

Malian Conflict: Underlying Causes and Implications, 2012 to 2017**Mike C. ODDIH and Vincent Obiora EMESIBE**

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Abstract

This paper examined the underlying factors behind the 2012 Malian crisis and its implications for the Sahel region. The data were collected through interviews complemented with literature. The paper employed Robert Cox's Critical Theory and thematic method in its analysis. The findings indicate that the Tuareg-led northern Malians' grievances borne out of long neglect and marginalisation by southern based government in Bamako are the dominant underlying causes of 2012 Malian crisis. The Malian situation calls for prompt redress through all inclusive government and functional autonomy to the northern Mali, state building, delivery of massive improvements in government services to the entire Malian citizens, but particularly to northern Malians. The peace process should be strengthened and its implementation decentralized.

Keywords: Governance Issues, Implications, Mali Conflict, Underlying Causes**Introduction**

Mali, for over six decades, has been intermittently confronted by armed self-determination rebellions. Thus, in 2012, such conflict erupted again in Mali when National Movement for Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) led a self-determination armed rebellion against the Malian state in what happened to be the most complicated crisis since the political independence of the Malian state. The rebels attacked northern Mali and unilaterally declared independent state of Azawad though they failed to secure international recognition. However, part of the consequences is the coup that ousted the civilian President and led to the subsequent collapse of the much acclaimed democracy of over two decades in Mali. Then, it was followed by the involvement of violent extremists groups that contested for occupation of northern Mali with MNLA and eventually took over the control of some major cities in the north from MNLA. Furthermore, the conflict resulted in displacement of about quarter of a million persons from Mali to other states in the Sahel region (International Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2014). This was with the attendant high level insecurity beyond Mali to some other states in the Sahel region.

The crisis drew great international attention, hence scholars and the international community established that the crisis constituted a threat to international peace and security (United Nations Security Council [UNSC] Res 2085, 2012). Consequently, international responses followed as United Nations passed resolution 2085 of December 20, 2012, authorizing international action. African Union and ECOWAS got involved, France intervened with Operation Serval; then, the African-led International Support Mission in Mali (AFISMA), followed by a United Nations peacekeeping mission known as

United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stability Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) (United Nations Security Council [UNSC] Res 2100, 2013). In spite of these efforts, serious violence persisted and sustainable peace continued to elude Mali.

It is against the backdrop of this intractable intra-state crisis in Mali that the paper examined the underlying causes and implications of the Malian crisis for the Sahel region. The paper addressed the following questions: what are the underlying causes behind the 2012 Malian crisis and what are the implications of the crisis for the Sahel region? The paper argued that the underlying causes of the conflict that commenced in Mali in 2012 cannot be fully explained or resolved without resorting to governance issues in Mali, though other factors contributed to the crisis. Implications of the crisis include the migration crisis, a new scramble for Africa and security effects of the crisis on Sahel states. The paper is organized as follows: following the introduction, it proceeded with review of related literature, and discussion of theoretical and methodological issues. Next, it examined the underlying causes of the Malian crisis and its implications for the Sahel before the conclusion and recommendations.

Review of Related Literature

The underlying causes of the 2012 Malian crisis are generally seen as being complex and multidimensional. In the views of Hannah (2013), Mali inherited a centralized state apparatus from French colonial rule and this has left a legacy which has contributed in the current issues of governance. Similarly, Jonathan (2013) posits that what constitutes the existential challenges for Mali was basically its complex journey towards pluralist politics that dates back from the country's transition from authoritarian rule in 1991-1992. A re-examination of these views clearly shows that the internal dynamics as regards Malian crisis are likely embedded in colonial legacy of centralisation of power. Thus, the default of the inherited system of Mali is partly source of the crisis in recent years and these points to the attempt of decentralisation in Mali. In fact, Malian programme of decentralisation was very ambitious, both in the realm and at the level of transferring power (Kwiatkowska, 2016). In line with this point, though with reservations, Hannah (2013) insists that decentralizing reforms aimed to tackle the Tuareg problem and give more autonomy to the northern region were not fully implemented. Interestingly, scholars such as Robert (2013), Cuolibaly and Bratton (2013) respectively agrees to this view point

In fact, after studying decentralisation in Mali and Niger, Westerfield (2012) insists that, though there are small differences in the form of decentralisation, yet Niger is not thrown into crisis like Mali. In support of this view in a more broad state, Emerson (2011) and Lins de Albuquerque (2014) aver that the Tuareg in Mali and Niger have been exposed to equal amount of marginalisation in equal ways in history though change occurred after 2010 in Niger, yet Niger is not engulfed in crisis.

