

# Fighting for Liberal Peace in Mali? The Limits of International Military Intervention

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*The January 2013 French military intervention in Mali exposed the rising threat of ‘terrorist’ and illicit networks in the Sahel, but more importantly the intertwined limits of Malian politics and of the international politics of African conflict management. While much has been written about the ‘liberal peace’, this article argues that what is at stake in this debate is the consistency of the ‘liberal peace’ ideological form and what governance requirements it imposes. Such an ideology necessarily intersects with ongoing Malian peace-, nation- and statebuilding dynamics and competing normative orders that transcend state borders and nationalist projects.*

**Keywords** Mali; liberal peace; France; Sahel; conflict; ideology

In this article, we seek to problematize the ‘liberal peace’ critique and the militarized dynamics sustaining the demands of its ideological form. We move away from an analytical framework that takes for granted the ‘reality’ of the ‘liberal peace’, as such a framework seems to hide at least as much as it reveals (Sabaratnam 2013). Understood primarily as an ideology, the object of our analysis is not the ‘liberal’ content of the ‘peace’ that must be built, but how the ‘liberal peace’ ideology serves to support an understanding of social reality that structures effective relationships. As such, it necessarily intersects with ongoing Malian nation- and statebuilding dynamics and competing ideologies and normative orders that transcend state borders and nationalist projects. This article sets forth the troubles that specifically ‘liberal peace’ thinking confronts when projected through international military intervention such as that in Mali in 2013. The relevant context of the January 2013 French military intervention and subsequent multilateral mission focuses not only on immediate pre-2012 events, but also on dynamics of Mali’s post-colonial and post-Cold War statebuilding in relation to France’s ongoing and militarized interest in Malian affairs. Under the conditions of post-authoritarian transition, a liberalizing governance ideology is constructed by domestic and international actors. Seeking the hegemony and legitimacy of such a project, these elite actors face resistance from multiple alternative sites and sources of legitimacy and authority. Such challenges, we

argue, defy both homogenization and simplistic dichotomization, but may remain broadly resistant to the hegemony of the liberalizing peace ideology currently on offer by transnational intervention in Mali.

We begin by examining what is at stake in the ‘liberal peace’, thus illustrating both its analytical limits and its ideological function. We argue that the issue is not whether the ‘liberal peace’ can build peace or not, whether it can achieve what it claims it will, but rather the consistency of its ideological form and what this form commands. This allows us to analyse how the French war (waged in the name of peace) works to very effectively minimize sustained engagements with the competing and contradictory sites of authority and legitimacy in Mali. By moving away from analyses and standpoints that securitize and uphold the ontological primacy of the Malian state, we emphasize the political and historical practices that are authorized under the umbrella of ‘building peace’. The move highlights the transnational politics authorizing the French war and the limits it imposes on the form that a ‘peaceful’ Mali ought to take. Focusing thus on sustaining peace ideology illustrates how elites’ constrained political imagination conditions the possibilities for refounding the Malian state. Such possibilities—through processes of reform, reconciliation and development—hinge on the extent to which Mali’s ongoing political and social struggles will leverage multiple and transnational sites and sources of legitimacy and authority, and contest a post-authoritarian and post-Cold War homogenizing and hegemonic liberalizing peace ideology.

### The Trouble with the Liberal Peace

The ‘liberal peace’ has become a catchall concept that brings together different theoretical approaches that only seem to share an agreement over the content of international peacekeeping and peacebuilding. For proponents, the liberal content of peace is the permanent solution to war (see the critical analysis of the liberal/democratic peace by Beate 2007a, 2007b). For many critics, the liberal nature of international peace intervention is instead the key problem. Critics show how an ‘imperial peace’ that aspired to direct control was transformed into a ‘liberal peace’ of non-territorial and networked relations of governance (Duffield 2007), argue that all peacebuilding activities converge to build liberal states, societies and subjectivities (Heathershaw 2008), or contend that there exists a ‘liberal way of war’ (Dillon and Reid 2009). Richmond (2011, 1) defines the liberal peace as ‘a model through which Western led agency, epistemology, and institutions, have attempted to unite the world under a hegemonic system that replicates liberal institutions, norms, and political, social, and economic systems’. The ‘liberal’ is associated with ‘international’ (when they are not deployed as synonyms), thus allowing the ‘local turn’ literature to argue that ‘local’ agency and ‘local’ culture hold the key to escape from the liberal peace (Mac Ginty and Richmond 2013). However, as David Chandler (2010) argued, critics of the ‘liberal peace’ conceive it as a *fait accompli* that reproduces the

civilizational divide and that leaves little room for freedom as we have all become victims of liberal governmentality. The focus on ‘local-as-escape’ is hardly convincing given that the ‘liberal peace’ is already built as a formalized practice of containment and escape.

The basis of the ‘liberal peace’ debate thus caricatures the power relationships between ‘local’ and ‘international’ actors and externalizes the problem of international intervention in terms of a violation of state sovereignty or of the local capacity to build peace (Charbonneau 2014). Perhaps this international/local binary is too attractive to resist as it evokes an older key contradiction ‘between the external imperialist(s) and the country united against it’ (Charbonneau 2014, 623). Just as this imperial/(inter)national binary has worked historically and theoretically (in IR theory in particular) to obscure their interdependence and co-constitution (Walker 2010), the international/local dichotomy limits the analysis of the transformation of forms of political rule and statehood (Hameiri 2010). Moreover, the binary obscures the ways in which actors constitute themselves as ‘local’ or ‘international’ and how this process of constitution works to generate resources of power and new normative orders (Charbonneau 2012).

