling economy in the region had become de-socialised, or disembedded from the social ties which previously facilitated the circulation of resources.

This desocialisation and its essential traits (centralisation, state complicity, and a-social recruitment and employment) carried acute implications for their destabilising impact on traditional social hierarchies and networks. In addition to the unprecedented opportunities for social mobility, they have become key tools in the government's efforts to alter the internal power relations of their historically peripheral regions. This is yet another point

wherein the structurally requirements of the trade, particularly the need for state complicity to operate, intersects and indeed alters local social arrangements.

The involvement of the traditionally low status Berabiche and Tilemsi Arabs in the narcotics trade was not simply a geographic accident. Indeed, the structural need for state involvement allowed Malian officials to choose the winners and losers in the regional narco-trading market. Naturally, as noted earlier, it was the traditionally low status Arabs and Tuareg who were selectively permitted to engage and profit from the trade in an attempt to upset the delicate socio-economic balance upon which the oft-rebellious Kunta Arabs and Ifoghas Tuareg derived their power.[25]

The material and political rise of these traditionally subordinate tribes "had thrown the Ifoghas on the defensive" (Thurston, 2020, p. 118). In 2006, armed conflict broke out once again between northern rebel groups and the state in what Shaw and Tinti (2014) describe as a "watershed moment in Mali's history" (p. 10) due to the sheer scale of smuggling and business rivalries clearly driving it. A rather short-term affair, the Malian authorities and Tuareg representatives signed a peace accord three months later—again mediated by Algiers (ibid). A key provision was the removal of Malian security forces in the north, which echoed a provision of the 1996 Algiers agreement which officially ended that conflict; however, this took on a more urgent character due to the perception by the Tuareg nobility of the involvement of such state forces in the drug smuggling trade that was empowering their social rivals. Frustrated with the pace of the security changeover, one prominent Ifoghas leader, Ag Bahanga, defected from the agreement and began attack Arab smuggling convoys

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[25] For more on the state's governance strategy vis a vis the north, particularly its reliance on clientelist networks, see: see Boilley 1999; Seely 2001; Bøäs and Torheim 2013).

across the northern Mali. In response, Beribiche and Tilemsi Arab militias, along with a number of Imghad Tuareg allies, emerged to protect their interests, often in alliance with irregular army units. Together these forces would team up to battle the noble Ifoghas and Idnan Tuaregs as well as their Kunta Arab allies (ibid). By 2007, the future battle lines, reflective of the tumultuous socio-economic landscape, were drawn, with "the Malian state and various northern elites with trafficking interests [low status Arabs and Tuareg] allied in a battle against anti-state Tuareg rebel groups [noble Ifoghas and Idnan] and their own trafficking interests" (ibid, p. 11).

Concerns over the ascendent power of these trafficking interests further drove Ifoghas politics in the years ahead. In 2009, Alghabass ag Intalla, son of the Amenokal (the titular head of the Ifoghas Tuareg), took a more political approach to the issue, forming the Réseau pour le Plaidoyer, la Paix, la Sécurité et le Développement dans les trois régions Nord du Mali (Network for Petitioning, Peace, Security and Development in the Three Regions of Northern Mali), a development and peace-building body that pressured the government, amongst other things, to crack down on drug trafficking (Thurston, 2020). At its heart, the organisation calls to "reaffirm the moral authority of customary chiefs whose deliquescence has proven to be a source of disorder…The more active involvement of these chiefdoms should make it possible to strengthen the foundations of our societies shaken by a long period of rampant anarchy and various conflicts" (Ag Intalla, 2009). It further calls for addressing the issue of "idle youth" who are often drawn into the "narcotic underworld", further underlining the association with the degradation of social order and emergence of the narco-smuggling economy (ibid).

Indeed by 2008, the narco shipments traversing northern Mali hit massive proportions. "The door had been blown wide open," noted one elected official from Timbuktu (Shaw & Tinti, 2014, p. 11). Indeed, in reference the destablilising effect of cocaine in Mali and wider region, a United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2013) report notes that "it does not take a lot of cocaine to cause trouble in a region with poverty and governance problems. The entire military budget of many West African countries is less than the wholesale price of a ton of cocaine in Europe" (p.4) Signs of conspicuous wealth building were popping up everywhere as the dividends of the lucrative trade were laundered through other areas of the economy, greatly distorting local markets and contributing to a general sense of social unease as the built environment, in the form of vast secretive villas,[26] spoke directly to the changing economic sphere and its stark disconnect with the traditional social order (Scheele, 2012, pp. 110-115).

This social fracture, and the separate smuggling realms facilitating it, is once again viewed starkly through the salient heuristic of vehicle type and the rhythms of desert travel. In contrast to the road-based predictability and inherent sociality of trucks circulating vital local staples, the "well equipped 4x4s" that facilitated the narcotics trade "can pass virtually everywhere, and their drivers trade on their ability to escape detection" (Scheele, 2012, p. 100). Crucially for the old social order, "the fabled navigational acumen of Tuareg guides is no longer essential…thanks to the ubiquity of GPS equipment and satellite phones" in addition to an extensive network of fuel depots hidden about the desert (Shaw & Tinti, 2014, p. 7).

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[26] One neighbourhood in Gao was dubbed "Cocainebougou" - or "Cocaine-ville" – by locals. See Dreazen, 2013; Scheele, 2012, 113.

Violent clashes amongst the social classes continued and began to accelerate in 2010, when a group of Ifoghas Tuareg and Kounta Arab seized a large shipment of cocaine from Tilemsi Arabs and Imghad Tuareg. The Tilemsi Arabs retaliated by kidnapping the leader of the Kounta Arabs, a gross normative violation traversing a traditionally sacred boundary of order and social hierarchy (ibid, 12). Events were rapidly eluding Bamako's ability to influence, let alone control. Speaking of the Malian president, Amadou Toumani Touré (ATT), one source in Gao recounted to Shaw and Tinti (2014):

> ATT's biggest mistake was that he did not realize the extent to which traditional structures in northern Mali had been completely undermined by the influx of illicit cash and the "mafia culture" that came with it. Below the Arab and Tuareg notables was a separate strata of "elite"; a younger generation who had acquired their status through trafficking and who had "different morals and different ways of doing business (p. 14)

In this way, the subsequent alliance structure that emerged throughout the ensuing conflict period of 2012-2015 becomes clear in light of these economic developments and, as such, highlights the degree to which this change in the smuggling economy had shaken social hierarchies and redrawn the region's political map along new socio-economic lines. The CMA and the Platform, the two main, and opposing, umbrella groups under which conflict negotiations have taken place are largely centered around competing visions for the political future of the North; with the independence-driven CMA largely composed of Ifoghas Tuareg and Kunta Arabs, and the traditionally marginalized groups, newly empowered by their access of narco-smuggling rents, gathering under the Plateforme and preferring to maintain direct relations with Bamako. In addition, as will be seen in the next chapter, the growing footprint of Al Qaeda and other jihadist groups would facilitate these tensions further as they formed yet another node of resources and opportunities around which these local intra-ethnic and social rivalries could play out. Thus, the ethnic and social divisions that structured the

splits and divisions along which the conflict has unfolded concealed an underlying material tension between the traditional power structures and those who threatened to upend the proper ordering of socio-economic life.

Indeed, this split amongst the armed insurgents of the north, with one side fighting for full independence and the other merely pushing for increased autonomy, aligns almost perfectly with the socio-economic shift that emerged throughout the introduction of the narco-smuggling economy prior to the conflict. In fact, one may plausibly argue that it was this rather abrupt socio-economic shift that led to the outbreak of conflict in the first place, highlighting the intertwined relationship between social institutions and the surrounding material environment. However, this was not merely a case of resources infecting the Tuareg movement with infighting and conflict, but is rather an instance of an evolving economic landscape undermining the socio-economic basis upon which the Ifoghas maintained power. The introduction of narcotics smuggling in the 2000s almost immediately altered the economic environment in a way that precluded the ability of the prevailing leadership to retain material leverage over subservient classes; in turn, these subservient actors were well positioned to capitalize on this particular industry given their structural position within the regional social hierarchy and the way this related to the state's governance strategy. In sum, it was a combination of particular social features and the nature of the resource that determined how and why the introduction of the narcotics empowered certain actors over others.

Conclusion

This chapter has argued that the intervening years between the termination of the second Tuareg rebellion in 1996 through the arrival of Andean cocaine smuggling economy in the

2000s was a period of dramatic economic change which further undermined the social relations of the region. In turn, this altered the power structures in the north of Mali. This dynamic was traced to the particular features of cocaine as a commodity within the smuggling economy, specifically its low bulk and high value, and how this represented a qualitative shift in how it interacted with the surrounding social environment. I argue this represented a form of 'de-socialisation' within northern Mali's smuggling economy which carried acute implications in the subsequent conflict.

The following chapter proceeds to lay out these implications by outlining how the main conflict actors, and the splits between them, were rooted in the varying levels of involvement that different communities had with the drug smuggling economy. These varying levels of involvement were themselves rooted in the structural position of these communities within the social hierarchies of northern Mali, particularly the formerly marginalised Arab and Tuareg castes, the Kounta and Imghad, respectively, who were selectively permitted to engage in the illicit trade as part of the Malian state's governance strategy against the traditional noble tribes of the north. This represents a further empirical validation of this thesis' theoretical argument regarding the structural interrelations of social and economic forces.

Chapter 6

A New Landscape, A New Order: Conflict in Mali from 2012 to 2015

The conflict in 2012 began in a manner that, on the surface at least, looked similar to the dynamics of the 1990s. The hostilities were initiated by the MNLA, the Mouvement national de liberation de'l Azawad, in January 2012 with attacks on military posts in Menaka, Aguelhok, and Tessalit (Desgrais et al, 2018). This initial wave of attacks saw quick, decisive victories that took the Malian state off guard. Like the 1990s, the unity of this movement quickly disintegrated and the underlying material tensions within the northern Malian political landscape began to emerge. However, the persistence and degree of these divisions was something new, as nearly two decades of socio-economic change had done a number on Tuareg society and its ability to organise rebellions.

This chapter will argue that a new socio-economic environment emerged which had fundamentally altered the balance of power between these rival social groups in the north of Mali. The shift in the smuggling economy that formed an opening through which new actors could emerge formed a new pole of material power that impacted the gravitational landscape of local Tuareg politics. This allowed aggrieved/ marginalised actors to find refuge in an alternative power base whose material resources were largely independent from prevailing powers structures.

Thus, the illicit smuggling economy has indeed played a key role in driving and shaping events of the third Tuareg rebellion, but through deeper mechanisms than the existing literature captures. Discussion of the role of Mali's illicit economy often conceptualises 'criminal actors' or 'organised crime groups' as essentially a-social actors who opportunistically exploit various features of northern Mali's particular political situation, such as weak state presence, inter-communal rivalries, and economic marginalisation, to

pursue their profit interests (International Alert, 2016;.Kuhne, 2014). In turn, references to social turmoil, particularly its intersection with such illicit economic activity, is generally treated in passing, often conceptualised as a one of many permissive conditions rendering the region vulnerable to economic exploitation by malign external actors.

Alternatively, discussions that focus on the social element of these illicit economies touch on its intersection with local norms, values, and conceptions of legitimate economic activity. Whilst such anthropological work is scarce, the work of Scheele, utilised extensively in the previous chapter, serves as an incredibly insightful window into the role of informal norms in the facilitation of the trading networks that sustained life and economic viability of the region for decades, if not centuries (Scheele, 2012).

This analysis seeks to combine these strands of observation and demonstrate the intricate interrelations between economic and social forces driving conflict and instability in Northern Mali. As these strands often stand rooted in distinctly separate ontological starting points (i.e. social v economic/material) the ensuing case of the conflict in northern Mali serves to flesh out the mechanisms through which a combined 'socio-economic' approach reveals the drivers of armed groups organisation.

This continues the thread developed in the preceding chapter which demonstrates how the northern Mali conflict in 2012 took place within a context of intense social turmoil brought on by changes in the local smuggling economy. These economic changes "greatly affected the rise of new interest groups, with the marginalization of others unable or unwilling to adapt to changing conditions. (Raineri & Strazzari, 2015, p. 255). This altered resource landscape had a significant effect on the politics of the region and the roster of actors who would vie for influence in the ensuing conflict. Previously marginalised groups now found themselves empowered by virtue of their new economic resources, increasing

their ability to pursue their interests in the political arena as well as the battlefield. This would produce a conflict landscape more enduringly complex and crowded than anything seen previously, as the number of actors with a durable source of resources prevented the type of forced consolidations that characterised previous rebellions. Indeed, there were many occasions in the first stages of the conflict where one could anticipate a repeat of certain elements of the conflict in the 1990s, particularly the case of the marginalised groups being consolidated by more powerful actors in a way that put an end to their independent project to assert their own interests. In the end, this did not happen.

Aside these developments, a new constellation of actors would emerge within this conflict that deserve their own analytical treatment. The spread of Al-Qaeda and affiliated actors into northern Mali throughout the 2000s (see discussions of Belmokhtar in previous chapter) would be responsible for the emergence of a number of salient armed groups whose development likewise followed the contours of the socio-economic landscape. These include AQIM, MUJAO, Ansar Adine, and a number of successor groups whose activities extend beyond the time frame of interest for this thesis. These groups' developments were in many ways inextricably linked with those of the traditional Tuareg and Arab groups, or at the very least emanating from common environmental pressures.

The analysis below will be organised into two sections, one centred on the armed Tuareg/Arab groups, namely the MNLA, Ansar Adine, [27] HUCA, MAA and the consolidations into the CMA and the Plateform. It will then move to the jihadi groups, namely AQIM and MUJAO, tracing their development from the onset of conflict through the French military intervention (phase one;) then phase two from the fallout from the

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[27] Despite its jihadist sounding name, Ansar Adine is included in this section as it is socially intertwined with the Ifoghas Tuareg and largely a product of their intra-ethnic power struggles.

intervention to the signing of the Ouagadougou Agreement in 2014 and the formation of the CMA and the Plateforme.

The non-jihadist strain: from the MNLA to MIA to CMA

Phase One: MNLA and Ansar Adine before the French intervention

Following their initial success in January 2012, the MNLA would soon see the generational and class divisions inherent in their formation activated. The animating spirit of the group was more modern and progressive in its outlook, carrying the torch of *ischumar* culture and social reform that, whilst appearing on the scene in the 1990s, [28] entered an economic landscape that was more materially aligned with it. This naturally made the Ifoghas leadership quite nervous as they struggled to make sense of these fast-blowing winds of revolution and where exactly to position themselves within them.

Perhaps no individual represented the disconnect between Tuareg revolutionary politics of the past with those of more recent times than Iyad Ghali. As the leader of the MIA in the 1990s,[29] and a prominent figure in Ifoghas politics for decades, Ghali made an attempt to assume control of the nascent armed movement in late 2011 only to be rebuffed by "younger, idealistic Tuareg rebels" (Thurston 2020, p. 128). The "multi-clan and multi-caste" rank and file of the MNLA had bolder visions of a future Azawad free of the shackles of past hierarchies and privileges, and while such sentiments were present in the 1990s, they now proved decisive in determining the ideological orientation and interests of the initial movement.

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[28] Covered more extensively in chapter four, *Ischumar* refers to a cultural movement born of the post-independence Tuareg generation that challenged traditional forms of thinking and social organisation. For further scholarship, see:(Lecocq, 2004; Lecocq, 2010, 227-294; Hawad, 1990, 123-138)

[29] As outlined in chapter three, the MIA was the main Tuareg armed group in the second Tuareg rebellion and in many ways the organisational predecessor of the MNLA.

Ghali and other Tuareg nobles found themselves sidelined as the MNLA emerged as a seemingly autonomous social force. In response, Ghali formed Ansar Adine, an armed group that aligned itself with the MNLA throughout the initial phases of the rebellion, playing a critical role in capturing key northern towns. The group was composed of two primary constituencies, committed jihadists who had been circulating in AQIM circles, and other fellow Ifghoas nobles (ibid). These two constituencies seem contraposed: Tuareg; secular, religiously moderate, with AQIM: largely Arab and religiously extreme. However, this confluence makes sense in light of the economic landscape and alignment of interests it promoted.

The shift in the smuggling economy that formed an opening through which new actors like AQIM could emerge formed a new pole of material power that impacted the gravitational landscape of local Tuareg politics. This allowed aggrieved/ marginalised actors like Ag Ghali to find refuge in an alternative power base whose material power was largely independent from the MNLAs. In a different economic landscape in which the MNLA had monopolised all the relevant resources for mobilising rebellion, Ag Ghali's story would have ended much earlier when he was rebuffed in his initial leadership bid. The fact that he was able to pivot towards an alternative power base and realise his own personal ambitions after losing an internal power battle speaks to certain permissive conditions of the environment that facilitated multiple avenues of opportunity. This returns to a key contention of this thesis that latent divisions exist throughout all armed group and social movements for broadly, yet it is the material environment that largely mediates the degree to which these divisions are permitted to rise to the surface and produce splits. Thus, while much of the commentary of accounting of the armed group rosters and alliances systems in this early phase of the conflict focus on personal and social divisions that motivated this split between the MNLA and Ansar

Adine, a deeper cause is the material environment which allowed these latent motivations to be realised.

Working together in the first phases of the conflict, the relationship between the MNLA and Ansar Adine would quickly break down after the successful capture of key northern towns. The first major movement came when Ag Ghali successfully recruited Ifoghas leader Alghabass ag Intalla to Ansar Adine from the MNLA along with a number of other prominent Ifoghas (ibid). A number of theories have emerged to explain this shift in loyalties from such figures. Ag Intalla himself maintained that the move was purely practical:

> Right at the start we were with the MNLA. But afterwards we joined Ansar ud-Dine. We thought this was how we could defend religion in our society and at the same time defend our territory. And protect our entire culture, right here. I found that Ansar ud-Dine were fairly strong compared to the MNLA, in their actions against the enemy. (Morgan, Aghabass interview, 2013).

Such a surface explanation did not satisfy many observers. Morton Boas considered that this was move by the Ifoghas leadership to pull Ag Ghali close and moderate him, preventing him from going all in on aligning with the most radical jihadi elements and rallying the people of Kidal around him and what this would mean for the "older, tribal structure of authority" (Boas, 2015). An alternative theory posits that it was in fact the MNLA, not Ansar Adine that initiated the most concern within the traditional tribal authorities of the Ifoghas given their multi-class/clan composition (comprised of many Imghad fighters and other from non-noble classes) and their more radical vision for social reform. For this reason, "the Ifoghas felt the need to close ranks" around Ag Ghali, whom "became the focal point of [their] discomfort with the MNLA" (Thurston, 2020, p. 131). This underlined a palpable discomfort with their internal social position on the part of the Tuareg nobility.

