

Terror in the Inner Niger Delta: Jihadism, Ethnic Conflict, and Virtuous Violence in Central Mali

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Abstract

In 2015, jihadist fighters affiliated with groups originating in northern Mali began to assert themselves in central Mali's Mopti Region and have since carried out many armed attacks not just against the Malian state, but also against ethnic militias and civilians. This article explores how jihadist groups became new actors in preexisting conflicts over economic and political relations between different ethnic groups and state actors in central Mali. I argue that traditional theories of both terrorism and ethnic conflict are by themselves incapable of explaining the ongoing system of violence in Mopti Region. The events following 2015 are better understood in the context of the communal sharing and authority ranking relational models of virtuous violence theory. By highlighting the social consequences of violence, this theory can also be applied towards resolving the interlocking conflicts in Mopti Region. Finally, I discuss how the factors behind the success of jihadist groups in central Mali relate to those present in other conflict zones across Africa. Based on this comparison, I argue that the conflict in Mopti Region risks becoming a blueprint for jihadism and terrorism that is highly transferable to other conflict zones in the coming years.

Keywords: Mali; Katibat Macina; Dan Na Ambassagou; jihadism; terrorism; virtuous violence theory; ethnic conflict

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On January 8 and 16, 2015, unidentified armed men attacked Malian military outposts and the village of Dioura near Ténenkou in the southwestern part of central Mali's Mopti Region, killing a dozen soldiers. Media reports claimed that witnesses heard the attackers chanting "God is great" and "there is no god but God" in Arabic.¹ More specifically, press accounts soon linked the attacks with a purported jihadist group called the Macina Liberation Front,² ostensibly under the control of Hamadoun Kouffa.³ Kouffa was a preacher turned jihadist who had led the assault by jihadist groups against the city of Konna in Mopti Region in January 2013 during the Malian civil war. On July 18, 2015, a few months after the Dioura attacks, armed men from the pastoralist Peul community attacked the village of Mondoro more than 200 miles to the southeast. The village was inhabited by Dogon, an ethnic group whose members primarily cultivate land, and the attacks resulted in the death of six people.⁴ Although the events of January and July initially appeared to be unrelated—local officials dismissed the Mondoro attack as merely an "inevitable" confrontation between herders and farmers⁵—the violent jihadist campaign against the Malian state and cycles of intercommunal violence between herders and farmers have expanded and merged into a single system of violence in Mopti Region, and the death toll from these interlocking conflicts has grown to far outstrip that of the better-known conflict in northern Mali.

This article examines how jihadist groups became new actors in preexisting conflicts over economic and political relations between different ethnic groups and state actors in central Mali, all overlaid on a backdrop of ecological stresses induced by changes in rainfall patterns straining old norms of communal resource access and management. I argue that traditional theories of both terrorism and ethnic conflict are by themselves incapable of explaining the ongoing system of violence in Mopti Region. The events following 2015 are better understood in the context of the communal

sharing and authority ranking relational models of virtuous violence theory. By highlighting the social consequences of violence, this theory can also be applied towards resolving the interlocking conflicts in Mopti Region. Finally, I discuss how the factors behind the success of jihadist groups in central Mali relate to those present in other conflict zones across Africa. Based on this comparison, I argue that the conflict in Mopti Region risks becoming a blueprint for jihadism and terrorism that is highly transferable to other conflict zones in the coming years.

The Inner Niger Delta: Geography, People, and History

Central Mali's peoples and history have been shaped by the unique geography of the area. The Niger River—which flows roughly southwest to northeast from its sources in the highlands of Guinea—dramatically turns in northeastern Mali, from there flowing roughly northwest to southeast until it empties into the Gulf of Guinea from Nigeria (see figure 1 below). Just south of this "Great Bend," in central Mali, the river forms what is dubbed the "Inner Niger Delta"—hundreds of kilometers of alluvial floodplains, wetlands, and marshes. The level of the Niger River rises and falls each year in accordance with the rainy and dry seasons. The annual flooding of the wetlands means that the Inner Niger Delta is remarkably fertile and can support a great deal of production of both crops and of animals. In 2012, Mopti Region—the administrative division of Mali into which most of the Inner Delta falls—accounted for 40% of Mali's rice production and 20% of its millet and sorghum production.⁶ It was also the country's leading region for livestock raising, despite comprising only 6% of Mali's land area. Due to the major seasonal changes in the river's water levels, the same land can be used or transited by both agriculturalists and herders at different times of the year. Typically, herders pasture their



FIGURE 1. Map showing the location of Mopti Region in relation to the Niger River.⁷ *Note: The borders for Mopti Region are approximations, and only for illustrative purposes.*

animals on pastures outside the flood zone during the rainy season, but during the dry season they lead their herds to pastures within the flood zone, where their animals graze on a nutritious plant that grows underwater when the area is flooded during the rainy season. Access to these pastures and the right to move herds across the land to reach them is regulated not just by the laws of the Malian state but also by a set of customary laws dating back to the nineteenth century.⁸

Central Mali is populated by a large number of ethnicities. Members of ethnic groups are often identified with certain occupations; for example, Peuls (also referred to as Fulbe or Fulani) are known as pastoralists, Bozos are fishermen, and Songhai and Dogon are farmers.⁹ In practice, things are not quite so simple, and members of any given group may practice many different forms of economic activity. Nevertheless, the identification of ethnic groups with occupations is widespread and means that economic conflicts are sometimes

framed in ethnic terms, as will be discussed below. Today, the majority of the Inner Niger Delta's people are Sunni Muslims, and, despite the formally secular nature of the modern Malian state, Islam is an important component of the identity of most residents of the Inner Delta.¹⁰ However, Islam is more important to some groups than others. Different communities converted to Islam at different points, and the region as a whole embraced Islam significantly later than other areas of West Africa.¹¹ For example, Peuls in central Mali place the introduction of Islam to their community at the end of the seventeenth century, but some Peuls, as well as members of other ethnic groups such as the Bambara, remained non-Muslim for centuries longer.¹² Even in the present, many members of certain ethnic groups, such as the Dogon—the single most numerous group in central Mali—are non-Muslim, holding on to traditional beliefs.