It might be so that peace interventions are both *Western-led* and *liberal*, as Richmond defines them, but the problem with the ‘liberal peace’ conceptual framework is twofold. First, given the multilateral and multinational characteristics and dynamics of peace operations, exactly how does one distinguish Western agency from non-Western agency? How are different and transforming forms of agency/identity constituted? Second, given the particular content that the term ‘liberal’ can take in different scholarly disciplines, cultural and political contexts, or normative orders, exactly what does it mean for someone or something to be liberal? The two questions intertwine and seem to lead to a tautology as ‘Western agency’ is assumed to be ‘liberal’ and ‘liberal’ is presumed to be defined in (and imposed by) the ‘West’. Some have started to point to the limits of the ‘liberal peace’ debate, but ‘for the field [of peace and conflict studies] as a whole, a great deal remains to be done’ (Heathershaw 2013, 282). The ‘liberal agreement’ seems largely limited to the cohesion of activities around the promotion of the ‘open market’ and neoliberal economics (Mac Ginty and Williams 2009, 51). Political economy approaches certainly emphasize how peacebuilding ‘reinforces neoliberal prescriptions’ and limits the possibilities of peace to the priorities of the neoliberal agenda, thus apparently narrowing the critique of the ‘liberal peace’ form to the ‘neoliberal’ form of capitalist relations (Pugh, Cooper, and Turner 2011).

Hence, the ‘liberal peace’ debate seems to be built around a truism: the world is state-centric and capitalist and peace (and war) efforts reflect and reproduce this system, albeit in various localized forms and to various effects. Proponents of the ‘liberal peace’ accept this fact and often embrace it, while critical scholars are more ambivalent because of the indeterminate content of the ‘liberal’ object of critique. How is it possible, then, that scholars who start with similar assumptions about the content of peacekeeping and peacebuilding

(i.e. it is 'liberal') reach opposing conclusions? When Roland Paris (2010, 354–357) asked if critics were 'liberals in disguise', was he not onto something of significance?

Critics of the 'liberal peace' might or might not be 'liberals' (Cooper, Turner, and Pugh 2011), but the critique that seeks to reveal the hidden content of the 'liberal peace' or the hidden potential of 'local/hybrid peace' misses its radical contingency. Every solution to every political conflict is conditional and temporary. The aspiration to abolish war and conflict is precisely the source of authoritarian temptation (and perpetual war). Even the expansive notion of 'positive peace' consists of determining the definite properties and permanent essence of 'peace'. Peace is a *radical impossibility* in the sense that there is no final reconciliation possible. Just as Laclau and Mouffe (2001) argued regarding 'radical democracy', a 'radical peace' is not one that seeks to establish an endpoint, a final resolution, an end-of-history utopia. To build 'peace' one must take into consideration this radical contingency or impossibility. Put another way, there is no escaping the 'liberal peace', or more precisely no escaping the hegemonic ideological field that structures effective peace efforts and relations, but only provisional solutions that involve the acknowledgement of its fundamental antagonism.

The internal condition of peacekeeping and peacebuilding activities is one of contradictions between their empirical realities (that is, the ways in which people live it) and the modes of their symbolization. As Slavoj Žižek's ([1989] 2008, 107) analysis of ideology emphasizes,

the Real itself contains no necessary mode of its symbolization ... because the Real itself offers no support for a direct symbolization of it—because every symbolization is in the last resort contingent—that the only way the experience of a given historic reality can achieve its unity is through the agency of a signifier.

In the liberal ideological space, the meaning of 'peace' is provided retroactively by the liberal master-signifier. What happens 'on the ground' is retroactively interpreted as 'liberal peace' and compared to this abstract construct. The paradox is that when and where it 'lands' in a (post-)conflict zone, the 'liberal peace' is experienced as something else: as neoliberalism as political economy approaches underline, as imperialism as nationalist elites claim, as neo-colonialism as political opponents, neo-Marxists and postcolonial scholars argue. It is not about 'liberal peace' per se, but about how peace is legitimized according to a liberal master-signifier which is competing with other modes of symbolization or normative orders.<sup>1</sup>

The essentialist illusion, as Žižek demonstrates, is in the belief that 'peace' can be determined with positive properties, that it contains an immanent essence (i.e. it can be defined in contrast to war, as a state of non-violence or fewer than 1,000 battle-deaths per year, etc). This is the myth of peace as teleology, as if a 'peaceful' endpoint can be reached if the right conditions are constructed or the right policies implemented. No wonder some have concluded

that little is at stake in this debate with regard to policy and practice (Campbell et al. 2011, 4) or that others claim there is no alternative to the ‘liberal peace’ (Paris 2010, 357). What is at stake is what the ‘liberal peace’ ideological form demands of us: ‘what is really at stake in ideology is its form, the fact that we continue to walk as straight as we can in one direction, that we follow even the most dubious opinions once our mind has been made up regarding them’ (Zizek [1989] 2008, 92). Put another way, the aim of the ‘liberal peace’ is not its content (i.e. can its associated practices establish ‘peace?’) nor its empirical expressions (is it really ‘liberal?’), but the consistency of its ideological form. As even Mali’s road map to sustainable, post-conflict democratic peace acknowledges, legitimate state power is achieved and maintained not solely by exercising force across the territory, but by educating and engaging citizens subject to its rule (Sears 2013). The double fallacy is to see, for instance, Malians’ rejection of relatively authoritarian governance and/or of radical Islamist governance as identical to an embrace of liberalism or Western norms of governance *and* to see Malians’ deployment of (allegedly Western) ‘liberal’ norms and values as evidence of the hegemony of the ‘liberal peace’. Both scenarios obscure an ongoing process of legitimation with aspects derived and appropriated from multiple sources—‘Western’, ‘Islamic’, ‘customary/indigenous’—which are themselves ideological constructions open to contestation and situated in coexisting and interacting normative orders with different sources of legitimacy and authority.