Following the defection of Ag Intalla and other Ifoghas noble elite, the MNLA was increasingly side-lined by Ansar Adine and its jihadist allies throughout the occupations of key northern towns in 2012. Ansar Adine came to control Kidal, the traditional Ifoghas base, whilst the situations in Gao and Timbuktu also moved away from them. Ansar Adine was developing as a stronger local force as they fostered close connections with the Arab business elite, particularly in Timbuktu, which put pressure on the organisational composition of the group. A particularly emblematic move came when Ag Ghali replaced Ifoghas politician, Mohamed ag Aharib, as the group's spokesman with Sanda Ould Bouamama, a Berabiche Arab,[30] signalling, as Thurston (2020) notes, "the layering of ideological, geographical, and ethnic distinctions within Ansar al-Din" (p. 131). At this point in 2012, the composition of the group was collating around two main components: Ifoghas nobles led by ag Intalla, and a growing faction of hardline jidadists drawing from a more diverse social and ethnic background, primarily Arab. The primary mission of the former was to prevent the group's internal radicalisation and represent them to external actors, particularly in their efforts to gain international support for their cause against the Malian state. Indeed, Ag Intalla went to great lengths to present a moderate, Western acceptable version of the group, representing them in talks mediated by the Economic Community of West African States in the latter half of 2012. Here, West African leaders pressed the group to cut ties with the more radical jihadi groups in the region, namely AQIM and MUJWA, and restore their function as "an ethnic rather than a jihadist movement" (Thurston 2020, p. 136).

However, such a desire, essentially to will a repeat of the dynamics of the 1990s conflict (which they knew how to deal with) was never realistic. The viability of a

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[30] Terminological note: Berabiche Arabs are described as a predominant merchant class around Timbuktu of non-noble origin (see more detail in chapter five). In the discussion of Arab class dynamics in the remainder of this chapter, the terms Berabiche, Lemhar, and Tilemsi (as well as Tangara discussed in chapter five) all broadly denote Arab tribes and clans of non-noble origin newly empowered by their involvement in the regional smuggling trade.

revolutionary movement led and controlled by the Ifoghas elite was a relic of the past, as the new socio-economic environment could not sustain it. Instead, the power balance had shifted from Kidal towards other northern urban centres that had seen a major growth in wealth due to changes in the smuggling economy. Aligning themselves with these new business interests, a key factor in AQIM's ability to endogenate to the Malian scene (see discussion of Belmokhtar in the previous chapter), also allowed Ansar Adine and other jihadi elements to assume control of the revolutionary movement. The Ifoghas and Tuareg nobility could assert their preferences for the direction and goals of the movement all they wanted, but they no longer wielded the material leverage needed for this to be decisive. As the relative power of Ansar Adine vis a vis the MNLA grew, concomitant with the internal churning of the leadership composition of the group as Berabiche Arabs increasingly replaced Tuaregs, the traditional Ifoghas nobility found themselves marginalised once again. Indeed, it was clear they were losing this internal power battle within Ansar Adine, and with it the battle for the ideological soul of the group, as the tactics of Ansar Adine soldiers became more and more radical and disruptive. In June 2012, historic mausoleums in Timbuktu were destroyed, with Ansar Adine spokesman, Ould Bouamama, justifying the actions by deeming the UNESCO sites as *haram*, whilst also describing al-Qaeda as "our Islamic brothers" and asserting the religious imperative for the implementation of sharia—an intention ag Intalla went through great pains to deny the group ever held to his external diplomatic interlocutors (Thurston, 2020, p. 136).

Aside from struggling for influence at the leadership level, the Tuareg leadership of the MNLA failed to instill discipline and control even within their own rank and file. Violence, looting, and theft was rampant among the MNLA as they captured territory and began asserting control over towns and villages. Thus, local inhabitants quickly grew tired of

the chaos and violence wrought by the MNLA and increasingly looked towards Ansar Adine and other groups to push them out (Degrais et al, 2018; Raineri & Strazzari, 2015).

By December 2012- January 2013, any semblance of a power balance between the two constituencies within Ansar Adine broke down as the situation quickly escalated out of control and well beyond the limits of what the Ifgohas had envisioned. Ag Ghali and Abu Zayd met in the absence of Ifoghas leaders and discussed plans to expand the conflict significantly by pushing into central Mali (Thurston, 2020). [31] Ag Intalla, out of the country in Burkina Faso at the time, strongly advised against the plans when he caught wind of the discussions but was nonetheless overturned by hardline jihadists based in Timbuktu, namely Zayd and Amadou Kouffa (ibid). In January, the two Arab jihadists personally led the assault on the town of Konna in the administrative district of Mopti, a crossing of the proverbial Rubicon which provoked what the Ifgohas and other moderate factions of the movement feared most: a French military intervention in favour of the Malian state.
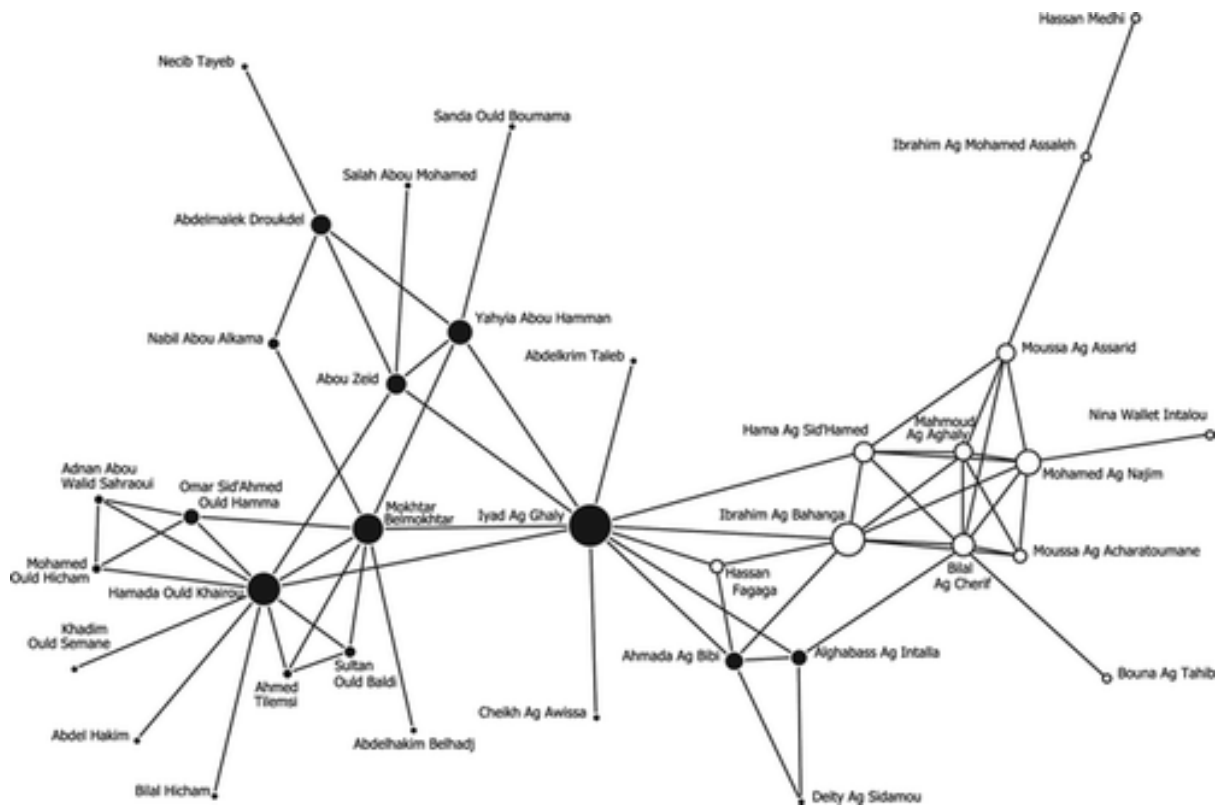
This French military intervention was predictably decisive, quickly expelling the rebels from central Mali and driving jihadists from the key northern cities. This represented a dramatic end to the first phase of the conflict: a tumultuous year that proved itself completely different from anything witnessed before in Mali's modern conflict history, a fact rooted in the dramatically altered socio-economic context. As is often the case, the degree to which the fundamentals had shifted beneath their feet was not immediately obvious to many on the ground or external observers. This is evidenced by the actions of the Ifoghas leaders and regional states (the would be mediators) throughout this phase, which indicated a desire, if not expectation, that this conflict was fundamentally a re-run of the 1990s: a Tuareg led affair (read: Ifoghas) attempting to re-negotiate a fairer distribution of power and resources for the

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[31] Abu Zayd was an AQIM branch leader discussed in chapter five.

marginalised north after years of neglect and state backsliding on previous promises. Indeed, Ifoghas leaders such as Ag Intalla had the ear of regional states, a relationship each side clearly expected to figure prominently in the inevitable peace agreement that would be drawn up once the situation was ripe. The narrative presented by Ag Intalla to his international audience was consciously modelled on the historic memory of past rounds of Tuareg rebellion: a meek, marginalised minority resisting oppression and standing up for the people of a region who were being let down by a distant state (Bencherif, 2018). It is difficult to assess how much of this was propaganda framing on the part of Intalla in order to garner international sympathy and allay their fears of a jihadist ascendency in the Sahara, or how much this reflected his genuine reading of the situation. Both are probably true, but what is clear is just how false this framing proved to be.

In interlocuting with the Ifoghas leader, external observers were speaking with someone who, unlike the 1990s, had very little material power and influence on the ground. Whether he really knew it or not, Ag Intalla was largely a symbolic relic of the past: a titular leader whose historical standing and traditional position atop the social hierarchy was uncoupled from any decisive ability to exercise material power and shape events. Writing in 2013, Moren Boas and Liv Elin Torheim observed this internal weakening of Tuareg social order and its apparent relation with events in the smuggling economy. "This sudden influx of cash weakened the traditional power structure of the Tuareg society, leading to competing regimes of power, locally and regionally" (Boas & Torheim, 2013, p. 1286).

Figure 1: Social Network Analysis showing network degree centrality of prominent figures in the Malian conflict landscape

Another way of visualising this comes from the work of Walther and Christopoulos (2014), who conducted an extensive Social Network Analysis (SNA) of armed groups involved in the first phase of the northern Mali conflict. As shown above in Figure 1, this analysis revealed the prominent individual players (nodes) and the strength of their relations with others. Consulting the image above, the relative size of the node denotes a stronger connection, or higher degree of centrality within the network. In real world terms, this characterises an individual with a higher degree of social power and influence given their

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[32] Permission to reproduce this figure granted by Taylor & Francis, (March 18, 2024).

ability to reach a broader range of actors. Their power also derives from their indispensable role as a key facilitator, or intermediary node through with many others must pass through to reach other areas of the network.[33]

Notice the largest circle belongs to Iyad Ag Ghaly, who despite being rebuffed in his leadership bid of both the Ifoghas Tuareg confederation and the MNLA, remains a highly connected and relevant figure (arguably the most) in northern Mali politics. Contrast this with Ag Intalla who, according to this analysis, stands a as a relatively minor character within the broader conflict ecosystem despite his enormous symbolic power and historic social privileges. This stands as a stark visualisation of how the Ifoghas historic social role has become decoupled from the material reality on the ground.

This weakening of Tuareg power structures were a cause and consequence of a number of features of this phase of the conflict, from the looting and ill-discipline within the Tuareg MNLA that alienated local communities, to the marginalisation of the Tuareg nobility in the key decision-making. The ground had undoubtedly shifted. The proliferation of opportunities to accumulate resources outside of the traditional power structures of the Tuareg and Arab elite had profound social consequences which manifested in a significantly more crowded and complex conflict landscape. The Tuareg and Arab nobilities who led previous conflicts and traditionally drove political events in the north formed but one faction of a now wider movement, a movement in which they were increasingly marginalised.

Phase Two: MIA, HUCA and formation of the CMA and the Plateforme

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[33] See discussion in chapter three regarding strength and density of social networks and the implications for armed groups formation and cohesion.

Following the French intervention, Tuareg leaders looked to regroup and separate themselves from Ansar Adine and the jihadi milieu that had proven so toxic to building international support. Ag Intalla and other Ifoghas politicians formed a new group, the Mouvement Islamique de l'Azawad (MIA) which would draw significant recruits from both Ansar Adine and the MNLA (Thurston, 2020). Ag Intalla, in an interview shortly after the group's formation, again presented the group's struggle within the broader historical context of previous Tuareg led rebellions in the north. "The Touareg people and the Arabs who are with us," he notes, "nobody can say that they don't know that cause. It's lasted for years, from colonial times and independence right up until now." The group framed itself as forming from the moderate wing of Ansar Adine in a clear bid to remove itself from France's crosshairs and spare the Ifoghas' home base of Kidal from international military action (ibid).

In line with this moderation, Ag Intalla stressed that his new group was open to talks, and the first group they engaged with were the MNLA. In late January 2013, leaders of the MNLA entered Kidal for talks with Ag Intalla, quickly forming the "Transitional Council of the State of Azawad" (ibid). Here we begin to see the emergence of class sorting in the second phase of the conflict. This rapprochement," Thurston (2020) notes, "set the stage for more far-reaching unity initiatives in northern Mali, at least among Tuareg and Arab nobles (p. 140). In May of the same year, Ag Intalla would announce the formation of an umbrella group for "non-jihadist Tuareg rebel groups," called the Haut conseil pour l'unite de l'Azawad (HCUA) under which the top families of the Ifoghas nobility would finally come together after initially backing separate groups (ibid).

Meanwhile, northern Mali's Arab community was also navigating its way through the tumultuous conflict landscape as well. During the MNLA's initial advance, a group of Arab militias popped up around Timbuktu to protect the city and its Arab inhabitants (Desgrais et

al., 2018.) As the MNLA and Ansar Adine neared the city, government aligned forces fled whilst others stayed behind to negotiate the terms of the handover. This remaining group was centred around the figures of Oumar Ould Ahmed, Dina Ould Daya, and Moulay Ahmed, local Arab businessmen who were said to be involved in cannabis resin smuggling (Lacher, 2012). These forces reportedly delayed the advance of the MNLA, allowing AQIM aligned forces to enter and take the city and fueling speculation of their own commercial ties to such groups (ibid). After being ordered out of the city by AQIM soon after, these Arab militia forces would form the National Liberation Front of Azawad (FNLA) before becoming the Movement of Azawad (MAA) in August 2012 (ibid).

The MMA was presented as an umbrella organisation to represent the interests of northern Malian Arabs; however, intra-ethnic class faultlines were shaking under the surface. Said to be committed to preserving business interests as well as the "traditional social and economic hierarchies," it is likely the MAA became largely dominated by noble Kunta Arabs (Desgrais et al., 2018, p. 669). In 2014, the MAA would bound together with the Ifoghas Tuareg led HCUA and MNLA to form the Coordination of the Movements of Azawad (CMA), an umbrella group of non-jihadist Tuareg and Arab rebels (ibid). Aside from their non-jihadist identities, there was indeed a common socio-economic thread binding this pan-ethnic movement together: that of the traditional noble tribes whose power derived from the pre-drug smuggling status quo.

Plateforme

In opposition, an alternative coalition would form from a number of groups organised around traditionally subservient actors newly empowered by the new socio-economic landscape. The first groups to emerge was the CM-FPR in 2012, made up primarily of Songhai and bellah (former slave of Tuareg nobles) and framed as a self defence group against the Tuareg (ibid).

It would later be joined by the GATIA, a predominately Imghad Tuareg group led by the

Malian General El Hadj Ag Gamou who had fought for the ARLA in the 1990s during the

second Tuareg rebellion. Since then, Ag Gamou has developed extensive family ties with

non-noble Arab communities (Sandor, 2017), however his figure represents a key pillar in

what is perceived as a historic and on-going struggle between the Tuareg nobility and the

Imghad. As recounted in Bencherif's (2018a) field interviews:

> The people I spoke with, who were GATIA members and sympathisers, were
> consistently part of a narrative where the current conflict is actually a struggle of the
> Imghad against the inequalities, domination and abuse of the Ifoghas. Conversely, the
> Ifoghas questioned presented GATIA as a tool of the government created to weaken
> them. The Ifoghas and the allied tribes routinely stressed the ambiguous status of Ag
> Gamou who was both an officer in the army and head of the GATIA militia (p. 19).

Thus, at first glance this may appear to be a mere revival of the subaltern movements

present in the prior conflict; however, there are again some salient differences of note. The

first is the formal instantiation of the Plateforme itself, which for the first time represented a

broad subaltern umbrella group that was not only free of Ifoghas leadership but in fact free of

them all together. Contrast this to the previous Tuareg rebellion which saw the creation of the

Mouvements et Front Unfies de l'Azawad (MFUA), an umbrella groups formed of the

Ifoghas-led MPA as well as the non-noble led ARLA and FPLA to represent a united front in

negotiations with the Malian state on behalf of all rebelling parties.[34] It hence stands as a

novel product, an exclusively subaltern coalition formed to assert their interests not just

within the confines of an armed movement whose general direction of travel lay largely

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[34] As discussed in chapter four, these armed groups were largely composed of Imghad Tuareg and other
subservient classes/tribes and were committed to challenging the noble Ifoghas' dominance of the movement
and society more broadly.

outwith their control, but a movement (or anti-movement) in and of itself free to engage or shape events on their own terms.

This increased capacity to organise was greatly facilitated by the financial resources of the third group to join this subaltern alliance and form the Plateforme: the MAA-Tabankort. Splitting off from the MAA (Arab alliance under the CMA), the MAA-Tabankort formed around the Lemhar tribe and their significant smuggling-derived wealth. Here, the socio-economic drivers of group formation are particularly acute, as described by Desgrais et al (2018):

> Just like the Imghad vis-à-vis the Ifoghas in the Tuareg political order, the Lemhar used to occupy a subaltern hierarchical rank among the Malian Arabs, as vassals of the most prominent tribe, the Kuntas. [As such], The MAA-Tabankort can be considered as the Lemhar's vehicle of social promotion and power accumulation (p. 672).

This made them natural allies to the Imghad, as well as the Shongai and Bella, and their smuggling wealth was crucial in providing the resources needed to form the Plateforme following their deliberate distancing from MUJAO and other jihadist groups within which they had previously thrown their lot (discussed below). Indeed, these ties were quickly and willingly overlooked by the Malian government who likewise identified the wealthy, non-separatist Lemhar as their ideal partner to combat the Tuareg rebels and their Arab allies.[35] As Strazzari & Raineri (2015) observe, the group "provided an excellent venue for the 'political laundering' of former jihadists who had fought in the MUJAO ranks" (p. 266), with associates of their leader Sidi Mohamed Ould Ahmed, "notorious drug traffickers," either

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[35] A 2019 report from the UN Panel of Experts on Mali suggests additional mechanisms of support via the Malian state for drug smuggling activities of the Lemhar community, noting that reports of "officials in Bamako claiming to belong to State Security" pressuring Niger to release a prominent Lemhar figure arrested and held there for drug smuggling (de Kroning et al., 2019, p. 29)

avoiding arrest or being released shortly after (ibid). El Hadj Ag Gamou himself, leader of GATIA and a general in the Malian army, was rumoured to be a key figure in facilitating these arrangements (Thiolay, 2013; Diarra 2013). Indeed, ties between the Imghad and Lehmar communities were deepening, with Gamou's daughter marrying a prominent Lehmar Arab with ties to cocaine smuggling in 2015 (Carayol, 2016).