In the early nineteenth century, after centuries of fragmented political authority, the Inner Niger Delta was unified by Seku

Amadu, a charismatic Peul Muslim religious leader with links to Sufi orders and the Sokoto Caliphate of northwestern Nigeria. Seku Amadu's new state became known as the Macina Empire, and its ruling elite was dominated by Peuls. Under the Macina Empire, Islam thoroughly penetrated Peul society. The empire's bureaucracy consisted entirely of 'ulama'—Islamic clergy—and Islam guided the state's ideology; for example, the empire's administration, called the Diina, sponsored Qur'anic schools and traveling preachers to spread Islam to the common people.¹³ In addition to firmly entrenching Islam amongst the inhabitants of the Inner Delta—especially among Peuls—the Macina Empire formalized and codified customs to manage resource access. Territories for rice cultivation and pasturing were defined, fishing rights were allocated, and regulations were set down to clarify who could access which pastures when, and via which routes. For example, specific Peul clans were granted the right to graze their cattle on delineated seasonal pastures and to charge access fees to those wishing to transit the land.¹⁴

Since Mali gained independence in 1960, the Malian state has persistently sought to restructure the traditional systems of resource access and play a larger role in regulating land use and arbitrating disputes, with mixed success.¹⁵ State-sponsored interventions, especially in the form of land ownership reforms, have consistently favored cultivated agriculture and those who practice it—mainly Bambara, Songhai, and Dogon—over pastoralism and pastoralists.¹⁶ Decade by decade, the state has clawed for itself an ever-larger role as an arbiter in conflicts over land use at the expense of traditional authorities.¹⁷ Despite these efforts, the Malian state does not have a major on-the-ground presence in rural areas of the Inner Delta, and the provision of services such as infrastructure, health care, and education is nonexistent in many areas. A lack of state presence, especially in terms of rural access to the central justice system, means that the state has not been able to

eradicate customary systems regulating resource access. By many rural residents of central Mali the state is seen as distant, abstract, and—due to the corruption and overbearing attitude of state officials deployed to the area—predatory and threatening.¹⁸ At the same time, the state's expansion has undermined traditional authorities, and, as a result, most non-state systems are not fully functional. Many traditional leaders of ethnic communities have also moved to towns and cities in the region, leading members of their communities in rural areas, especially the youth, to question their authority, thus further weakening traditional systems.¹⁹ As a result, state authority and traditional customs maintain an uneasy coexistence in central Mali.

In addition to political pressures, the systems regulating resource access in central Mali have increasingly been stressed by environmental factors. In one way, these systems have always been subject to changes in the environment. During years in which the Niger River's flood has been small—such as during the droughts of the 1970s and 1980s—herders have sought to move their animals to formerly submerged pastures earlier in the year in order to arrive before other herders. This has led to conflict both between different groups of herders and between herders and farmers, as earlier transit of animals over cultivated land is more likely to interfere with the harvest and damage crops.²⁰ Over the last few years, however, climate change has led to drastic changes in rainfall patterns in the region, severely impacting traditional systems of resource access. According to a local climatologist, some parts of Mopti Region today receive only half as much rain as they did during the 1960s, putting enormous pressures on the livelihoods of many local people and groups.²¹ In particular, drought reduces soil productivity, leading cultivators to attempt to make up the deficit by expanding onto new land—including land formerly used as pasture—again leading to farmer-herder conflicts.²² Especially since

2015, conflict has broken out over access to water and land, and, due to the identification of ethnic groups in the area with an economic occupation, this conflict has been cast in ethnic terms.²³

Violence in Mopti Region: Origins and Actors

The MNLA, Ansar al-Din, and MUJAO

The current violence in central Mali has its immediate roots in the Malian civil war, which formally lasted from 2012 to 2015. The war began in January 2012 with a rebellion in Mali's three northern regions (Timbuktu, Gao, and Kidal)²⁴ led by the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA), a secular, mainly Tuareg²⁵ group seeking the independence of northern Mali. The MNLA was joined in its rebellion by Ansar al-Din ("Partisans of Religion"), a group with an Islamist ideology and possible links to al-Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM).²⁶ By April 2012, the two had defeated the Malian military in the north, and the MNLA declared the independence of northern Mali as Azawad.²⁷ In June 2012, however, the MNLA and Ansar al-Din had a major falling out over the formal role of Islam in Azawad, and fighting erupted between them. Following the separation from the MNLA, Ansar al-Din became more explicitly committed to an AQIM-inspired jihadist ideology and the implementation of AQIM's interpretation of Islamic law in the territories under its control. As part of this process, Ansar al-Din was also joined by new jihadist groups, most notably the Movement for Jihad and Tawhid in West Africa (MUJAO).²⁸ Together, these jihadist groups decisively defeated the MNLA and seized military control of most of the north.

The civil war, however, was not just contained to the North but spread into central Mali as well. In 2012, the MNLA had occupied the northern part of Mopti Region before being replaced by the Ansar al-Din-MUJAO alliance. Most of northern Mali and part of Mopti Region remained under jihadist

control throughout the remainder of 2012 as the Malian government was occupied by an ongoing military coup and the international community dithered about mounting a response. Initially, neither the MNLA nor the Ansar al-Din-MUJAO alliance succeeded in establishing a presence outside the main towns of the northern Mopti Region, despite attempting to recruit locals into their ranks.²⁹ In January 2013, however, the alliance attacked the city of Konna in Mopti Region, breaking through the Malian army's front lines and threatening to push further south, possibly even to the capital, Bamako. Faced with the prospect of AQIM-linked groups seizing control over all of Mali, France intervened militarily with Operation Serval, which swiftly repelled the jihadists and pushed the war back into the north.

Although the period of war in central Mali was relatively brief, it would have a significant impact on the region in the subsequent years. As previously discussed, the Malian state presence in central Mali was always tenuous at best, especially in rural regions. The fighting in 2012 and 2013 caused many government officials to flee their posts for the relative safety of the city of Mopti or areas further south, and many of them have neither returned nor been replaced.³⁰ The loss of these officials has crippled state presence in much of Mopti Region, and unsurprisingly left the state even less capable of mediating conflicts over resource access in central Mali. At the same time, as discussed above, the state's historical expansion into the area had come at the expense of local systems of governance, and it was not always possible to simply fall back on traditional systems when state officials left in 2012-2013. Thus, by the end of 2013, a critical power vacuum had emerged in much of rural central Mali.

Katibat Macina, JNIM, and Dan Na Ambassagou

While central Mali saw a period of low violence following the French intervention in January 2013, the power vacuum created by the withdrawal of the state during the civil

war was eventually taken advantage of by newly formed local jihadist groups. In January 2015, these groups—whose identities were initially somewhat unclear—mounted their first attacks against Malian soldiers in central Mali. Many more attacks soon followed targeting not just Malian security forces but also other state officials, state institutions (such as schools), and local community leaders who opposed the jihadists. The Malian press quickly labeled Hamadoun Kouffa, a locally known Peul preacher with alleged ties to the leadership of Ansar al-Din, as the leader of the jihadists.³¹ While the media portrayed these jihadists as operating under a new group called the Macina Liberation Front (MLF), the nature of this organization was, and has remained, extremely unclear (no evidence existed of a political or military command structure, and the group never claimed responsibility for local attacks or produced videos or other media content).³² Instead, in May 2016, an official communication appeared by a group which referred to itself not as the MLF but as Katibat Macina, again led by Hamadoun Kouffa. The group claimed to be part of Ansar al-Din.³³ In March 2017, Kouffa himself appeared in a video announcing the creation of a new jihadist umbrella group in Mali, Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wa-l-Muslimin (JNIM; “The Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims”), which subsequently pledged allegiance to al-Qa'ida's central command and was officially recognized as al-Qa'ida's Malian affiliate.