Peace is a radical impossibility because it is impossible to define its essence. One might try to define it as an ‘absence of war’, peace as a ‘peaceful’ state of affairs, but as David Keen (2000) argued, even this distinction is empirically dubious. Attempts at refining a universal definition will fail because the meaning of ‘peace’ will always be tied to the signifier that constitutes its ‘identity’. An anti-essentialist position can only define ‘peace’ by pointing to all actors, organizations and activities that legitimize themselves as ‘peaceful’ or as acting in the name of ‘peace’. To paraphrase Walker (2010, 256) on political life, any understanding of the politics of peace depends not on finding an acceptable definition, but on the analysis of the political practices through which definitions of ‘peace’ come to be authorized. Thus, to name as ‘liberal peace’ international peace intervention has limited explanatory value, but this does not mean that such naming is without effect or ideological function.

### Before War

The international response to the Malian crises was very slow. If the ‘liberal peace’ seeks to unite the world under its hegemonic agenda, it was in no hurry to bring Mali back into the fold in 2012. The most immediate events leading to the French war started in January 2012 when the MNLA (*Mouvement national de libération de l’Azawad*) attacked Malian positions in the country’s north. The armed rebellion was soon joined by the Islamist armed group of Ansar Eddine,<sup>2</sup>

led by the Tuareg leader Iyad ag Ghali, and by the MUJAO (*Mouvement de l'unicité du jihad en Afrique de l'Ouest*). Both groups had established links with al-Qaeda in the Islamist Maghreb (AQMI) during the previous decade. Between January and March, the Islamist groups gained in strength and, by the end of June, were able to oust the MNLA rebels. From July 2012 until the January 2013 French military intervention, Ansar Eddine, MUJAO and AQMI controlled all three northern regions of Kidal, Timbuktu and Gao.

The situation in the north was worsened by the reaction in the country's capital, Bamako. On 22 March 2012, Captain Amadou Haya Sanogo led a mutiny that turned into a *coup d'état* against the regime of President Amadou Toumani Touré (ATT). Sanogo argued that the regime's inability to respond to the rebellion, the worsening situation in the north, and the very poor condition of the Malian army legitimated the coup. He promised that the Malian army would take back the north and reassert Malian sovereignty, but only succeeded in exacerbating the crisis. From then on, the crisis developed along two parallel tracks with no necessary links between them (Marchal 2012). In Bamako, political elites focused on their political game, divided as they were between the camps of interim President Dioncounda Traoré, Prime Minister Cheick Modibo Diarra and Captain Sanogo. The *coup d'état* left Mali deeply divided, but not necessarily on a neat north-south axis or a secular-Islamist divide. These widespread clichés obscured the multidimensionality of the crises and the effects of an 'erosion of democracy, rise of criminality, and impunity of state officials' that 'opened the door for various groups to flourish in the north, gaining territory and, in some instances, popular legitimacy' (Wing 2013, 481).<sup>3</sup> The crises of political legitimacy in Mali continue to be expressed in dissatisfaction with government corruption, debate-stifling 'consensus',<sup>4</sup> and ineffective development programmes. Widely expressed desires to curb corruption and revitalize public life feed into the increasingly broad appeal of religiously framed discourses about deficits in the moral authority of Mali's political leadership.

It was the crucial French diplomatic and military efforts that transformed Mali into an 'international' problem. On the day of his inauguration (15 May 2012), President Hollande put Mali at the top of the French foreign affairs to-do list, arguing that his predecessor neglected the risks that destabilization in Mali represented ("Mali" 2013). But French diplomats were unable to persuade their Western allies at the UN, notably the Americans, who were unconvinced that the Sahel groups were a threat to US security interests (Interview, US intelligence officer, Washington, DC, March 14, 2014). Only in July, after the destruction of the Timbuktu mausoleum, was French ambassador to the UN, Gérard Araud, successful in passing a cautious resolution that took note of the request of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the African Union for a UN mandate authorizing the deployment of a stabilization force. This resolution further requested that the Secretary-General 'develop and implement in consultation with regional organisations, a United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel region encompassing security, governance, development, human rights and humanitarian issues' (UNSC 2012a).

This prudent resolution did not incite rapid and willing international action. The deployment of ECOWAS troops was delayed by the Sanogo junta's opposition to an international intervention, by ECOWAS members that doubted the organization's intervention capacity and negotiated financial aid packages and political advantage, and by members of the UN Security Council, especially the United States, that questioned the operational capacity, ability and objectives of the ECOWAS force. In November, the Secretary-General expressed his fears that a poorly conceived and executed military deployment could exacerbate 'an already extremely fragile humanitarian situation' and 'risk ruining any chance of a negotiated political solution to the crisis' (UNSC 2012b). After long negotiations between France and the United States in particular, on 20 December the Security Council adopted Resolution 2085, which authorized the deployment of an African-led International Support Mission in Mali (AFISMA) for an initial period of one year (UNSC 2012c). At the time, there was no plan to re-conquer the north. The Malian army was to be trained and work with AFISMA forces, but coming events transformed the crisis into a French war.

### The French War for Peace in Mali

What was striking in Mali was both the relative political and logistical ease and speed of the French military intervention and the post facto Malian and international consensus supporting it. No other state than France could have deployed 4,000 troops in Mali on such short notice, with such efficiency, and with such strong political support (particularly from Niger, Senegal and Guinea). While in other contexts the deployment of such force was judged to be neocolonial by many, as in Côte d'Ivoire in 2011 (see Charbonneau 2012), the management of contested political narratives in Mali through French military means received unambiguous support. The French military capacity in Africa is, obviously, one of the preconditions permitting the intervention (Charbonneau 2008). There is no space to elaborate here, but suffice it to say that this military capacity is grounded in Franco-African postcolonial arrangements and relationships born out of contested colonial legacies that, no matter how defined, form the inescapable a priori context of international interventions in Francophone Africa. This context is rapidly evolving and challenged by a variety of actors and is in constant interaction with non-francophone dynamics and processes, but this is exactly the point: we must problematize the practices where, so to speak, 'global liberal governance meets postcolonialism' (Charbonneau and Chafer 2014, 16).