Thus, as the Lemhar found their vehicle for social promotion in the form of the MAA Tananbort, the Malian government found an ideal group to revive their clientelist network, fueled by resources extracted from the drug smuggling economy, to counterbalance the separatists. In turn, the Imghad found a friend with deep pockets with whom to team up and pursue the interest they held in common by virtue of their shared position in the regional social system. In August 2014, a cease fire declaration was signed in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso by Ag Intalla, representing the CMA, and Sidi Mohamed Ould Ahmed on behalf of the Plateforme (Desgrais et al., 2018). The Ouagadougou accords would be followed by the more comprehensive Algiers accords, sometimes referred to as the Bamako Agreement, signed in June 2015 by the Malian government, CMA, and the Plateforme, which sets out a broad roadmap for political, economy, and security reforms intended to realise a sustainable peace in the north.[36]

These two organisation would form the main group structures for the purposes of negotiation and contestation in the coming years. With the Plateforme committed to the preservation of Malian territorial integrity and the CMA advocating for independence for the north, they represent the span of non-jihadist constitutional contention. They also represent a clear case of socio-economic sorting, with the traditional Tuareg and Arab nobility organising under the CMA with those lower down the social hierarchy backing the Plateforme. The

[36] More details on this agreement and its aftermath will be dealt with below.

divisions between these two factions/coalitions are not new, as they are rooted in the historical developments discussed in chapter four. However, the previous activation of these fault lines was short lived as the armed groups formed to represent these subaltern classes were subsumed into the MFUA one year later, indicating the relatively limited ability of these formerly marginalised classes to organise themselves and independently assert their interests in the conflict arena. However, with the changes that had occurred in the economic landscape in the intervening decades, these subaltern social actors had now acquired the resources to challenge the traditional nobility and associated power hierarchies more fully and persistently.

This persistence and strength of divisions is thus something new, a product of a new socio-economic environment which had fundamentally altered the balance of power between these rival social groups. Here we see the power of resources to prove decisive, not only in the process of armed group and alliance formation, but also in conditioning the interests of these groups themselves. In terms of armed group formation, there were approximately eight recognizably distinct armed groups that emerged throughout the 1990s (Togo, 2002); while, in the current conflict, there are approximately 32 (Desgrais, et al, 2018), a majority of which are rumoured to have some link the narco-smuggling economy (ibid). In turn, these groups are formally collated into two distinct movements, the CMA and the Plateforme, in contrast to the single MFUA two decades prior. The emergence and strength of the Plateforme is particularly striking, as it indicates a level of brokerage and independent organising ability that was clearly outside the realm of possibility for the subaltern classes in the 1990s.

In terms of interests, the aims and goals of today's conflict actors are also novel vis a vis the groups of the 1990s. While the political aims of the previous rebellion were broadly anchored in a coherent set of demands revolving around a more equitable distribution of

national resources between the more developed south and neglected north, the drive for full

independence by the MNLA and its allies represents a radical departure. This brought the

entire concept and utility of statehood to the forefront of the conflict, a development that

Strazzari & Raineri argue is rooted in economic interests. They note "the reality of an

economy of survival and social mobility embedded in permissive/selective forms of border

management and law enforcement" in driving the control of such border arrangements to the

forefront of concern (Raineri & Strazzari, 2015, p. 252).

> This is crucial for understanding the shift of Tuareg rebel movements, from political
> aims articulated in terms of identity and non-discrimination in the 1960s and 1990s to
> today's aspirations couched in terms of territorial claims, national independence, and
> bounded statehood. Nationalist projects and the geopolitical imaginaries of a nomadic
> state are inextricably linked to the emerging patterns of illicit criminal economies
> (ibid, p. 258).

What could arguable be seen an equally radical development is the strength of

opposition to this vision by the Plateforme. Often described as a 'pro-government militia', the

groups comprising this umbrella coalition have seemed to shed the 'rebel' terminology all

together, a categorical determination they unambiguously inhabited during the second Tuareg

rebellion despite their differences in vision with the noble leadership of the wider movement.

Here they have opted out of the movement all together, standing up and separate from the

spirit of armed rebellion which had swept up their forebearers in previous iterations of Tuareg

uprisings. Despite evidence of apprehension and misgivings on the part of the Imghad and

other subordinate groups in the 1960s and 1990s, they were nonetheless compelled to follow

the Ifoghas lead and resign themselves to influencing from the inside an armed movement

whose existence and general direction of travel was set at a level beyond them. Whilst any

sense of misaligned interests between themselves and the Ifoghas had produced mere

misgivings during previous iterations of conflict, the creation of the Plateforme represented a full on rebellion; not against the Malian state, but against the Ifoghas and traditional power structures of the north. In fact, not merely an untargeted third party, the Malian state now represented a key ally to the Plateforme as the two entities not only shared a common enemy in the Ifoghas, but a shared interest in the preservation of Mali's territorial integrity and the illicit cross border economies it sustained.

The restoration of this territorial integrity was indeed key in animating the Malian state-aligned Plateforme, as "the emergence of a newly proclaimed state of Azawad in April 2012 replaced Mali's formal sovereignty at the heart of international smuggling routes, thereby upsetting the equilibria between powerful local interests" (Raineri & Strazzari, 2015, p. 265). Hence, the shifting socio-economic landscape not only gave sub altern actors the ability to assert their interests but also impacted those interests themselves as their reliance on illicit smuggling revenues endowed the Plateforme with a massive stake in the preservation of the political orders which facilitated them.

Here, one may challenge this claim that interests are being impacted by changes in the resource landscape, and that what we are observing is simply greed-based behaviour on the part of Plateforme members who are pursuing their crude material interests through any institutional means possible. In other words, it is not the interests that have changed but merely the means used to realise them. This would hardly represent a novel or theoretically interesting development. However, even if we were to concede a fundamentally greed-based driver of behaviour on the part of these actors, it is the social context that has determined which political vision is most conducive to the pursuit of these interests: a territorially intact Malian state from the perspective of the Plateforme and subservient classes, or some fundamental reforms to revive the pre-smuggling status quo on the part of the CMA. It also

accounts for the alliance ties between the groups within these umbrella organisations, as their shared position within the traditional social hierarchies—subordinate, non-noble on the part of the Imghad and Lehmar—has driven cooperation to exploit a resource (drug smuggling in this case) that, owing to these very social positions, is structurally favourable towards to them. The same can be applied to the ties between the Tuareg Ifoghas and Kunta which likewise emerge from their common social position and the economic benefits to which this has traditionally entitled them. As such, we observe a situation that, as Raineri and Strazzari (2015) note, "corroborate(s) a hypothesis that differing political aspirations and geopolitical visions rest on underlying socioeconomic structures that are rapidly changing" (p. 265).

Jihadi strain: AQIM and the crucial case of MUJAO

In response to this altered economic landscape, the previous section described how traditionally marginalised actors from the non-noble Arab and Tuareg classes, mainly the Berabiche and Imghad, respectively, animated an alternative network that was more aligned with the material reality of the region. As they had largely coalesced under rival groups to the MNLA, it is not surprising these groups were able to quickly gain local supremacy. Indeed, as events rapidly transpired in these early conflict phases, the ascendency of these groups such as Ansar Adine, AQIM, and MUJAO startled and surprised external observers given their associations with jihadism and seemingly foreign character. It was thus tempting to treat this jihadist dynamic as a disturbing side-show to the real, more legitimate conflict being waged by the local Tuareg and Arab groups, and hence analyse it from the perspective of parasitic outside forces capitalising on regional instability emerging from local dynamics and grievances to which they lay no claim or involvement.

However, as more attuned observers were noticing early on, these group were not foreign invaders running roughshod through Mali in the interest of expanding their global jihadi project, but rather a much more local product emerging from the particular social conditions of the region. Thus was the key to their early success and the MNLA's lack thereof, as they were "more deeply ingrained into local communities than the rank-and-file members of the MNLA" (Boas & Torheim, 2013, p. 1286).

Boas & Torheim (2013) go on to argue that these groups must be understood as "not an external invading force, but as an actor which over time has managed in many ways to become part of local communities" (p. 1287). However, we may argue one further. We are not merely talking about an external force that has successfully integrated itself into local communities over time, but rather a local force that had been emerging for some time and whose development had been accelerated by these developments in the regional illicit economy. "Not a pathology," Lebovich (2013a) notes, an apt analogy to an external element successfully integrating into its host, "but a political and social object" with local, organic roots (p. 5).

No group demonstrated this better than MUJAO, a titular jihadist group whose character and emergence in 2012 seems to have befuddled observers. The first evidence of their presence dates to December 2011 when a Mauritanian jihadist and former AQIM leader, Hamada Ould Mohamed Kheirou, appeared in a video claiming responsibility for the kidnapping of three European aid workers in southern Algeria (Raineri & Strazzari, 2015). This aligned with the trend of North African jihadi groups setting up shop deeper into the Sahara, following in the footsteps of AQIM and Belmokhtar. However, due precisely to the growing strength of AQIM, competition in the region for such a group was tough. Combine this with the observation that AQIM at the time had shown itself to be a relatively flexible

and accommodating organisation open to absorbing and/or franchising semi-autonomous

groups (Bencherif, 2020), the emergence of such a splinter group require explanation (ibid).

A number of possibilities present themselves. On the one hand, there was

disagreement at the leadership level, what Shapiro may call "preference divergence," as

Kheirou was formerly rebuffed by AQIM leadership in his request to create a squadron or

katiba of Sahelian Arabs. As Bencherif (2020) notes, the request was a reasonable one, as

there already existed a *katiba* composed of Tuaregs led by the cousin of Ag Ghali, Amada Ag

Hama.[37] The franchising of Kheirou's *katiba* would have thus been a practical move, one not

without precedent, in response to the logistical challenges of distance and the need to

endogenate to local conditions. More ground-up explanations also emerged, with observers

pondering that his new group must be serving a new, untapped constituency. These early

theories focused on the ethnic/racial element, conceptualising MUJAO as a 'black African'

jihadists group focused on distancing itself from the cultural and political domination of

North African Arabs, a natural process of re-ethnicising the jihadist movement to more

appropriately reflect the areas to which it was spreading (Idoumou, 2011). Indeed, early

propaganda videos from the group highlighted many historical figures from local "black"

Islamism and associated themselves with anti-colonial struggles (Raineri & Strazzari, 2015).

Ould Kheriou himself took care to appear alongside 'black recruits' from Senegal, Guinea,

southern Mali, and Niger, pushing the impression that the group was led and composed

largely of 'black' Africans in contrast the 'white' Arabs who had dominated previous

iterations of jihadist groups, including AQIM. However, this impression failed to make any

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[37] Better known as Abdekrim al-Targui, or Adekrim the Tuareg, was an Ifogha from Kidal (Jacinto, 2015). Forming the "Ansar al Sunnah"in 2010 at the behest, or at least permission of, AQIM leader Droukdal. Beyond being "composed of Tuareg from Mali and Niger,"(Lebovich, 2013a) little is known of the social class makeup of the group, though it is likely the rank and file constituted non-noble Tuaregs from around Timbuktu and other non-Kidal regions that were likewise supplying troops to the MNLA and AQIM. Further, given the lineage of its leader as a Tuareg noble and his familial relations to Ag Ghali, the role of intra-Ifoghas power struggles in the formation of the group is an under-researched dynamic at the moment of writing.

purchase with reality, as local observers reported that "80 to 90 percent of MUJAO's membership was composed of Arabs and Moors coming from Mauritania, Algeria, and the Sawaharawi Polisario ranks" (ibid, p. 259), including Ould Kheriou himself.

Thus, the emergence of the group fails to lend itself to a neat, straightforward ethnic explanation. This is where one must once again return to the resource element and the ways the shifting economic landscape had empowered a new constellation of actors and endowed them with valuable interests they were committed to advance. Rumours of MUJAO'S financing highlight the names of a number of prominent Arab businessmen, such as Cherif Ould Taher and Mohamed Ould Ahmed 'Rouji, with known ties cocaine smuggling (Ibid). According to interviews conducted by Raineri and Strazzari (2015), the names of at least two other prominent Tilemsi Arabs emerged, including Baba Ould Cheick, the mayor of Tarkint and advisor to high level Malian officials, as well as Mohamed Ould Mataly, a wealthy Telimsi businessman who had sat in Mali's National Assembly. This "Arab Solidarity," they note:

> stretches far beyond the Tilemsi valley north of Gao and includes the Lamhar and the Berabiche groups among the communities of Timbuktu. This is consolidated by a major political cleavage—with great significance for understanding the character of MUJAO—that runs between the Kunta tribe and their traditional vassals, the Tilemsi-Lamhar…to a significant extent, the Kunta-Tilemsi divide is an Arab equivalent to the one opposing Ifoghas and Imghad clans among the Tuareg (p. 260).

This socio-economic development, discussed in the previous chapter, developed like most things do, gradually over time, then all at once. Throughout the 2000s control over trafficking routes was gaining significant prominence in mediating intra and inter-ethnic tensions. Arab smugglers increasingly preferred the direct route between Gao and the Algerian border town of in-Khalil, circumventing Kidal (home of the Ifoghas and traditional

depot) as the latter had become "too expensive and housed "local fraudsters" (i.e: Tuareg)

(ibid, p. 260). A significantly longer journey, this route shift was undoubtedly facilitated by

GPS and vehicle technology and thus dis-embedding this most profitable trade from the

social networks that had existed previously. As Raineri and Strazzari (2015) conclude, "it is

only against this background that the emergence of MUJAO in late 2011 becomes fully

intelligible" (p. 260). Even their purported jihadi fanaticism concealed an underlying socio-

economic logic, represented by their destruction in September 2012 of a Sufi mausoleum

north of Gao: a symbolic place of worship for the Arab Kunta (ibid).[38]

In terms of their brand of jihadism, they promoted a sort of "jihadism without

borders" in which customs duties and tariffs would be abolished under *sharia*, a nod to their

constituents in the smuggling industry (ibid). In a propaganda video circulated on local Gao

TV in Summer 2012, a bearded Arab man noted, "we started prohibiting what Allah the

almighty has forbidden, including tolls, customs, taxation, fining people's money. Trading

came back to normal; goods are available more than before, and at lower prices" (ibid, p.

262). This was part of an extensvie hearts and minds campaign which allowed them to

successfully chase out their former short-lived allies (the MNLA) from the city in late June

2012. Indeed, some semblance of calm and stability did return to the city. Living conditions

improved as food and fuel prices dropped as a result of the resumption of vital direct trade

links with Algeria that were unencumbered by customs or tolls (ibid), routes which were

likely trodden and developed over the preceding years by Tilemsi smugglers.

Soon they were able to secure the backing of Gao's *cercle de notables*, described as

"the most widely recognized local representative body" (ibid, p. 262). Different from the

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[38] There were also reports of killings and amputations of Kounta leaders by MUJAO fighters, which Lebovich argues "may have had more to do with longstanding inter-Arab conflict [Noble Kounta vs non-noble Tilemsi] than jihadist militancy (Lebovich, 2013a). For accounts of the killings, see Diakite, 2013.

"traditional leadership" (read: noble tribes and religious leaders), the *cercle de notables* was largely informal and open to "non-aristocratic members of civil society: wealthy merchants" (ibid). This formed an ethnically diverse institution, composed of local Shongais and Tilemsi Arabs who nonetheless shared a common history and interest in the illicit smuggling industry (ibid). This money was vital to their local recruitment efforts, with the group reportedly offering young recruits 100 to 400 dollars a month, a sum equivalent to nearly an entire year of hard work in the traditional economy (ibid).

As this money, largely Tilemsi Arab businessmen, flowed in and allowed the group to become socially entrenched, MUJAO also found significant support within the Fulani community. Again, the broader economic context here is instructive. The Fulani, a semi-sendentarist group spread across West Africa and comprising of around 16% of the population of Mali, are said to play an outsized role in the illicit trade of the region. They are said to control 90% of the import/export trade of Guinea, including the ports of Guinea-Bassau and Guinea Conakry, through which most of the illicit drugs destined to transit Mali enter the continent after passing through the Guinean city of Lobe, considered the capital of the Fulani (ibid). Indeed, Raineri reports that local sources spoke of a 'distinguished Guinean Peul [Fulani] present in Gao from the very first days of the MUJAO's penetration of the city" (qtd in Strazzari, 2015, p. 9).[39] This is not a surprising development, as Gao represented a vital trading hub for the Fulani trading network, rendering it a key strategic interest to Fulani businessmen who, like the Tilemsi Arabs, saw in MUJAO a tool for re-opening lucrative trade routes free of Tuareg exactions. This was likewise a symbiotic relationship as Fulani

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[39] Class dynamics amongst the Fulani in some ways mirror those of the Tuareg and Arabs, with a traditionally noble and subservient classes. These divisions are rooted in similar socio-economic contexts discussed in chapter four regarding the Tuareg, with the noble classes taking the role of warriors and raiders (Brossier et al., 2018). Current tensions between sedentary and pastoralist Fulani in central Mali are said to, in part, emanated from these historical tensions (Sangare, 2019). The role of the regional smuggling economy on local Fulani society, particularly how it intersects and/or undermines traditional social hierarchies is a largely unaddressed in the literature, thus represents a highly interesting avenue of future research.

money was substantial and largely untapped by existing armed groups. In fact, Raineri and Strazzari (2015) suggest this was a key motivator of MUJAO's "black jihadism" narrative as they sought to associate themselves with the Fulani and create a permission structure to receive their money and recruits.[40]

Their success in controlling the city was short lived as they were soon driven from Gao by the French military intervention. Some members would join MAA Tanonkort, whilst the more hardline faction would join up with Mokthar BelMokhtar and his AQIM splinter group to form Al Moruabitoune in 2013 (Desgrais et al, 2018.) This group would remain active on the margins, eventually fusing with other jihadi strains to produce the Islamic State's faction in the Sahara (ISGS) and JNIM, an affilitate of Al Qaeada in 2015 and 2017, respectively (ibid).

While distinct in their ideological narratives and purported goals, the development of these jihadi groups in northern Mali from 2012 to 2015 shared many of the same issues of factionalism that beset the non-jihadist movements. "Despite its sustained military and tactical consistency, Desgrassi et al (2018) note, "the jihadi coalition is internally as volatile as its separatist and pro government counterparts" (p. 668). This tracks with a wider context in which their development was taking place within a socio-economic landscape that was undergoing significant re-shuffling. The "most notable evolution since 2012," they note, "is the endogenation to the Malian context" (ibid).