While Katibat Macina, along with several groups operating primarily in northern Mali, is supposedly an official part of JNIM, little suggests that the group has been formally integrated into either al-Qa'ida's or JNIM's command structure.³⁴ Aside from the extent to which Katibat Macina is centrally controlled and integrated vertically into JNIM and al-Qa'ida, certain characteristics of the group are known. As the name suggests, the group is dominated by Peuls, most of whom have been recruited from rural areas of Mopti Region and had low social standing. Much of the group's

rhetoric is built around the need to “return” to the era of the Macina Empire, and Kouffa has frequently praised the Macina system, framing it as a golden age for local Peuls characterized by a just system of resource access.³⁵ Indeed, the group is highly critical of the status quo in central Mali, which they perceive as disadvantaging most Peuls. It heavily criticizes the Malian state and its ally France for imposing foreign norms and morals on the Muslims of the Inner Delta. In this context, it also attempts to provide basic services—including a justice and education system—in many areas of the rural Mopti Region where the state has no presence or has been driven out by Katibat Macina's attacks.³⁶ Moreover, the group is also critical of parts of the Peul community. For one, it rhetorically attacks Peul elites for having sold out their people and frames itself as a means for people to liberate themselves from unjust social hierarchies.³⁷

As fighting between Katibat Macina and Malian security forces continued through 2015 and 2016, a third set of violent actors soon entered the scene: non-Islamic ethnic militias. Many of these ethnic militias emerged from the primarily agricultural Dogon community, which, while not an absolute majority, is the largest single ethnic community in Mopti Region. While some of the Dogon are Muslim, most have maintained traditional beliefs, and these groups did not frame themselves as “jihadists” or “Islamic fighters.” Instead, most Dogon self-defense groups were initially formed by Dozos—traditional Dogon hunting societies³⁸—as *anti-jihadist* responses to localized conflict eruptions. With time these groups got more organized, and in late 2016, a number of them merged to form a new group, named Dan Na Ambassagou (“Hunters Who Trust in God”).³⁹ Dan Na Ambassagou reportedly has a military-style command structure with ranks and units and commands hundreds of fighters throughout Dogon areas.⁴⁰ With Dogon militias entering the political and military arena, violence in Mopti Region became more explicitly embedded in ethnic

tensions. Because, as mentioned above, most jihadists are recruited from the Peul community, the anti-jihadist stance of Dan Na Ambassagou and its likes has often been cast in ethnic terms, as Dogons versus Peuls. Nevertheless, ethnic tensions do not just arise due to the Peul involvement in jihadist movements. In addition to maintaining security and defending their communities from jihadist attacks, Dan Na Ambassagou and other Dogon militias have also been motivated by economic concerns, responding to increasing tensions regarding resource access, especially in terms of land usage. In this context, they have framed their operations in terms of mobilizing agriculturalists against pastoralists and have mainly targeted Peul villages and civilians. While similar forms of economic and ethnic motives for violence in central Mali can be traced to the 1980s,⁴¹ earlier instances of fighting took place at far lower levels. Following the Malian civil war, the rise of jihadist movements, and the growing impact of climate change on resource access, the spread and intensity of ethnic violence have escalated drastically.

The relationship between the Dogon militias and the Malian state is somewhat more complex. Malian government leaders have consistently called for the dissolution and disarmament of the Dogon militias, especially after the latter was found to have committed atrocities against civilians. In March 2019, Dan Na Ambassagou was formally banned after it was accused of killing more than 125 Peul civilians in the village of Ogossagou.⁴² Prior to the Ogossagou massacre—which raised such national and international furor that it led to the resignation of the government of Malian prime minister Soumeylou Boubèye Maïga—the Dogon militias, and especially Dan Na Ambassagou, had clashed with Malian security forces in several instances over the course of 2018, albeit with far fewer casualties. Nevertheless, despite its official stance against Dan Na Ambassagou, the government has yet to take serious action against the group.⁴³ In fact, strong evidence

exists of links between the Malian military and the Dogon militias, and many civilians in Mopti Region have accused the state of providing military weapons to the Dogon militias.⁴⁴ At a minimum, elements within the Malian military see the Dogon militias as useful in securing areas of central Mali where the state has no presence (despite the Dogon militias' less-than-stellar record in actually fighting jihadists). The leader of Dan Na Ambassagou has even publicly stated his men have worked alongside the Malian military in just such a role.⁴⁵ However, the formal policy of the Malian government remains the disarmament and demobilization of the Dogon militias, and the two sets of actors have different goals. In this way, Katibat Macina, Dogon militias, and Malian security forces are all actors in a single mutually reinforcing system of violence in central Mali, in which each group has fought with the other two.⁴⁶

Applying Theories of Terrorism and Ethnic Conflict to Central Mali

In international media and scholarship, violence in the central Mali region has often been framed as either “terrorism” or “ethnic conflict.” There are many reasons why this terminology is appropriate. Although there is no universally accepted definition of terrorism, many common definitions understand terrorism as violence intended to intimidate or coerce civilian populations.⁴⁷ When this definition is applied, all three sets of violent actors in central Mali can be said to have engaged in terrorism. Indeed, the brunt of the fighting in Mopti Region has been borne by civilians, and civilian deaths in Mopti Region have come to far outstrip casualties from fighting in other areas of the country.⁴⁸ This reality is a shared responsibility, and members of each of the three main sets of actors involved in the conflict have been accused by international rights groups of committing war crimes and crimes against humanity.⁴⁹ Similarly, there is certainly an ethnic component to this

violence, evident in the rhetoric of both *Katibat Macina* and the Dogon militias. Nevertheless, violence in Mopti Region is more complex than this. Due to the belief on the part of Dogon militias and state security forces that Peuls automatically support jihadist groups and the identification of ethnic groups with economic occupations, it is no longer possible to effectively separate violence motivated by differing interpretations of Islam (i.e. jihadism), violence motivated by ethnicity, and violence motivated by competition for resources. In this context, traditional theories of terrorism and ethnic violence have largely been unable to completely explain events in Mopti Region.

In the case of terrorism, most established theories seek to explain terrorist violence in one of two ways. First, some theories paint terrorism as a product of underlying psychological conditions. As Walter Laqueur, a proponent of the psychological conditions model, wrote, “all terrorists... suffer from some form of delusion and persecution mania.”⁵⁰ Alternatively, other theories frame terrorism as a strategic choice, a tool in the service of political goals. Shibley Telhami, one advocate for the strategic choice model, argues that terrorists are not psychologically abnormal but that groups adopt terrorism “as a method to serve their ends,” ends that are typically political in nature.⁵¹ Nevertheless, both of these paradigms run into problems when applied to the context of central Mali. One such problem arises in analyzing *Katibat Macina* and similar jihadist groups. While little empirical data on individual members of jihadist groups in central Mali exist, the extant data—mainly consisting of interviews conducted by NGO researchers with youths formerly involved with jihadist groups, some of whom were in government custody at the time of the interview—does not indicate any sort of systematic psychological abnormalities or predilections on the part of central Malian jihadist recruits.⁵² It is similarly difficult to ascribe *Katibat Macina* fighters’ use of terrorist strategies in central

Mali to clear-cut political goals. First, it is uncertain whether or not *Katibat Macina* actually exists as a unified group rather than a loose collection of fighters, as there is no evidence of a clear military or political command structure.⁵³ Second, even assuming *Katibat Macina* is a unified group and is responsible for most or all attacks in Mopti Region attributed to jihadists, the group does not publicly claim responsibility for its attacks, nor does it release videos or other media, undermining the idea that it seeks to leverage its attacks for political goals.⁵⁴ Third, and most importantly, when former members of central Malian jihadist groups—including those who left voluntarily and those who were captured by security forces—were interviewed by a team of Malian and European researchers working for an NGO, they overwhelmingly claimed that they joined these groups primarily to protect themselves and their families and secondarily to increase their social standing in their communities.⁵⁵ While *Katibat Macina*’s purportedly has an overarching political goal, namely the establishment of an Islamic state in Mali and the application of the group’s interpretation of Islamic law in daily life, this does not appear to have influenced recruits.⁵⁶ Thus, in the case of *Katibat Macina*, the strategic choice approach must be complemented by a more expansive theory.