The political support for the French military intervention came only after everything else had failed, notably the UN Security Council reluctance to act and authorize an African force and the failure of African regional organizations (notably the African Union) to get organized. Throughout the autumn of 2012, President Hollande repeated numerous times that his government would not 'put boots on the ground'. But his government became increasingly frustrated by the

reluctance of the UN Security Council and the United States, the European Union's lack of interest, and the inconclusiveness of ECOWAS meetings whose members showed little interest in finding a solution (Marchal 2013, 488). UNSC Resolution 2085 (20 December 2012) authorized an African force, but offered no timetable or mechanism to generate troops. The French government nevertheless had a few allies. President of Niger, Mahamadou Issoufou, argued strongly for a quick military operation to save his country from 'contagion'. African presidents Macky Sall (Senegal) and Alpha Condé (Guinea) also favoured such a solution.<sup>5</sup>

It may be an important point of debate whether the initial international (US, European and African) resistance to intervene militarily in Mali indicates the limits of the 'liberal peace', but the start of the French war is better understood by taking into account the colonial legacy of Franco-African relationships that inevitably places France at centre stage of international 'peace' efforts in Francophone Africa (Charbonneau 2008, 2014). Given the history of French military interventions in Africa, it is largely expected of France to intervene when necessary. As one official of the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) claimed, the French military presence in Africa has an adverse effect. Because everyone seems to expect that the French state will eventually intervene, volunteers and alternative conflict resolution strategies are left wanting (Interview, UN Secretariat, New York, December 9, 2013).

The official and public reason for launching the French war was that the situation evolved 'at the speed of light' in January 2013 when the rebels moved south toward, allegedly, Bamako.<sup>6</sup> Despite official statements and media reports about the global threat that the Malian Islamist rebels represented, the situation was more complicated than a 'terrorist' attack against an ostensible 'liberal peace' and was rooted in Malian dynamics. On 9–10 January 2013, the situation in Bamako was tense. Political movements, most of them having been created after the March 2012 *coup d'état*, which they supported, called for the immediate creation of a national and sovereign platform for change in Mali. They also demanded that interim President Traoré leave office and that the north be liberated from the Islamists. According to several reports, the demonstrations were to continue for a few days and produce an insurrectional climate that would bring back the Kati military (i.e. the 'Green Berets' loyal to Captain Sanogo) to the political centre. Different rumours of a *coup* against Traoré included one about an agreement between the Islamists of Iyad ag Ghali and marginalized political actors in Bamako to take over the country (ICG 2013; Marchal 2013).

In early 2013, Hollande had transformed his discourse:

the very existence of this friendly nation is at stake. Military operations will last for as long as required ... Terrorists must know that France will always be there when it's a matter not of its fundamental interests but the right of a population ... to live in freedom and democracy. (In S. Smith 2013)

At work here are two intertwined tropes that legitimize and authorize *both* the French military interposition and the object of its intervention (i.e. the Malian state). First, the Malian state is made unproblematic. The state form that must take the political community is legitimized by the military intervention. The challenge that Islamist rebels represents must be eliminated. As Chief of Staff of the Armies Admiral Edouard Guillaud testified in front of the French National Assembly defence commission in May 2013, the directives given in January were

to stop the offensive toward Bamako and thus preserve the existence of the Malian state; to destroy—which means in military language to neutralise 60 per cent of the enemy forces—and disorganize the terrorist network; to help in re-establishing the territorial integrity and unity of Mali; and to seek hostages, notably ours. (Assemblée nationale 2013)

With little to no regard for the deep history of resistance to the imposition of colonizing powers and projects in Mali, or for the Malian state's attempts at projecting and consolidating a hegemonic national political identity, the war for 'peace', the war to preserve the Malian state, depoliticizes the object of its intervention (see next sections).

Second, the use of terms such as Islamist, jihadist, salafist and terrorist to express security considerations legitimizes international military violence *and* is legitimized by the ontological priority given to the Malian state. These terms enable a co-articulation of spatial narratives about enemies and temporal narratives about barbarians. As such, they can mobilize practices that do not make the distinction between French (international/external) and Malian (national/internal) security interests and that equate policing and military action. The hostage scenario at the In Amenas facility in Algeria was interpreted as supporting the claim that the Malian conflict was linked to the globalized Islamist al-Qaeda networks, thus signalling a capacity and necessity to authorize violence in ways that elude the known borders and limits of international politics. The emphasis on Islamist and 'terrorist' violence made the French military intervention *and* the authority of Malian political elites unproblematic: 'Interim authorities clearly capitalised on a widespread perception of an Islamist threat, and it effectively garnered international support for the Malian government at a time when its domestic standing was doubtful' (Bergamaschi 2013a).

French troops were applauded by Malians. François Hollande was welcomed in Bamako and Timbuktu as a national hero. French Minister of Foreign Affairs Laurent Fabius gloated over the 'great success' of the operation and over the authorization to deploy a UN peacekeeping force. French Minister of Defence Jean-Yves Le Drian kept repeating that 'France can be proud'. Interim President Traoré did not miss an opportunity to be seen shaking hands with Hollande and the international consensus over the necessity and success of the military operation was sustained (with the exception of Morsi's Egypt). The large consensus on the French war in Mali is grounded in the 'double legitimation of international violence as the condition under which modern politics might be brought to some order' (Walker 2010, 209). On the one hand, the French war is

legitimized by, and affirms, Malian nationalist and sovereign claims. On the other, it is authorized by, and confirms, the international authority to wage war against barbarians (a.k.a. Islamist terrorists). Ultimately, this double legitimation encourages the status quo as it works very effectively to minimize sustained engagements with the contradictory claims of state sovereignty and international authority. To interpret the French war (and subsequent UN peacekeeping operation) as either extending or resisting liberal universalism, where international actors impose peace against a ‘local resistance’ and thus defend Malian ‘freedom and democracy’, is to mistake the transnational politics of ‘peace’ for the ideological effects of the ‘liberal peace’ in restricting possibilities of contested democracy, development and political narratives.

