Försvarshögskolan

Exploring the Limits of Shelter Theory

A Case Study on Mali 2011-2021

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1. Introduction

Since its inception, scholarship in *International Relations* (IR) has focused on great power competition (Bailes, Rickley & Thorhallsson 2014). Much of realist theory argues that as units, all states are functionally undifferentiated, having the same goals in an anarchic environment that encourages suspicion and competition between states (Bailes, Thayer & Thorhallsson 2016). To survive and thrive in this environment, each state aims to accumulate as much power as possible, and if that happens at the expense of the opponent, so much the better. Smaller states, with their inherently limited population size, territory, military and economic output, are thus considered as easy prey in this view. In other words, the weakness that comes with *smallness* means that these states have largely been viewed as unimportant or *system ineffectual*. Still, some options are available to small states, such as allying oneself with a powerful state so as to appease them and/or gain power from their success (*bandwagoning*) or *hiding* from the international arena by adopting a neutral, non-threatening posture (Bailes, Thayer & Thorhallsson 2016).

These realist views have, over time, been challenged by liberal institutionalists, emphasising the possibility of lasting peace through international institutions and increased economic interdependence, and social constructivists, who emphasise the intersubjective nature of reality. Taking inspiration from these developments, while still maintaining some of the fundamental assumptions of realism, *shelter theory* emerged during the 2010s with the aim of explaining the foreign policy of small states. The theory sees small states as fundamentally different units than great powers, that are incentivised to seek *shelter* from bigger states and international institutions in order to survive and thrive. These incentives take the form of the world's anarchic character along with internal and external vulnerabilities originating from a state's smallness.

At the time of writing, the French military is in the process of ending Operation Barkhane, an almost decade long effort to "combat jihadist terrorism in the Sahel" (Ministère des Armées 2021). In response, the government of Mali has begun talks with the private military company (PMC) Wagner Group, and rumors swirl that the Russian group is already active in

the country (Diallo & Sangaré 2021). This development was the impetus for this essay, which applies shelter theory to Mali. While the country has been the subject of much scholarly debate in development studies, sociology, African studies and security studies, Mali, and other African countries, have remained curiously neglected in shelter theory literature and small state studies as a whole. Given the numerous bilateral and multilateral relationships the country is engaged in, and the fact that Africa holds several small states, this is somewhat surprising. The hope with this project, then, was that by examining Mali through the lense of shelter theory, the theory might provide some answers to the country's behaviour, and in turn lead to further development of the theory. How this particular case might accomplish that is discussed in the following section.

1.1 Structure of the Thesis

This thesis is structured in the following way: Section 1, which introduces the topic of the thesis. Section 2 introduces the research problem, which relates to the academic question of shelter theory's relevance to West African and so-called fragile or failed states. Section 3 introduces the thesis' aim and research questions. Section 4 recounts former studies using shelter theory and gives a brief review on scholarship state fragility. Section 5 gives an explanation of shelter theory, and attempts to relate state fragility to it. Section 6 introduces and motivates the choice of method and material for the thesis. Section 7 lays out an analysis of Mali's foreign policy that is made through the lens of shelter theory. Section 8 answers the research questions by discussing the results of the analysis, relates those answers to earlier shelter theory literature and provides suggestions for future research.

2. Research Problem

Generally, studies based on shelter theory have focused on European small states (see Section 4), and the theory was developed with these western "modern" states in mind (Bailes, Thayer & Thorhallsson 2016). While this geographical limit of the theory has been acknowledged by researchers, one article conducted a "plausibility probe" of the theory by looking at three non-western small states, finding that the theory was applicable in these cases (ibid). Taking this result into account, as well as the fact that most small states are neither European or

Western, there is therefore a theoretical interest in seeing exactly how far shelter theory can *travel*, i.e. whether this assumed geographical limit actually exists. It has also been argued that Africa specifically lacks options for "credible shelter" in comparison to the North Atlantic area (Wivel & Ingebritsen 2019, 207), a statement which deserves further study. Finally, most literature in this field examines relatively developed states, with stable, often well-functioning democratic political structures. As early work on this theory was based on Iceland and other European states, this is not surprising. However, there is once again a theoretical interest in seeing if shelter theory applies in small states that differ in these characteristics, or put another way, if shelter theory travels well to these states.

Summarising this section, it can firstly be argued that if shelter theory travels well to a small state that is a) non-western and b) underdeveloped and politically unstable, and that fulfills these characteristics to a high extent, then the the theory may have a much broader applicability than previously thought, perhaps being universally relevant to small states. If it does not travel well, expounding on the reasons why these limits exist is also of potential interest for researchers in this field. Secondly, an examination of shelter options in Africa is also needed, as the continent has several small states and regional institutions, but no shelter studies have been made on a country in this continent.

3. Research Objective and Research Question

The main aim of this essay is explorative. Specifically, it will explore the potential limits of shelter theory, as defined in the previous section, or in other words, how well the theory travels to small states that are non-western, underdeveloped, and politically unstable. For the purposes of this thesis, political unstableness will be referred to as *state fragility*, a term related to the concept of "failed states". A further elaboration on these terms is found in sections 4.2 and 5.2. The research question can thus be formulated as:

- ➡ To what extent can shelter theory explain the foreign policy of small fragile states (which are non-western and underdeveloped)?

This essay will also explore the assertion that African countries are generally left with few options for credible shelter, as well as reflect on what can be considered "credible shelter". A second, subordinate, research question can therefore be formulated as:

- ➡ To what extent does Mali have credible shelter options?

To answer these two questions, a case study on the country of Mali was performed.
Spatially, the study was delimited to this country and relationships with it considered relevant according to shelter theory. Relationships with France and regional institutions were prioritised, as they can be considered as the most significant actors for the country, and because a full accounting of actors currently involved in Mali would be too long and not contribute significantly to the theoretical aim. Temporally, the case was delimited to the period between 2010 to the present day. During this period, the country was rocked by civil war and three coups d'état, and the country currently ranks high on the Fragile State Index (2021), thereby fulfilling the condition of political instability. Being West African and very underdeveloped (see section 7.2), Mali also fulfils the other conditions. It should be noted that while a case study of Mali helps expand the knowledge on shelter in Africa, such a limited scope can obviously not give a definite description of the entire continent, or even all periods of Malian history (both of these are worthy research aims on their own). The main aim of this thesis is therefore theoretically explorative, not empirically explorative.

Preferably, a case would have been found where only one of these aberrant characteristics (state fragility and underdevelopment or a supposed lack of credible shelter options) was present in order to clarify the results of the analysis by removing more independent variables. However, the original aim of the thesis was to examine a case of a small fragile state, and as no such state was found in an environment with many obviously credible shelter options (a quite interesting empirical observation on its own), the result is this somewhat two-headed research objective.

4. State of Research

4.1 Shelter Theory

The scholarly literature on shelter theory grew out of small state studies. Baldur Thorhallson, who introduced the theory, had already written about small states before (see for example Thorhallsson & Wivel 2006, which examines EU small states and what constitutes a small state). The first mention of shelter as a concept seems to be in a book by Steingetz and Wivel, published in 2010 (Thorhallsson 2010). In it, Thorhallson examines the need for political and economic shelter for small states in the wake of the Great Recession of 2008. Thorhallsson wrote about the same topic again in a following article (Thorhallsson 2011). Research by Peter J. Katzenstein on small states was particularly influential in Thorhallson's approach here. Following these early forays by Thorhallson and other researchers such as Anders Wivel, a flurry of publications were written in the 2010s using shelter theory, of which a selection will be described here:

In 2012, Thorhallson published an article applying the theory to Iceland's medieval history and relationship with Norway during this period (Thorhallsson 2012). Before the 2014 Scottish independence referendum, an article analysing Scotland's potential shelter options was published (Bailes, Thorhallsson & Johnstone 2013). Importantly for this thesis, a 2016 article introduced the first non-western case studies using shelter theory (Bailes, Thayer & Thorhallsson 2016). Focusing on alliance (political) shelter, the article examines the foreign policy choices of Armenia, Singapore and Cuba, finding the theory applicable in all three cases. Another important turning point was a 2018 article by Thorhallsson, analysing "nordicness" as a form of shelter for Iceland (Thorhallsson 2018). This would later be developed into the notion of societal shelter (See section 5 and 7.3). In 2020, an essay was published examining the shelter seeking strategies and vulnerabilities of the Baltic states in relation to Russia and NATO (Bladaitė & Šešelgytė 2020).