Similarly, neither the psychological conditions model nor the strategic choice approach can comprehensively account for terrorist acts committed by fighters from the Malian state and the Dogon militias. First, the high number of participants makes it unlikely that perpetrators of terrorist actions from either of these two sets of actors suffer from psychological conditions such as delusion and mania. Second, it is unlikely that attacks against civilians carried out by the Malian state is part of the government’s political strategy. Malian military authorities have repeatedly condemned atrocities against civilians in central Mali, and taken measures against members of its own security forces when these have been

suspected of perpetrating such atrocities.⁵⁷ Any attempt to apply the strategic choice approach to the attacks against civilians thus inevitably relies on retroactively divining from security forces' terrorist actions goals that Malian military and Malian state officials at all levels themselves deny. The strategic choice approach is perhaps best applied to the Dogon militias, as their attacks against Peul civilians appear to be part of an explicit strategy to achieve their goals of "protecting Dogons against potential jihadist attacks."⁵⁸ The Dogon militias seem to view Peul civilians as potential jihadist supporters and believe that terrorism can coerce the Peul civilian population into abandoning their support of the jihadist groups. Terror against civilians could arguably also be used to intimidate and deter Peul pastoralists from using Dogon lands. Nevertheless, as we will see below, there are other dimensions to these acts of terrorism that can only be understood outside the strategic choice approach.

Traditional theories of ethnic violence are similarly incapable of alone explaining the system of violence in Mopti Region. These theories typically incorporate three sets of causes.⁵⁹ The first sees ethnic violence as instrumental and claims that people participate in ethnic violence because they believe it is in their personal interest to do so.⁶⁰ The second views ethnic violence as fundamentally emotional, suggesting that ethnic violence is driven primarily by emotional impulses and emotional antipathy towards another ethnic group.⁶¹ Finally, the third set of causes for ethnic violence found in the literature, albeit somewhat less frequently, is obligation—people perpetrate ethnic violence because they believe their social ties oblige them to do so.⁶² To some extent, the combination of instrumental, emotional, and obligatory motives traditionally explored in theories on ethnic violence can account for violence perpetrated by the Dogon militias and jihadist groups. Nevertheless, by definitionally focusing on ethnicity as a cause for violence they do not adequately account for other factors in

informing public motivations on all sides of the violence, such as the importance of promoting or combating religious ideologies. Neither do these theories capture the importance of economic struggles over resource access. Finally, theories of ethnic conflict are completely unable to explain acts of violence committed by the Malian state. As discussed above, Malian security forces operating in central Mali are not organized along ethnic lines or dominated by any ethnic group from the area.

Virtuous Violence and Central Mali

Since traditional theories of terrorism and ethnic violence are unable to fully explain what motivates perpetrators of violence in central Mali at the group and individual level, a broader theory of violence is needed. Here, virtuous violence theory, articulated by Alan Fiske and Tage Shakti Rai, offers a number of useful lenses through which to examine violence in central Mali. Fiske and Rai argue that perpetrators of violence overwhelmingly believe their actions are morally justified and engage in violence to advance four types of universal social relationships or relational models, which they call communal sharing, authority ranking, equality matching, and market pricing.⁶³ Of these, this article will focus on communal sharing and authority ranking.⁶⁴ Communal sharing derives from the idea of group unity, which, as Fiske and Rai put it, "is directed toward caring for and supporting the integrity of in-groups through a sense of collective responsibility and common fate."⁶⁵ More pointedly, for those "motivated by [communal sharing] unity, violence is morally praiseworthy if the victim is perceived as a potential threat or contaminant to the in-group."⁶⁶ Authority ranking, for its part, is motivated by hierarchy, "creating and maintaining linear ranking in social groups."⁶⁷ Violence motivated by authority ranking is deemed morally acceptable if it is directed against those who are a threat to what the perpetrator sees as the ideal hierarchy in social

relationships. The principle holds for hierarchies composed of both individuals and groups. In addition to the relational models, Fiske and Rai propose six constitutive phases, referring to the ways in which each relational model “generate[s], shape[s], and preserve[s] the social relationships a person needs.”⁶⁸ The six constitutive phases are: creation, “violence that is intended to form new relationships”; modulation, which change “the nature of an existing relationship in a way that does not create a fundamentally new relationship”; protection, violence deployed to protect the perpetrator and the perpetrator’s relationship partners; redress and rectification, violence designed to restore a relationship to its ideal state by punishing a transgressor; termination, violence intended to forever end a relationship; and mourning, violence “in response to the loss of an important relationship.”⁶⁹ Each of these constitutive phases can be motivated by and contribute to any of the four relational models.

All three of the main sets of perpetrators of violence in central Mali have acted in accordance with both the communal sharing and authority ranking relational models. For example, former members of Katibat Macina who spoke with members of an NGO stress that they joined the group primarily because they sought to protect their communities as the state cannot or will not do so. As one former member put it, “since the state left, we have had to protect ourselves as best we can.”⁷⁰ The decision of these recruits to join Katibat Macina is an explicit fulfillment of the protection constitutive phase and an implicit fulfillment of the redress and rectification constitutive phase of the communal sharing relational model. By joining a group dedicated to violence, the recruits preemptively demonstrate their willingness to participate in violence to defend members of their in-group—their local community (protection). Moreover, because Katibat Macina is not a strictly defensive group but also carries out offensive operations against its perceived opponents, recruits who ostensibly join to

protect their communities also implicitly signal their willingness to carry out offensive operations against their communities’ enemies in response to perceived threats (redress and rectification). In line with the theory proposed by Fiske and Rai, both constitutive phases strengthen the unity of the in-group.

Authority ranking motivations behind Katibat Macina are somewhat more subtle, but they exist in multiple forms. At the individual level, some former members said they were motivated to join the group by the prospect of group membership helping them rise within their communities.⁷¹ For these recruits, joining Katibat Macina fulfills the modulation and potentially creation constitutive phases of the authority ranking relational model. By committing themselves to perpetrate violence against third parties, they seek to modulate their hierarchical relationships with other members of their community and potentially create new social hierarchies in which they benefit from their status as specialists in violence. At the group level, Hamadoun Kouffa, the purported leader of Katibat Macina, has rhetorically attacked Peul elites in Mopti Region for their corruption,⁷² and his group has targeted many traditional Peul leaders who refuse to pay taxes to jihadist groups.⁷³ Attacks on traditional Peul leaders fulfill the redress and rectification constitutive mode of the authority ranking relational model, as the group perpetrates violence to punish those who have transgressed against the group’s ideal hierarchy by refusing to pay taxes. The punishments are designed to restore the hierarchy and warn other would-be transgressors. At the community level, Katibat Macina has attacked local agriculturalist communities, especially the Dogon, in tandem with its attacks against state forces and institutions. Combined, these attacks serve to challenge through violence the Malian state’s longtime preference for cultivators over herders, expressed through land policy, in favor of a more egalitarian or even opposing hierarchical relationship between cultivators and herder

communities.⁷⁴ These attacks thus constitute the modulation constitutive phase of authority ranking because Katibat Macina uses violence to challenge the farmer-herder hierarchy. While Katibat Macina justifies its actions through the language of Islam and jihad, the group operates according to multiple logics. In this context, Fiske and Rai's relational models offer a complementary understanding of the group's everyday operations.