### The Liberalizing Rule in Mali

To interrogate explicitly the pre- and post-war period is to set the liberalizing peace/rule in Mali in the context of post-World War II dynamics of decolonization and independence. Well before its transition from authoritarianism in 1991–92, Mali’s development as a nation-state was inscribed in a 60-year history from pre-colonial, to colonial, to post-colonial authoritarian rule, to post-authoritarian political and economic liberalization. Even without exploring the histories of decolonization and militant nationalism in the region (Lecoq and Klute 2013), the daily realities of rural and minority communities are clearly disconnected from the dominant views of political elites economically reliant on international donors.

These political elites oversaw the past two decades of Mali’s tutelage by the International Monetary Fund, World Bank and major bilateral donors such as France, a period marked by excessive executive dominance and a minimalist and procedural vision of democratization as electoralism to support ‘good governance’ for international financial institutions-mandated economic liberalization and development initiatives. Thus, liberalizing governance in Mali prior to the events of 2011–13 had further centralized power, concentrated wealth and intensified socio-economic cleavages, especially between rural and urban populations, but also among classes within urban areas. Indeed, the legacies of economic restructuring—‘[e]conomic stagnation, the rise in poverty, the breakdown of public services’ (Van de Walle 2001, 231)—are still keenly felt among 50 per cent of Malians who live daily on less than US\$1.25 Parity Purchasing Power. Notwithstanding relatively high GDP growth in 2001–10, overall GDP growth per capita has remained flat in 1990–2010 (IMF 2013).

Given the ongoing role of the 2013 French and UN intervention and presence in legitimizing Malian nationalist and sovereign claims, and the desire to return Mali to *la vie politique normale* (normal political life), this ostensible normalcy deserves greater scrutiny. If intervention and its analysis have tended to represent the Malian state as unproblematic, then Mali’s past and ongoing governance and development challenges raise serious questions about the

prospects of the (re)establishment of liberalizing governance and peace. Such a (re)establishment is understandable in light of the ‘liberal peace’ ideological form and the particular form of post-conflict peacebuilding that electoral democratization demand. As much as Mali’s armed forces were unable to maintain territorial control of the country during the events of 2011–13, this was exacerbated by the broader context of the ATT regime’s (2002–12) weakening domestic legitimacy in the face of consistently favourable views abroad.

Indeed, against this lack of legitimacy Captain Amadou Sanogo claimed to lead the 2012 coup and, a year later, defended it as saving Mali from its own rulers (“Malian Coup” 2013). After the 2013 elections, now *Général* Sanogo faced kidnapping and murder charges. This high-profile reassertion of the rule of law against impunity is significant for helping further to legitimize Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta’s (IBK) presidency, his newly formed government and administration. Notwithstanding support for IBK in Mali’s legislature of between 78 and 86 per cent, the disappointingly low electoral turnout (37–38 per cent) qualifies any straightforward interpretation of these results as overwhelming support of IBK’s government at this point (Inter-Parliamentary Union 2014). Indeed, even as the International Crisis Group lauded the twin pillars of the ‘strong international presence’ and ‘current legitimacy’ of the president’s call for ‘serious reforms and inclusive dialogue’, it also admitted that ‘room for manoeuvre narrows when past clientelist practices start reappearing’ (ICG 2014). Further qualifying its assessment of possibilities, the ICG insisted that despite ‘persistent intercommunal tensions and localised violence continue to undermine efforts thus far to stabilise the country’, ‘emphasis on the North must not eclipse the need to refound the state and governance in their entirety’ (ICG 2014).

While most Malians certainly desire a renewed moral and political order, and favour a strong leader at the head of a ‘strong state’, the form that such ‘strong state’ authorities might take is not the object of similarly broad consensus. Indeed, the decline of the moral and political legitimacy of Mali’s leaders fuelled both Sanogo’s coup and insurgents’ declarations. For President IBK a key challenge is to oversee a credible, state-led rethinking of the state (‘refondation de l’État’). Given the roles of social movements (whether close to partisan opposition forces or politicized religious leadership) or militants (whether Islamist, Tamasheq-speaking or other), meaningful implementation of administrative decentralization will be crucial. The key challenges for the government now seem to hinge on representing many of those highly placed in the *ancien régime* as the next saviours of the third republic. IBK’s commanding approach and apparent desire to ‘show national and international opinion that he is the one and only chief [*chef unique*]’ (Diallo, Sogodogo, and Dramé 2013) and to control very closely the new ministry of reconciliation and development of Mali’s northern regions is of particular concern, given the legacies of executive dominance under the ATT regime. With a number of administrators returning under IBK for their second and third term, even IBK’s supporters fail to see the kind of foundational changes so desired by the general population (Daou 2013).<sup>7</sup>