In 2018, Thorhallson published a book which expounded on shelter theory and provided a case study of Iceland's shelter seeking strategies throughout its modern history (Thorhallsson

2019). The approach taken in Thorhallssons analysis and the introductory and concluding (Wivel & Ingebritsen 2019) chapters on shelter theory were highly inspirational to this project.

4.2 State Fragility

The term "failed state", which is sometimes used alternatively or in conjunction with "fragile state", began to emerge in the 1990s (Nay 2013, 327). This period saw at once the seeming end of superpower competition, as well as the proliferation of civil wars, such as in the former Yugoslavia or Rwanda and elsewhere. These developments led to a shift in security scholarship and politics, that emphasised intra-national conflicts and breaking down of state authority and legitimacy in parts of the world. As the academic literature on these developments accumulated, many terms such as "fragile states", "lame leviathan" and "imaginary state" were introduced and both the US and EU started to see failed states as major threats to their security (Grimm et al. 2014, 198-199). On the other hand, critical researchers have criticised the concept of state fragility, as they are often applied to states that wildly differ in their capacity, legitimacy and security (ibid, 202).

This essay does not pretend to significantly contribute to the theoretical discussions regarding the nature of "failed" or "fragile" states or the academic and political agendas regarding this topic. These debates are nevertheless mentioned here, partly because Mali is today sometimes considered a "failed" or "fragile" state, but also to relate this concept to the literature on shelter theory (see section 5.2)

5. Theory

5.1 Shelter Theory

At its essence, shelter theory is a continuation of alliance studies, and seeks to nuance the existing literature by putting small states at its focus. It argues that small states are driven to make foreign policy choices that differ from bigger states, due to their inherent weaknesses and relative lack in capabilities in an anarchic world system. This can lead them to seek

shelter[1], which can broadly be defined as protection by a bigger state (for example Denmark and the US) or membership in an international institution (the prime example being the EU) in order to cover certain vulnerabilities that stem from smallness. An article published by Thorhallson, Bailes and Thayer lays out 6 general points where shelter theory differs from traditional alliance theory and realism:

- 1. Small states are fundamentally different political, economic and social units than large states
- 2. The foundation of the alliance relationship is distinctly unique for domestic as well as international reasons
- 3. Small states benefit disproportionately from international cooperation
- 4. Small states need political, economic and societal shelter to thrive
- 5. Social and cultural relationships with the outside world are especially important for a small society
- 6. Shelter may come at a significant cost for the small state

The above points are quoted from Bailes, Thayer & Thorhallsson 2016.

Examining these differences, the common thing between all of them is that small states differ from bigger states due to them being small. So, what is a small state? As hinted at earlier, the most commonly cited characteristic of small states is their weakness, or more precisely, their lack of power (Wivel & Ingebritsen 2019). Different metrics, such as economic, military, territorial or demographic size are sometimes used to define the lack of power in small states[2] (Thorhallsson 2019, 14). Regarding the latter of these metrics, a common range for small states is 1-30 million (ibid). Mali, with 20 million inhabitants would therefore be a bigger small state according to this metric, and regarding its territorial size, the country is in fact

[1] This is not the only possible strategy however; for example, it was fairly common for small European states to "hide" from the international arena by adopting policies of neutrality and pursuing economic and political autonomy during the Cold War (Wivel & Ingebritsen 2019, 205).

[2] In this discussion, Thorhallsson notes how some city states have, according to some authors, managed to rise above their small size and become influential on the world stage (2019, 15). This could have interesting implications for shelter theory: If you turn this statement around, big states, that through relative weakness are unable to control outcomes of domestic and foreign politics and have become system-ineffectual, could be considered as *functionally small*. A possible example of this would be China during the 19th century or Russia in the 1990s.

twice as big as France. However, it has been argued that in the third world, small states can have larger populations as they are not as able to benefit from this demographic size (Vidal 1967, 8 in Steinmetz & Wivel 2010, 22), and generally, these sorts of absolute metrics carry obvious limitations. For example, Liechtenstein is minuscule compared to neighbouring Switzerland, which in turn is small compared to France, which, while not a small state by most metrics, appears puny compared to the US or China. Similar comparisons could be made regarding economic or territorial size.

Because of the inherent problems in these categorisations of smallness, Thorhallsson, along with other researchers using shelter theory, opts for a combination of these absolute power metrics, along with subjective views of the state as being "small" or "system ineffectual", looking at both internal perceptions of the state as well as how other states regard it (Thorhallsson & Wivel 2006, 654). Beyond these metrics, Thorhallsson and Wivel also argue for the use of relative metrics of size, which account for power the state *exercises* as opposed to power the state *possesses* (ibid). A state may therefore be small in one realm, for example demographically, while quite big in another, such as militarily. Two such examples could be Israel, which has a small population but is militarily significant, or Qatar, which is similarly small but exercises significant economic and mediatic power. In the end, Thorhallson states that definitions of smallness will always be subjective and imprecise (2019, 15), and this thesis will proceed from this assertion. Applying these metrics to Mali during the last decade would suggest that it is indeed a small state (excluding territorial size), especially when looking at how the country is perceived by others, and its relative power, as it has not even been able to maintain control of its territories during this time period. Returning to the concept of shelter and the above stated differences with traditional alliance theory, some important differences can be found. First, the theory considers domestic issues as an equally important foundation for alliances as external threats. Second, the theory places emphasis on economic and societal issues as an incentive for small states to seek shelter. Third, and perhaps most important, is the view that small states are fundamentally different units than great powers, due to their lack of power vis-à-vis great and middle powers.

Before closing this part, the concept of shelter will be elaborated on. The term refers to actions taken by small states to protect themselves from external or internal vulnerabilities

that stem from smallness, and the theory posits that small states increasingly need shelter to survive and thrive (Wivel & Ingebritsen 2019, 206). In a more concrete sense, the term refers to membership in international institutions, such as NATO or ASEAN, or relationships with more powerful states, such as the military alliance between Iceland and the US. States can seek shelter in three realms: the political realm (usually military protection, but not exclusively), the economic realm and the societal realm (broadly referring to social and cultural initiatives, such as the ERASMUS program in the EU). Beyond shelter, small states can also use domestic buffering to counteract their weakness in the international environment, such as mandatory conscription in Finland in order to dissuade Russian aggression. Last but not least, Thorhallson argues that shelter must be to the benefit of the majority of a small state, in order to avoid that the concept applies too widely and loses its theoretical meaning (2019, 3).

5.2 State Fragility and Shelter Theory

Despite the fact that many states considered as "fragile" fit Thorhallsons definitions of smallness, both in the relative and absolute criteria (see Fragile State Index 2021), no case study of shelter theory has been made in these countries. On the one hand, this is not surprising as the theory was developed with modern European countries in mind. On the other hand, there is an interesting overlap between a state's eventual smallness as defined by Thorhallsson and its fragility. Namely, Thorhallssons relative metric for smallness (and the absolute metrics to a lesser degree) correspond well with the general definition of state fragility outlined by Grimm et al. (2014, 198 - 199): "...insufficient state capacity or the unwillingness of a state to meet its obligations, generally understood as delivering 'core functions to the majority of its people'" (ibid).

These criteria focus more on domestic affairs and are more severely defined than Thorhallson's criteria. Looking at fragile states defined as such through the lens of shelter theory, one would thus expect that sheltering would focus more on domestic affairs than foreign affairs, even if this division between foreign and domestic policy can be somewhat problematic in these states. For example, political shelter would be used to maintain state

monopoly on violence and control of its physical space. One would also expect that shelter, especially military shelter, would be more crucial to small fragile states, as the state per definition has a limited ability to control its own territory, fulfill public functions and uphold its legitimacy, or to use the term from shelter theory, these states have a limited ability for domestic buffer. *Small fragile states* should therefore be vulnerable not only to external threats such as bigger neighbours, but also internal instability (rebellions, coups d'état, etc). To sum this section up, the following analysis should suggest that small fragile states need shelter to survive, but not to thrive, as thriving is outside of their purview.