Flipping this observation around, however, gives a fuller account of the story. In fact, it was the social context of Mali that was endogenizing these jihadist forces to its own terms, driving the type of socio-economic class sorting that gave groups like MUJAO, and AQIM

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[40] Around 500 Fulani were believed to have joined MUJAO's ranks by the middle of 2012 (Raineri, 2015).

before them, a constituency to form in the way they did. Indeed, these constituencies, particularly the Lehmar and Berabiche Arabs, were newly empowered by alterations in the economic landscape that favoured them structurally as non-noble tribes. These emergent socio-economic dynamics in turn produced the opportunity structures and openings for this roster of armed groups to emerge and persist. The existence of these structures were indispensable in the creation of the MUJAO as, following the refusal of the AQIM leadership to grant Ould Kheriou his Sahelian *katiba,* he and his allies "were able to leave AQIM and coopt other Sahelians without any possibilities for the leadership to avoid it or force them to stay" (Bencherif, 2020, p.108). This was undoubtedly a reflection of their ability to cultivate an independent resource base free from the control of the central AQIM leadership.

This dynamic also played heavily in the relationship between the AQIM leadership and Belmohktar, whose increasing autonomy was a source of frustration for Droukdal.[41] At the root was the brute reality that "since Belmohktar was also bringing the main financial funds to the group, it was impossible for Droukdal to expel him" (ibid, p. 109), effectively eliminating any sort of material leverage between principal and agent. The eventual split between Belmokhtar and AQIM was thus "inevitable considering the contradiction between the structure of power and his autonomy in the field" (ibid, p. 110).

These challenges with Belmokhtar likely weighed heavily in the mind of Droukdal when refusing the initial request of Kheirou to create a new *katiba*, as they questioned the feasibility and/ or wisdom of the prevailing franchising model of AQIM in the context of the Arab community of northern Mali. This is speculation, as we know little details of what was happening in the mind of Droukdal when he refused Kherious request soon after granting a similar one for the creation of a Tuareg *katiba*, but it is plausible he was aware that the social

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[41] Dynamic discussed in more detail in chapter five.

base from which the Lehmar and Berabiche Arabs were organising (the constituency that Kheirou's katiba was explicitly intended to represent) was a much more potent and uncontrollable force than that of Ifoghas Ag Hama and his Tuareg katiba. As such, any ceding of power to the Arab jihadists in northern Mali would merely replicate the command and control problems faced before with Belmokhtar and eventually manifest in the group's fragmentation.[42] Preceding and subsequent events would prove him correct. Thus, like the non-Jihadi strains, these groups were, in a sense, an expression of a shifting socio-economic structure attempting to come to terms with itself.

Concluding remarks

The introduction of narcotics smuggling in the 2000s had a significant impact on the economic environment in a way that precluded the ability of the prevailing leadership to retain material leverage over subservient classes; in turn, these subservient actors were well positioned to capitalise on this particular industry given their structural position within the regional social hierarchy and the way this related to the state's governance strategy.

The alliance structure that emerged throughout the ensuing conflict followed the contours of these economic developments and, as such, highlighted the degree to which changes in the smuggling economy had shaken social hierarchies and redrawn the region's political map along new socio-economic lines. At the heart of the contention was the vision for independence and what this would mean for the most lucrative resource in the region: the

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[42] There is some debate as to whether the AQIM-MUJAO split represents a case of legitimate fragementation or if it was merely an articial or superficial organisational reshuffling. Some cite the early cooperation between the groups as evidence of a "managed separation", or strategic split to specialise and divide labour whilst working towards their overarching, common goal (Lebovich, 2013b). However, Bencherif (2020) argues that subsequent alliance dynamics by key MUJAO figures, particularly Al Sahrouri following Belmokhtar following the French military intervention rather than re-joining AQIM, as well as his subsequent pledge of allegiance to the Islamic State (AQIM's staunch rival in the region) indicate a more fundamental divergence between the two groups.

Malian national border. "The emergence of a newly proclaimed state of Azawad in April 2012," Raineri and Strazzari (2015) note, "replaced Mali's formal sovereignty at the heart of international smuggling routes, thereby upsetting the equilibria between powerful local interests" (p. 265).

The CMA and the Platform, the two main, and opposing, umbrellas groups under which conflict negotiations have taken place are largely centered around competing visions for the political future of this borderland; with the independence-driven CMA largely composed of Ifoghas Tuareg and Kunta Arabs, and the traditionally marginalized groups, newly empowered by their access of narco-smuggling rents, gathering under the Plateforme and preferring to maintain direct relations with Bamako and the territorially integrity of the existing Malian state.

Thus, the ethnic and social divisions that structured the splits and divisions along which the conflict unfolded concealed an underlying material tension between the traditional power structures and those who threatened to upend the 'proper ordering' of socio-economic life. However, this was not merely a case of resources infecting the Tuareg movement with infighting and conflict but is rather an instance of an evolving economic landscape undermining the socio-economic basis upon which the Ifoghas maintained power.

In a way this was yet another chapter in the longer term epoch of northern Malian politics: a new industry or technological change alters the economic landscape in a way which stresses the prevailing socio-economic balance, undermining social hierarchies and contributing to increased factionalism. From cars and subsidized goods throughout the latter decades of the 20th century, to GPS and narcotics into the 21st, the Tuareg and Arab nobility have been on the backfoot as they have invariably struggled to maintain their social privileges, and the political power it bestows, as any sort of material logic underpinning it

eroded. This is what Bencherif (2018) describes as "the gap existing between the past statutory categories, or castes, and the present economic and political reality" (p. 22). But why must this be the case? Why were the noble tribes unable to capitalise on these newly emerging economic trends? One may reasonably presume that their social capital endowed them with certain advantages that placed them in a privileged position to capitalise on any emerging economic trends.

This returns to the conceptual notion of social capital itself as an economically contingent resource that is rooted in specific social, political, and economic contexts. When these contexts change, any remaining social capital linked to them quickly loses its potency. The stock of social capital possessed by the noble Tuareg and Arab tribes was developed in an era where their mastery of the camel, strategic position of their homelands in key mountain passes, and unrivalled local navigational knowledge were essential to the functioning of the wider socio-economic system. This pre-existing social capital has since degraded in line with changes in the economic environment which has itself reformed the socio-economic system to value different functions. These functions involve links with state and trans-national actors to facilitate the illicit trade of narcotics and other high value, small bulk resources, links to which the Imghad and other non-noble tribes were structurally positioned to develop given their historic rivalries with the nobility and how this aligned with the state's governance strategy.

These ties have and are facilitating economic interactions that are generating new stocks of social capital that are more potent and relevant than those retained by the Ifoghas and other noble tribes. This undoubtedly speaks to the difficulties the Ifgohas faced early on in maintaining order within the MNLA and the haphazard, indecisive nature in which prominent Ifoghas leaders such as Intalla Ag Alghabas shifted allegiances and clearly

struggled to find their way in conflict landscape they had little control over. Contrast this with the cohesion and initiative of groups like Ansar Adine and MUJAO, who quickly displaced the MNLA to take control of key northern towns while deriving much of their rank and file from non-noble classes and retaining links to emergent business interests. These groups were clearly drawing on different sources of social capital to facilitate their operations, and it was the stock more closely aligned to the altered economic landscape that proved most potent.

Chapter 7

The Emergence of Northern Mali's new power blocs

In June of 2015, the leaders of the CMA arrived in Bamako to finally add their signatures to a document that would lay out the frameworks for the ending of the conflict and restoration of peace and stable governance in the north. The Plateforme and the government had both signed the agreement months earlier in August, leading to months of tension anxiety as to the prospect of getting the rebels in the CMA to join them. The Algiers Agreement (as it came to be called) was a watershed moment, not so much in its impact on the conflict per se, but in what it revealed about contemporary state of power distribution across the north and the relative social bases behind it. In this way, if we were to view the peace agreement as a tool for peace, we may think of it as a torch light rather than anything else. Indeed, rather than signalling an end to the conflict, the singing of the Algiers Agreement in June 2015 represented a shift to a new phase whose dynamics were becoming increasingly clear and predictable in light of the socio-economic logic that had driven the conflict to this point.

As had been argued in the preceding chapters, the internal politics of northern Mali over the past three decades has been driven by changes in the smuggling economy that have empowered formerly marginalised actors to form their own independent power bases and challenge the political hegemony of the region's traditional nobility. This has in turn mapped onto the dynamics of the 2012 conflict by producing two independent and competing armed movements whose power and interests are tied to their position within this altered socio-economic landscape. The formation of the two non-state signatories, CMA and the Plateforme, represent the formal organisational manifestation of northern Mali's two socio-economic blocs, with the Plateforme broadly representing the region's non-noble, traditionally subservient classes, and the CMA representing the traditional nobility.

Rather than diffusing tensions along this broad faultline of intra-regional conflict in the north, the peace agreement has arguably exacerbated them by raising the material stakes offered by access to peace dividends as well as the opening up of new geographic space whose political future has been the object of increasingly violent turf battles between armed groups. This new phase of the conflict has been described in terms of the increasing trend towards 'horizontal' axes of conflict between local power blocs as opposed the 'vertical' contest between rebels and the Malian state (Bencherif and Campana, 2017, p.121; Charbonneau, 2018).

Like the conflict in the 1990s, this latter phase of increasingly horizontal contestation has been described as the "tribalization of armed groups" (Sandor, 2017, p.20), or as Boutellis and Zahar put it, the "clanisation of the peace process" (2017, p. 29). This has been interpreted as a function of the increasing violence and uncertainty reigning in northern Mali, as "one's ethnic or tribal community becomes one of the surest bases on which to seek protection" (Sandor, 2017, p.20). In this way the horizontal tribalization of the conflict is a sort of natural product of a dialectical process between increasing violence and uncertainty, and the concomitant search for protection and armed recourse that often follows the contours of identity and the ethnic/social heuristics that signal group boundaries. This forms a positive feedback loop as violence increases the demand for close, identity-based allegiances which in turn often militarise group boundaries and promote more violence.

This increasing 'tribalisation' of the conflict has led to a general view that the formation of the CMA and Platform are mere organisational proxies for what has become, or perhaps always was, a tribal conflict between the Tuareg Ifoghas and the Imghad, respectively (Sandor, 2017, p.23; Ahmed, 2015a). This indeed aligns with Kalyvas' (2003)

observation that local cleavages become activated in response to wider conflict, often replacing or supplanting the national or wider cleavages responsible for initiating the conflict in the first place. As such, the conflict in Mali has evolved from a civil war around competing demands for changes in the political status of the north (be it full independence, devolved federalism, or some lesser mode of reform) to tribal conflict rooted in local rivalries between the Ifoghas and the Imghad and the allies they have gathered under their respective blocs. As one northern notable argued in an interview with Ahmed (2015a), "at this stage of the Malian crisis, the masks have fallen for those who want to see them. The Malian crisis germinated on the tribal rivalry between Ifoghas and Imghad, and this fracture is more than ever visible."

However, this chapter will argue that these dividing lines are in fact not tribal, but instead rooted in new political subsets formed around emerging socio-economic power blocs. This dynamic follows from the discussion in previous chapters as to how changes in the economic environment has altered and undermined the salience of the tribal structures in the region and the tribal ties that formed them. In contrast to the common view outlined above, this has actually *decreased* the salience of traditional tribal bonds in this phase of the conflict and activated other, alternative cleavages that are more in line with the altered economic environment and attendant distribution of socio-political power.

This chapter will demonstrate that, rather than generalised ethnic violence, the situation post 2015 is continuing to reveal the underlying socio-economic logic that had been driving conflict dynamics previously, and as such has conditioned the ways in which the Plateforme and CMA have engaged with the peace process. It will begin with an overview of the key dimensions of the peace agreement and track how its implementation, or lack thereof, unfolded in the three years following its signing up until the eventual installation of interim authorities in the north in 2018. This period from 2015-2018 will track the continued clashes

and rivalries between the CMA and Plateforme as they jockeyed for territory and positions within the newly emerging governance structures of the north. The role of drug smuggling will continue to feature prominently as it not only forms a key source of funding for armed groups, but also (more importantly) has driven the territorial interests of both the CMA in the Plateforme. Indeed, the installation of the northern interim authorities in 2018, and the way in which it aligned with the power bases of the CMA and Plateforme, was a watershed moment in both the conflict and the wider history of northern Mali. As such, it stands as a natural end point to the empirical time frame of focus. It represented how the conflict had become detached from purely tribal enmities and historic rivalries to a territorialised competition between two emerging political subsets rooted in distinct socio-economic extraction systems.

The territorialisation of these two socio-economic blocs had been emerging for some time, and in a sense it represented an inevitable evolution of the region's socio-political structures in response to fundamental changes in the economic environment; however the arrival of drug smuggling in the early 2000s along with the outbreak of conflict in 2012 had supercharged the process. In situating the effects of the drug smuggling economy within the evolutions of this period, the chapter traces how the de-activation and re-activation of various competing local cleavages are rooted in a material logic that have produced these emerging political subsets. In this way, it not only sheds light on the dizzying complexity of armed group formation and alliance building in this phase of Mali's conflict, but also contributes to our wider understanding of the interaction between economic change and the dynamics of identity-based categories, such as tribal affiliation and ethnic identification, and how it relates to armed group formation.

Algiers to Anefis: Continued clashes in the year following the peace agreement

To begin, an overview of the Algiers agreement and its various dimensions is needed to demonstrate the ways in which the two movements have engaged with it in line with their broader socio-political roles. It set out a roadmap along four substantive themes. These include; Defence and Security, involving plans for disarmament, demobilisation, and re-integration of former rebels into either civil society or a reconstituted Malian military; Socioeconomic and Cultural Development focusing on the improvement of social services and infrastructure in the north; Reconciliation, Justice and Humanitarian Issues to investigate war crimes and human rights abuses; and finally, Political and Institutional Matters.[43] This latter theme has been the most challenging in terms of implementation, as it has formed a site of intense contestation between the CMA and Platform as they jockey for position and structural advantages in the creation of nascent regional institutions. As such, it has formed a significant impediment to the overall peace process, an early bottleneck behind which the other themes await unattended until the basic institutional parameters can be established (Wiklund & Nilson, 2016, p. 33).

As a starting principle, it emphasises the need for decentralisation of power from Bamako to regional assemblies and increasing the presence of northern communities in Mali's national institutions. This includes a financial transfer mechanism wherein thirty percent of the annual national budget will be allocated to the north in support of economic development and narrowing the gap with the south. It also includes the implementation of a major structural reform in the creation of two new administrative regions in the north,

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[43] All of these political themes have emerged in previous peace agreements, particularly the National Pact signed in 1992 (Pezard & Shurkin, 2015, p.5-22).

Taodenni and Ménaka, bringing the total to five along with Kidal, Gao, and Timbuktu.[44] In an effort to advance decentralised democracy, the agreement sets out that these regions are to be represented by elected regional assemblies following an interim period of six months, after which elections must occur.

The instalment of these interims authorities however would be some time off. The security situation would continue to worsen in the immediate months following the signing of the accords, as the CMA and Plateforme continued a war for position in the regions of Kidal and Menaka. Menaka was a particularly valuable possession as it forms the eastern border with Niger and encompasses many lucrative drug smuggling routes that eventually feed north into Libya (Sandor, 2017, p. 22). Many of the clashes between the CMA and the Plateforme prior to peace agreement reportedly centred around control of these vital transit points (Jublin, 2015) and while the Plateforme officially relinquished control of the city of Menaka as the condition of the accords, they retained a keen interest in the control of here and other hubs. For instance, in August, just one month after the signing of the Algiers agreement, three days of clashes broke out which saw the Plateforme gain control of the town of Anefis, "a strategic locality, in particular for the control of trafficking of all kinds", 100km from the CMA base of Kidal (Jeune Afrique, 2015).

This was a significant moment, as it represented the first violation of the ceasefire terms outlined in the Algiers Agreement signed just a month earlier, and as such led to fears for the peace process' viability. This was met with severe consternation by the international community, as well as anger from the CMA as they removed themselves from a key monitoring committee and threatened to remove themselves from the peace process

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[44] This emanated from legislation originally passed in 2012 addressing the creation of new administrative districts across the country, though the conflict gave the implementation of the two new northern districts an added urgency.

altogether unless the Plateforme retreated from their positions (Rugiririza, 2015). The concerns of the CMA revolved around the motivations and scope of the attacks, fearing they represented one of a series of upcoming steps to move on Kidal and eventually eliminate all CMA controlled territory. Such a scheme from the Platform would likely have been heavily coordinated with the Malian government, and as such represented a continued effort to eliminate the power and political aspirations of the northern Malian nobility once and for all. From early on however, local sources favoured an alternative hypothesis: that these clashes centred around control of the local trafficking route (Jeune Afrique, 2015). The proceeding days and weeks would seem to favour this interpretation as well, as a series of negotiations would take place tying together the various tribal, smuggling, and security interests in the region.

These talks took place in the town of Anefis and resulted in a "surprising détente…[and] several "honour pacts" signed on behalf of the major nomad communities in the region" (ICG, 2015). For their part, the Ifoghas and Imghad claimed to have made peace and presumably clarified the various claims and motivations surrounding Kidal. They signed a document, entitled "The Honor Pact and Social Contract, which they "commit to consensual management of their common problems at all levels: management of pastoral space, transhumance areas, salt land and water, etc." Political power would be shared, and they would work towards "the concerted and inclusive management of political affairs" while conflicts and tensions would be settled according to "their habits and customs" (Ahmed, 2015).

This 'bottom up' initiative instilled hope for the prospects for peace, with comparisons made between this Anefis Agreement and the National Pact of 1995--signed following extensive community-led dialogue that eventually brought an end to the second

Tuareg rebellion (Boutellis & Zahar, 2017). However, as others would argue, this comparison should be received with a great deal of caution given the main drivers of the talks and the role of trafficking interests. Writing in late 2015, the ICG (2015) argued,

> Although Anefis is not just about drugs, the meeting was also motivated by the desire of the main traffickers to put an end to costly disputes to restore some form of control over the disputed territories….It is above all the strong men of the armed movements, the politico-military leaders and the powerful businessmen, who led the discussions and signed these pacts…[t]here should be no mistaking who took the initiative: these are less "traditional" community leaders than politico-military leaders and businessmen at the head of armed groups.

A temporary peace ensued, "encouraged, it seems, by a sharing of the "cake" (Offner, 2016).

Thus, as opposed to the conditions around the National Pact in 1995, a better comparison would be with the calming of the situation in Gao following MUJAO's takeover in the summer of 2012. In both instances, the resumption of trade and commerce was at the forefront of the agenda for both local business leaders and the population whose livelihoods were severely impacted by the economic shutdowns the fighting caused. Indeed, as desert towns, Gao, Anefis, and Menaka rely on trade for their very material lifeblood; hence, their fates are quite literally reliant on the functioning of the wider regional trading networks (Scheele, 2012). These trade routes were re-opened following the Anefis negotiations and the circulation of good resumed. Like MUJAO's takeover of Gao, this emerged from a pragmatic arrangement between 'local business leaders' and the active armed groups of the area around pertinent issues of governance, even if, as Sandor (2017) notes, "most assume this to mean drug trafficking…" (p. 22, footnote 33).[45]

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[45] Interestingly, international mediators were excluded from these discussions, supporting the view that illicit business was on that table of discussion. It Is likely that representatives of the Malian state were present, however. (Bencherif, 2018b, p. 14).