Dogon militias, and especially Dan Na Ambassagou, also perpetrate violence in accordance with the communal sharing and authority ranking relational models. Both Dan Na Ambassagou and the militias that preceded it (and continue to exist in parallel) were explicitly founded as a community self-defense group intended to repel jihadist attacks.⁷⁵ Individuals who joined Dan Na Ambassagou under these auspices thus sought to fulfill the protection constitutive phase of the communal sharing relational model, signaling their intent to perpetrate violence to protect members of their in-group. At the communal level, Dan Na Ambassagou has attacked Peul villages and civilians outside the areas under the effective control of jihadist groups. These attacks constitute the redress and rectification and protection phases of communal sharing. By killing Peul civilians, Dan Na Ambassagou militiamen punish third parties for attacks on the militiamen's in-group (redress and rectification) and eliminate perceived potential threats to the in-group (protection). At the same time, these attacks also fulfill the redress and rectification phase of authority ranking by punishing Peuls for challenging traditional herder-farmer hierarchies in central Mali. Dan Na Ambassagou has also frequently engaged in armed confrontations with the Malian state, even if the levels of violence accompanying these confrontations have thus far been significantly lower than those associated with Dan Na Ambassagou's attacks on civilians.⁷⁶ These confrontations fulfill the modulation constitutive phase of authority ranking as Dan Na Ambassagou seeks to challenge the Malian government's

imposed hierarchy placing Malian security forces above Dan Na Ambassagou as legitimate purveyors of violence in central Mali.

Finally, Malian security forces have also perpetrated violence in central Mali to further the relational models of communal sharing and authority ranking. For instance, in May 2018, Malian security forces summarily executed 12 civilians at a weekly cattle market in the village of Boulkessy after a Malian soldier was killed in an attack nearby.⁷⁷ The killing of civilians in Boulkessy is an example of violence used to fulfill the redress and rectification and protection constitutive phases of the communal sharing relational model, the community, in this case, being the Malian military. By killing nearby civilians and falsely accusing them of having been terrorists,⁷⁸ the Malian soldiers sought to avenge their comrades (redress and rectification), eliminate potential threats to the in-group (protection), and induce those outside the in-group to desist in attacking members of the in-group (protection), thus demonstrating their commitment to the in-group's unity. The Boulkessy massacre was not an isolated incident, and international rights groups have documented a pattern of violent reprisals by the Malian military against local civilians.⁷⁹ In this context, Fiske and Rai's theory can be used to cast light on some of the motivations behind the soldiers' actions. Moreover, this theory can also be applied to the confrontations between the Malian state and Dan Na Ambassagou. In attacking the Dogon militia, the military seeks to punish it for its transgressions against a perceived hierarchical agreement between the two groups that Dan Na Ambassagou would operate only in areas where the army was not.⁸⁰ Moreover, the Malian military seeks to restore the honor of its in-group by demonstrating that it is capable of maintaining security in areas under its control without assistance. In this way, the confrontations with Dan Na Ambassagou fulfill the redress and rectification constitutive phase of both the

authority ranking and communal sharing model.

Conclusion

This article has argued that violence in central Mali is being perpetrated by three primary sets of actors: jihadist groups, especially Katibat Macina; Malian state security force; and ethnic militias, especially the Dogon militia Dan Na Ambassagou. By targeting civilians, all three sets of actors have committed acts of terrorism. An analysis of the central Malian conflicts shows that violence is fueled by a wide range of factors, including disputes over the role of Islam, ethnic tensions between Peuls and Dogons, economic conflict over resource access, tension between state and traditional authority, and changing rainfall patterns due to climate change. More importantly, this article has argued that these actors and factors cannot be viewed separately from one another. What is occurring in central Mali cannot be broken down into distinct sub-conflicts pitting just two of the actors against each other, nor can it be reduced to insulated models of terrorism or ethnic conflict. Instead, traditional theories of both terrorism and ethnic conflict are best complemented by a more expansive theory of violence—such as Fiske and Rai’s theory of virtuous violence. By showing how violence is informed by a wide range of logics—including supporting the integrity of the in-group, and maintaining the in-group’s linear ranking—Fiske and Rai allow us to see central Mali as a complex social and political space in which acts of terrorism are not just rooted in ethnic hatred, political strategizing, or psychological disorder.

Understanding the system of violence in central Mali through virtuous violence theory also offers insight into potential paths to reducing the current levels of violence and ultimately ending the interlocking conflicts. Over the course of the past three years, the Malian government and various ethnic militias have formally agreed to unilateral

and multilateral ceasefires and disarmament schemes.⁸¹ All such schemes, however, have quickly broken down. Although some Malian public figures—especially Salafi-oriented religious leaders such as Mahmoud Dicko, former leader of the High Islamic Council of Mali—support negotiating with Hamadoun Kouffa and Katibat Macina over an end to violence in exchange for an adjustment to the role of Islam in public life in Mali, no such negotiations have formally occurred.⁸² The Malian state, community peacebuilders, civil society groups representing ethnic militias, and international donors and human rights groups all agree in principle that lasting peace can only be achieved in central Mali if Malian security forces can guarantee security to all elements of the populace impartially and if the Malian state expands its presence on the ground to provide services to the population.⁸³ However, in their current form, Malian security forces are firmly contributing to the system of violence in central Mali rather than playing a role in ending it—one rights group’s investigation concluded that the Malian military summarily executed more than 100 civilians and tortured dozens of others in 2018 alone.⁸⁴ This comes despite extensive sums of money and time being spent on training for the Malian military focused on respecting the rights of the populace. In the short- and medium-term, the Malian state simply lacks the resources to dramatically expand services in central Mali, and it is unlikely that it will be able to single-handedly ensure peace in the region.