6. Method and material

6.1 Methodology

This case study functions as an implicit comparison to the other case studies using shelter theory. In order to accomplish this and contribute to the wider literature on on this topic, it is necessary to assure that the thesis examines the same phenomenon, using similar or equivalent analytical tools, to situate the case of Mali in a wider category of cases (see Section 6.3) and to demonstrate that the findings of the thesis relate to the further theoretisation on shelter (see Section 8) (Esser & Vliegenthart 2017, 5). So far, shelter theory researchers have not explicitly laid out a comprehensive methodical framework for the theory.

Nevertheless, it is possible to glean some commonalities regarding their methodology. Studies using the theory tend to be case studies, either being comparative case studies or examining a single country. The phenomenon that is being examined in these studies and this thesis can be operationalised as relationships between small states and international institutions or bigger states, or in a broader sense, small states' foreign policy, i.e. *shelter*. Furthermore, Thorhallson provides a clear starting point for any case study using shelter theory: "By framing our investigation around the disadvantages and needs of small states we can clarify and account for the foreign policy behavior of Iceland over this period of history [Author's note: Iceland's modern history]." (2019, 86). The analytical tools used in shelter

theory are described in section 5.1, where it was established that small states seek shelter due to the vulnerabilities and problems that are due to smallness. In regards to small states that seek shelter, the three main vulnerabilities are summarised by Christine Ingebritsen and Anders Wivel and paraphrased here as:

- 1. Military weakness and limited diplomatic administrative and diplomatic capacity
- 2. Limited size of domestic markets leading to import/export dependence
- 3. Social, cultural and educational stagnation and necessity of a competitive marketplace of ideas

(Wivel & Ingebritsen 2019, 207)

So, when analysing empirical material, these three vulnerabilities were identified, along with other vulnerabilities that can reasonably be tied to smallness and/or state fragility. When they were found, the next step was to examine if the government tried to address them through shelter (or internal buffering, or a combination of both). The third step was to see if the government succeeded in obtaining shelter, and to evaluate what the result of that strategy was. The final step was to reevaluate whether or not the specific instance can be considered as shelter, and to reflect on why. This process was repeated for every type of shelter (political, economic and societal). This process was further operationalised with the following questions:

- Were there significant vulnerabilities in the political, economic or societal realm? What was the character of these vulnerabilities?
- If vulnerabilities can be found, can it be established that the government sought to address these through shelter-seeking?
- Did the strategy or relationship succeed in obtaining shelter and if so, what was the result of this?
- Can the strategy or relationship reasonably be considered as shelter, and if so, is that shelter effective and credible? If not, what qualities of the strategy or relationship disqualifies it as shelter or as credible and effective?

The first three of these questions are mainly answered in the analysis, while the fourth is mainly answered in the discussion and conclusion. Before moving on to empirical material, some problems regarding the methodology of this thesis will be outlined. First, I have no field experience in Mali, no access to relevant actors in Mali and related countries and institutions and had no developed conception of the country before starting this research process, facts that necessarily had an effect on my understanding of the country and the analysis. The thesis is also hampered by linguistic bias, as I am not fluent in any of the widely spoken languages by the Malian population[3], something which may have affected the analysis on societal shelter in particular. I also have no formal education in economics, which probably affected the analysis on economic sheltering to some extent. Lastly, the focus on France and regional institutions may have affected the answer to the second research question, as credible shelter giving actors may have been unwittingly ignored during research.

6.2 Material

In the studies mentioned so far, the authors neglect to discuss exactly how or why certain empirical material was chosen. While this could be viewed as undisciplined or unsystematic, it also affords the authors a certain flexibility in their analysis, allowing them to draw from an eclectic selection of both qualitative and quantitative empirical material. Generally, however, it can be stated that most of these studies seem to follow a method similar to one outlined by George and Bennett (2005, 90): First immersing themselves in the most easily accessible academic literature on the case in order to establish a chronological narrative. This is followed by case study analysis, where historical inquiry is used to identify independent and dependent variables. Finally, explanations for the outcome of a case are developed, which is accomplished by identifying several weak inferences rather than one strong inference identified through quasi-experimental research design[4].

[3] Mali's official language is French, which I am fluent in, but people tend to speak a variety of local languages, the biggest of which is Bambara (CIA 2021).
[4] In Thorhallson's book on Iceland (2019), these inferences take the form of, one the one hand, qualitative material such as history books, academic research, newspaper articles and interviews with political staff, such as diplomats, and, on the other hand, descriptive statistics that convey the size of military and diplomatic expenditure and staff, economic size and performance, and academic enrolment and academic and cultural output.

For this thesis, I followed a process similar to the one described above. I began by seeking out articles (both academic and non-academic), documentaries, history books and reports that related to Mali's history and the conflict during the last ten years, in order to gain a timeline of events for the conflict and general overview of the country. Using this general overview, I identified several potential independent and dependent variables (*needs and vulnerabilities inherent to small fragile states* and *shelter seeking and internal buffering*, respectively), which were used to guide further reading into the academic and non-academic literature. During this reading, some variables, and related material, were found to be irrelevant and others were introduced into the project. More concretely, only vulnerabilities and shelters which could reasonably be considered significant were included in the analysis, a criteria that is necessarily subjective and prone to arbitrariness, but was nevertheless necessary in order not to get stuck in the endless details present when analysing an entire society. Finally, descriptive statistics were introduced which relate to the three main types of vulnerabilities and weaknesses experienced by small states, and state fragility. The specific data was partly chosen based on previous literature on shelter theory, and other data was chosen as it reflected on state fragility and the specific case of Mali[5].

6.3 Case Choice

The choice of Mali for this thesis relates to the theoretical aim of this thesis (exploring the potential limits of shelter theory). So, in what sense can the case of Mali be theoretically relevant to shelter theory? As has been noted, previous literature on this theory has been developed with modern, European small states in mind (Bailes, Thayer & Thorhallsson 2016). While one article conducted a "plausibility probe" into three non-western countries (Cuba, Armenia and Singapore) and found that the theory was applicable in these cases (ibid), these states are still either highly developed, or have a relatively stable, unitary state apparatus, normative concerns regarding democracy and corruption put aside. Mali was thus chosen as it stands apart in all of these variables: it is economically underdeveloped, has a comparatively unstable state apparatus, and as Anderson notes, is generally considered as "epitome of remoteness in the western imagination" (2019). In other words, it can be

[5] Heavy inspiration was taken from Thorhallsson 2019, as well as Bailes, Thayer & Thorhallsson 2016 regarding data relating to smallness, while, for example, data on foreign aid was included as it proved quite important for this case during research.

considered as the opposite of a European, developed, modern state, while still being small. Similarly, there was also an interest in examining whether or not the claim that Africa has few options for credible shelter (Wivel & Ingebritsen 2019, 207) actually held true, as well as to examine what exactly constitutes "credible" and "non-credible" shelter. Mali has several bilateral and multilateral relationships, regional and international, which seems to contradict the claim that the region lacks credible shelter options, in turn offering an interesting empirical puzzle.

To summarise the theoretical motives for choosing Mali, it can be argued that if shelter theory could be found to be relevant in this case without major alterations, this result would suggest that the theory has very wide relevance for small states, and that it *travels* further than researchers had thought. If it is not found to be relevant, the reasons for that would be theoretically relevant to the shelter theory literature (see George & Bennett 2005, 32-33, for an elaboration on using single-case studies for assessing the necessity of variables for a certain outcome). Furthermore, as the first studied case of a small fragile state using shelter theory, Mali could offer some potential theoretical indices to other small fragile states[6].

In order for this case to meet these conditions, the time frame of the study was limited from 2010 to the 2021 coup, as this period is arguably the most turbulent period in modern Malian history, and because much western academic interest has been directed at the country since 2012. Given this turbulence, and the three military coups d'état endured during the last decade, one might challenge the choice of Mali as it does not fit the western archetype of a state; in other words, Mali might be small and fragile, but is it really a coherent state as such? This issue will be raised in the conclusion, but it should be noted that shelter can be given to any small political unit (Thorhallson 2019, 15), a definition that reasonably fits the Malian state.