### The Reproduction of (Contested) Ideologies of Malian Identity

The continuing violence in the north (including French military operations<sup>8</sup>) undoubtedly complicates both the post-election national peacebuilding processes. Building unity across the national territory, however, remains part of Mali's post-colonial challenges. Indeed, 30 years of centralized and clientelistic state leadership enforced harsh measures of internal party and social discipline, combining socialist and militaristic discourses to stress the unity and discipline of 'party-member-citizen-militants' (Kouyaté 1964). Built on legacies of 'civic and moral education', democracy promotion since the 1990s has sought to mobilize Malians to participate in elections, with appeals to a cultural ideology of peace built on legacies of social cohesion and unity which tend to obscure entrenched injustices, exploitation and structural inequalities. This broad ideological project, built on enthusiasm for the movement against Moussa Traoré's regime (1968–91), and with its discourses of 'unity' and 'reconciliation', remains enthusiastically supported by international donors and NGOs. Crucial to the politics of legitimating economic liberalization through limited and procedural democratization, contemporary rhetoric continues (as that of the earlier period) to obscure 'sharp divisions across one divide or another' with 'expressions of national unanimity' (Manning 1998, 186), and complements the state's administrative and coercive capacities with consent-seeking. When ranged alongside the nationalist unity rhetoric under IBK's strong leadership, post-2013 calls for inclusive dialogue highlight contradictions while reflecting the ascendancy of liberal formalists in the democratization period. Well supported among Mali's donor-partners and allies, these democratic transition actors consolidated their influence and represented an ostensible consensus by marginalizing those who bore most directly the legacies of anti-authoritarian populism. With 'one foot in the *ancien régime* and one in the stirrup of the insurgents',<sup>9</sup> these mostly upper-middle and middle class intellectuals and professionals were 'very little inclined to accept and even less to accomplish deep socio-political changes' (Bagayoko 1999, 25). Thus, in 2014, Mali faces refounding the state and governance with the legacies of those who often 'associated social rights with anarchy' (Bagayoko 1999, 25), and the ascendancy of 'a specific social fraction: educated, urban, professional employees, many of them centred in the public service' (Manning 1998, 190). Thus, Mali's liberal formalists have structured the minimal reforms of 'good governance', avoiding much of the transformative aspirations of Mali's most marginalized populations. What might be termed an anti-authoritarian 'high' liberal(ism)—emphasizing justice, equality and participation—shifted to political and economic liberalization (neoliberalism) aligned with donor-partners' ideologies and policies.

Well before the 2013 French war, the idea of ostensibly 'national' culture as an 'anchor' to legitimize hegemonic liberal good governance was well articulated for and with allies and donors, such as France and the United States. With its capacities and donors' support, the Malian state (together with sponsored civil society actors) has since the 1990s sustained programmes of 'democracy

promotion' which acculturated citizens into a sense belonging to the Malian polity, mainly as voters in elections. Such an identity has taken hold mostly with donor-oriented political class actors in civil society and government. These mainly Francophone and Bamanan-speaking actors—largely educated, urban and professional—have dominated national political cultural ideology in Mali during the decades of democratization. Domestic and foreign government and NGO actors' citizen awareness activities have predominantly emphasized formal citizen identity commensurate with procedural democracy: election participation within the institutional consolidation of a minimal neoliberalizing state.

By emphasizing formal citizen identity thus, the Konaré and ATT regimes aimed to manage the possibly disorderly popular demands invigorated by the political liberalization of the 1990s. Such management sought narrowly conceived political class cohesion at the expense of linking formal politics to concerns and activities of the mass population. To minimize the influence of ethno-linguistic diversity and inequality, post-1991 regimes stressed social harmony, and further reproduced a mythological unity of Malians' ostensibly 'national characteristics' within an idea of 'greater Mali' (Sears 2007, 57–61; cf. Haidara 2013).<sup>10</sup>

The story of Sundiata Keïta founding and ruling the Mali Empire (*Maliba* 'Greater Mali') in the thirteenth–fifteenth centuries has been represented as an important 'contemporary political symbol in the context of Malian democratization' (Z. Smith 2003, 39). Such political symbolism and historiography frames the 'founding epic of the nation' (Z. Smith 2001, 76) as a 'Malian, indeed African, non-aggression pact', and further claims that 'all of these elements, internalized in the collective memory, are brought to the surface and invoked to protect Mali from ethnic conflict' (Konaré 2000, 22). Such analyses articulate democratization with 'Malian traditional society' as 'a unique political culture that may have provided Mali with a democratic advantage over other African nations' (Z. Smith 2001, 76).

Malian historian and writer Adame Ba Konaré (wife of former President Konaré) exemplifies the nationalist historiography, stressing that the Sundiata epic remains 'more than lived history' because his deeds 'are cultural ingredients defined for all time' (Konaré 2000, 16). Reading history thus, she claims that the interdependence of norms and practices governing economic and political relationships has forged a 'veritable Malian identity of common characteristics and values that are internalized and shared' (Konaré 2000, 15). This problematic historiography—partial and oriented to the south of Mali—has influenced contemporary political discourse in multiple spheres and organizations of the state administration, as well as donor-oriented local civil society organizations and foreign NGOs (Sears 2007). This historiography also exemplifies the selective articulation of Mali's dominant, Mandé/Bamanan heritage, with a liberal formalist orientation to the electoral legitimation of ongoing statebuilding. This ideology of liberal democratic peace tends to exaggerate commonalities and minimize differences and conflicts in the complex ideological and material transformation of social and political identities.

Against this historical backdrop, the post-French war dynamics that seek to reproduce a hegemonic liberalization are comprehensible. Bamako-based ‘donor-oriented, professional civil society’ actors, specifically ‘because of their proximity and entanglement with the State’ and its neoliberalizing agenda, inherit a liberal and formalist and market-oriented vision of post-authoritarian, post-Cold War Mali. They have indeed largely ‘lost sight of the country’s grass-roots realities and regional dynamics’ (Bergamaschi 2013b, 8). Such ideological homogenization and truncated possibilities are affirmed as ‘good governance’ and conducive to ‘peace’ by international donors. In the Malian case, the struggles to maintain control and order are alternately aided and resisted by attempts to remedy the hollowing out of liberal universalism as extended into the Malian territory through security and development interventions—to translate ‘thin’ liberal democratic peace into more meaningful moral and political authority. Not simply identical to state versus non-state actors’ struggles, these contests occur in the transnational spaces of global governance produced by international interventions, as seen in the increasing tension between IBK and French diplomacy.

Thanks to the collaboration of these influential transnational elites, Mali’s ‘donor darling’ status has further obscured persistent shortcomings in liberal governance (Bergamaschi 2013c). Convergent domestic and international policy viewpoints combine with Mali’s long-standing aid dependence and model aid recipient status in partnerships with bilateral donor and multilateral aid agencies. These donor-led ‘partnerships’ have tended to ‘lessen the accountability of the executive branch of government’ (Van de Walle 2012). As it was in Mali’s early post-transition period (1992–97), the 2013 presidential and legislative elections, required by the ‘liberal peace’ ideological form, were (again) enthusiastically and uncritically overemphasized as a feature of progressive democratic consolidation and return to the pre-coup peace. Excessive enthusiasm for mere elections once again ignored the broader domestic governance problems arising from ‘growing socio-cultural cleavage between urban elites and the rest of the population’ and the ‘several structural and longstanding threats to democratic consolidation in Mali’ (Van de Walle 2012, 3). Electorally legitimating the international military intervention has yet again reinforced a system of militarized global governance for liberalization.