Despite this temporary success in clarifying issues of control around Anefis, questions remained outstanding over control of Kidal which would eventually manifest in renewed tensions a few months later. On February 2, 2016, a convoy of some 250 GATIA soldiers arrived in the town of Kidal, a move which the group's general secretary claimed was allowed under agreements made in the Anefis negotiations. The CMA contested this, noting that prior notification had not been given and was thus a violation of the agreement. This set off days of negotiations, facilitated by the local MINUSMA special representative's good office, in which an eventual compromise was reached: the Plateforme would agree to decrease their military presence in Kidal in exchange for inclusion into the administrative structures of the town (UNSC, 2016a).

The formal incorporation of the Plateforme into the administration of the town would prove challenging, as the process was often sputtering, tense, and bloody. On June 6, the Plateforme expressed their frustration on the state of the power sharing, denouncing the inequitable division between themselves and the CMA in the town, "to which the CMA reacted by stating that CMA remained in charge of the management of the town" (UNSC, 2016b). Days later, on July 14, the two factions would be invited to talks in Niamey under the mediation of the government of Niger to clarify the issue and reduce tensions. On the 17th of July, an agreement was reached on the joint management of Kidal (ibid). This Niamey Declaration re-affirmed their joint commitment to "the collegial management of security in Kidal, including checkpoints", control of which, according to Bencherif (2018b), "probably also involves the distribution of crossing points and strategic sites for armed groups, but also for drug convoys" (p.24).

Despite the purported agreement, clashes between CMA and Plateforme soldiers would commence again days later and continue sporadically for the next two months. The

violence would claim dozens of soldiers on each side in addition to civilians, prompting talks on August 12 that were encouraged and mediated by the government of Mali and other regional actors (UNSC, 2016b). These talks did not prove to be successful and "no consensus was reached" on any issues pertaining to the cessation of hostilities and achieving "peaceful co-existence" between the two camps (ibid, p. 3). Clashes would persist into September, with GATIA combatants attacking a CMA checkpoint northwest of Kidal, as well as seizing a CMA position in the Algerian border town of In-Khalil (ibid).

Interim Authorities & Delayed Elections

A significant event also occurred this month in the form of a split within the CMA. In August, prominent leaders of the Daoussahak and Chamanamas communities would meet in northern Menaka to create a new armed group, the MSA, which would later officially break with the CMA and join the Plateforme.[46] By November 2016, MSA and GATIA forces were performing joint patrols throughout Menaka "to much local fanfare", underlining the strong social base upon which these groups rest (Sandor, 2017, p. 24).

At the heart of the broader tensions at this phase of the peace implementation process in late 2016 between the signatory armed movements and the government were the installation of interim regional authorities in the north.[47] As these interim authorities would administer the elections to choose their eventual democratic replacements, a lot was riding on them from the point of view of both the CMA and the Platform. "The positioning of the

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[46] The Daoussahak and Chamanamas are traditionally subservient, non-noble Tuaregs inhabiting the region south and east of Kidal. The circumstances surrounding this split and the creation of the MSA will be further detailed below.

[47] The process was already significantly delayed by this point nearly a year after the signing of the Algiers Agreement, which was supposed to produce interim authorities after three months.

groups within the interim authorities makes it possible to ensure winning the elections afterwards," noted one Tuareg leader in an interview with Bencherif (2018b, p. 18), illustrating the stakes and widespread belief that the appointment of interim authorities represented a major first step in their permanent installation into the structures of power. Both sides moved vehemently to oppose any installation of officials they deemed against their interest and maneuvered to encourage their preferred candidates. Tribal, economic, and national political interests overlaid all of this, rendering the process enormously contested, complicated, and an imposing obstacle for the peace process and establishment of stable, legitimate governance in the north.

A key issue of disagreement between the CMA and Plateforme surrounded sequencing of the establishment of these interim authorities with the commencement of joint security patrols. The CMA was adamant that the interim authorities must be established as an immediate priority, whilst the Plateforme favoured prioritising the joint patrols. This followed a general theme of the CMA taking a more strident position on the issue of interim authorities while the Plateforme seemed more content with their delay. This likely reflected the fact that, as a demographic minority, the nobles of the CMA felt that achieving a foothold with the interim authorities was critical in giving them any sort of chance to achieve a favourable outcome once elections were held. From their end, prioritizing the joint patrols allowed the Platform to continue their apparent strategy of solidifying their territorial control and continuing to encroachment into CMA territory. Indeed, taking a prominent, visible role in these joint patrols generated a good deal of local goodwill towards the GATIA, particularly as they presented themselves as solidly 'pro-trade' and aligned with local business interests, in addition to giving their military maneuvers a veneer of legitimacy.

With elections looming in November of 2016, the government finally appointed the interim authorities in the northern regions on October 14. The move was contested by the CMA, who maintained that the composition of the authorities was designed to be unfavourable to them,[48] as well as civil society and youth groups in Gao and Menaka who felt marginalised from the process and protested the removal of locally elected officials to pave the way for the new Bamako appointed authorities. In any case, the political and security situation was not sufficiently stabilised in the north in time for the November elections, which went ahead nationally but without the full participation of a number of northern municipalities in Gao, Timbuktu, and Kidal, as well as the newly formed regions of Menaka and Taoudenni. The CMA was quick to refuse the legitimacy of the elections on the grounds that interim authorities were not sufficiently established first (as dictated by the Algiers Agreement), and the long arduous process of political reconsolidation in the north plodded on (Tobie et al., 2016).

In February, the CMA and Platform would meet with the government of Mali to eventually agree on appointments of interim authorities in the five northern regions. Whilst not explicitly designed as such, the installations of these interim authorities reflected a balance of power amongst the parties, with the CMA aligned figures taking Kidal, Timbuktu, and Taoudenni, and the Plateforme taking Gao and Menaka (Jeune Afrique, 2017). This put the CMA in control of Kidal and the Algerian borderlands, the traditional homeland of the Ifoghas and nobility, whilst the Platform would control Gao, the home of GATIA leader Ag Gamou, and the borderlands of Niger.

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[48] This revolved around the government appointing their own special advisors to the regional bodies that would determine the presidencies of the administrations, thereby violating previously agreed quotas and increasing the government and, by extension, the Platform's voting power.

The broadly represented the state of play following the maneuvering of the immediate post-Algiers period: a geographic splitting of the north between the CMA and Plateforme that would roughly codify their control over their respective power bases. As is often the case, these dividing lines are porous and objects of continued contestation, particularly in the region of Kidal which saw continued clashes between CMA and Platform through July 2017 until the signing of yet another cease fire on August 23 (UNSC, 2017). Due largely to these clashes, as well as a significant increase in terrorist attacks across the north and centre of Mali, the national elections scheduled for December were postponed, once again delaying democratic elections in the north of the country which would have represented a monumental milestone in the implementation of the Algiers peace agreement.

The situation calmed significantly in the ensuring months, an outcome likely attributed to several factors, including increased deterrence mechanisms for the violation of ceasefire agreements in the form of a UN sanctions regime targeting assets and travel bans of individuals identified in violations, as well as new controls on vehicle movement requiring MINUSMA approval for convoys over five vehicles (ibid, p. 4). Another significant factor was a renewed round of direct talks between the armed movements in October, taking place once again in the town of Anefis and centring around discussion of "the root causes and consequences of the conflict" (ibid, p. 2). Like the previous iteration of Anefis talks, these meetings likely included the topic of smuggling interests and the division of routes which undoubtedly remained a key source of competition between the CMA and Plateforme.

Indeed, the role of drug trafficking, both in facilitating the Anefis Agreement, and the degree to which it is entrenched in the broader politico-economic structures of the north was an increasingly open, unignorable, and uncomfortable secret to policy makers seeking peace. As Offner (2016) notes, the narcotics trade was coming to be viewed as a sort of necessary

evil in the imposition of order across the north, embedded as it was within the broader trading networks and the material lifeblood of armed groups across the divide. "All the armed groups of Mali are suspected of playing *Mad Max* foot to the floor on the roads of the Sahara by transporting drugs. Stopping all the sand-coloured Toyota pickups and opening the trunks could reveal truths we'd rather not see." He goes on to quote a security source in Bamako: "Who are we going to run into if we start stopping and searching vehicles? Probably people with whom we are sitting at the negotiating table. We will come across our allies."

By allies, the official is undoubtedly referencing the Plateforme and forces aligned with Ag Gamou whose familial ties with Arab traders and prominent position in the Malian military places him a key broker within this complex web of political power and economic interests (Sandor, 2017).[49] This acknowledgment that the Plateforme is connected to drug smuggling seems hardly a charged accusation, as the ubiquity of the trade and its embeddedness within wider power relations renders it difficult to moralise or condemn. Indeed, by this point fewer and fewer people had the energy to condemn it as its presence within the region was increasingly taken for granted. This is evidenced by the pragmatism of the Anefis Agreement and the wider international reaction to what was commonly understood of a negotiation over narco-trafficking territory as a promising, if not awkward, step towards the stabilisation of the regional security situation. "There is a willful blindness to drug trafficking because the international community does not know what to do with it," notes Yvan Guichaoua in an interview with Offner (2016). "It relies on actors that it considers to be essential for the consolidation of peace and these same actors, even if they are not necessarily completely in the traffic, have links with the traffickers."

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[49] As noted in the previous chapter, it is well publicised that Ag Gamou's daughter is married to Chérif Ould Attaher, a Berabiche Arab from the Gao region who is considered "one of Mali's most successful alleged drug traffickers" (Sandor, 2017, p. 22).

Contextualising this relationship between the drugs trade and conflict, GATIA spokesperson Fahad Ag Almahmoud minimises the role of the former in driving the violence, though implicitly acknowledges tangential relations between those involved in trafficking and the armed group. "Drug trafficking has never been the subject of confrontations between the CMA and the Platform. *Even if parents are in there, these are their activities, that does not commit us*" [Emphasis added] (Quoted in Offner, 2016).[50] He emphasises that the recent clashes between the Plateforme and CMA has revolved around issues of leadership in the region as well as internal social tension, arguing that "neither drugs, nor terrorism, nor nationalism are at the root of this violence" (ibid).

Situating Drug Smuggling in Northern Mali's emerging power blocs

Thus we are left with the question of how to situate the role of drug smuggling at this point. For policy makers, it's presence is increasingly viewed as a fait accompli, resistance to which could only be counter-productive in the short-term. With the integrity and stability of the Malian state as the over-arching goal, drug smuggling takes on a different aura when it is associated with the strength of pro-state militias who are vital to Bamako's goal to both secure and win the peace in the north. GATIA is also a key actor in the international community's efforts against terrorist groups in the region (Sandor, 2017, p. 25), further underlining the alignment between the strength of Ag Gamou's organisation and the security interests of Mali and its international partners. However, GATIA's association with drug smuggling and the role it plays in its financial streams conceal a deeper dynamic around the

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[50] This quote from Al Almahmoud was translated from the original French, however it retains the original word, 'parent' which in French can take on a more flexible meaning to include 'relatives' or those to whom you retain some sort of relation.

relations between trade and the group's social base. Like MUJAO's entry into Gao in the summer of 2012, GATIA's initial arrival in Menaka in April 2015 was met positively by local inhabitants.[51] According to one local resident, "when the group took the city, the inhabitants came out en masse to chant its name, but its fighters immediately asked to chant the name of Mali instead" (Ahmed, 2015). This echoes the scenes in Gao years earlier, where upon MUJAO's entry into the city, a "crowd gathered in the symbolic Place des Martyrs (in memory of those who died for the independence of Mali), shouting "Mali! Mali!" and waving Malian national flags" (Raineri & Strazzari, 2015, p. 262). These scenes are striking in their similarity despite the apparent gulf of difference between the two groups, MUJAO, and GATIA, whose military success set them off. MUJAO: an AQIM splinter group of committed jihadists and proponents of the implementation of *sharia* who desecrated ancient monuments and carried out brutal executions and amputations against their enemies, and GATIA: a secular, pro-state militia led by a prominent Malian military leader and signatories of an internationally mediated peace agreement. However, we again gain clarity by overlaying the socio-economic lens to these events to see how they relate to the broader dynamics of socio-economic transformation ongoing in northern Mali.

Indeed, what was witnessed on those streets was the power of an emerging social base whose interests were not aligned with irredentist vision of an independent Azawad offered by the MNLA, but rather in the new economic landscape in which drug smuggling was a prominent but not exclusive pillar. What the residents of Gao and Menaka saw in both MUJAO and GATIA, respectively, was a force that would bring stability and allow for the

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[51] This came at a very perilous time in the Algiers peace process, signed in February by Bamako and the Plateforme, which was waiting for the agreement of the CMA (who would eventually sign in June) who were incensed at losing Menaka and threatened to not proceed with negotiations. See (Jeune Afrique & AFP, 2015).

resumption of vital commerce and trade that was essential to the maintenance of local livelihoods, regardless of their involvement in the drug trade.

Indeed, by this point in 2015, drug smuggling and the local wealth it generated had altered the economic landscape significantly. Smuggling kingpins laundered their money through the formal economy, particularly in the sectors of transport, construction, and real estate, in an effort to diversify their holdings as well as gain social status (ICG, 2018; Scheele, 2012). They also used their wealth to fund political campaigns and provide public goods, such as the building of wells and schools in addition the provision of electricity generators and religious festivals. This intertwined the licit and illicit economies, rendering it increasingly difficult to view as the latter as a "parallel" economy operating in a shadowy dark underworld that was detached from the licit activities on the surface.

For better or worse, the drug smuggling industry had largely integrated into the economic and political power structures of the region, a reality that had been developing for some time, though was now manifesting in very clear ways in the conflict arena. At this point, armed groups in Mali had used their ties to local elites involved in smuggling to build strong relations with the local civilian base. This was again exemplified by MUJAO in Gao with their provision of free electricity and financing of new bus network to transport goods and people from to the Algerian border (Agence France Press, 2012) , as well as opening up jobs for local residents to take on the menial, labour intensive tasks such as sewing buttons on uniforms and painting cars.[52] While common wisdom at the time of GATIA's arrival into Menaka in 2015, and the Anefis process some months later, was that many of the drug smuggling routes had been diverted away from Mali due to the outbreak of conflict,[53] the

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[52] These jobs paid well, carrying a monthly salary of 8-50 USD (Delsol, 2019, p. 835).
[53] Later developments led to a re-assessment of this, with a significant drug bust in the port of Guinea-Bissau in 2018 indicating the continued flow of cocaine from West African ports into the regional network of land routes east and north, of which the Menaka-Niger route was identified as a significant node. (Bish, 2019).

residual impact of the wealth it generated in the years prior would continue to assert its gravitational force across the conflict landscape.

Interviews conducted in 2018 with members of armed groups in the north by ICG suggested that drug smuggling remained the main source of funding for armed groups from both the CMA and the Plateforme (ICG, 2018, p. 13). Indeed, the supply for armed protection has grown and spread to include the smuggling of other illicit drugs as well, most notable hashish and cannabis resin, with figures related to the GATIA and MAA-Plateforme armed groups identified as accompanying such convoys (De Koning et al., 2018). The onward effect of this money ranges from direct payments to soldiers from smuggling revenues, to more indirect mechanisms wherein armed groups farm resources from local civilian populations whose economic base is awash with smuggling wealth and intertwined with the trade routes it travels and sustains. This provided a structural advantage to armed groups whose social base was aligned with the increasingly significant demographic of those who benefited from the industry. This was the case previously with MUJAO in Gao with their favourable ties with the Berabiche Arab community, as well as the GATIA in Menaka and other regional trading hubs as the Imghad found increasing common cause with other non-noble Tuareg tribes that was undoubtedly facilitated by Gamou's connections to Arab smuggling networks. This dynamic played to their favour in their initial bid to occupy the town of Menaka, as the local population reportedly encouraged their presence and beseeched them not to withdraw (Sandor, 2017). They had particularly ingratiated themselves to the Daoussahak and Chamanamas communities, who had welcomed the GATIA security missions to track down cattle thieves that were operating in the area (ibid, p. 23). These groups were traditionally subservient, non-noble Tuaregs inhabiting the region south and east of Kidal who had nonetheless remained allied to the Ifoghas and the MNLA in the early phases of the conflict through the Bamako agreement and creation of the CMA. This initial alignment represented a

relic of the Ifoghas-led CMA's ability to create and maintain a cross class coalition; however, the socio-economic class sorting that had driven so much of the early phases of alliance formation would continue to churn on inexorably.

Indeed, in August of 2016, prominent leaders of the Daoussahak and Chamanamas communities would meet in northern Menaka to create a new armed group, the MSA, officially breaking with the CMA and joining the Plateforme. By November 2016, MSA and GATIA forces were performing joint patrols throughout Menaka "to much local fanfare", underlining the strong social base upon which these groups rest (Sandor, 2017, p. 24).

This GATIA-MSA alliance under the Plateforme is viewed as a wider strategy by Ag Gamou to fragment the CMA and increase the power of the Imghad vis a vis the Ifoghas. It has thus been described in terms of Ag Gamou's co-option of the Daoussahak and Chamanamas communities via his clientelist networks that have led to the 'political capture' of key figures such Ag Acharatoumane and Assalat ag Habi, both founding members of the MNLA who were instrumental in the split that formed the MSA (Sandor, 2017, p. 23). This is all indicative of wider network of alliances that are highly fluid and inherently unstable, driven by short term convenience and the instrumentalization of social faultlines to further local power claims (Bencherif & Campana, 2017). However, one may speculate that what we are witnessing is a more fundamental re-alignment, as the distribution of political power across the region seeks to align itself with the new socio-economic landscape.

Local Cleavages and the Redrawing of Social Categories

This takes us back to the conceptual framework and the inherent relations between social categories, be is caste, class or ethnicity, and the economic sphere. In northern Mali, as in

most places, there are there are multiple overlapping identities--national (Malian), ethnic (Tuareg/ Arab), religious (Muslim), class/caste (Ifoghas/ Imghad)—that form the scaffolding of an actor's social world. As discussed in chapter two, the boundaries between these identity categories are porous and in many ways contingent on pressures from the surrounding material environment. This porosity allows actors to move amongst categories in response these pressures, such as the example of the pastoralists in Sudan moving between ethnic categories as they adopt different livelihood strategies, as well as to de-emphasise one category in favour of another (i.e.: identifying with class instead of ethnicity). This forms multiple avenues through which to seek support and security in the context of heightened levels of insecurity and instability. In this way, these overlapping social categories retain varying levels of fluidity or stability in response to wider environmental contexts. A reasonable expectation is that we would observe an increasing fluidity of social identity commitments as physical insecurity rises, such as the context of northern Mali. Indeed, as noted above, these heightened levels of violence are cited as a driving force of the 'tribalisation'/'clanisation' of the conflict as actors revert to familiar networks of support and safety. "It is in this context of generalized insecurity," Sandor (2017) notes, "where it is increasingly difficult to identify which actors are credible and not in league with one's enemies, that one's ethnic or tribal community becomes one of the surest bases on which to seek protection" (p. 20) This reflects Kalyvas' (2003) insights that 'local cleavages', generally organised by tribal or ethnic boundaries, become activated by the 'major cleavages' that define the civil war or conflict. As the major cleavage creates insecurity, the local cleavages activate in response.