Where other efforts have failed, however, virtuous violence theory offers a subtly different approach towards reducing levels of violence in central Mali. As Fiske and Rai note, violence only continues to be seen as morally acceptable when it actually *enhances* the perpetrator’s social relationships through any of the relational models—violent practices formerly seen as morally acceptable “[disappear] as soon as the consequences of violence bec[o]me maladaptive.”⁸⁵ According to this line of reasoning, violence in central Mali should

theoretically cease if violent actions have a negative impact on the perpetrator's social relationships. The impact of violence on the perpetrator's social relationships is most easily adjustable on the side of the Malian security forces because the Malian state is already formally committed to ending the violence, providing security impartially, and respecting human rights. The Malian state has even paid lip service to the need to end the culture of impunity in its armed forces. However, thus far punishments inflicted by the state on soldiers found or alleged to have committed violent rights abuses have not extended beyond simply redeploying offending units to other parts of the country.⁸⁶ As such, these punishments have not succeeded in making violence on the part of the security forces maladaptive. Nevertheless, security reforms dedicated to rendering violence maladaptive for the social relationships of perpetrators—starting with harsher, more transparent punishments for transgressors but focusing on forming negative perceptions of transgressors among those in communal sharing and authority ranking relationships with them—may succeed where attempts to simply educate soldiers on the importance of human rights have failed.

Reducing the adaptivity of violence for perpetrators in jihadist groups and ethnic militias is more difficult. As Fiske and Rai suggest, changes in cultural views in these communities must come from within the communities themselves. However, in some places, local activists—and especially women—have spurred local community reconciliations. For example, in the small town of Macina,⁸⁷ following an eruption of violence between the local Peul and Bambara communities, local women organized first community dialogue and then a formal reconciliation celebration featuring cultural activities shared by both groups. The event, which successfully ended the outbreak of violence in the area, also shamed authority figures in the community who could have done more to stop the violence but did not.⁸⁸ In short, these local peacebuilders have been

trying to make violence negatively impact the perpetrator's social relationships and to socially reward non-violent options, and, in the case of the Macina women, also furthering the communal sharing relational model through non-violent means. However, while these grassroots peace efforts have met with some successes, they remain largely unconnected from each other and from state support.⁸⁹ At the moment, it is not immediately clear what can be done to support the efforts of such local activists, and the topic requires further research. Nevertheless, virtuous violence theory indicates this approach is likely to be productive if more support is given.

Virtuous violence theory is not just relevant in the case of central Mali but can cast light on many of the ongoing violent conflicts in the broader African context. Worryingly for counterterrorism efforts, the underlying conditions that have allowed Katibat Macina to persist and grow—preexisting ethnic and economic conflict, low levels of state presence, and Islam as a strong local identity marker—are present in many other regions throughout Africa. For example, in Plateau State of central Nigeria, at least 4,000 people have been killed since 2001 in violence that has largely pitted Peul and Hausa Muslim herders against Christian farmers from other ethnic groups.⁹⁰ As in central Mali, the Nigerian conflict features a mix of ethnic conflict and conflict over access to resources, and changing rainfall patterns have exacerbated economic pressures. Until now, the conflict in Plateau State has not been framed in jihadist terms, and the Nigerian military has not become a primary perpetrator of violence against civilians as the Malian military has. However, the example of central Mali shows that jihadist ideology can graft itself onto existing conflicts, and the Nigerian military has a history of perpetrating violence against civilians in other areas of the country. The conflict in Plateau State is not alone in sharing parallels with that of central Mali; the Central African Republic and Mozambique are also home to conflicts with similar

characteristics. Local factors will determine whether or not conflicts in states such as Nigeria, CAR, and Mozambique are eventually framed in terms of jihad, but the underlying elements for escalating violence along central Malian lines are present. Violence, moreover, is not just a social and political question, but also an environmental one. Across the continent, increasing climate pressures will induce greater tensions between different communities over resource access, raising the potential for violence to assume ethnic and jihadist dimensions. The potential proliferation of conflicts similar in

nature to the system of violence present in central Mali underscores the importance of understanding and resolving this situation. When confronted with a system of violence involving jihadism, ethnic conflict, state actors, and economic tension traditional theories of terrorism and ethnic violence encounter severe limitations. Only a broader theory of violence, such as virtuous violence theory, can be applied to the conflict holistically. Perhaps most importantly, such theories hold the key for conflict resolution in the years to come, both in central Mali and elsewhere.

¹ “Attaques de Tenenkou: L’ombre de Hammadou Koufa avec un Mouvement de Libération de Macina plane,” *Le Republicain*, January 23, 2015, http://malijet.com/a_la_une_du_mali/121613-attaques_de_tenenkou_l_ombre_de_hammadou.htm 1.

² In this article, I use the term “jihadist” solely as a label in accordance with the term’s overwhelming occurrence in Malian discourse and the Malian media. An analysis of the nuances of the deeper concept of jihad in the Malian context and how groups operating in Mopti Region engage with the concept is beyond the scope of this article.

³ A note on names: different spellings of many Malian personal and place names appear in various scholarly and media sources. For example, the jihadist leader Hamadou Kouffa’s first name appears as Hamadou, Hamadou, and Amadou, while his second name is variously rendered as Koufa and Kouffa, among others. In this article, in my own writing, I strive to consistently use the name that appears to be most commonly used, and I include French accents and diacritical marks where applicable. However, I do not make any attempt to standardize names in quotations and citations.

⁴ “Mali: violents affrontements communautaires au centre du pays,” *Radio France Internationale*, July 20, 2015, <http://www.rfi.fr/afrique/20150720-mali-violents-affrontements-communautaires-centre-pays>.

⁵ “Mali: six morts dans des violences entre Peuls et Dogons,” *Jeune Afrique*, July 20, 2015, <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/247833/societe/mali-six-morts-violences-entre-peuls-dogons/>.

⁶ *Central Mali: An Uprising in the Making?* (Belgium: International Crisis Group 2016), <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/mali/central-mali-uprising-making>.

⁷ Map derived from “Map of the River Niger,” Wikipedia Commons, available from http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Niger_river_map.svg (accessed October 5, 2019).

⁸ Matthew D. Turner, “The Micropolitics of Common Property Management on the Maasina Floodplains of Central Mali,” *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 40, no. 1 (January 2006): 47–48, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00083968.2006.10751335>.

⁹ Anca-Elena Urcu, *Under the Gun: Resource Conflicts and Embattled Traditional Authorities in Central Mali* (Clingendael: Netherlands Institute of International Relations 2018), 10, <https://reliefweb.int/report/mali/under-gun-resource-conflicts-and-embattled-traditional-authorities-central-mali>.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 92.

¹¹ Timothy Insoll, “The Archaeology of Islamisation in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Comparative Study,” in *Islamisation: Comparative Perspectives from History*, ed. Andrew C. S. Peacock (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 260. While the Inner Niger Delta was incorporated into major West African empires such as the Malian Empire, the rulers of which converted to Islam in the early 14th century CE, it is unclear to what extent Islam spread to the common people during this period rather than remaining a religion of the elite.

¹² Despite their relatively recent conversion, Peuls today place Islam at the very center of Peul identity: they believe the ancestor of all Peuls was a Companion of the Prophet who married a Malinké woman. See Mirjam De Bruijn and Han van Dijk, *Arid Ways: Cultural Understandings of Insecurity in Fulbe Society, Central Mali* (Amsterdam: Thela Publishers, 1995), 51.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 53–54.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 54.

¹⁵ While the systems of resource access laid out by the Diina of the Macina Empire have been repeatedly contested over the past two centuries, these systems continue to influence norms for communal resource access in the rural Inner Delta to this day. See Turner, “The Micropolitics of Common Property Management,” 48 and De Bruijn and van Dijk, *Arid Ways*, 92–93.