In contrast to above views, Magdalena and Kin (2014) assert that what constitutes the cause of the Malian crisis in 2012 was separatist aspiration by rebel groups, notably Tuareg, in the north. They clearly state that the Tuareg having constituted a small minority in Mali felt aggrieved that the brutal state repression of the first armed rebellion post-independence in 1963-1964 was an indication of a government that neglects the interest of the minority. In their views, Magdalena and Kin (2014) align with Dillon (2016), who

insists on ethno-nationalist narrative that locates the underlying causes of the Malian conflict on historical ethnic separatist aspiration and grievances of the Tuareg against the Malian government. These views are in line with Thurston and Lebovich (2013) and Lecocq (2012). It is important to state that what might be the view of Lecocq (2012), Thurston and Lebovich (2013) and Magdalena and Kin (2014) and Dillon (2016), can be analysed on state failure or governance issues. Similarly, Koops, Macqueen, Tardy and Williams (2015), underscored the role of long standing structural conditions that include basically poor governance issues leading to neglects and consequent animosity in northern Mali against southern based government in Bamako, in addition to environmental degradation and climate change. Similarly, Theroux-Benoni (2014) asserts that domestic politics, economic and political governance failures worsened by regional transnational terrorism, criminality and religious extremism led to the crisis of the Malian state. Thus, governance failures are central to the rise of the crisis.

On their part, Collier and Hoeffel (2004), years before Hannah (2013), Jonathan (2013), Magdalena and Kin (2014), aptly assert that the common ground for intra-state conflict and civil war are incumbent governments whose sovereignty is being questioned by its citizens through political and military action. In view of this, John and Alfred (2015) assert that the conflict in Mali originated from the long standing skirmishes and the perceived injustices faced by the northern based society. Thus, Napoleon (2012) maintained that the ongoing crisis of northern Mali breaking away to form a new country - independent state of Azawad explains the immense threat which disconnected regions may pose to central governments.

Contrary to the perspectives on colonialism, injustices, weak state, poverty and drought discussed so far above; the Malian crisis is also seen to originate from regional conflict ecosystem and resultant issues such as migration of militants. On this, Steven and Robert (2013) argue that the Tuareg fighters who worked for Muammar Gaddafi and who at the death of Gaddafi returned to Mali with their sophisticated weapons, also contributed to the crisis. However, it is important to note that before the fall of Gaddafi, there was extensive collaboration between Bamako, Algeria and Libya to control northern Mali (Emy, 2013). This implies that, the insecurity impact in the region paved the way for the reoccurrence of the Malian crisis. Thus, Oumar (2012), commenting on the role of immense geographical spaces, notes that it constitutes a causal factor in the Malian crisis by pointing out that the Sahel is a wide strip of transit route connecting the Sahara desert in north Africa to region of Europe.

In partial agreement to Oumar (2012), Steven and Robert (2013) made a shift from these scholarly views when they assert that why Mali and the Sahel region in general are attractive to transnational organized crime is because cocaine traffickers have used the Sahel region as established smuggling routes. This provides organized criminal activities and economic gains to the people of northern Mali, partly because they provide rewards that vastly outweigh the income that government's legitimate alternatives can offer, if such alternatives are available. On a different note, there are also scholarly positions that greed is an underlining cause of the Malian crisis. Expanding on the factor, scholars agree that according to the theory of exclusion, groups that are more common with mineral resource tend to experience such tensions during struggle for these resources and the neglect of the

development of the areas are breeding ground for crisis. In fact, the complex nature of the struggle is when these resources might be of relevance in international economic relations. However, Emerson (2011) and Lins de Albuquerque (2014) fault the general perspective of the greed as a causal factor in the Malian crisis. The scholars insist that the exclusion from economic resources can be a motivation for the marginalised minority, hence grievances rather than greed is the source of conflict. The import is that greed cannot be a factor for seeking autonomy; rather it is grievance arising from marginalisation that leads to such conflicts. However, Shuriye and Ibrahim (2013) introduce a different dimension to the understanding of the causes of the Malian crisis. In their views, they align slightly with postulation of insecurity in Sahel region. In doing this, both scholars went beyond the insecurity position and insist that the current political turmoil in Mali can be associated with the Islamic “Extremist” groups who connived with various Islamist groups internationally with the support of Tuareg rebels to take northern Mali by advocating the implementation of Shari’ah law of Pan-Islamic political unity. This indicates interplay of politics and religion. Contrary to the Islamic narrative, Dillon (2016) asserts that national and foreign actors employ such narrative to justify international intervention and suppress local armed insurgents.