These dynamics seems mechanistic and theoretically sound, yet a number of open questions persist, particularly around the nature of these local cleavages and their evolution throughout the conflict. As noted above, many overlapping local cleavages exist, thus which

ones become activated and which ones do not? What accounts for this variation? For instance, as Sandor describes the activation of local "tribal or ethnic" cleavages, it is not a minor terminological critique to point out that "tribe" and "ethnicity" are two separate (though related) things in the context of northern Mali, and thus form separate cleavages. On the one hand, we have Tuareg and Arab, two ethnic categories that define one local cleavage across the region where the two co-exist and live side by side. On the other, we have tribes: Ifoghas, Imghad, Daoussahak, Chamanamas, Kounta, Berabiche, etc. that form other categorical boundaries capable of being activated. In turn, the precise definitional boundaries of these tribal distinctions are open to contestation, underlining their permeable nature and possibility of parallel or competing cleavages around them. Take Bencherif's (2017) note on the Imghad for instance:

> Even though Imghad is generally associated with the "vassal" caste, the term is currently often used as the equivalent of "tribe". This term is, however, more complex. It designates a caste but for some, it can also mean a united political sub-set due to its common origins that cut across all of northern Mali (p. 14).

The post-Anefis alliance formation amongst the GATIA and MSA illustrates this tension, as on the one hand it could at once be described as a heterogeneous tribal coalition of Imghad, Daoussahak, Chamanamas, whilst on the other it could be presented as a homogenous *caste* movement of the region's vassal classes. This changes the conception of Ag Gamou and GATIA as tribal entrepreneurs co-opting their neighbours in an effort to strengthen their power vis a vis their traditional enemy (the Ifoghas), but rather presents them as vanguards of an emerging "political sub-set" that is increasingly trans-tribal and oriented around their common origins in the northern Malian class structure. Here we see local cleavages animated by tribe becoming de-activated in favour of others, namely, those rooted in class and caste. So what is driving this shift in salience from tribal to class cleavages? Here

we can insert the changes in the economic environment, covered extensively by this point, that have created a newly empowered social constituency whose common histories of perceived exploitation by the prevailing nobility and shared interest in the emerging economic trends have strengthened their bonds with each other whilst concomitantly strengthening their differences with the nobility.

This very much aligns with the theory of ethnicity and identity development, whereas, as Hyden (2005) notes, "a shared sense of purpose may come about as a result of people feeling marginalized or excluded from access to resource. People become aware of their common identity by virtue of a shared experience of exploitation, oppression, or exclusion (p. 188)." He maintains however that this "does not necessarily become a factor in politics without someone first being able to articulate a common identity and mobilize action based on any such claim" (ibid). This opens the door to 'ethnic entrepreneurs' to give voice to these concerns and mobilize people around them. Does this describe the figure of Ag Gamou, a conflict entrepreneur instrumentalising grievances and senses of historic marginalisation to agitate against his own perceived enemies and further his personal or parochial interests? Again, this could serve as one reading, but a rather surface level and unconvincing one.

First, there is very little evidence in his nearly four decades on the Malian political scene to suggest he fits the mould of an ethnic agitator or rabble rouser. He certainly would not have advanced so far in his career in the Malian military had he been so. While it is true that states often find ethnic conflict entrepreneurs useful and co-opted them to pursue various indirect governance strategies, they rarely if ever invite them into the formal power centres of the state. In interviews and public statements, he routinely speaks in national terms and presents himself as a Malian whose cause is "the restoration of the authority of the State," across the north (L'Enquêteur, 2018). He rarely speaks in ethnic or tribal terms, and his

description as an "Imghad" leader pursuing explicitly tribal-based goals comes from others, mostly his opponents. Indeed, this appears to be a framing of his role in the conflict from which he consciously distances himself, from let alone amplifies himself. Besides, given his position as a pro government actor against the project of an independent as Azawad, it is officially his position that he would have preferred this conflict not to begin in the first place.

Second, such an instrumentalist view of these local cleavages treats them, once again, as exogenous *a priori* entities, whose existence is taken for granted, or at the very least left unexplained. As such, they passively await activation by exogenous forces (the ethnic entrepreneur in this case). Such a view of these social institutions would place us at odds with the theoretical perspective outlined in chapters two and three, while failing to capture the fluid dynamics of cleavage activation and realignment occurring in the conflict.

This instead supports the view that he is a manifestation of more foundational forces, a process of social realignment occurring from the bottom up in response to changing socio-economic conditions. The 'horizontalisation' of this phase of the conflict can thus be conceived as the process by which different local cleavages have become activated, a process rooted in the inherent relations of these social cleavages to economic conditions and thus following an endogenous logic of change.

The dynamics of this change can be viewed at various time scales, with the longue durée lens focusing back on the social structures of the region in the period immediately preceding independence. As outlined in chapter four, the local cleavages were organised around a division of material functions which mapped onto one's tribal identity. In fact, these material or economic functions dictated the boundaries and definitions of these tribal identities themselves. The nobility were the warrior class whose mastery of the camel, a feature hypothesised to be rooted in earlier migrations of Berber people into the Sahara, was

utilised to facilitate long distance desert trade. They also routinely conducted raids on neighbouring peoples, the spoils from which formed crucial patronage and distribution networks that created and sustained vertical ties of material dependents. These vertical ties of dependency were also held in place by the protective function provided by this warrior class against raiders from other confederations.

For their part, the dependents reared and protected the herds of the nobility and provided various other functions vital to their military readiness and existence as a warrior class. Sustaining all of this was the agriculture and labour of various tribes designated as slaves, generally sedentary agriculturalists, in contrast to the 'free' classes above who engaged in pastoralism. This direct association with tribal identity and economic function/privileges is what has led to the use of the term 'caste' to describe these categories, fixed as they were to describe one's relation to the broader socio-economic system, as system which in turn has been described as feudal (Heath, 2005, p. 7; Prasse, 1995, pp. 16-17).

However, as argued in chapter four, these categories become contested as this broader socio-economic system changes, as it did throughout the second half of the twentieth century in the transition away from the traditional 'camel culture'. The vertical relations between the nobility and dependents, and the social privileges and obligations associated with them, were no longer propped up by any sort of economic logic as the use and value of camels and other livestock had declined significantly with the arrival of modern vehicles and navigational technology. As such, these vertical boundaries which delineated many of these tribal categories became a mere relic of the past, a vestigial holdout from a socio-economic system which has less and less relevance to the daily lives of the people in the region. This rendered these boundaries extremely vulnerable to contestation and conflict, as those who stood on the bottom of the power hierarchies they created could ask increasingly salient questions as to the

fairness and rationality of the system, while those at the top had little in the way of material leverage to discourage this.

One key feature of such a systemic transformation is social mobility, wherein one's ability to engage in various forms of economic activity and accumulate material resources is no longer fixed to a specific role dictated by membership to a particular group. Hyden (2005) describes this dynamic within the wider context of social change and the decreasing salience of ethnic categories in Africa in response to the neoliberal economic reforms of the 1990s:

> …with growing competition comes the possibility that groups become more aware of their relative worth and tensions among them increase. The insecurity that is often associated with enhanced competition easily translates into greater social consciousness. Alternatively, competition, especially in the market, may spur greater social mobility—and this may have consequences for the effectiveness of the gatekeeper factors to maintain ethnic boundaries (p. 189).

Two parallels with the contemporary situation in northern Mali stick out. One is the increasing 'social consciousness' that emerges from economic changes that de-value former ascriptive boundaries, leading individuals to move away from them in favour of identifying with social class as a more relevant categorising tool to makes sense of the socio-economic world around them and the particular opportunities and challenges they face in it. This leads to the second, which is the increasingly inability of 'gatekeeper factors' to maintain non-class boundaries, such as ethnicity or tribe, as the economic logic that underlined them degrades and with it the material leverage traditional leaders could use to police boundaries.

What we are witnessing in northern Mali is the increasingly social consciousness of the non-noble Tuareg tribes who are organising along lines of socio-economic class as opposed to the tribal distinctions of before. This is informed by their common experience over the past half century of inhabiting a subordinate position in wider Tuareg society that

was increasingly detached from the contemporary economic reality, and as such fostered grievances with the noble tribes, particularly the Ifoghas, who continued to possess outsized political and social power despite this. From their end, the nobility struggled to counter-act this, as the material leverage they traditionally maintained by their vital function in the former socio-economic system was all but gone and with it their ability to discipline subordinates or address their grievances in any real way. The stark reality is that there is very little way to discipline and control a dependent if they are no longer an actual dependent.

This is the broader dynamic of social change in northern Mali and the ways in which it is driving various elements of the conflict. As it was crucial in the formation of the CMA and Plateforme (particularly in the dividing line between them), it continued apace in later, post-Algiers phases of alliance structuring, such as the creation of the MSA and its move from the CMA to the Plateforme. It was built on a common grievance among Daoussahak fighters who, according to Sandor (2017), "began to develop grievances with the CMA leadership, who they perceived to be dominated by Ifoghas notables" (p. 23). This grievance against domination by the Ifoghas is interesting in its ubiquity throughout the conflict timeline, and in turn what is says about the contemporary state of social consciousness in northern Mali wherein power differentials in favour of the Ifoghas, and traditional nobility more broadly, is viewed as illegitimate and unacceptable by default. A stark difference to the former socio-economic system in which such a power differential was as a fundamental starting point and undergirded by wider material relations.

As communal tensions surrounding the role of the Ifoghas within the CMA embroiled the movement, many groups such as the MSA branched off in large part to the fact that they, as Sandor (2017) notes, "grew closer to Gamou's vision of the Ifogha" (p. 23), that is of an exploitative and illegitimate group whose domination can and should be organised against.

This is a key moment illustrating the transition from one local cleavage to another as the vertical bonds of the Tuareg traditional tribal structure broke in favour of new trans-tribal groupings organised around class and common perceptions of exploitation and grievance. However, were one to insist on a framing of the conflict as persisting along tribal cleavages, being essentially a power contest between the Ifoghas and Imghad, it would be worth allowing these events to inform a broader reconsideration of the term 'tribe' and its various competing interpretations. Indeed, the term Imghad, as noted above, has long carried a certain ambiguity that has reflected broader power claims and agitation around social and political hierarchies.[54]

The long running existence of various interpretations by local actors, particularly the rejection of many so-called Imghad of their subordinate or dependent status, speak to an underlying aspiration for hierarchical change and social reform that nonetheless had a limited ability to realise itself. We can harken back to the 1990s and the *Ischumar* culture that developed as an early manifestation of this, while the particular circumstances of the termination of the second Tuareg rebellion (namely the creation of the Ifoghas-dominated MFUA and its subsummation of the ARLA and other armed groups formed the serve non-noble constituencies) indicated its limited ability for realisation. While the economic changes in the last decades of the twentieth century (particularly the effects from the introduction of the vehicle, navigational technology, as well as increasing urbanisation and spread of education) opened the space for these aspirations to be articulated, they did not bestow this emerging social constituency with the means to fully challenge the prevailing hierarchies. It was not until the decisive changes in the smuggling economy some decades later where this would occur, as this 'united political subset' has gained the resources to become major

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[54] See Lecocq (2005, pp. 45-48) for wider discussion of the vagaries and tensions around the construction of social status categories amongst the Tuareg in the post-colonial period.

political players in their own right. The Plateforme is their military arm, and the Imghad are a rallying point, if not a symbol, for a broader collection of groups whose tribal distinctions are withering in favour of new lines of social connectivity that is reflective of the modern socio-economic environment.

It is important to note that such 'social consciousness' and this class-based organising is not explicit nor part of consciously created Marxist-like revolution in northern Malian society. Instead, it is a natural result of changes in the economic environment that are creating new pressures on older ties of dependency and control and empowering new constituencies capable of organising around and pursuing their common interests—and particularly against those who stand resistant these changes. In Mali, as well as in Africa more generally, such a redrawing and reformation of social boundaries is relatively common when ethnic and tribal boundaries are not overlaid with religious and/or linguistic differences, which are generally more intransigent and difficult to traverse (Hyden, 2003). This is undoubtedly a relevant context to the development of this political subset in Mali where, despite traditional tribal differences, common religious affiliation in the form of Islam and a shared Tamasheq language facilitate trans-tribal identities. In turn, the multi-ethnic nature of both the CMA and Platform, bringing together the traditional nobility and subservients, respectively, of the Malian Arab community are likewise smoothed by a shared adherence to Islam despite linguistic differences that themselves are mediated by the existence of French as a *lingua franca.*

Concluding remarks

This chapter has traced how the local cleavages activated by the conflict and instability in northern Mali have themselves undergone a process of evolution, as changes in the economic environment have encouraged new avenues of affiliation and shared purpose that stand

against traditional tribal categories. This leads to an argument that the CMA and Plateforme are better described as political subsets defined by factors rooted in socio-economic rather than tribal cleavages. This has implications for our understanding of the dynamics of conflict in Mali, as the prevailing view of the tribal nature of these division in the north undersell the durability of the affiliations between the armed groups and social bases under the organisational umbrellas of the CMA and the Plateforme. Indeed, rather than temporary, *ad hoc* alliances between distinct tribal units made on an instrumental basis, these umbrella structures represent emerging power blocs whose ties and interests are deeply rooted in the contemporary social and economic structures of the region. As such, they are likely to persist into the future as their political power and interests become more and more reflective of these socio-economic realities.

In addition, this leads us to re-assess the relation of these local cleavages to the main cleavage at the initial phases of the conflict, that is, the political status of the north. It has indeed been common to dismiss the salience of the wider cleavages as the conflict entered this 'horizontal' or 'tribalized' phase, as they have been increasingly overtaken by these local dynamics that take on a logic of their own. In this way the conflict has been seen to have progressed beyond the initial divide over sovereignty and statehood and towards a more localised affair with its own internal logics. However, if we understand how the cleavage between the CMA and Platform are rooted in the various economic interests and opportunities emanating from this original question of sovereignty—particularly the issues of borders and trade—we see the that the conflict in fact continues to revolve around it. Indeed, the natural alliance between the Plateforme and the Malian state in support of the country's continued territorial integrity is largely rooted in the systems of extraction within the smuggling economy that are held up by this status quo arrangement. Thus, instead of evolving past this issue, this phase of Mali's conflict continues to witness the structuring

effect of this central cleavage, if only one knows where to look for it. This is indeed akin to what Kalyvas notes as cases where "local cleavages may lose all autonomy and turn into mere local manifestations of the central cleavage." This is perhaps the irony of reframing these local cleavages in light of their socio-economic logics, as it shows how they in fact turn on the central issues of statehood and sovereignty that impelled the conflict in the first place.

Finally, this underscores the overarching argument of this thesis regarding the intertwined nature of social and economic categories, as the traditional tribal affiliations have rested upon a socio-economic logic that drove relations of power and dependency. As changes in the wider economic environment undermined these traditional relations, new socio-economic logics have emerged that are reshuffling the balance of power in the region and the social categories that mediate it. This is driven by the emergence of new economic industries and systems of extraction that have conditioned the interests and capabilities of formerly marginalised actors, forming new alliance structures around these interests and laying the groundwork for new, territorialised power blocs in the north. These power blocs will likely drive conflict and politics in the north into the future, as well re-draw many of the prevailing social categories around it as much of the moral and ideological scaffolding that supported previous socio-economic hierarchies (particularly the *sherifien* status of the Ifoghas and Kounta Arabs)[55] will likewise evolve to reflect the new reality. Just how this will manifest is unclear, but this stands as an exciting pathway of research to track the dynamics of structural transformation at a local level and the ways in which social and economic landscapes interact and come to terms with themselves, justifying and explaining each other to form an intertwined and mutually constituted socio-economic system.

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[55] This denotes their believed descent from the Prophet Muhammad.

Chapter 8

Conclusion: Theoretical Contributions and Avenues of Future Research

By the time of the installation of the interim authorities in 2018, the political geography of northern Mali had become territorialised around two socio-economic constituencies: the CMA representing the traditional nobility and the Plateforme, largely composed of formerly subordinate tribes. Despite intense contestation and clashes with the Plateforme, the CMA continued to control their historic homeland of Kidal and the region along the Algerian border. In turn, the Plateforme's power base solidified to the southeast, controlling the regions of Gao and Menaka, including the crucial smuggling routes to Niger and border towns along the frontier. Indeed, the Algerian and Nigerien borders each form key pillars of economic activity and the extraction regimes that underpinned these emerging power structures.

The role of smuggling in creating and maintaining these territorialised power blocs ties the politics of northern Mali into a wider regional network of material connectivity and exchange that represents an essential context to its changing conflict dynamics. As argued throughout the previous chapters, changes in the smuggling economy, particularly the arrival of Andean cocaine, undermined prevailing power structures in the region and promoted an environment conducive to increased factionalism and fragmentation as formerly marginalized actors began to be able to independently acquire the resources needed to become conflict actors in their own right. The formation of the Imghad Tuareg-led Plateforme as an independent bloc standing in opposition to the Ifoghas-dominated CMA represents a clear crystallisation of this dynamic, whilst a comparison with previous iterations of conflict in northern Mali reveals its development in connection with material relations of dependency and control.

This final, concluding chapter summarises the conflict history of Mali covered in the preceding four chapters with a focus on how the region's social and economic structures have evolved to produce a progressively more complex conflict landscape. It then moves to a discussion of the main theoretical takeaways from this thesis, mainly the dual socio-economic structures under which armed groups operate and the economic/material contingencies associated with social capital. This is situated within the social institutionalist literature on armed group formation and fragmentation in an effort to correct what I argue is it's 'over-socialised' approach. This leads to a number of questions regarding the effects of economic change on conflict areas that such a perspective is placed to address.

It then proceeds to briefly situate the role of the smuggling economy within a number competing/parallel explanations in the interest of accounting for the broader complexities and nuances at play in the proliferation of armed groups in Mali. Indeed, this thesis does not seek to present the emergence of these economic dynamics as a sole driver of Mali's conflict dyanamics, but rather as a crucial and salient context that is indispensable in accounting for how and why the conflict has developed as it had. As will be detailed below, there are many additional factors that, whilst outside the scope of this thesis, clearly have played a significant role. This includes the availability of weapons and return of experienced factors in the wake of Libya's collapse, the active divide and rule strategies by the Malian state, the spread of extremist jihadi ideologies.