In the Malian context, resistance to governance for liberalization in the post-authoritarian period was to be overcome by adapting ‘democracy to familiar cultural forms’, given that ‘the legitimation of the market depends on finding the factors that determine support for neo-liberal reforms’ (Coulibaly and Diarra 2004, 35–36). Political class actors in state and non-state spheres have narrated such forms and factors in a discourse of national political culture. This so-called ‘Malian’ culture, which allegedly holds advantages for democratic consolidation, is a dominant ideology centred on the political, economic and demographic centre of southern Mali, and resonates little with minority populations, particularly those of north Mali and of the littoral populations on the Niger River bend (Hall 2010).

Hence, within this framework, the French ‘securing’ of Mali from an Islamist security threat has both epistemological effects and ontological objectives: to secure the limits of Malian politics. In the period of post-coup, post-insurgency and post-intervention, a renewed emphasis on the region’s imperial historiography appears poised again to inform a preoccupation with ‘unity’ and ‘integration’ (Kande and Thiam 2013). The election of IBK as president in 2013 has not muted the nation- and statebuilding symbolism that has in the past weakened meaningful pluralism. Indeed, in such a political, ideological and discursive climate, the Malian administration and its donor-partners seem unlikely to attempt to ‘valorize local cultures while avoiding the steam roller that is the national narrative of the Mali Empire’ (Holder 2013). These domestic and foreign elites ignore that the pre-modern basis for international diplomacy, democracy, and human rights (as ostensibly formed by the Mali Empire), is ‘more mythical than historic’ and has ‘never been the cultural crucible of the north’ (Holder 2013).

Narratives of common historical experience across different populations have long overstated the inclusivity of Mali’s post-authoritarian nation-state building project, and these are linked to broader notions about compatible cultural democracy in Africa (Osabu-Klé 2000). Legacies from the early independence period, Mali’s leaders attempted to forge an abstract sense of national identity with flags, anthems, the idea of a national ‘people’s army’ and a modern nationwide school system (Cutter 1971, 96). Ideas about education for political development in sub-Saharan Africa, while no longer anti-colonial or anti-capitalist in tone, remain strongly tied to the ‘ideological re-education of African society to create the new African who can contribute effectively to the realization of nationalist objectives’ (Osabu-Klé 2000, 107). The hegemony-seeking project, to deepen the ideological consistency of an indigenized liberalism—primarily among national economic and political elites, but also across a mass of the population—rests on embedding market-capitalist relations within a more encompassing national narrative than has yet been set forth. Within transnational interfaces of actors, institutions, ideas and norms (Charbonneau 2014, 614) are multiple ideological and network resources with primarily ‘local’ or ‘domestic’ referents. Within Mali’s dominant, Mandé/Bamanan heritage, therefore, a cultural ideology of ‘liberalizing peace’ anchored in nationalist historiography remains essentially contested and contingent in Mali.

Indeed, those who take exception to the linking of a national ideology and nationalist narratives to those of neoliberalizing peace continue to build on local mechanisms of social regulation, based on coexisting and interacting ‘normative orders with different sources of legitimacy and authority’ (Benjamin 2008, 2255). The invigoration of alternative, non-state sites of social regulation including claims to moral authority from religious or traditional/customary bases, revive fundamental questions about the ongoing formation of the Malian polity. These persuasive/norm-setting and coercive/disciplinary alternatives continue to challenge not merely the legitimacy of a particular government and its donor-partners, but also the scope of the nation-state’s legitimate (capable and

acceptable) authority. Notwithstanding that the multiplicity of normative orders remains conditioned by parameters on transnational debates about and promotion of 'liberal peace' (Charbonneau 2014, 609), pride, belonging and investment in the Malian polity cannot be taken for granted; thus neither can be assumed the uncontested legitimacy of the Malian authorities that were rescued by the French military intervention.

Together, executive dominance, failed efforts to decentralize power and growing socio-cultural cleavages make up the Malian context, in which demands for self-determination and autonomy react to broader political and economic conditions. A decade of decentralization has 'done little to resolve the tension between state and customary authority or between the administrative drive toward uniformity and control' and the vibrant local social systems 'where there is a long history of self-governance and resistance to the state' (Benjamin 2008, 2260, 2267). Added to these administrative elements are the contours of contemporary ideological politics. Even if existing Malian territory remains non-negotiable, legacies of competing nationalisms and ethno-linguistically mobilized forces (e.g. Gandy Koy, Ganda Izo) and responses to socio-economic cleavages will persist. Add to these the dimensions of Islamist groups and actors, with their pragmatic approaches and ideological orientations, and these ideological foundational struggles of post-authoritarian transition will continue to condition Mali's development as a coherently sovereign nation-state (Bøås 2014). Indeed, the Malian case highlights the use of domestic hegemonic ideology as part of a dominant nationalist historiography that is negotiated, contested as well as resisted within dynamics of governance in Mali, illustrating the means by which liberal peace discourse privileges the unity and consensus fitted to statebuilding and globalizing neoliberal political economy (Doyle 2007, 9; Newman 2013, 141–157). Ostensible anchors for liberal democratic peace and open market political economy provide both domestically resonant and internationally relatable socio-cultural ingredients to support the dominant form of state- and peacebuilding in the post-Cold War moment.