[6] Afghanistan can, to some extent, be seen as an analogous case to Mali, as the pre-Taliban government was largely dependent on American assistance to maintain control in the country.

7. Analysis

7.1 Political Sheltering

Figure 1: Map of Mali with state capitals. Source: World Map With Countries 2021

Mali is a landlocked country situated in West Africa. The country can generally be divided into the extremely poor north, where the Sahel and Sahara run through, and the fertile, tropical grasslands of the south, which is home to 90 % of the population and most economic activity (Shurkin et al. 2017, 15). The south is also home to most settled agriculture and is mainly populated by Mandé groups. Generally, these Mandé groups are viewed as black, while the Arab and Tuareg groups of the north are viewed as white, a racial division that predates European colonialism (Shurkin et al. 2017, 8). These north-south divisions, along with political instability, are part of the roots of the political crises this part of the analysis will cover.

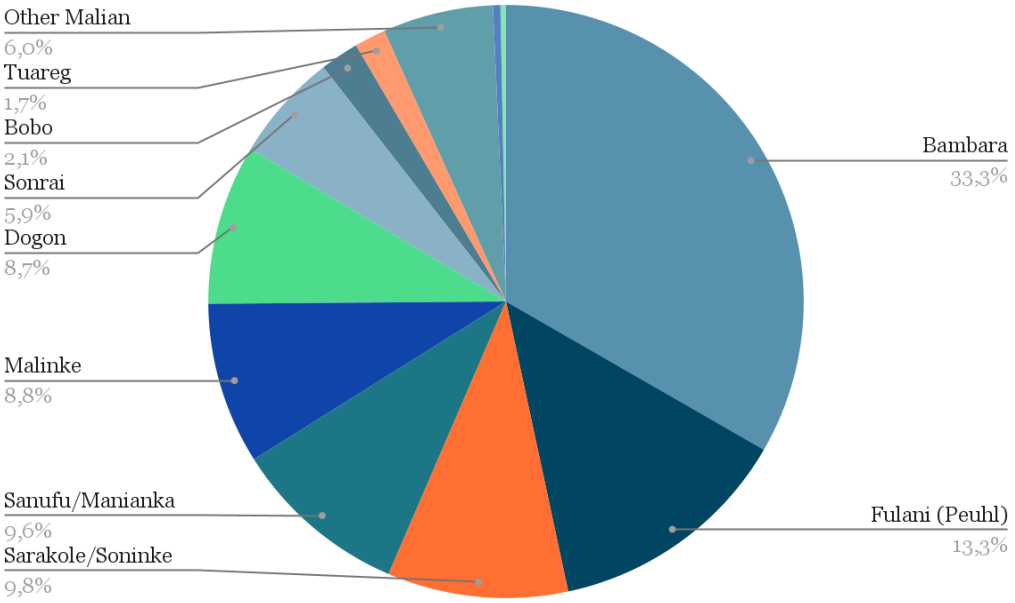

Figure 2: Mali's ethnic composition, 2018 est. The unnamed portions are *ECOWAS other than Mali* (0,4 %) and *Other* (0,3 %). Excluding the Tuaregs and Other Malian, all of the named groups are considered as black. Source: CIA 2021

7.1.1 Internal Upheaval and African Shelter

Mali has been shaken with several political crises during the last decade. In 2012, the MNLA (National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad) started the fourth Tuareg rebellion in the north of Mali (Stewart 2013, 35). The Tuaregs are a semi-nomadic group residing in the Sahel. Following independence from France, they suffered repressive violence, including destruction of wildstock and massacres, and have in general considered themselves as marginalised by the post-colonial state (Stewart 2013, 34). Periods of severe drought during the 70s and 80s led to many Tuaregs being taken into Libya by Muammer Qaddafi, on the condition that they joined his army (Shurkin et al. 2017, 8-9). After the Arab Spring, many of these Tuareg fighters, bringing with them relatively modern weaponry from Libyan arsenals, returned to Mali and joined with MNLA and Ansar Dine, a jihadists group headed by the leader of the 1990 Tuareg rebellion (Stewart 2013, 38-39). In January, these groups started launching offensives in the North (specifically the region surrounding Kidal). By April, the rebel groups had pushed army forces out of the entire north (Goya 2013, 158), and the MNLA proclaimed an independent Tuareg state (*Azawad*). This proclamation was met with

swift condemnations from the UN, ECOWAS (*Economic Community of West African States*), the AU (*African Union*) and neighbouring countries (Fontaine, Lahouari & Henni 2013, 198).

These events in the north reverberated down to Bamako. By March, a few weeks before the presidential elections, the relatively unknown captain Anagou Sanogo performed a coup d'état, ousting president Amadou Toumani Touré (*ATT*) (Salah Helali 2013, 112). Sanogo denounced a system of corruption and clientelism supposedly affecting the Malian state (ibid), which seemed to strike a chord with the population as resistance to the junta was nonexistent (Nathan 2013, 467). The military also demanded further means to combat the MNLA, feeling that the government had hampered these efforts (Salah Helali 2013, 112). At this point the first instances of effective political shelter can be seen: On April 2, ECOWAS announced a complete diplomatic, trade and financial embargo on the country, demanding a return to constitutional order (Al Jazeera 2012), with the AU following suit the day after (DW 2012). Sanago quickly backed down (Al Jazeera 2012), and after a few turbulent months with an interim government, ATT was reinstated in August before Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta (IBK) became president in 2013 (United Nations 2021). The Malian government's dependence on foreign actors would show itself again shortly. In June and July, the agreement between Ansar Dine and the MNLA broke down due to the latter's opposition to implementation of Sharia law in Azawad (Stewart 2013, 42). Exploiting the power vacuum in the south and discord between Ansar Dine and the MNLA, other jihadist groups (Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, AQIM, and Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa, MUJAO) managed to take control over the north and install strict Sharia law[7].

This led to quite an ironic development: In December, the MNLA and the Malian government met with ECOWAS negotiators in December in order to discuss a possible resolution to the conflict. This was followed on 20 December by UNSCR 2085, authorising AFISMA (*African-led International Support Mission in Mali*), an African-led military intervention in the country with a one year mandate (UN 2012a). This resolution hints at the political shelter provided by the UN. Unable to consolidate control over its territory or gain authority over its

[7] During the course of the decade, different jihadist groups would wax and wane in strength, and their alliances would also shift significantly. Due to the focus on the Malian state, and the short length of this essay, these nuances will generally be disregarded.

military on its own, the survival of the Malian government would largely depend on (territorial) legitimacy afforded by the international community. Without this legitimacy, as well as the rules laid out in the UN, MNLAs proclamation of an independent Azawad would not have necessarily been framed as an infringement of Malian territorial sovereignty, as it was in the earlier resolution 2056 (UN 2012b). AFISMA would play a role in giving Mali military shelter, but the main military support would ultimately come from the country's former coloniser: In January 2013, a new offensive by MUJAO and AQIM heightened fears within the Malian government to request assistance from France (UN 2021). Concerns in Paris regarding AFISMA's capabilities and that its deployment would be several months away[8] led to Operation Serval, which was launched in January 2013, ending in July 2014. Along with AFISMA, Serval succeeded in stopping the advance of MUJAO and AQMI and regaining a semblance of control in northern Mali. Following this military reversal, jihadist fighters resorted to guerrilla war (Stewart 2013, 43).

So far, we have seen how regional institutions, such as the AU and ECOWAS, as well as the UN, played an important role providing political shelter for the Malian government. We have also seen that French military support averted disaster in January 2013. In the short term, this shelter was vital for the Malian government, which was unable to buffer against these threats on its own.

7.1.2 French Presence and Stagnation after Serval

Operation Serval was succeeded by Operation Barkhane on August 1 2014[9]. Unlike Serval, Operation Barkhane did not only encompass northern Mali, but was (and is at the time of writing) conducted in five countries in the Sahel: Mauretania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger and Chad (Ministère des armées 2021). The two principal aims of the operation were "counterterrorism" and "heightening of capabilities of partner's armies" (Author's

[8] Researcher Marc-Antoine Pérouse de Montclos has challenged the assertion that Paris intervened in order to stop jihadists forces from reaching Bamako, a scenario he finds highly unlikely given their lack of regional support. Rather, he claims that Serval and Barkhane were meant to justify France's continued status as an global actor, including its permanent seat at the UN security council (Arte 2021: See also Powell 2017).