This chapter then moves to propose avenues of future research as well as initial, preliminary analyses that can serve as valuable starting points. The first is regards to migrant smuggling, and the ways it is re-enforcing or counter-acting the trends outlined in relation to drug smuggling. It presents an early hypothesis that the rapid growth in the migrant smuggling economy inaugurated a moment of socio-economic alignment that would work in

favour of the Ifoghas and other traditionally dominant social actors. This is due to its nature as a traditionally low value trade, not requiring the type of start-up capital and state involvement that precluded them from the drug trade. In this way it more resembles the prevailing staples trade discussed in chapter five that aligns with traditional social structures.

It finally proposes an expansion of geographic focus to consider the effects of these dynamics in the smuggling economy to the conflict in Libya. Whilst outside the scope of this thesis, a comparison between dynamics in southern Libya and northern Mali could present a fruitful research agenda, particularly into the role of the state in mediating power relations in peripheral regions where cross border smuggling stands as a key economic pillar.

Summarising Mali's Conflict History

The First Tuareg Rebellion in 1960, represents a solid analytical base from which to compare later changes in the material relations of dependency and control. As outlined in chapter four, it represents the case of a conflict in which the broad organisational structure of traditional Tuareg society was largely intact despite showing the early signs of fraying which would only intensify as technological advancement and globalisation hastened its grip. The reliance on camel-based transport and superior desert navigational skills allowed the Ifoghas to assume control of the fighting with little internal challenge, as their position atop the socio-economic hierarchy of the region was undergirded by a solid endowment of both material and social capital. This regional 'camel culture' rested upon control and use of the camel as a key mode of transport and exchange, as well as the system of warfare and raiding that facilitated crucial patronage regimes and vectors of dependency between the Ifoghas and subordinate tribes. Indeed, as this conflict unfolded in a material environment in which the use and

possession of camels was paramount, it was simply not possible to mobilise against the one social group whose mastery of the camel was unrivalled.

This situation would change with the outbreak of the so-called Second Tuareg Rebellion of the 1990s as the conflict would witness the introduction of new groups and actors who did not exist in any meaningful way during the first rebellion. This would be a reflection of the changing socio-economic environment of the region over the intervening decades as the traditional 'camel culture' dissipated and undermined the power hierarchies and relations of domination/subservience that existed within it. The social capital that greased the wheels of these hierarchies was losing power as the economic circumstances it was contingent upon changed. In turn, the social bases through which the Tuareg could mobilise violence had also changed as the socio-economic structures that governed life in the region shifted. As these structures shifted, so too did the means through which political power and control could and would be exercised. No longer were the Ifoghas the only voice emanating from the Tuareg north, as traditionally subservient groups, in particular the Imghad, emerged as a prominent force in their own right. These groups not only voiced their interests and demands during the rebellion in parallel to the Ifoghas, but also took on the traditional warrior class directly. This was manifested in the emergence of groups such as the FPLA and ARLA, which were formed to represent the interests of the non-noble tribes of the north, and their ability to mobilise their constituencies with a modicum of independence from the traditional power bases of the nobility. This independent mobilising ability, however, was limited and short-lived, as these groups were eventually subsumed into an umbrella group, the MFUA, which was dominated by an alliance between the Ifgohas and Kounta Arab and set the rebels' terms for the eventual cessation of hostilities.

This comparatively more fragmented conflict landscape was rooted in dynamics that would only accelerate through the coming decade, as changes in the economic environment would continue to obliterate old systems of dependency and create new avenues of contention. As outlined in chapters four and five, these changes were a continuation of what had been occurring over the past few decades. Modernity introduced new resources and modes of economic circulation that displaced the previous socio-economic balance. Just as the erosion of the 'camel culture' informed the movement structure of the conflict in the 1990s, the socio-economic changes of the late 1990s and early 2000s would structure the nature of the conflict in 2012. These socio-economic changes promoted the emergence of new conflict actors with the independent organising ability to assert their own interests.

The region became a hub for transnational smuggling enterprises that would introduce new resources into pre-existing trade networks and, in turn, alter the social networks that were embedded within them. These new resources would transform the socio-economic structures around the ever-vital trading networks of the desert, inaugurating a qualitative change which, as Scheele (2012) observed, promoted "unheard-of possibilities of social mobility, and has thereby put pressure on older ties of solidarity, dependency, and moral control" (p. 96). This, I argue, serves as the crucial context for understanding the unprecedented complexity of Mali's post-2012 conflict landscape and the drivers of armed group fragmentation that drove it. This was evident in the conflict's early stages where, like the 1990s, the unity of the rebel movement quickly disintegrated and the underlying material tensions within the northern Malian political landscape began to surface.

As argued in chapter six, in response to this altered economic landscape, traditionally marginalised actors from the non-noble Arab and Tuareg classes, mainly the Berabiche and Imghad, respectively, animated an alternative network that was more aligned with the

material reality of the region. This was a product of a new socio-economic environment that had fundamentally altered the balance of power between these rival social groups. In this case the power of resources proved decisive, not only in the process of armed group and alliance formation, but also in conditioning the interests of these groups themselves. In terms of armed group formation, there were approximately eight recognizably distinct armed groups that emerged throughout the 1990s (Togo, 2002); while, in the current conflict, there are approximately 32 (Desgrais, Guichaoua, & Lebovich, 2018), a majority of which are rumoured to have some link to the narco-smuggling economy. In turn, these groups are formally collated into two distinct movements, the CMA and the Plateforme, in contrast to the single MFUA two decades prior. The emergence and strength of the Plateforme is particularly striking, as it indicates a level of brokerage and independent organising ability that was clearly outside the realm of possibility for the subaltern classes in the 1990s.

Whilst any sense of misaligned interests between themselves and the Ifoghas had produced mere misgivings during previous iterations of conflict, the creation of the Plateforme represented a full-on rebellion; not against the Malian state, but against the Ifoghas and traditional power structures of the north. In fact, not merely an untargeted third party, the Malian state now represented a key ally to the Plateforme as the two entities shared not only a common enemy in the Ifoghas but also an interest in the preservation of Mali's territorial integrity and the illicit cross-border economies it sustained.

The restoration of this territorial integrity was indeed key in animating the Malian-aligned Plateforme, as "the emergence of a newly proclaimed state of Azawad in April 2012 replaced Mali's formal sovereignty at the heart of international smuggling routes, thereby upsetting the equilibria between powerful local interests'" (Raineri & Strazzari, 2015, p. 265). Hence, the shifting socio-economic landscape not only gave subaltern actors the ability to

assert their interests, but also impacted those interests themselves as their reliance on illicit smuggling revenues endowed the Plateforme with a massive stake in the preservation of the political orders that facilitated them.

In addition, as was discussed in chapter six, the growing footprint of Al Qaeda and other jihadist groups would facilitate these tensions further as they formed yet another node of resources and opportunities around which these local intra-ethnic and social rivalries could play out. Thus, the ethnic and social divisions that structured the splits and divisions along which the conflict has unfolded concealed an underlying material tension between the traditional power structures and those who threatened to upend the proper ordering of socio-economic life.

Indeed, this split amongst the armed insurgents of the north, with one side fighting for full independence and the other merely pushing for increased autonomy, aligns almost perfectly with the socio-economic shift that emerged throughout the introduction of the narco-smuggling economy prior to the conflict. In fact, one may plausibly argue that it was this rather abrupt socio-economic shift that led to the outbreak of conflict in the first place. This highlights the intertwined relationship between social institutions and the surrounding material environment. However, this was not merely a case of resources infecting the Tuareg movement with infighting and conflict, but it is rather an instance of an evolving economic landscape undermining the socio-economic basis upon which the Ifoghas maintained power. The introduction of narcotics smuggling in the 2000s almost immediately altered the economic environment in a way that precluded the ability of the prevailing leadership to retain material leverage over subservient classes. In turn, these subservient actors were well positioned to capitalise on this particular industry given their structural position within the regional social hierarchy and the way this related to the state's governance strategy. In sum, it

was a combination of particular social features and the nature of the resource that determined how and why the introduction of narcotics smuggling empowered certain actors over others.

Direct Theoretical Contributions to the Literature

This brings us back to the conceptual notion of social capital itself as an economically contingent resource that is rooted in specific social, political, and economic contexts. When these contexts change, any remaining social capital linked to them quickly loses its potency. The stock of social capital possessed by the noble Tuareg and Arab tribes was developed in an era where their mastery of the camel, strategic position of their homelands in key mountain passes, and unrivalled local navigational knowledge were essential to the functioning of the wider socio-economic system. This pre-existing social capital has since degraded in line with changes in the economic environment, which has itself reformed the socio-economic system to value different functions. These functions involve links with state and trans-national actors to facilitate the illicit trade of narcotics and other high-value, small-bulk resources, links to which the Imghad and other non-noble tribes were structurally positioned to develop given their historic rivalries with the nobility and how this aligned with the state's governance strategy.

By highlighting the role of material factors in driving the conflict dynamics in Mali, we gain a fuller understanding of its complexities and the role of resource control in mediating the power relations inherent in northern Malian society. It is these social power relations which in turn structure the contours of armed group formation and the alliance structures which have emerged. Beyond fleshing out this empirical story, this contributes to a re-evaluation of many of the ontological assumptions of much of the literature on armed

group formation and fragmentation. In contrast to a purely economic or social institutionalist approach, the story of Mali's conflict evolution speaks to how material and social forces interact to drive the organisational processes of armed groups.

By understanding these structures as socio-economic in nature, we are better placed to predict and understand certain endogenous processes of change which can occur in the event of economic transformation. This lends itself to certain questions that can and should be asked in areas either currently engaged in or prone to conflict, such as how an increasing or decreasing availability of a resource will impact local power hierarchies or empower certain subgroups over others. For instance, this can be seen as an indirect yet crucial knock-on effect of increased interdiction efforts against illicit trafficking that diverts flows towards or away from certain areas. With a grounded understanding of the material bases of local socio-political power structures, it can be anticipated how the arrival or diversion of this resource will interface with these local power regimes and the constituencies that stand to be undermined or empowered by it. This will not only speak to the balance of power between competing social groups, but also potentially activate faultlines that had previously lain dormant as traditionally marginalised groups acquire the material means to challenge prevailing hierarchies. This was the case with the Tuareg in northern Mali, as internal social faultlines became increasingly activated through successive iterations of rebellion as the Imghad and other subordinate groups challenged the social authority of the Ifoghas to represent the interests and demands of the wider community. In this way, new conflict actors emerge to assert independent claims as the distribution of opportunity structures widens, adding increasing layers of complexity to conflict landscapes. Indeed, whereas observers of the First Tuareg Rebellion in the 1960s, and even the first few weeks of later conflicts, may be prone to view 'the Tuareg' as a largely monolithic movement synonymous with the cause of the elite (Ifoghas, in this case), later developments would reveal a much more complex

landscape as subordinate groups emerged in response to changes in the economic environment. In short, it was largely a function of economic change which elevated the Imghad Tuareg and other subordinate groups as independent conflict actors in their own right.

In terms of the wider theoretical literature on armed group formation and fragmentation, these findings encourage a focus on the material contingencies associated with the social capital and endowments of armed groups. As described in chapter three, social capital is viewed in the current literature as a highly salient resource with which successful armed groups organise themselves and maintain cohesion and order. This is most clearly demonstrated in the works of Staniland and Weinstein, whose conceptualisation of social ties and social endowments, respectively, stand as key analytical leverage points they use to explain a range of outcomes in terms of armed groups cohesion and control. This thesis does not challenge these frameworks per se, but rather interrogates their ontological assumptions to emphasise the relations these social resources maintain with the material realm.

This was outlined in the discussion of the work of Robert Putnam and other scholars central to producing the concepts and theoretical content of the social institutionalist literature, highlighting how the contemporary economic conditions of Medieval Italy were important contextual factors in explaining the development and production of social capital. In turn, the application of this insight to cases of armed group formation and fragmentation in chapter three – namely the LTTE in Sri Lanka, the Taliban, and the LURD in Liberia – highlighted that the wider economic context is an ever-present factor in explaining the organisational processes and dynamics of these groups. This context largely centred around the ability of an armed group to develop an independent resource base that is controllable by the leadership, which is itself a function of the structural features of the wider economic

environment. In the case of conflict in northern Mali, the structural features of the mid-century 'camel culture' promoted centralised control on the part of the Ifoghas Tuareg, who retained a privileged advantage in the use of camels and thus the wider economic systems in which it was a crucial component. This translated to an ability to possess unrivalled control of the armed movement against the Malian state in the first Tuareg rebellion, an ability which progressively weakened as the economic structures of northern Mali changed through the second half of the 20th century and first decade of the 21st. As argued in chapter six, this was a case of the social capital of the Ifoghas losing its potency as its wider economic contingencies were severed, rendering it much less capable of being mobilised to control the wider Tuareg movement.

In regard to the social institutionalist framework of Staniland, this understanding of the wider economic contingencies associated with social ties can add valuable nuance and avenues of change. In particular, Staniland describes vertical ties between organisers of armed groups and local communities as integral elements in promoting an integrated movement capable of maintaining strong processes of command and control. These vertical ties are "created by relations of information, trust, and belief," and thus serve as "social anchors that organizers can call upon to align extralocal goals and imperatives with local action" (Staniland, 2014, p. 22). In turn, weak vertical ties denote the absence of such relations between armed groups and local communities, rendering groups vulnerable to processes of fragmentation down the line. In this way, Staniland's model describes vertical social ties in a binary sense: strong/weak that correspond with their presence or absence, respectively. However, if we apply this to the case of the Tuareg, particularly the vertical relations between the Ifoghas and Imghad, this presents a more muddled picture. In this case, strong vertical ties did not necessarily promote positive processes of integration. In fact, in some ways, these ties promoted the opposite.

As outlined previously, the relations between the Ifoghas as the traditional nobility atop the Tuareg social hierarchy and subordinate groups such as the Imghad took on a caste-like dynamic with elements of inherited privilege, perceived exploitation, and unequal access to resources. This embedded a level of ambient grievance amongst the Imghad and other subordinate Tuareg groups towards the Ifoghas that was key in animating a number of fragmentations throughout Mali's conflict history as the former resented the latter's near hegemonic control of the Tuareg movement. In this way, the vertical ties between them were not steady pillars of integration, but rather faultlines whose activation stood primed to create tension. This suggests a nuanced interrogation beyond the binary framework of strong/weak, present/absent, and their attendant associations with processes of integration or fragmentation, respectively, to consider the nature of these vertical ties and power dynamics and hierarchies that form them. In such a case, the local actors may hold feelings of exploitation and grievance against the organisers of the rebellion, forming a structural vulnerability in the emerging organisation that forms the seeds of future fragmentation. Staniland himself hints at this when he describes "the double-edged sword of social embeddedness," noting that "although social connections keep armed groups fighting, they also create vulnerabilities," particularly when a shift occurs in the coalitional dynamics of local groups and their alliance structures (2014, p. 36).

He lays out a number of mechanisms with which insurgent or counter-insurgent forces build or destroy vertical social ties, one of which – local disembedding – appears to most closely resemble the process of fragmentation amongst the Tuareg throughout Mali's conflict history. Local disembedding refers to the process in which the state or counter-insurgent forces sever the vertical ties between armed groups and their social bases, often by creating "locally rooted security forces, sponsor[ing] 'flipped' former militants…and establish[ing] pervasive social control on the ground" (ibid, p. 51). This indeed resembles the Malian state's

divide and rule strategy in the north, empowering non-noble groups by selectively permitting their involvement in the lucrative drug smuggling trade and sponsoring local militia figures such as Ag Gamou, the Imghad leader of the GATIA armed group. This was part and parcel of their wider governance strategy in the north and efforts to undermine and weaken the Ifoghas Tuareg and their ability to mobilise future rebellions. The conflict dynamics in the most recent conflict speak to the effectiveness of this strategy, particularly the enormous difficulties faced by the Ifoghas in maintaining effective command and control of the wider movement in addition to the unprecedented opposition mobilised against them in the Plateforme. Where this case deviates, however, is Staniland's emphasis on state agency in accounting for this process, noting it as a "resource- and time- intensive counterinsurgency strategy" that often entails "massive army and police resources" over a sustained period of time (ibid, p. 52). This does not reflect the Malian case, as the resources did not flow from the state but rather were extracted locally from the smuggling economy, a process which was itself embedded in and intertwined with socio-economic forces endogenous to the regional social context. Of course, as outlined in chapter six, the state's role as a gatekeeper was crucial to how and why these smuggling resources entered the region and were distributed in the way they were; however one may certainly overstate the degree to which this was a conscious strategic decision exclusively driven by concerns over the governance of the north, rather than other forces of corruption and patronage exclusive to the politics of the south. It is undoubtedly some combination of both, but the point remains that attributing state agency is particularly difficult in this case, not least because of the clandestine and illicit nature of this strategy, but also because state policy at this scale is an inherently complex and multi-dimensional process, often driven by multiple or competing concerns and replete with unintended and unpredictable consequences. What this case demonstrates instead is how this process of local disembedding can emerge from more endogenous processes wherein changes

in economic circumstances shift local balances of power, activating previously dormant social faultlines that weaken the vertical ties that had previously followed the contours of this social hierarchy. There is indeed a general focus in the literature that dramatic changes in resource flows emanate from states or other institutions capable of quickly shifting large amounts of supplies or money; what this case shows is that dramatic changes in the resource landscape which are salient to conflict dynamics can emerge from bottom-up processes in addition to these 'top-down', or state-based, sources.

Broader drivers of fragmentation: weapons, the state, and jihadist ideology

The availability of weapons was identified early on as a driver of instability and conflict across the region in the wake of Libya's collapse. In its final report, the UNSC's Panel of Experts concluded that the spread and trafficking of weapons out of Libya was fueling "conflict and insecurity – including terrorism – on several continents" most notably the Sahelian region of Africa. In regard to Mali, the panel notes "repeated reports regarding arms transfers…to Ansar Eddine. The deliveries are allegedly composed of light weapons, such as Zastava M80 assault rifles, anti-tank weapons and explosives" (UNSC, 2014, p. 51). Further, Mohktar Belmokhtar himself confirmed to the Mauritanian news agency ANI in November 2011 that "We have been one of the main beneficiaries of the revolutions in the Arab world…As our acquisition of Libyan armaments that is an absolutely natural thing" (as cited in Marsh, 2017, p. 79). The sheer ubiquity of weaponry appeared to benefit rebelling forces across the spectrum, with a spokesperson for the MNLA, ag Acharatoumane, noting in

March of 2012,[56] "[t]he Libyan crisis shook up the order of things…A lot of our brothers have come back with weapons" (as cited in Nossiter, 2012). One local mayor of a town outside the northern city of Menaka angrily cast blame on the West's intervention in Libya and the cascading effect it had on stability in the region. "The Westerners didn't want Qaddafi, and they got rid of him, and they created problems for all of us," he argued. "When you chased Qaddafi out in that barbaric fashion, you created 10 more Qaddafis. The whole Saharo-Sahelian region has become unlivable" (ibid). This led Nicholas Marsh to argue that "Mali offers the most clear-cut case of weapons proliferation from Libya having an effect upon conflict" (Marsh, 2012, p. 82). However, Strazzari cautions that "knowledge of the actual dynamics of weapons acquisition in this region is limited, and process tracing is extremely arduous. Therefore, analysis has to stop short of claiming any strict causal nexus" (Strazzari, 2014, p. 55). He nonetheless backs what can be reasonably asserted as a scholarly consensus that the widespread availability of weapons from Libya contributed to the increased instability and "fractionalization of armed groups" in Mali (ibid, p. 66).