Furthermore, the political turbulence in Mali can also be understood from the perspective of the quest for natural resources. Thus, Shuriye and Ibrahim. (2013), posit that uranium that serves as fuel in nuclear power plant for energy generation and weapons production are richly in deposit in Mali. The point is that mineral resources play a significant role in international politics and as such, efforts to pin down countries from possessing this material and its technology is of high interest to France, U.S, etc. Therefore, the role of natural resources serve as a departure point for both the rebel groups who declared northern Mali an independent state and the European companies who venture into exploration of the precious minerals in the area.

From the foregoing, it appears that the underlying causes of the Malian Crisis from the sum views of the scholars on the recurring decimal of the Malian crisis are multifaceted and problematic. How best to understand the driving causes of the crisis despite the effort towards building peace are traceable to understanding of the dynamics of historical grievances and animosity created right from colonial exploration by France and perpetuated in post-independence era by successive governments in Bamako to favour a particular section of Mali and denied the Tuareg led northern Mali political, economic and infrastructural development. This has persistently been at the heart of the Malian crisis. Thus, the perspective of majority of the literature on the underlying causes of the Malian crisis can be located within the issue of governance or state failure, which gave rise to marginalization and subsequent armed rebellions in northern Mali and beyond.

Theoretical and Methodological Issues

The paper employed Critical Theory, particularly the variant of Robert W. Cox, (Cox, 1981) as our theoretical framework of analysis. Basic assumptions of Critical Theory include: (a) every form of society or social order entails some forms of domination and that the critical emancipating interests underlie the struggle to change those relations of dominant and dominated. Thus, certain people and group in society are oppressed and need

empowerment and emancipation and may sometimes resort to taking up arms to achieve that. The case of northern Mali is in line with this point. (b) The purpose of critical theory is human emancipation, the liberation of people from those oppressive conditions that enslave them. (c) Critical Theory questions the existing world order and the existing states system formation which is believed to be unjustly configured. It rejects the prevailing social and power relationships and the institutions into which they are organized as the given framework for action. It reflects on the characteristics and structures of world order and how it came about. Then, it serves as a guide to strategic action for bringing about an alternative order different from the status quo. (d) The Theory tries to encompass basic processes at work in the development of social forces and forms of state, and the structure of global political economy (Cox 1981; Booth cited in Bellamy, Williams & Griffins, 2010).

In essence, the theory emphasizes the skewed structures within states and international systems in which unjust and exploitative relationships exist to the detriment of the dominated and exploited. This gives rise to intra-state and inter-state conflicts as a means of liberation of the dominated and enslaved groups within the state and international system. In relation to the 2012 Malian crisis, critical theory helps to bring into lime light the impact and historical role of colonialism and contemporary post-colonial domination in the process. In this case, at the root of the Malian crisis, is the struggle to emancipate the northern populations and area of Mali from internal and external marginalisation, domination and exploitation. Thus, Malian conflict is historical and can be traced from the French imperial domination of Mali in the colonial era which left a legacy of a centralised government with the base of power and dominance in southern Mali which has continued in this contemporary post independent era. In this regard, Ogunrotifa (2011) aptly states that most conflicts are carry-over of power tussle and socio-economic relations inherited in the global capitalism, especially from colonial era to post-colonial period which seems to destabilise the foundation of the newly independent states, and creates room for intractable armed conflicts that give rise to foreign intervention in form of peacekeeping missions, such as MINUSMA and France's military operations deployed to Mali. The Tuareg in northern Mali started agitating for self-determination even before independence as a result of colonial domination and takeover of the Sahel and desert trade dominated especially by Tuaregs - the "masters of the Desert". They were denied independent state which they sought; subsequently, Tuaregs were divided and dispersed into different emerging states: Mali, Algeria, Mauritania and Niger etc, in order to serve the imperial economic and other interests. Thus, the Tuareg after independence in Mali continued to rebel and struggle for self-determination in Mali against the Malian state. Four times the northern Mali led by Tuaregs rose against the Malian state; including the most violent and complicated rebellion in 2012 led by MNLA which comprised of other northern ethnic groups as well as the Tuaregs, but with the Tuareg playing prominent roles. This crisis situation eventually culminated in the intervention of the international community with the peculiar peacekeeping operation - UN stabilization mission known as MINUSMA.