[9] Several other security initiatives were undertaken during this time as well, such as EUTM (*European Union Training Mission in Mali*) and the UN peacekeeping mission MINUSMA (*United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali*). These are largely disregarded here due to their ineffectiveness (Michaïlof 2018).

translation) (ibid, 4), the partner's in question being the G5 Sahel, composed of the five countries mentioned above. In 2017, French forces numbered 3500 (Powell 2017, 47). By September 2021, this number grew to around 5000, with as many forces from the G5 (Ministère des armées 2021), covering a distance as vast as continental Europe.

Territory in square km*	1,240,192 sq km (ca 2,2 France)
Population est. 2021*	20,137,527
HDI Rank**	184 (out of 189)
GDP est. 2019 PPP***	45 bn (1/21th of the Netherlands)
GDP per capita est. 2019 PPP***	2,419.8 (1/24th of the Netherlands)
Exports est. 2016 USD*	2.8 bn USD
Imports est. 2016 USD*	3.4 bn USD
Military spending in USD (% of GDP)****	2011: 131 mn (1.2%)
	2016: 368 mn (2.6%)
	2020: 593 mn (3.3%)

Figure 3: Key demographic, economic, social and military data on Mali. Sources: *CIA World Factbook (2021), **UNDP HDR (2021), ***The World Bank (2021), ****SIPRI (2021)

From 2014 to 2020, French forces and the G5 Sahel provided political shelter to the Malian state through Barkhane, but not necessarily to *Mali*. Expectations were high after Serval, with 2015 perhaps seeing the high point of optimism for the country as a peace agreement between the MNLA and the Malian state was reached, in which the state promised to address Tuareg grievances through decentralisation of political power and increased economic resources (Kleinfeld 2018). However, these early years already saw increased jihadists violence in the north (Shurkin et al. 2017, 28), pointing to what would become a disturbing trend. By 2018, regular outbursts of violence between jihadists, self-defence militias and Barkhane forces were erupting in the central part of the country, showing that progress had stagnated (Kleinfeld 2018). The French Army would go on touting tactical victories, such as the killing of several jihadist leaders (Ministère des Armées 2021, 15), but as the decade closed without any resolution to the conflict, observers such as Serge Michaïlof questioned the efforts of France and its partners to build up Mali's army due to widespread corruption and dysfunction

within its ranks (2018). Michaïlof further argued against the prospects of counterinsurgency operations in the country, due to the dysfunction in critical institutions for this type of war (police, judiciary, et cetera), warning that France was increasingly viewed as a neocolonial occupier (ibid, 5-6).

7.1.3 La Russafrique?

In August 2020, IBK's government was deposed in a military coup, which was preceded by two months of protests triggered by election irregularities, a general perception of unchecked corruption and the stagnating military campaign in the north. While the coup leaders were greeted by cheering crowds in Bamako, international organisations such as the UN, AU and ECOWAS, along with France and other western countries condemned the action and instituted various diplomatic and financial sanctions against the new government, but without the effect of the 2012 sanctions (France 24 2020). The junta generally saw support from locals in Bamako (as in 2012), which can be traced to a long history of governmental corruption in the country (see Nathan 2013: Souaré 2006). The new government was not long for this world however. Nine months later, in May 2021, another coup d'état put the military leader of the 2020 coup, Assimi Goïta, at the head of the state.

Taken together, the events of the last two years act as a massive indictment of the long term effectiveness of France's and the G5 Sahel's (as well as the EU's) political shelter, both failing to decisively end hostilities in the country, while also severely undermining the popular legitimacy of the former government and ECOWAS (Diallo & Sangaré 2021: Mann 2021b). Pulling back the frame a bit, long term instability seems to be a pattern for French military interventions in Africa: quantitative research shows a correlation between French interventions and subsequent military coups d'état (Grey 1990, 106). Nathaniel K. Powell further argues that, over the 50 some French military interventions in Africa after 1960, short term stability has been achieved by offering a security umbrella to corrupt, autocratic governments, reinforcing the very causes that led to intervention in the first place (2017).

Following the 2021 coup, several protests in Bamako have erupted in favour of Goïta's government, while calling for France's departure and the arrival of Russia (Diallo & Sangaré

2021: Mann 2021b; see Mann 2021a for more on modern Malians relationship with France). At the time of writing, the junta are in negotiations with Russian PMC Wagner Group, whose arrival would obviously be politically problematic to France and other EU countries currently in Mali. Russian regular forces, such as military advisors, are already said to be present in Mali, and 4 helicopters along with small arms have already been delivered to the Malian army (Diallo & Sangaré 2021). As Barkhane will end in February 2022, it remains to be seen whether involvement from Wagner group and the Kremlin will offer more effective long term military shelter, but the record of the PMC suggests that their involvement may come at a higher humanitarian cost.

7.2 Economic Sheltering

Mali is one of the poorest countries in the world. With an economy mainly reliant on exports of raw goods, cotton and gold specifically, as well as foreign aid (CIA 2021), the country is particularly exposed to external actors and trends in the world economy. Many other African countries have faced similar fates as a consequence of European colonialism, resulting in low levels of development in infrastructure and human capital as measured through literacy and school enrolment (Mkandawire & Soludo 1998, 3 - 4). One of the most pernicious aspects of this colonial legacy is a reliance on the export of natural resources to foreign markets, leaving their economies vulnerable to fluctuations in foreign demand and terms of trade (ibid, 8). In general this colonial legacy therefore exacerbates the economic challenges of African small states (see section 5.1: Souaré 2006, 174).

GDP (January 2022 USD$)	2000	2004	2008	2012	2016	2020
Mali	2.9 b	5.4 b	9.8 b	12.4 b	14 b	17.4 b
Burkina Faso	2.9 b	5.4 b	9.4 b	12.5 b	12.8 b	17.9 b
Ivory Coast	16.5 b	23.5 b	34 b	36.3 b	47.9 b	61.3 b

Figure 4: GDP in selected francophone ECOWAS countries with roughly equal populations from 2000 to 2020. Mali's current GDP equals 0.02 percent of the world economy. Source: World Bank 2021

GDP per capita (January 2022 USD$)	2000	2004	2008	2012	2016	2020
Mali	270	441	697	778	780	862
Burkina Faso	255	418	643	758	688	858
Ivory Coast	1,007	1,308	1,738	1,684	2,013	2,326

Figure 5: GDP per capita in selected francophone ECOWAS countries with roughly equal populations from 2000 to 2020. Mali's current figure equals 6 percent of the world's average. Source: World Bank 2021

However, many other former colonies, such as Southeast Asian countries, seem to have escaped this continuity with the colonial era, by developing value-added export oriented industries (Mkandawire & Soludo 1998, 34). It has been argued that many African nations have not managed such development as investment has been focused on extraction of raw natural resources instead of human capital (ibid). In the case of Mali, however, the economic shelter provided by its former coloniser after independence, while conferring some benefits, can be seen as part of the reason behind this underdevelopment (see section 7.2.3). With the stage set in place, the next section will examine foreign aid received by Mali.

7.2.1 Foreign Aid

Following independence, Mali had a nominally socialist economy. However, following droughts in the Sahel during the 70s and a severe economic crisis in the 80s, there was an increase in foreign aid to the country that was accompanied with policy changes (van de Walle 2012, 4). Those policy changes were part of a larger trend in the developing world called *structural adjustment*, a neoliberal economic doctrine which encouraged deregulation and privatisation in developing countries in exchange for development funds. These policies began to be adopted in Mali after 1987, although the pace of reform was slow during the 90s (ibid, 5). Structural adjustment is a highly contentious topic, being criticised for not achieving the stated goals of development or even as being a form of neo-colonialism (Mkandawire &

Soludo 1998). In Mali, it has been suggested that while the country experienced significant economic growth during the 90s because of this assistance, this may have been due to the devaluation of its currency and increases in gold exports, with any real increases in economic production (Van de Walle 2012, 5). As the below graph shows, aid to the country has also increased rapidly during the 2010s, without a corresponding increase in the living standard in Malians (The New Humanitarian 2013). Van de Walle nevertheless suggests that aid to Mali may have helped foster a lively civil society and engagement, even if this effect is not as great as has been suggested by aid donors and NGOs (2012).