In attempting to situate this thesis' factor of focus (changes in the smuggling industry an wider economic landscape) amongst this particular competing factor, my argument stands as follows: the arrival of arms and fighters from Libya can be classified as necessary but not sufficient explanation for the conflict and instability in Mali from 2011 onwards, as it merely lit a match that in turn ignited a kindling of fractionalization that had been developing for some time. Indeed, as Strazzari (2014) presciently points out, similar flows of arms and conflict resources entered the neighbouring country of Niger, though these did not set off the same processes of conflict.[57] This leads back to the broader contextual conditions that made

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[56] This was the period in which the MNLA and their Ansar Eddine allies were in the process of capturing most of the key towns and strategic cities in the north, but before the French military intervention which took began in January of 2023.

[57] Acknowledging that Niger and all countries of the region have experienced heightened levels of insecurity and proliferation of extremists group acvitiy, but not on the scale of Mali in the timeframe concerned.

the Malian landscape so combustible, and the particular force of the smuggling economy in heightening social tension by altering the balance of power between competing social groups (i.e. Noble/ non-noble Tuareg and Arab castes). In turn, these smuggling activities carried an attendant increase in demand for armed protection, rendering Malian landscape particularly primed to absorb and mobilise these flows of weapons into contentious activity. In sum, it was the socio-economic dynamics unleashed by changes in the smuggling activity that produce the grievances, interests, and partially activated social fault lines that in turn provided the kindling that was lit by the metaphorical match of arms flows from Libya.

In addition to this bespoke socio-economic context, there remains the wider political dynamics of Mali in contributing to the conflict dynamics in the north. As described in chapter five, the role of the Malian state in selectively permitting the involvement of subordinate northern groups in the narco-smuggling economy was a key element in the introduction of the industry and the dynamics that followed. This has been viewed as a key plank of their governance strategy in their northern hinterland as they attempted to undermine the problematic and oft-rebellious Tuareg and Arab nobility. As was touched upon in the above section in regards to the connection of this point to the broader theoretical literature, it is difficult to deduce the strength of this 'state as gatekeeper' element as a factor in the conflicts dynamics, as there is significant uncertainly as to the degree to which this formed a conscious strategy on the part of the Malian state in the south rather than representing a more organic form of opportunism and corruption within certain actors of the state. This is due to the inherent opacity of data regarding illicit economies, and particularly the intersection with state corruption, but also challenges in discerning clear, linear causal connections in such a context. Was it the agency of the Malian state that was responsible for the direction of narco-smuggling opportunities to the non-noble Arab and Tuareg groups in the north, or was it the opportunism and ambition of the latter that made them prime partners for actors upstream?

The reality is likely some combination of both, highlighting this thesis' main contention that it a combination of both social and economic forces that mutually account for the effect it played in the ensuing conflict dynamics. Specifically, it was the structural requirements for state collusion on the material side, and the subordinate, opportunistic, and ambitious social traits of the non-noble groups that made them ready and willing participants in the introduction of narcotics into the smuggling networks of the north (in parallel with some degree of comfort by actors upstream with their involvement in the trade and the economic empowerment it would affect).

This leaves a third and final competing explanation for the proliferation of armed groups in the north of Mali, namely the role of ideology and spread of jihadi extremism. Indeed, the role of ideological rivalry between now competing jihadist groups in the Sahel have formed a core pillar of concern of scholars and policy makers as they seek to track the number of fragmentations and proliferations that have taken place.[58] This emanates from the fact that splits between jihadi groups are often framed and justified as disagreements over doctrine, belief, and strategic priorities that are themselves tied to specific theological positions. However, as Thurston notes, this macro level of contention is often an outgrowth of more local, material dynamics, as he writes that jihadists groups in North Africa and the Sahel "participate in local, national, and regional politics, and not just through intimidation but also through the management of strategic relationships. They negotiate with power-brokers, build alliances, and respond to the demands of constituencies" (Thurston, 2020, p. 2). Indeed, chapters five and six cover these 'constituency demands' that in part drove the formations and development of jihadi groups in northern Mali, demands that were

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[58] For a detailed account of the ideological/theological factors in the splits between GSPC and AQIM, see Thurston (2020, pp. 63-101), then within AQIM (ibid, pp. 102-146). For a similar analysis of the split between AQIM and ISGS, see Cold-Ravnkilde & Ba (2022). For an analysis of the role of Islamic ideology on the MNLA and wider Tuareg separatist movement, see Klute, 2013.

often firmly couched in the material interests of trade resumption and governance. This is not to argue that these more material drivers supplant or negate the role of ideational factors like ideology, but once again emphasizing it is the connection and intertwined nature of the former with the latter that give a fuller account of the picture. This is particularly clear in the case of ideological disagreements (either genuinely held or instrumental) developing into group fragmentations only when a dissenting/aggrieved actor can acquire the material means to strike out independently.[59]

By situating the role of the smuggling economy within these competing parallel explanations and factors, we can gain a better sense of the broader complexities and nuances at play in the proliferation of armed groups in Mali. Again, this thesis does not seek to present the emergence of these economic dynamics as a sole driver of Mali's conflict dyanamics, but rather as a crucial and salient context that is indispensable in accounting for how and why the conflict has developed as it had.

As the following section will the discuss, the scope and applicability of this argument can be further interrogated by a future research program. In particular, it presents an intitial foray into interrogating the effects of migrant smuggling on the social balance of forces discussed above, as well as a comparative research program between southern Libya and northern Mali, both in the interest of expanding the geographic scope of the argument, as well as further teasing out the nuances relating to the role of the state in governing their peripheral regions where illicit smuggling economies thrive.

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[59] See chapter three (pp. 89-93) for a theoretical engagement with this dynamic in reference to existing scholarship on armed group fragmentation. In turn, see pp. 140-146 in chapter five for an elucidating case of this in the discussion and analysis of Mokhtar Belmokhtar and his split with the AQIM leadership.

Avenues for Future Research

Migrant Smuggling Economy

Beyond these contributions to the literature, my focus on the socio-economic drivers of conflict dynamics opens up a set of additional empirical investigations that are worth pursuing in Mali and the wider Sahelian sphere. One of them is the impact of other lucrative elements of the regional smuggling industry, particularly the migrant smuggling economy. As discussed briefly in the introduction, the possibility of the migrant smuggling economy in driving significant structural shifts in Mali's conflict landscape was an initial impetus to this project. Due to the pandemic-related inability to conduct fieldwork and the lack of empirical sources, the project pivoted towards its eventual focus on drug smuggling; however, this does not mean that we are unable to venture into this subject and posit some hypotheses and preliminary conclusions based on what we do know. This can serve as a valuable starting point for future research and discussion as to the full effects of the various elements of the illicit smuggling economy on Mali's conflict dynamics.

One entry point for interrogating the effects of the lucrative migrant smuggling economy is the structural traits associated with it and how this relates to an actor's ability to engage and profit from it. As described in chapter four, it was the structural features of drugs as a resource within the smuggling economy, namely its low bulk and high value, that accounted in great part for the effects it had on the wider social structures it moved through. Its low bulk and comparative ease of transporting did not necessitate the type of broad range cooperation and sociability that characterised the staples trade, creating a condition in which marginalised actors could engage in it through by-passing the prevailing social hierarchies and the networks associated with them. In turn, its high value encouraged opportunism and promoted a more a-social process of organisation, recruiting drivers and facilitators based on

their ability and willingness to do this dangerous work rather than their position within a familiar social network. This is the dynamic described by Scheele (2009) when she notes, "small [smuggling] networks do not explicitly rely on tribal links, but they nevertheless reproduce the major divisions to the extent that these determine everyday social ties, shared material interests and marriage alliances ... In contrast, drug trafficking is described as a means for an individual to get rich fast, to the detriment of wider solidarities" (pp. 84-85).

In terms of internal Tuareg politics, this was a case of the Ifoghas' pre-existing social capital degrading in line with changes in the economic environment, which has itself reformed the socio-economic system to value different functions. These functions involve links with state and trans-national actors to facilitate the illicit trade of narcotics and other high-value, small-bulk resources, links to which the Imghad and other non-noble tribes were structurally positioned to develop given their historic rivalries with the nobility and how this aligned with the state's governance strategy.

How may this dynamic differ in terms of the migrant smuggling trade, to the extent the conflict landscape is intersecting with it, and what may those effects be? A report in 2019 from the Global Initiative Against Transnational Crime covering the period around which this thesis concluded (2018), allows us to undertake some preliminary analysis. A main conclusion is that there is little direct involvement with the migrant smuggling trade by armed groups, unlike the narcotics trade. They conclude however that "although armed groups are not involved in the organizational aspects of migrant smuggling, some actors have ties with armed groups that are involved in this illicit trade" (Global Initiative, 2019, p. 79). This lack of direct involvement likely reflects the structural features of the trade, comprising of higher-bulk, lower-value convoys that contrast with the structural features of drug smuggling. This leads to speculation that the trade is not lucrative enough to incentivize direct involvement, as

the large profits that can undoubtedly be made come as a function of quantity and consistent operations over a sustained period of time. This reflects the nature of the staples trade discussed in chapter four, a wide-ranging and incremental economic system that, partly as a reflection of these features, facilitated prevailing forms of social interaction. In contrast to the opportunism promoted by higher-value, lower-bulk resources, such commodities promote vertical and horizontal linkages between actors and communities who must cooperate to realise value from the trade. From this structural perspective, may this suggest a benefit towards the CMA and nobility-aligned forces whose traditional lifeblood was rooted in this type of system? There is reason to believe so, given the Ifoghas' traditional control of the Malian-Algerian border and the important In-Khalil border crossing. Significant volumes of trade moving through this area would indeed represent an economic boom to these communities, and hence the social bases upon which the CMA-aligned forces extract resources. Evidence of a connection between migrant smuggling networks in the area and CMA-aligned groups are cited in the figure of Mahamadou Ag Rhissa (aka Mohamed Talhandak), a member of the High Council for the Unity of Azawad (HCUA), "who controls migrant smuggling in Talhandak" (ibid, p. 80). The authors conclude that these groups would indeed stand to benefit should migrant flows increase through this area.

In terms of Plateforme-aligned groups and the alternative political sub-set emerging in the region around the non-noble tribes, there are also connections with the industry worth analysing. One element reflects their control over the region of Gao and the border with Niger which, like the Algerian border to the CMA, stands to generate resources towards Plateforme-aligned groups. The second dynamic, and more reflective of the structural traits of the industry and the social positioning of the Imghad, involves collusion between the state and actors involved in the migrant smuggling economy. An illustrative figure in this regard is Baye Coulibaly, a smuggler with ties to the GATIA who allegedly receives protection from

Malian security forces on his route from Gao to Tamanrassat and colludes with state officials to produce fake passports and travel documents that are essential to facilitating the journeys of many migrants (ibid, 81). Here we see the Plateforme–state axis at work again, with the non-noble aligned forces able to capitalise on the industry due to their ties to the Malian state, again underlining the connection between economic and social features in accounting for how and when this resource is exploited.

This potentially adds a new wrinkle to the story of the conflict, particularly how it developed following the French intervention in 2013. By this time, the Ifoghas-led MNLA seemed on the brink of destruction. A coalition of Islamist groups had driven the group from the regional capital of Gao, including the MUJAO, a group of largely Tilemsi and Barabiche Arabs financed by local businessmen with known ties to drug trafficking (Lacher, 2012). These financial resources allowed MUJAO and their Islamist allies to offer pay incentives to recruits that the MNLA could not match, as well to channel investments into the local community that would grant them significant local support and legitimacy (Raineri and Strazzari, 2015). However, events would soon alter the playing field and re-deal the cards in a way that would grant the MNLA new life. Firstly, the French-led intervention in 2013-14 would significantly disrupt the regional narcotics networks and thus undermine the resource base of MNLA's rivals. Secondly, the growth in the migrant smuggling industry would allow the MNLA to prevent the regional balance of power from shifting irrevocably against them.

The emergence of the migrant smuggling economy inaugurated a moment of socio-economic alignment that would work in the Ifoghas' favour. As a traditionally low-value trade, migrant smuggling did not require the type of start-up capital and state involvement that precluded them from the drug trade. In turn, research suggests that this migrant smuggling industry is structurally diffuse and resistant to centralisation (Molenaar & van

Damme, 2017). This decentralisation reflects the structural needs of an industry that does not require an overarching central organisation to function, as the smugglers' job is simply to move migrants from (a) to (b). This is opposed to other high-value illicit trades such as narcotics and diamonds that must maintain firm relations with downstream sellers, upstream buyers, and often state officials in order to facilitate cross-border movements and international communication channels. Hence, unlike drug smuggling, the Malian state could not direct the industry towards its chosen beneficiaries. Once again, this opened up space for new socio-economic complementarities to emerge that would upend prevailing power balances. It just so happened that, in the context of Mali, this new socio-economic landscape did not appear all that different from the old one.

In sum, if the centralisability of the drug trade and subservient social status of those who engaged in it accounted for the rise of newly empowered conflict actors in 2012, perhaps the resistance of migrant smuggling to such centralisation and the Ifoghas' historical advantage in the trade of low-value commodities (derived from their position along the Algerian border) provided the means for their comeback. Both socio-economic alignments represent distinct moments in the conflict that cannot be understood absent the underlying social and economic forces that made them so impactful. While the social bases of the various groups in the region provided the origins of their cohesion and common grievances – both against the state and other tribes – the economic environment provided them with avenues to act. However, we must dive deeper into the structures of this economic environment to understand how and why certain resources or activities favoured these particular actors at particular times.

Libya and Broader Geographic Considerations

We may also carry this perspective to other countries in the region, asking how and if their conflicts are being impacted by these changes in the smuggling economy and wider socio-economic transformation. Libya represents an obvious, even perhaps more dramatic case, whose conflict landscape has witnessed enormous fragmentation following the fall of Muammar Ghaddafi in 2014. Here the migrant smuggling economy likely stands as key factor in shaping the contour of these fragmentations, as the activity "interfaces … with local familial, tribal and community interests" (Global Initiative, 2017, p. vi). Again, we may analyse faultlines in the social landscape, particularly those within and between the Tuareg, Tebu, and various Arab tribes in the southern region of the country and how they are being impacted by changes in the smuggling economy. In the southeast, for example, the emergence of the migrant smuggling economy seems to have altered the balance of power between the Arab Zwayya and the more marginalised Tebu. The Arab Zwayya tribe had traditionally held a dominant position in the regional economy due to ties with the Ghaddafi regime, placing them in a prime position to benefit from the drug trade. Since the fall of the regime however, the Tebu have been on the ascendency, benefiting from their knowledge of the desert and kinship ties that stretch across the southern border into Sudan, Niger, and Chad. This, along with the lack of a need for regime collusion, has allowed them to assert "near-total dominance" in the local migrant smuggling field. This has made them a key actor in the politics of the southern Fezzan, with the feuding sides of Libya's main conflict cleavage seeking to cultivate ties and alliances with them (Global Initiative, 2019, p. 45).

This represents an interesting contrast with the dynamics in Mali, where it was the traditional nobility who stood to gain most from the migrant smuggling trade as opposed to the more marginalised Tebu in Libya. This is likely rooted in their different socio-political structures. Whereas power in southern Libya was more tightly intertwined with regime politics in the north of the country, favouring state allies in the provision of state resources as

well as within the smuggling economy, the ties between northern Mali and the state were much weaker, allowing the latter to influence and disrupt, but not fully structure the internal power structures of the north. Fully fleshing out these dynamics stands outside the scope of this thesis, however a deeper dive into the changing social landscape of southern Libya and its relations to changes in the smuggling economy stands as a fruitful avenue for future research. In turn, comparing conflict dynamics in southern Libya with the conflict dynamics in northern Mali analysed in this study could not only give this study increased geographic reach but also further clarify the role of state relations in mediating power relations in peripheral regions where cross-border smuggling stands as a key economic pillar.

Scope and Applicability

This leads to an elucidation of the scope and applicability of this thesis and potential variables that these future studies can interrogate. As this thesis has argued that changes in the illicit smuggling economy in Mali has altered social hierarchies and stressed relations of dependency, further research and policy interdictions can benefit from a focus on 1.) the traditional social hierarchies, and their economic bases, in regions where illicit smuggling thrives, and 2.) the structural traits of commodities within these smuggling networks and how they stand to re-enforce or undermine these social institutions. With some caution, I maintain that these variables and dynamics will exist in a meaningful way in regions with a distant state presence and a thriving illicit smuggling economy. This further research program stands to better reveal the nuances of their variation. In turn, it can crucially inform the implications of policy decisions and state strategies relating to increased interdiction efforts or the selective permission given to certain actors to engage in such illicit trade.

Appendix: Ethical approval letter for fieldwork interviews referenced on pages 12 & 100.

To: Thomas Hinkel

Cc: Yomna Amr

From: Atta Gebril, Chair of the IRB

Date: March 6, 2018

Re: Approval of study

This is to inform you that I reviewed your revised research proposal entitled "The Political Economy of Migrant Smuggling: The Case of Conflict in Mali" and determined that it required consultation with the IRB under the "expedited" category. As you are aware, the members of the IRB suggested certain revisions to the original proposal, but your new version addresses these concerns successfully. The revised proposal used appropriate procedures to minimize risks to human subjects and that adequate provision was made for confidentiality and data anonymity of participants in any published record. I believe you will also make adequate provision for obtaining informed consent of the participants.

This approval letter was issued under the assumption that you have not started data collection for your research project. Any data collected before receiving this letter could not be used since this is a violation of the IRB policy.

Please note that IRB approval does not automatically ensure approval by CAPMAS, an Egyptian government agency responsible for approving some types of off-campus research. CAPMAS issues are handled at AUC by the office of the University Counsellor, Dr. Ashraf Hatem. The IRB is not in a position to offer any opinion on CAPMAS issues, and takes no responsibility for obtaining CAPMAS approval.

This approval is valid for only one year. In case you have not finished data collection within a year, you need to apply for an extension.

Thank you and good luck.

Dr. Atta Gebril
IRB chair, The American University in Cairo
2046 HUSS Building

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