¹⁶ This favoritism originated with the political ideology of the Malian government under President Modibo Keita (1960-1968), which viewed cultivated agriculture as the key to economic development, but has generally continued under subsequent regimes. For more information, see Charles Grémont, "Villages and Crossroads: Changing Territorialities Among the Tuareg of northern Mali," in *Saharan Frontiers: Space and Mobility in Northwest Africa*, ed. James McDougall (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), 137–138.

¹⁷ De Bruijn and van Dijk, *Arid Ways*, 489.

¹⁸ An analyst who had recently spent time in Central Mali told the author that among Malian government officials, Central Mali is seen as a place to get rich, *i.e.* through corruption, rather than provide services. See De Bruijn and van Dijk, *Arid Ways*, 465.

¹⁹ Interview conducted by the author with an analyst employed by an NGO based in the United States who had recently spent time conducting research in Central Mali, July 2018.

²⁰ Turner, "The Micropolitics of Common Property Management," 53–54.

²¹ Sebastien Malo, "In Rain-Short Mali, Villagers Enlist Irrigation to Ward Off Extremism," *Thomson Reuters Foundation News*, October 29, 2018, <http://news.trust.org/item/20181029065819-is8ps/>.

²² De Bruijn and van Dijk, *Arid Ways*, 93.

²³ Urcu, *Under the Gun*, 23–24.

²⁴ Taoudenit and Ménaka, formerly administrative subdivisions of the Timbuktu and Gao regions respectively, have subsequently been promoted in status to full regions, bringing the total of northern regions to five.

²⁵ Tuaregs constitute a transnational ethnic group spanning Mali, Niger, and Algeria. In Mali, Tuaregs are concentrated in the North, although some also live in the Center. Traditionally nomadic pastoralists, Tuaregs have long had a contentious relationship with the Malian state; Tuareg-led rebellions have occurred in northern Mali in 1963, 1990, 2006, and 2012.

²⁶ The precise nature of the links between Ansar al-Din and AQIM and between the MNLA and Ansar al-Din during the first half of 2012 are highly contested.

²⁷ Although Azawad was originally a geographic term—referring to a valley spanning the Mali-Niger border—since the 1970s it has been linked to the Tuareg nationalist movement as a name for a would-be Tuareg nation-state.

²⁸ A full discussion of the jihadist groups operating in northern Mali during the MNLA's uprising and the complex, ever-changing relations between them is outside the scope of this article. However, Ansar al-Din and MUJAO were both front groups for AQIM, although Ansar al-Din was through its leadership tied much more closely into elite Tuareg religious and political circles in Kidal Region, while MUJAO developed extremely close links with predominantly Arab drug traffickers, especially in Gao Region. Both

Ansar al-Din and a successor group to MUJAO ultimately formally pledged loyalty to AQIM.

²⁹ *Central Mali: An Uprising in the Making?*, 7.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ "Attaques de Tenenkou: L'ombre de Hammadoun Koufa avec un Mouvement de Libération de Macina plane," *Le Républicain*, January 23, 2015, http://malijet.com/a_la_une_du_mali/121613-attaques_de_tenenkou_l_ombre_de_hammadoun.htm

³² *Central Mali: An Uprising in the Making?*, 11.

³³ Aurélien Tobie, "Central Mali: Violence, Local Perspectives, and Diverging Narratives," SIPRI Insights on Peace and Security Series No. 2007/5, 7, https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2018-02/sipriinsight_1713_mali_3_eng.pdf.

³⁴ Katibat Macina and Ansar al-Din were each announced separately as becoming parts of JNIM, leaving Katibat Macina's previous reported status as a division of Ansar al-Din unclear.

³⁵ See *Central Mali: An Uprising in the Making?*, 12, and Tobie, 11. In positioning itself to appeal uniquely to a specific group—in this case, Peuls—Katibat Macina followed in the footsteps of many AQIM-linked groups present in the Sahara and Sahel more broadly. Indeed, rather than claim to control a single unified group, AQIM and central al-Qa'ida leadership encouraged the proliferation of ostensibly independent groups that tailored their rhetoric and messages to specific audiences. This was done for three reasons. First, al-Qa'ida leadership was simply logistically incapable of exerting direct control over many of its lieutenants in the Sahara and Sahel, and rivalries existed between different commanders. Thus, commanders could not be prevented from acting independently, at least occasionally, and separating them formally helped minimize intra-organizational rivalries. Second, AQIM leadership cautioned its lieutenants and supporters in the Sahel against showing their power too openly, lest they provoke international retaliation. Because the small groups were not officially pledged to al-Qa'ida, they were thought to attract less undesirable attention. Third, al-Qa'ida leadership believed that a number of smaller, specifically tailored groups could, combined, recruit more effectively than a single umbrella group. All of these beliefs were re-evaluated following the takeover of northern Mali by AQIM-linked groups and subsequent international intervention, leading to the formation of JNIM as an umbrella group. Although the ideology of the group is framed around a "return" to the Macina system, both Katibat Macina and JNIM support a form of Islam quite different than that practiced in the Macina Empire. The group thus presents a return to an idealized ahistorical condition of Islam as the solution to both perceived injustice within the Peul community and repression of the Peul community by the Malian state.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 15.

³⁷ Tobie, "Central Mali," 14.

³⁸ Dozos are secret societies of hunters with their own initiation and ritual practices. They are not only drawn from the Dogon but rather from a number of ethnic groups in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Cote D'Ivoire. However, in Central Mali, Dozos are perceived as belonging to the Dogon community, and a full analysis of the Dozos is outside the scope of this article.

³⁹ "Mali: deux nouveaux groupes d'autodéfense voient le jour dans le centre," *Radio France Internationale*, May 24, 2018, <http://www.rfi.fr/afrique/20180524-mali-deux-nouveaux-groupes-autodefense-voient-le-jour-le-centre>.

⁴⁰ "We Used to Be Brothers": Self-Defense Group Abuses in Central Mali (Washington D.C.: Human Rights Watch, 2018), <https://www.hrw.org/report/2018/12/07/we-used-be-brothers/self-defense-group-abuses-central-mali#>.

⁴¹ Turner, "The Micropolitics of Common Property Management," 53.

⁴² "Mali Bans Hunting Society After Attack Kills 130 Fulani," *BBC News*, March 24, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-47687682>.

⁴³ Moribafing Camara, "Centre du Mali : FAMA et Dan Na Ambassagou s'affrontent de nouveau," *L'Indicateur de Renouveau*, November 22, 2018, <http://bamada.net/centre-du-mali-fama-et-dan-na-ambassagou-saffrontent-de-nouveau>.

⁴⁴ Urcu, *Under the Gun*, 26.

⁴⁵ "Le risque d'une balkanisation du territoire malien est réel," *Le Monde*, June 11, 2019, https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2019/06/11/le-risque-d-une-balkanisation-du-territoire-malien-est-reel_5474782_3212.html.

⁴⁶ The rise of Dogon militias has in turn spurred the creation of non-jihadist Peul self-defense militias. However, these Peul militias have had a smaller impact on the system of violence in Central Mali than the jihadist groups, the Dogon militias, and the Malian state, and they are not discussed in detail in this paper.