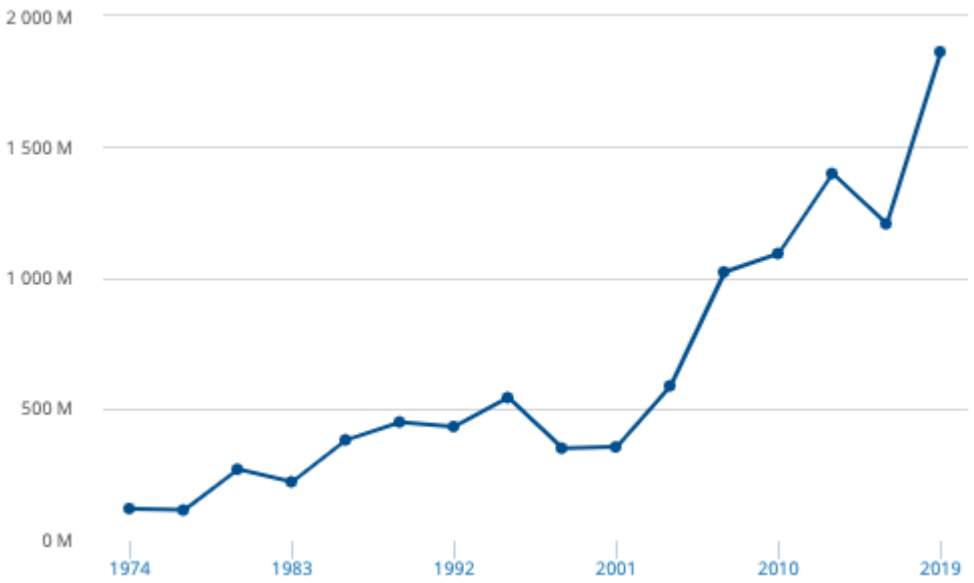

Figure 6: Net official development assistance and official aid received in Mali (January 2022 USD$).
Source: World Bank 2021

Foreign aid is, on paper, a perfect example of economic shelter: An underdeveloped, and in the case of Mali, small country which is experiencing difficulties developing its economy or in some cases even providing food security to its citizens, receives financial help from wealthy countries in order to address these issues. This representation of foreign aid, especially as a means to combat starvation and food insecurity, two acute problems in Mali since the beginning of the conflict, can be considered as credible economic shelter.

However, corruption and clientelism are significant problems in Mali which are historically entrenched and run from top to bottom in society (Nathan 2013, 475: van de Walle 2013, 5). Given that this aid is mainly directed through the national government, it is prone to end up in the pockets of a corrupt official (The New Humanitarian 2013). An example of this corruption was seen in 2011, when former health minister in the government of ATT, Ibrahim Oumar Touré, was arrested for embezzling 4 million dollars meant for combating AIDS in the country (Nathan 2013, 476). In the north, fighting over aid between Tuareg and Arab groups has also caused instability (Shurkin et al. 2017, 15). On the donor side, a former employee of the French embassy claims that her government wilfully ignored this corruption and societal dysfunction at the executive level, in order not to tarnish Mali's image as the "good student" regarding development and aid receiving countries (Rousselier 2013). Taylor further notes that much of French aid in West African countries is, in fact, drawn from receiving countries' international reserves that are required to be stored in the French Treasury, and that 78 % of this aid is actually loans to be paid back with interest (2019, 1078).

In summary, aid has had positive effects in Mali to some extent, including vertical accountability, literacy and public health (Van de Walle 2012, 3). However, evaluated from its wider purpose of development and fostering of a strong democratic society, it is hard to argue that it has achieved its desired results. Widespread and deep rooted corruption further detract from the status of foreign aid as economic shelter (unless one only considers the people directly benefiting from this corruption), and French aid in particular largely seems to be a inhibiting factor for the country's economy.

7.2.2 ECOWAS

The Economic Community of West African States was established on May 28 1975 with the treaty of Lagos (ECOWAS 2021), comprising 15 original members. The goal of the bloc was to promote economic integration by removing intra-regional trade restrictions, promoting free movement of people goods and services and "harmonizing regional sectoral policies" (Adam & Sharif Chaudhry 2013, 102). As was explored earlier, the organisation has outgrown its original purpose, taking on *de facto* military and political functions as well. As Adam and Sharif Chaudhry argue, unified, regional economies can facilitate the pooling of risks

between vulnerable economies, increase intra-regional trade and allow the countries within the region to exploit complementarities and entrench competitiveness (2014, 103). The previous literature on shelter theory in European small states confirms this idea, with the EU and EFTA often held as important safeguards against bigger economic players like the US and China, as well as providing markets for one's exports and other benefits (See the literature cited in section 4.1).

In ECOWAS, these effects do not seem to have manifested to the same extent as in Europe. For example, intra-regional trade as a percent of total trade lay at roughly 8 % from 2000 to 2014 (Taylor 2019, 1081). In comparison, trade within the SADC (*South African Development Community*) experienced steady growth during this period, starting at around 12 % and ending up at around 19 % (ibid). Increases in production in Mali have also been implied to reduce bilateral trade with other ECOWAS countries (Adam & Sharif Chaudhry 2014, 114). Looking at trade barriers, ECOWAS data from 2002 show an average of four to seven checkpoints per 100 km on intra-state highways in the bloc, and only Benin has completely lifted trade tariffs on industrial products despite a general commitment to do so for member states (Souaré 2006, 174-175).

To summarise this section, ECOWAS may hold some value for Mali as economic shelter, in that its formalised rules give the country an increased voice in economic matters in the face of regional economic giants such as Nigeria (see Thorhallsson 2011, 326). In matters of trade, the institution's status as credible economic shelter is doubtful however.

7.2.3 French Connection: the CFA Franc

The CFA Franc (*Communauté Financière Africaine*) is the name of two currencies, the XOF and the XAF. The former is used by several countries in West Africa, whereas the latter is used in Central Africa. Both of these currencies are quite unique, as the formal obligation to guarantee them lies with France, not any of the countries that use them. Furthermore, member countries are required to hold an operating account at the French treasury consisting of 50 % of their international reserves, and the currencies have a fixed exchange rate with the Euro set by Paris (Taylor 2019, 1069-1070). From this point on, unless otherwise stated, the rest of this text will refer to the XOF as the CFAF and ignore the XAF.

The CFAF is used by 8 countries in ECOWAS, all of them francophone except Guinea-Bissau. The history of the currency stems from French colonial history. The currency was created in 1945 as France adopted the Bretton Woods agreement, using the same acronym as today but with the meaning "Franc of the French colonies in Africa" (author's translation) (BCEAO 2021). Mali joined the CFAF zone in 1984, after the use of the Malian franc became untenable (Mann 2015, 85-86). As with structural adjustment, the CFA Franc is highly controversial both within and outside Africa, sometimes being seen as the epitome of *La Françafrique* in contemporary times. This term, roughly translated as Francafrica, refers to a collection of economic, political and personal relationships between French and francophone African elites characterised as neocolonial (see for example Taylor 2019). The use of this term is debated nowadays, partly because France's economic engagements in the continent have diminished drastically, but also because personal ties between French and African elites are not as prevalent as during the 20th century (Powell 2017, 47-48: see also Powell 2017, 63).

There are some scholars who argue for the benefits of the CFA Franc. David Fielding, for example, argued that the union succeeded in keeping prices stable and removing deterrents to inward investment, while being less successful at regional economic integration and dealing with short term adjustment (Fielding in Chown 2003, 290). In fact, prices in the two CFA Franc zones have historically remained remarkably stable compared to other Sub-Saharan states (Wilson 2021, 747). In this sense, the currency is an example of economic shelter provided by France to Mali.