Given Mali's and Sahel region position as a transition route to Europe and the fact that security crisis in Mali can easily be transported across Sahel to Europe and the rest of the Western states through the Mediterranean sea, peacekeepers such as France and some

European states sought to stabilize the Malian conflict that is threatening their interests in the crisis-prone zone (Ogunrotifa, 2011). France for instance, controls heavy uranium mines, which contributes greatly to France status as a top exporter of Energy from uranium and also a nuclear power (Francis 2013). Also, Mali in reserve has one of the largest amounts of mineral deposits including uranium and other energy related resources (Shuriye & Ibrahim 2013). For instance, France's key involvement in the Mali conflict cannot be dissociated with her interests in uranium deposits in Mali and neighbouring Niger, geostrategic security and migration concerns with respect to terrorism being transported across the Sahel into Europe through Mediterranean Sea. Thus, the international involvement in form of the stabilization mission seems to now serve the interests of France in coincidence with Malian governing class interest, but not to the best interest of achieving sustainable peace for the generality of Malians. The adoption of MINUSMA with stabilisation mandate was shaped and approved as it is to enable the protection of the strategic context of the conflict in coincidence with the Western States' interests, especially France's economic, political and security interests in Mali and the wider Sahel region. In Malian state, northern Mali suffers from long neglect and marginalization of its area and people by the southern based government at Bamako. Therefore, there is need for emancipation through functional autonomy to the north and all-inclusive government at the centre, massive improvement in development and service delivery by government, etc, rather than the emphases on stabilization or military operations.

Methodology: The study is qualitative and adopted primary data obtained through key respondents interviews complemented with literature from secondary sources. Thus, 15 respondents selected purposively from members of relevant international organizations-United Nations (peacekeepers), Embassy official, non-governmental organization and research institutes that worked in Malian crisis. The respondents were selected from 3 continents :(America 13%, Europe 20% and Africa 67%) made up of 6 countries-(Nigeria, South Africa, Mali, USA, Canada and France). Thematic analysis was employed to analyse the data. The scope of the paper covered from 2012 to 2017.

Underlying Causes of the 2012 Malian Crisis

Table 1 presents the overall responses to the question: what are the underlying causes of the Malian crisis?

S/N	Emerging Themes	Frequency of Single causes	Frequency of Mixed Causes	Total	
		Score	Score	Frequency Total Score	Percentage Total Score (%)
1	Governance Issues	10	9	19	55.88
2	Tuareg Ethnic Grievances	2	4	6	17.65
3	Libyan Crisis and Migration	0	4	4	11.76
4	Violent Extremists Groups	0	3	3	8.82
5	French Neo-colonial interests	0	1	1	2.94
6	Quest for Economic Resources	0	1	1	2.94
Total		12	22	34	100

Source: Researcher's Interview 2018

Governance Issues: according to findings as presented in table 1, six themes emerged as causes of the Malian crisis with governance issues as the leading theme. Governance issues refer to the government marginalisation of the northern populations and area of Mali. That means the long neglect and exclusion of the northern population and area of Mali from economic, infrastructural and political developments. It got total frequency score of 55.88% (i.e. it appeared as a set of sole causes and also as combined causes with other factors). This score is 38.23% higher than the total frequency score of the second causal factor – (Tuareg grievances) which secured 17.65%.