⁴⁷ One definition of terrorism that frames it in such terms is the oldest extant definition of terrorism encoded in US federal law, which appears in the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act of 1978.

⁴⁸ Rupert Colville, "Press Briefing Notes on Nicaragua, Mali, and Kashmir," UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, July 17, 2018, <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=23383&LangID=E>.

⁴⁹ *Dans le centre du Mali, les populations prises au piège du terrorisme et du contre-terrorisme* (Paris: International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), 2018), 11, https://www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/fidh_centre_du_mali_les_populations_prises_au_pie_ge_du_terrorisme_et_contre_terrorisme.pdf.

⁵⁰ Quoted in Arie W. Kruglanski and Shira Fishman, "The Psychology of Terrorism: 'Syndrome' Versus 'Tool' Perspectives," *Terrorism and Political*

Violence 18, no. 2 (2006): 195, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09546550600570119>.

⁵¹ Shibley Telhami, *The Stakes: America in the Middle East: The Consequences of Power and the Choice for Peace* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2002), 16.

⁵² Lori-Anne Théroux-Bénoni et al., "Mali's Young 'Jihadists': Fuelled by Faith or Circumstance?," Institute for Security Studies Policy Brief Series 89, August 2016, 3–6, <https://issafrica.org/research/policy-brief/malis-young-jihadists-fuelled-by-faith-or-circumstance>.

⁵³ *Central Mali: An Uprising in the Making?*, 11.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ Théroux-Bénoni et al., "Mali's Young 'Jihadists'," 2–5.

⁵⁶ In one way, the strategic choice approach to understanding terrorism, which holds that groups employ terrorism as a tool to achieve specific ends—usually, but not exclusively, understood to be political in nature—cannot be dismissed entirely in the Central Malian case. That members of Katibat Macina engage in acts that fall under the definition of terrorism because they believe doing so will advance their goals *in general* cannot be doubted, but the same motivation can be applied to practically any human behavior.

⁵⁷ *Dans le centre du Mali*.

⁵⁸ "Milice d'auto-défense: après les Peulhs, les Dogons créent leur mouvement," *Studio Tamani*, June 1, 2018, <https://www.studiotamani.org/index.php/themes/politique/15836-milice-d-auto-defense-apres-les-peulhs-les-dogons-creent-leur-mouvement>.

⁵⁹ Matthew Lange, "Emotional Prejudice and Ethnic Obligations: Motives of Ethnic Violence," in *Killing Others: A Natural History of Ethnic Violence*, ed. Matthew Lange (Cornell University Press, 2017), 123.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 124.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 125–126.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 134–136.

⁶³ Alan Page Fiske and Tage Shakti Rai, *Virtuous Violence: Hurting and Killing to Create, Sustain, End, and Honor Social Relationships* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 17.

⁶⁴ Available data is insufficient to determine to what extent, if any, the equality matching and market pricing relational models are also present as motivations behind violence in Central Mali.

⁶⁵ Fiske and Rai, *Virtuous Violence*, 18.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 21–22. While all the constitutive phases can be, and usually are performed non-violently, virtuous violence theory is, of course, interested in their performance through violence.

⁷⁰ Quoted in Théroux-Bénoni et al., "Mali's Young 'Jihadists'," 5.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁷² *Central Mali: An Uprising in the Making?*, i.

⁷³ See *'We Used to Be Brothers': Self-Defense Group Abuses in Central Mali*.

⁷⁴ Grémont, "Villages and Crossroads," 137–138.

⁷⁵ See *'We Used to Be Brothers': Self-Defense Group Abuses in Central Mali*.

⁷⁶ Camara, "Centre du Mali."

⁷⁷ "La MINUSMA conclut son enquête sur les incidents de Boulkessy du 19 Mai 2018," Mission Multidimensionnelle Intégrée des Nations Unies pour la Stabilisation au Mali (MINUSMA), June 26, 2018, <https://minusma.unmissions.org/la-minusma-conclut-son-enqu%C3%AAtte-sur-les-incidents-de-boulkessy-du-19-mai-2018>. The Boulkessy attack was particularly embarrassing for the Malian government to admit because the Malian soldiers in question were under the official command of the G5 Sahel, a security cooperation organization comprised of Chad, Mauritania, Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger. The G5 Sahel was set up with significant international support and donor backing in February 2014; it was originally intended as a mechanism to allow regional countries to more effectively address shared security threats, including terrorism. The organization has faced significant challenges in becoming operational.

⁷⁸ "Mali: Communiqué du ministère de la défense sur les événements à Boulkessy," *Mali Actu*, May 21, 2018, <https://maliactu.net/mali-communique-du-ministere-de-la-defense-sur-les-evenements-a-boulkessy/>.

⁷⁹ *Dans le centre du Mali*, 10.

⁸⁰ Camara, "Centre du Mali."

⁸¹ For example, Dan Na Ambassagou's leadership announced a unilateral ceasefire in September 2018. See "Engagement en faveur d'un cessez-le-feu unilatéral de Youssouf Toloba et son groupe armé de Dan Nan Ambassagou," Dan Nan Ambassagou, September 27, 2018, [https://www.hdcentre.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Cessez-le-feu-](https://www.hdcentre.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Cessez-le-feu-unilat%C3%A9ral-Youssouf-Toloba-Dan-Nan-Ambassagou-Septembre-2018.pdf)

[unilat%C3%A9ral-Youssouf-Toloba-Dan-Nan-Ambassagou-Septembre-2018.pdf](https://www.hdcentre.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Cessez-le-feu-unilat%C3%A9ral-Youssouf-Toloba-Dan-Nan-Ambassagou-Septembre-2018.pdf).

⁸² *Speaking with the 'Bad Guys': Toward Dialogue with Central Mali's Jihadists*, Africa Report No. 276 (Belgium: International Crisis Group, 2019), <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/sahel/mali/276-speaking-bad-guys-toward-dialogue-central-mali-jihadists>.

⁸³ Richard Reeve, *Mali on the Brink: Insights From Local Peacebuilders on the Causes of Violent Conflict and the Prospects for Peace* (London: Peace Direct 2018), https://www.peacedirect.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/P772-PD-Mali-LVP-Report-ENG_WEB.pdf, 7.

⁸⁴ *Dans le centre du Mali*, 10.

⁸⁵ Fiske and Rai, *Virtuous Violence*, 239. For example, in many societies around the world, a more robust formal system of justice has put an end to the widespread pursuit of blood vendettas. Pursuing vendettas originally furthered the authority ranking and/or communal sharing relational models of those who pursued them, but the social cost of legal penalties came to exceed the social benefit accorded by acting violently to further these relational models. As a result, the violence became socially maladaptive.

⁸⁶ *Dans le centre du Mali*, 11.

⁸⁷ Not to be confused with the Macina Empire, which was centered on Hamdallahi to the northeast of the modern *cercle* of Macina.

⁸⁸ Reeve, *Mali on the Brink*, 26.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ Jana Krause, "A Deadly Cycle: Ethno-Religious Conflict in Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria" (working paper, Geneva Declaration, Geneva, 2011), 9–10, <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/GD-WP-Jos-deadly-cycle.pdf>.