Nevertheless, the currency regime has been criticised for essentially transferring control of monetary and economic policy from African countries to France, as well as guaranteeing a continued reliance on extraction of raw natural resources through fixing of the exchange rate, so that the most viable export destination is always French industry (Taylor 2019). This reliance on a few natural resources, gold and cotton in the case of Mali, may thus increase the vulnerability of small states to price fluctuations. The CFAF has also been cited as one of the main reasons behind underdevelopment in the region (ibid). Furthermore, a 2014 study noted

that Mali showed no increase in intra-regional trade due to the currency (Adam & Sharif Chaudhry 2014, 115).

A possible alternative to the CFAF began to be discussed in 2003: The *Eco,* as the would-be currency is called, which would encompass all of ECOWAS, was to be introduced in 2020. It would be uncoupled from the French state, however plans for its introductions have been pushed back to 2027, as member states have yet to meet the proposed economic criteria necessary for its adoption (Mugabi 2021). As such, the CFAF will probably remain in place for the foreseeable future, conferring some benefits but also being highly politically controversial and having inhibiting effects on Mali, making its effectiveness and credibility as economic shelter two-sided.

7.3 Societal sheltering

The notion of societal shelter entails seeking relationships with bigger societies and international institutions in order to avoid cultural stagnation and isolation. In other studies, this type of shelter is often analysed by looking at exchange programs for higher education (see for example Thorhallsson 2019). However, when looking at secular education, Mali differs from previously studied countries greatly. Literacy in the country lies at 35.5 %, with the male population at 46.2% and the female population at 25.7% (CIA 2021). Furthermore, expenditure on education lies at 3.5 % of GDP (Denmark lies at 7.8%) (ibid), and school life expectancy at 7 years (for Denmark it is 19 and for Rwanda 11) (ibid). Looking at the total population over the age of 25 that have at least completed short cycle tertiary (college or university), the figure was at 2.8 % in 2018 (for Denmark it was 37 % and Rwanda 4.1 %) (World Bank 2021). During my research, I have failed to find extensive statistical data regarding exchange programs at the tertiary level, especially after 2011[10]. Given the low levels of education, education expenditure, and this lack of empirical material, exchange programs within secular education will largely be disregarded. In short, this state of affairs can be seen as part of the country's colonial legacy, but also a failure by Malian leaders to buffer domestically.

[10] Reports regarding enrolment in primary and secondary education are available at the Malian ministry of education's website, but no information after 2011 is available (Ministère de l'education Nationale 2021).

The following analysis will explore the country's relationship with other francophone nations, especially other former colonies and France, connections with other muslim countries and the effect on Malian muslims those connections have, and the role of Mali's historical heritage in its relationships with the world.

7.3.1 La Francophonie

Mali is a member state of the OIF (*Organisation internationale de la francophonie*), which is an international organisation with the goal of promoting the French language, cooperation within politics, education and member economies, as well as "supporting democracy and human rights" (OIF 2021). In 2021, Mali had 2 million French speakers (ibid), with French being the official language, even if fluency in it is mostly a feature of the elite in Bamako (Mann 2021a: Nyhus 2005). France has stated that the spread and promotion of its language is a top priority for its diplomacy, and as the leading contributor of the OIF (Ministère de l'Europe et des affaires étrangères 2021), it can be argued that this goal is an important part of France's ambitions for global prestige and continued relevance in the world.

For Mali's part, this institution can be seen as societal shelter, in that it provides cultural and educational links to France (and by extension, the EU) which may increase in importance if the country's educational sector develops. Looking back, cultural connections between the two countries already resulted in La Festival au Désert (*Festival in the Desert*), a music festival based in Tuareg tradition which brought together thousands of Malians but also international attention, including that of western rock stars such as Bono and Damon Albarn (Festival au Désert 2021: see also Bandsplaining 2021, a mini-documentary on the festival). Research has also found that francophone African countries tend to trade with each other more, due to common colonial and cultural ties (Adam & Sharif Chaudhry 2013, 115).

Nevertheless, it is questionable whether this relationship can be considered as credible shelter during the last years. As explored in section 7.1.3., popular discontent towards France has become rampant in recent years. Furthermore, given the growing prevalence of English in the country (Nyhus 2005), its surrounding region, and the world at large, further integration into the anglophone cultural-linguistic sphere could be considered as a more promising

alternative than the francophone one: the only widely french speaking countries (and regions) with developed and influential educational and cultural sectors are France, Belgium, Switzerland and Quebec. In comparison, the US, UK, large parts of Europe, Australia, Canada are mainly English speaking or have populations that are highly fluent in the language, as well as large parts of Africa, including giants such as Nigeria and South Africa. English is also the most influential academic, diplomatic, and, arguably, cultural language in the world, further incentivising a move towards the language in public education and politics, even if continued membership in the OIF may continue to confer the benefits outlined above.

7.3.2 The Role of Islam

Roughly 94 % of Mali is Muslim (CIA 2021). Generally, Malians practice a more moderate form of Islam as compared to Wahhabi or Salafist doctrines (Stewart 2013). Islamisation in the region began during the 11th century. Through conversion, the Malian and Songhai empire gained important trading benefits with Muslim political entities in North Africa, as well as deep cultural and academic ties with the wider muslim world (Encyclopaedia Britannica 2021). Through these ties, the cities of Djenné and Timbuktu had become important centres of Islamic study under the Songhai Empire, and the scriptures produced during this period still attracted significant numbers of religious and non-religious tourists before 2012 (Stockreiter 2020, 122). All in all, Mali's historical ties to the Muslim world can be seen as an early form of societal shelter, giving rise to economic shelter.

Returning to the modern day, different Islamic institutions and bilateral relationships related to Islam provide societal shelter to Mali, with varying effect. The country joined the Organisation for Islamic Cooperation in 1969, which touts its status as the second biggest international organisation with "57 member states over four continents" (OIC 2021). As with ECOWAS, the OIC provides Mali with a forum where formalised rules help it stand on more equal footing with much bigger Muslim states. Furthermore, the *Hajj* (pilgrimage required by all muslims) helps develop personal, and in the long term, cultural ties between Malians and other muslims. Connections to other muslim countries have also resulted in the increased funding of education in *madrasas* (qu'ranic schools), which provide a cheap alternative to other educational tracks, and enrolled 13 % of Mali's pupils during the 2000s, thereby

providing societal shelter, particularly in the impoverished and educationally underserved north (Chauzal & van Damme 2015, 23)

However, societal shelter related to Islam also contains aspects that are problematic for Malian society. While madrasas have filled an important function for poorer Malians, this also means that they have contributed to the abandonment of the state in education (Chauzal & van Damme 2015, 14). Mali's former ambassador to Iran has furthermore linked these schools to the diffusion of wahhabist islamism in Mali (Maïga 2013). Saudi and Pakistani preachers have also diffused increasingly radical interpretations of the religion in the north, leading to the conversion of some Tuareg and Arab leaders to radical, sometimes jihadist, doctrines (Chauzal & van Damme 2015, 23-24). One example of this is the leader of Ansar Dine, Iyad ag Ghali, who turned from whiskey drinking Tuareg fighter into a committed jihadist (Gonin 2013).

In summary, Islam provides several opportunities for cultural and educational shelter with the Muslim world, and given the long history Mali has in it, this is an avenue worth pursuing even further. However, some of this shelter also extends to groups that are destructive towards Malian society, exacerbating north-south tensions, and has to some extent claimed the obligations of the fragile state.

7.3.3 World Heritage Sites

To finish the analysis, the examination will turn to Mali's history and the role of that history in the country today. Before Mali's colonial period, the country had a quite illustrious past that still plays an important role in the identity of Malians (see for example Dunning & Harrison 2010), as well as their relationship to the wider world. Specifically, the regions Mali now encompasses have given rise to three historical empires: the Ghanian Empire, the Malian Empire and the Songhai Empire (Encyclopædia Britannica 2021). The architectural and scriptural heritage left behind by these earlier rulers, in particular those of the Songhai Empire, was cultivated by the Malian state after independence as part of the construction of a post-colonial national history (Arnoldi 2014, 48), a form of domestic buffering. As part of this process, the state has also had four sites accepted as UNESCO World Heritage sites, among them the cities of Djenné and Timbuktu, and plans may be in place to add other sites

to this list (ibid, 50). It has been argued that states use the promotion of World Heritage sites in UNESCO to shore up cultural hegemony and state nationalism (Askew 2010 in ibid, 50), a concept which lines up quite well with the concept of societal shelter. In other words, the management of these sites can be seen both as a way of building international attention, as well as to patch over cultural divisions.