Malians dissatisfied with democratization point to corruption, administrative inefficiency, opportunist party politics and 'consensus', and find resonance in the promises of moral purification and order made in 2012 by putschists and Islamists alike (Wing 2013). The specifically moral dimensions of legitimacy-seeking are re-emerging from 20 years' attempts to reinvent neoliberalizing governance in Africa (Berman 2010). The Malian authorities' hegemonic drive highlights how nationalist discourse articulates multiple moralities, plural knowledge and skills and their bearers in favour of neoliberal political economy to build durable peace. In other words, a domestic–foreign, transnational partnership of political development remains a strategic arena of struggle over the future shape of the Third Republic in Mali and the challenges faced in refounding, rebuilding and consolidating the post-conflict state consistent with the international and domestic legitimacy of neoliberalizing peace. In Mali, a hegemonic though contested nationalist ideology seeks to bridge the tension between liberal and other-than-simply-liberal with locally meaningful idioms of 'liberal peace' (see Kühn 2012).

## Conclusion

One of the ideological effects of the ‘liberal peace’ is, as Meera Sabaratnam (2013, 259) argued, how it is conceived as both oppressive and ‘the only true source of emancipation’. Hence, to problematize the transnational practices and forms of politics that authorized the French war, we challenged the uncritical dualisms where liberalizing global governance intersects ongoing, nation- and statebuilding in post-Cold War Mali. Thus is revealed a contradictory global political order that not only sets out the homogenizing ideological criteria on which to build peace through war, but also links these criteria to liberalizing governance in the transnational donor–partner relations of domestic and international politics. Such transnational liberalizing governance, in the Malian context, is part of both the hegemony- and legitimacy- seeking ideological homogenization of an elite political and economic class, and the limits that international military intervention attempts to place on domestic dynamics and local subjectivities. However, to frame ‘liberal’ and ‘western-led’ peace in transnational intervention contexts as problematic does not automatically embrace a ‘local turn’ and endorse uncritically those actors working from alternative sites of legitimacy and authority, whether customary or religious. Indeed, a ‘liberal peace’, when superimposed over such complex and coexisting normative orders, significantly oversimplifies ideological struggles that are fully encompassed neither by the dichotomies of ‘liberal’ versus ‘non-liberal’ (or illiberal), nor those of ‘local’ or ‘international’, nor those of ‘state’ and ‘non-state’ actors and spaces. Rather, different registers of ideological contestation are situated in the transnational spaces forged by military intervention and the related development cooperation activities of post-conflict reconciliation and reconstruction. As international conceptions of legitimate authority diverge from those with more domestic resonance, internationally supported reconciliation and electoral processes will still fail to integrate marginalized and minority communities. Despite finding legitimacy in ‘liberal peace’ discourse, the French intervention also re-energized debates over the limits of liberal peacebuilding to frame the types and range of challenges of nation- and statebuilding faced in Mali.

In Mali, the ‘liberal peace’ is a radical impossibility given the contested politics and political narratives about what ought to be ‘Mali’, the state and peace. This does not mean, however, that the ‘liberal peace’ is some ideological veil behind which the ‘truth’ can be found. Its ideological function generates resources of power by affecting epistemological positions and ontological assumptions, framing the limits of debates and issues, specifying legitimate practices and sites of authority, constituting identities and subjectivities, and so on. We have sought to demonstrate how the consistency of the ‘liberal peace’ ideological form shapes and limits the political practices that it authorizes and legitimizes.

## Notes on Contributors

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## Notes

1 For instances of alternative master-signifiers, from a radical Islamist point of view, ‘peace’ necessitates a universal religious purification and unification. From a Communist point of view, ‘peace’ means to fight against the capitalist order.

2 Ansar Eddine has many transliterations (e.g. Ansar Dine, Ançar Dine, Ansar al-Din and Ansar ul-Din). Iyad ag Ghaly’s insurgent movement is not the same as Cherif Ousmane Madani Haidara’s 30-year-old movement in southern Mali, called Ansar Dine.

3 Such plural, alternately competing and overlapping sources of legitimacy were also at play during the crises of legitimacy (some since 2011, others since 2008–9) that culminated in the pro-coup mobilization, including social movements close to partisan opposition forces (see Whitehouse 2012).

4 If enthusiasts of Mali’s democratization saw ATT’s first election in 2002 as marking the end of the transition period and the start of democratic consolidation, his re-election in 2007 dampened that enthusiasm. Since that time, Malian critics of ATT’s rule have not only denounced elite-level corruption, but also lamented declines in democracy and freedom from the impacts of unanimism, reconciliation and consensus-building. Moreover consensus governance has been defended and even touted by domestic political elites who are economically reliant on international donors (see Bergamaschi 2013c; Diallo 2009; Sears 2013).

5 According to the French newspaper *Le Nouvel Observateur*, after UNSC Resolution 2071 was adopted on 12 October, the French government received calls from several African governments which did not believe that AFISMA could perform its mission. At the end of October, France changed its strategy and planned its military support of the African force, including the presence of French troops on the ground (“Mali” 2013).

6 The French government and media reports claimed that the rebels threatened Bamako, but this is highly unlikely. The small rebel forces (estimates varied greatly but it seems safe to say between 2,000 and 3,000) could hardly have controlled both the north and a capital of 2 million people.

7 For example, notwithstanding its support for IBK's presidential candidacy, the 'official' grouping of Islamic associations (supported by the Malian Government's Islamic High Council), voiced disappointment in the composition of IBK's government. 'Mouvement Sabati 2012' president Moussa Boubacar Bah stated 'we think president IBK has not understood the Malian people. This government does not correspond to the change wished by the people'.

8 The headquarters of the French military operation Serval were supposed to move from Bamako to N'Djamena (Chad) at the end of May 2014, but the increasing violence in Kidal has postponed it.

9 Bagayoko's 'insurgés' means the ensemble of those rising up against the dictatorship. 10 Created in March 2013 to support IBK's presidential bid, l'Alliance pour la démocratie et la paix (ADP-Maliba) makes explicit the political salience of 'Greater Mali' in 2013–14.

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