The causal factor- governance issues - are quite comprehensive as they captured the collective interests of the northern Malians including Tuareg's historical grievances. Thus, neither the marginalisation of the whole northern Mali nor Tuaregs alone could have been possible without the poor governance perpetrated through a weak and corrupt state institutions and officials. On the other hand, the ethnic historical aspiration and armed struggle experiences of the Tuareg added force to the northern people's armed self-determination struggle. This respondent aptly captured the situation as follows:

The underlying driver of the 2012 Malian conflict is the marginalisation of the northern population and area of Mali. That is the long years of neglect and exclusion of the peoples in the North (the periphery) by the political elites in the South (the Centre), (Respondent 8, Researcher, 2018).

Furthermore, in alignment with the foregoing view, another respondent was quick to opine that:

Malian crisis is more of an issue of governance between the state and citizens. When the citizens see that government is no longer providing services it is meant to provide for the people, they tend to contest the state's authority such as the violent rebellion in northern Mali and some parts of central Mali... (Respondent 13, Field Researcher, 2018).

Ethnic Tuareg Historical Grievances: This is the second emerging theme with total frequency score of 17.65 % (i.e. it appeared as sole cause and also as combined causes with other factors). These grievances include marginalisation of the Tuareg home area which is part of the northern Mali. It also includes the historical separatist aspiration of the Tuareg to have an independent state of Azawad in northern Mali and ethnic tensions and divisions within and amongst other groups in Mali.

The Tuaregs separatist agitation dates back to decolonisation struggle against French colonial government for a Tuareg state in Africa, however, they failed to actualize that aspiration at the end of decolonisation process (Dillion, 2016). Instead, Tuaregs were dispersed into different emerging independent states that spread across over five countries around the Sahel region as follows: Mali, Niger, Algeria, Burkina Faso, Libya, etc (Thurston & Lebovich 2013; Morgan 2014). However, in post-colonial period, Tuaregs of Mali continued the ethnic agitations for self-determination. Initially the struggle was for autonomy and then the armed struggle was for full political independence of the northern Mali, from Malian state. Thus, between 1960 when Mali became politically independent and the year 2012, the Tuareg led four rebellions against Malian state, hence the 2012 crisis was the fourth wave of the rebellions (Boutellis & Zahar, 2017; Adeyemi & Musa 2014). Consequent upon these past Tuareg rebellions, Tuareg grievances also include the government's failure to implement past peace agreements with the Tuareg at the end of some of the previous rebellions, especially the promised decentralisation of power and granting of autonomy to the northern Mali. However, the Tuareg main grievance is marginalisation. Aptly, Francis (2013, p.4) captured this Tuareg's main grievances: "Their [Tuareg's] fundamental grievance is their claim of decade's discrimination and exclusion from political and economic processes by successive Bamako based government." Thus, data in table 2 below indicates that continued marginalisation and failures of Malian government to honour past agreements with the Tuareg contributed to the 2012 crisis. This was indicated by 80% of the responses.

These basic grievances contributed in sustaining the Tuareg separatist aspiration in the independent era of Malian history until the subsequent formation of the liberation movements that led to the 2012 rebellion. These background circumstances were captured in the first declaration of National Movement for Azawad (MNA) which later transformed into the ICT wing of National Movement for Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) that led the 2012 Malian rebellion. The press release read:

Today, Azawad has become a zone of conflict fought over by countries and extremist groups who care only for their own interest. As for the Azawadis themselves, they are simply caught between the anvil and the hammer of the so called terrorist groups. Azawad is now prone to all manner of regional and international intervention... in which the people of Azawad are given no role at all, except that of useless spectator, forced to look on while the image of their homeland is ruined and its natural riches plundered by government and multi-national companies..... Aware of the pain that our people have suffered for decades, as sons of the nation and defenders of a cultural identity threatened with extinction, who are merely perpetuating the struggle of their ancestors, whilst adhering to universal human values... we announce today the birth of a National Movement for Azawad (MNA) (cited in Morgan 2014).