This heritage also played an important role during the conflict of 2012 to 2013. As hostilities in the north began to spiral out of control, UNESCO gathered international support for protecting the world heritage sites in the north, providing some political shelter. But as jihadists took control they unfortunately destroyed many Sufi tombs and other cultural sites, whose restoration UNESCO and the Malian state would collaborate on (Arnoldi 2014, 52). This destruction would nevertheless have lasting psychological and economic effects on the local population, and the sites' UNESCO status may have made them more attractive targets for jihadists (Ba 2019, 593-594). Moreover, while the state celebrates Djenné's status as a World Heritage site, development and an increased economic share from the tourism provided by this status has largely eluded the local population. These tensions resulted in a riot in 2007, and anecdotal evidence suggests that this was largely motivated by the perception of widespread corruption within the "heritage elite" (Arnoldi 2014, 55). As such, the Malian state's relationship with UNESCO is a form of societal shelter, helping it find international prestige and build national pride, but which has come at the psychological, physical and economic cost of local populations.

8. Discussion and Conclusions

This thesis was an explorative case study on Mali using shelter theory during the period of 2010 to 2020. The purpose of this study was to see what relevance the theory can have to non-western, undeveloped, small fragile states. If this relevance could be proved, the theory's geographical applicability would be broadened significantly, suggesting that it may be universally applicable to small states. If not, the analysis would hopefully have provided theoretical indices for why that is.

In trying to answer this central question, problematic aspects of this case in regards to the theory, as well as bilateral and multilateral relationships that quite clearly fit the definition of shelter have been found. Examples of the latter are ECOWAS, the G5 Sahel (during the early 2010s) and the OIC. These multilateral relationships have been mainly positive to Mali, even if their effectiveness can be challenged, and there are analogous examples in other parts of the world. It has also been made clear that external relationships, especially in the form of military assistance, are essential to the Malian state's survival. Unlike other countries studied with shelter theory, this case has further provided examples where the state was faced with existential threats which could have destroyed it without political shelter, such as the 2012 coup d'état and later islamist advance towards the south. In comparison the EU may have helped its smaller members by, for example, creating formalised channels of communications and formal rules for settling disputes with bigger neighbours (like ECOWAS), but it is hard to think of a case where a member state's continued existence hinged on actions by other members or the EU itself. Another central finding is that state fragility, defined as the state's inability to provide core functions to the people, was not found to inhibit the seeking of shelter, but rather made the Malian state even more dependent on it.

On the other hand, one might ask who was being sheltered in these relationships. For while the French and African interventions in the country certainly protected the state from domestic threats (up to a point), this shelter also served to shield a corrupt, clientelistic system that deprived the Malian population of good governance. This is particularly relevant regarding foreign aid, but is seen in almost all of the relationships examined here, from those with UNESCO to Operation Barkhane. Thorhallson's assertion that shelter must be to the benefit of the majority thus places a shadow over the theory's relevance in this case, and African countries in general. In other words, if shelter theory were to fly to Bamako, it is at this point in the security check where it would start sweating and looking nervously at the airport staff. While this could be taken as a definite limit to the theory, rigorously applying this rule to earlier research also challenges the findings of, for example Bailes et al.'s article which suggested that the theory held relevance in Armenia and Cuba (2016), or Thorhallson's article using shelter theory to examine Iceland's medieval history (2012). One might also argue that "the benefit of the majority" needs further discussion, as this condition can mean several different things depending on one's ethics. Another possible solution to this problem

would be for the theory to ditch its baggage, in other words to drop this normative criteria entirely. It was introduced so that every relationship to a small group within a state would not be considered as shelter, but a strict or idealistic interpretation of this clause would essentially limit shelter theory to only the most democratic and well-governed small states, making its relevance for small state studies as a whole quite small. To return to the earlier airport analogy, if the theory does not leave behind this normative bag, it *might* find itself with a travel restriction for almost every country outside of northern Europe.

A second potentially problematic point towards the theory's applicability relates to the credibility of the studied shelter. While, for example, the CFA Franc has ensured currency stability, and French military intervention likely prevented fighting in the south during 2013 and gained tactical victories, the latter failed to decisively end the jihadists threat and the former, while providing price stability, is largely to France's benefit while inhibiting Mali's economy. Both of these relationships have also seriously damaged the Malian state's legitimacy. Another example is ECOWAS, whose regional economic integration is poor compared to the EU. Tying this all back to the second research question, it seems that for Mali, it is true that its region lacks credible regional shelter options compared to Europe, especially political, economic and educational shelter. However, considering Mali and its region in isolation, one might argue that these comparisons are unwarranted and informed by euro-centric assumptions, and that if a society such as medieval Iceland may be analysed with shelter theory (see Thorhallsson 2012), then Mali may be as well. Further speaking in favour of the theory's relevance is that the analysis confirms the expected hypotheses outlined in section 5: the intervention of France, other western countries, and, to some extent, ECOWAS were important for the Malian state's survival during the early 2010s, and perhaps its ability to thrive in the future (assuming jihadist fighters would have caused further damage in 2013 without french troops). Those relationships have also come at a cost to the legitimacy of the government, with popular unrest directed at against the return of the former coloniser, and its sovereignty, as the state has become reliant on external actors to maintain control, just as shelter theory would predict. Furthermore, the foreign policies of Mali, especially in military matters, were not motivated by fears of another state, and cannot be explained in terms of balancing or bandwagoning. Instead, the relationships studied here are mostly directed at

internal threats and vulnerabilities (excluding armed salafist and seperatist groups to some extent), once again confirming the expectations of shelter theory.

Nonetheless, a third aspect of the analysis may be the most problematic for shelter theory's relevance, which relates to the state and its fragility. Taking as an example the coup of 2012 and subsequent sanctions, one might ask *who* or *what* the Malian state was during this period. Was it the ousted government of ATT, the junta leaders who were affected by the supposed shelter, or the Malian constitutional order in an abstract sense, given that ATT was not in office by the next year? Leaving these questions aside, one might further question if the state is the most relevant research unit in Mali, given its lax control and the outsized roles that NGOs play on the ground (Mann 2015). Some researchers have been arguing for a turn away from state centrism when studying this region, or as was put by Boyart: "African political structures are duplicated between, on the one hand, a *pays légal*, a legal structure which is the focus for multilateral aid donors and western governments, and on the other hand, a *pays réel*, where real power is wielded" (Author's note: Pays translates as country) (2000, 229-230). This study has focused on the state because of previous shelter theory literature, but perhaps other political units, for example NGOs, armed groups and powerful families, should be included in future studies. But such a solution may introduce methodological problems, as access to such groups is often limited or nonexistent; For example, gaining reliable and specific data on AQIM's international funding and finances is a challenge for the CIA, let alone political scientists. At the very least, further research needs to codify and examine how state fragility should be most appropriately related to shelter theory and small states studies.

During this project, some other methodological problems have made themselves apparent. Several types of data, regarding education, the size of Mali's diplomatic corps, et cetera, were not readily accessible. This has inevitably reduced the reliability of this analysis in comparison to previous research. However, where data was found, regarding foreign aid for example, the relevance of that data can be called into question, due to the effects of governmental dysfunction and corruption in the country. Both of these problems, regarding access and reliability of data, should be kept in mind in any future studies on small states that are similarly affected by corruption.

In conclusion, by answering the main research question this essay has found that shelter theory may hold relevance for the Malian state, and other fragile, non-western, underdeveloped small states, thereby suggesting that the theory holds wider explanatory power than previously thought. However, two main theoretical problems have also become apparent in this case which need to be resolved: The first relates to normative standpoints in the theory that also affect previous research. This issue necessitates a theoretical reconsideration of these criteria or a reconsideration of previous research, regardless if small fragile states are studied further. The second relates to the unstableness and weakness of the Malian state, aspects that complicate any analysis of similar states and also call into question the relevance of the state as the primary research unit for future research. At best, this issue requires further theoretisation to relate similar societies to previously studied small states (and political units), perhaps by including more small political units in future studies. At worst, methodological issues may make this an impossibility in many cases.

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