Table 2: Data on how Tuareg's historical grievances relate to the 2012 Malian Crisis			
S/N	Emerging themes:	Frequency Score	Score (%)
1	The crisis was caused by government's continued neglect of the northern Mali and failures to honour past peace agreements	12	8
2	Western Interest and Incitement	2	13.3
3	Ethnic/tribal conflict	1	6.7
Total		15	100
<i>Source: Researcher's Interview 2018</i>			

Following the establishment of MNA; MNLA emerged subsequently, from the integration of MNA and the armed combatant returnees from Libyan crisis in 2011. Thus, on 16th November, 2011, MNLA was established (Dillon, 2016). Then, on 17th January, 2012, MNLA attacked and occupied the northern Mali and declared independent state of Azawad on 6th April, though the state failed to survive. This development triggered the commencement of the 2012 Malian crisis. Furthermore, this respondent aptly explained the situation:

The Tuaregs in the northern Mali who are regarded as warriors felt completely neglected in terms of economic and infrastructural development. They were [comparatively] living in 19 century in which there was almost no sign of modern Mali but that left by the Empire of Mansa Musa... Thus, they championed a movement called National Movement for Liberation of Azawad (MNLA), which rose to demand for self-government (Respondent 9, a MINUSMA Military Officer, 2018).

Appraising the standing of the second emerging theme Tuareg grievances from the views of our respondents in table 1 and 2, we note, first, Tuareg grievances alone did not

capture the other ethnic groups of the northern Mali, but emphasised ethnic Tuaregs separatism. Secondly, the National Movement for Liberation of Azawad (MNLA), which led the rebellion on 17th January, 2012, was made up of other ethnic groups in the northern Mali, not just the Tuareg (ie, this included Tuareg, Fulanis, Arabs, etc). In fact, Tuareg is a minority group in Mali that is concentrated in the northern Mali which has 10% of the Malian population out of which Tuareg represents 5% (OECD 2015). Thus, other ethnic groups in the northern Mali were equally dissatisfied and aggrieved with the government neglect and marginalisation of the northern area and people; hence, together they participated in the armed struggle. So, it was not just about Tuareg's grievances only nor can it be called their rebellion alone. This assertion is aptly in support of the view:

Malian crisis cannot be explained on the basis of Tuareg historical grievances, it was not the only thing and perhaps not the most important one. So the issue is not just about Tuaregs, nor can it be best explained in terms of ethnicity (Respondent 11, Field Researcher, 2018)

However, the ethnic Tuareg historical grievances were quite significant in the crisis because of Tuareg's experiences in previous rebellions and their leading role in the crisis that commenced in 2012. Thus, given that Tuareg grievances did not capture some crucial collective interests of the entire northern Mali, it cannot fully explain the underlying causes of 2012 Malian crises nor can it suffice as a sole underlying cause of the 2012 Malian crisis, rather it can be seen as a facilitator and consequence of the governance issues which remains the leading causal factor in the crisis.

Regional Conflict and Migration Issues: The theme emerged as the third position in table 1. This refers mainly to the migration or return of Tuareg combatants with assorted weapons from Libyan crisis after the fall of Ghadafi and also the effects of transnational criminal and terrorist activities along the axis. This theme, scored total of 11.76 % (ie, all are combined causes with other factors). First, we argued that those combatants that fought in past Tuareg rebellions against the government's marginalization of the northern Mali migrated to Libya from where they served in Libyan army. Then, at the fall of Ghadafi, they returned to Mali and assisted in formation of MNLA. This has already been captured by the second emerging theme and is also rooted in governance issues. Thus, governance issues can be said to have given rise to this particular factor. However, the combatant from Libya helped to facilitate the rebellion right from formation of MNLA.

Violent Extremist Groups: This took the fourth position of emerging theme with 8.82 %. (ie combined causes with other factors). This emerging theme falls within a broad category of religion and politics. The Jihadists, violent extremists groups, Anser al-Dine, Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJWA), were not explicitly involved in the rebellion at the onset, though they had a brief alliance with MNLA which collapsed. However, they had opposing agenda which was to establish an Islamic state in Mali; against National Movement for Liberation of Azawad (MNLA's) goal of securing an independent state of Azawad, in northern Mali. Hence, the extremist group rather hijacked the crisis from MNLA and occupied some northern regions in Mali, and attempted to capture Kona before they were stopped with military

intervention by France, known as Operation Serval. This involvement of the extremist and terrorist groups wouldn't have been possible if the armed group were not already entrenched in northern Mali as a consequence of earlier government neglect of the northern Mali through corruption and poor governance that led to availability of ungoverned spaces in the northern Mali, hence the subsequent encroachment and entrenchment of cross-border criminal activities, violent extremist and terrorist groups in the northern Mali. This was how Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), MUJWA and Anser al-Dine (a splinter Tuareg group) and other similar groups were able to get involved in the crisis; though, they collaborated with MNLA at some point in time. However, respondents observed that after the initial violence in 2012, these group contributed substantially to continued violence in Mali, thus in final analysis, they are not the underlying causes of the 2012 Malian crisis.

France's Neocolonial Interests: The last two themes are not significant with regards to the underlying causes of the crisis. They made 2.94 each. However, France's neo-colonial interests and involvement in Mali and the Sahel added to the ember of Malian crisis and continues to increase in influence right from their military intervention with Operation Serval and Operation Barkhane. In addition, France played a leading role during the adoption and implementation of the UN stabilization mission in Mali. France's interest in Mali and Sahel also involves the next theme.

Quest for Economic Resources: This theme also scored 2.94. The role of exploration of natural resources in northern Mali was mentioned as part of the grievances for agitating against Malian state by National Movement for Azawad (NMA) which joined with militant returnees from Libya to form MNLA. Very few respondents observed that Western nations are already involved in mining of natural resources in northern Mali with increasing interests. Literature also assert that France is involved in exploration of Uranium in neighbouring Niger; and Mali also has uranium which is of great interest to France, in addition to other natural resources such as gold that exist in Mali too. However, governance issues remain the leading causal factor in the Malian crisis which commenced in 2012.

The major findings of the paper based on the primary data from the interviews align with the argument of John and Alfred (2015) who underscored long standing agitations and the perceived injustices by government faced by the northern Malians. Koops, Macqueen, Tardy and Williams (2015) also underscored the role of long standing structural conditions that include basically poor governance issues leading to neglects and consequent animosity by northern Malians against southern based government in Bamako in addition to environmental degradation and climate change which government could not tackle properly. Similarly, Theroux-Benoni (2014) notes that governance issues in form of domestic politics, economic and political governance failures worsened by regional transnational terrorism, criminality and religious extremism underlie the Malian crisis. Thus, Kwiatkowska (2016) notes that implications of the Malian crisis include its contributions to insecurity in Chad, Niger, Algeria, Nigeria, etc, partly because of collaboration and migration of militants from Malian crisis.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The underlying causes of the Malian crisis in 2012 are multifaceted with the governance issues as the dominant. Thus, the northern Malians grievances borne out of the long neglect and exclusion of the Tuareg-led northern population and area of Mali by southern based Malian government are the dominant causes of the crisis. Governance issues are interwoven with Tuareg grievances. They were perpetrated through poor governance characterized by centralized, weak state and corrupt institutions. Other factors such as Libyan crisis especially, return of Tuareg combatants with weapons, violent extremist groups, quest for economic resources and French Neo-colonial interests, etc, worked to escalate the crisis, but they are not underlying causes of the crisis; rather, they are more of the consequences of poor governance and facilitators that worsened the crisis.

The Implications are such that unless these underlying causes of the crisis are resolved urgently the conflict will persist and become more complicated because of the complexity of contested interests of many external actors given the geostrategic position of Mali in the Sahel. Part of the challenges of the crisis is that the violent extremism, jihad war, criminal enterprises and even terrorism might move from being insignificant causal factors and just temporal strategy in the hands of rebels to become an integrated force that will confront the Malian state and Sahel region in the near future. The neocolonial interests of France and other external states are also increasing in Mali and the Sahel in what seems like new scramble for Africa. Thus, the crisis continues to impact negatively on the security and economy of other Sahel states by causing migration of civilian refugees and fighters from different armed groups across the Sahel to and fro Mali, Niger, Chad, Nigeria, etc. Thus, there is ongoing transformation of non-significant old causes of conflict into significant causes of future conflicts in Mali and the Sahel region.

Recommendations The Government of Mali and international community especially UN/MINUSMA working in Mali should push for greater focus on prompt and effective redress of the long neglect and marginalization of northern Mali through effective and functional autonomy to the northern Mali and all inclusive central governments in Bamako with strong functional government presence in the northern Mali. Therefore, there is need for effective delivery of social services to the people both northern and southern Malians alike, by strengthening the capacity of existing state institutions and creating new institutions and development commissions to ensure effective service delivery. This will include strong migration agency and strategy for monitoring and checking trends of migration to forestall its short and long term impacts. Furthermore, the peace process needs to be strengthened and its implementation decentralised.

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