

Traditional Conflict Medicine? Lessons for Putting Mali and Other African Countries on the Road to Peace

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ABSTRACT

The primary thesis of this article is that Mali's success during the 1990s in resolving a six-year conflict between the Malian government and a northern-based insurgency among the Tuareg ethnic group was primarily due to the emergence of democratically elected elites who sought recourse to traditional mediation practices that are derivative of Mali's precolonial independence era; what one group of Africanists has referred to as "traditional conflict medicine." The analysis focuses on traditional Malian mediation practices that have served as the centerpiece of a veritable "culture of peace" and that continue to pervade contemporary Malian society. It is argued that recourse to these practices will be critical to resolving Mali's spring 2012 crisis that included the return of heavily armed insurgents to northern Mali amidst civil war in Libya, a military coup d'état that ended two decades of democratic rule, and the secession of northern Mali as the independent country of Azawad. A concluding section assesses the practical lessons from Mali's experience during the 1990s that potentially can be of use to observers interested in facilitating the resolution of Mali's 2012 conflict as well as those in other parts of the African continent.

Keywords: *democracy, conflict resolution, elites, Tuareg.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Mali has emerged as the first Sub-Saharan African country to be dramatically and negatively affected by the "Arab spring" sweeping across the Middle East and North Africa. In the aftermath of the overthrow of the Libyan regime of Muammar el-Qaddafi on October 21, 2011, hundreds of Tuareg soldiers who had fought for the Qaddafi regime returned to the northern provinces of Mali, bringing with them a large number of light and heavy weapons and years of fighting experience. The ensuing chaos within the region led disgruntled junior officers within the Malian military to undertake on March 21, 2012 a successful military coup d'état against a democratically elected Malian government. Further chaos unleashed by the 2012 coup enabled the returning Tuareg fighters to seize control over all of the major northern towns, subsequently declaring the secession of the region as the independent country of Azawad. Malian democracy, always fragile, was confronted by a "perfect storm" of events

unleashed by the Arab spring in North Africa (Schraeder and Redissi 2011; and Plattner 2011).¹

This extraordinary sequence of events stands in sharp contrast to Mali's two-decade experiment in democracy, best symbolized by the destruction on March 27, 1996, of more than 3,000 small arms in a massive bonfire referred to as the "Flame of Peace." This event symbolized the end of an earlier six-year (1990–96) conflict between the Malian government and an insurgency among the Tuareg that challenged Mali's nascent 1991 transition to democracy and threatened to plunge the country into a broader, more devastating civil war. The successful resolution of this conflict, which coincided with the holding of relatively free and fair democratic presidential elections in 1992, 1997, 2002, and 2007, catapulted Mali to the forefront of a burgeoning conflict resolution literature devoted to Africa, with international observers referring to a Malian "model" of conflict resolution against the backdrop of multiplying African conflicts in the post-cold war era (e.g., see Poulton and Youssouf 1998: xi).²

A variety of explanations have been offered to explain Mali's earlier success in fostering democracy and conflict resolution. Whereas some have focused principally on the role of Malian civil society (e.g., Poulton and Youssouf 1998), others have emphasized the centrality of individual state actors such as the Malian military (e.g., Keita 1998), popular participation in constitutional development (e.g., Wing 2008) or specific policies pursued by the Malian state, most notably decentralization (Seely 2001). Still others have focused on the supportive roles played by non-governmental organizations (e.g., Lode 1997) and international organizations, most notably the United Nations (e.g., Poulton, Youssouf, and Seck 1999). The primary thesis of this article is that the success of conflict resolution efforts in Mali, which will be key to the resolution of the 2012 conflict, was primarily due to the decision of a new generation of democratically elected leadership to implement traditional mediation practices that are derivative of Mali's pre-colonial independence era; what one group of Africanists refers to as "traditional conflict medicine" (Zartman 2000).

The recourse to traditional Malian mediation practices first began under the leadership of Amadou Toumani Touré, a Malian general who in 1991 led a

¹ The manuscript was originally submitted before the 2011 overthrow of the Libyan regime of Muammar el-Qaddafi and the 2012 military coup in Mali. The text was revised in July 2012 to take into account these and other spring 2012 events in Mali, before *NJAS* volume 20(2) was published.

² According to the democracy statistics compiled on an annual basis by Freedom House (2011), for example, Mali as of 2011 was tied with Botswana as the eighth most democratic country on the African continent out of a total of fifty-four African countries. A similar assessment was offered by the "Polity" democratization statistics annually compiled by the Center for Systemic Peace (Polity IV 2011). These scholarly assessments were echoed within the international policymaking community, including the European Union (EU), the United States (U.S.), the United Nations (UN) system, and non-governmental organizations (e.g., see National Democratic Institute 2011). It is the argument of this article that Mali's successful conflict resolution efforts were crucial to providing a nurturing environment for the consolidation of democracy during the last fifteen years.

military coup d'état against the dictatorship of Moussa Traoré and who oversaw the country's transition to democracy, including a two-week *Conférence Nationale* (National Conference) in 1991 that established the blueprint for Mali's democratic political system. Touré subsequently handed over the reins of power to Alpha Oumar Konaré, who won the 1992 presidential elections and ultimately served two terms of office (1992–2002). Konaré continued with and strengthened the traditional mediation practices initiated by the transitional government. This democratic story came full circle when Touré, after retiring from the military in 2001, was elected president in 2002. As of 2012, Touré was completing his second and final term in office (2007–12); he had made clear that, as is stipulated in the Constitution, he would be stepping down after two terms of office (see Freedom House 2011; see also Smith 2001).

An analysis of Mali's successful conflict resolution efforts from the 1990s is timely for a variety of reasons. First, these traditional mediation practices that contributed to sixteen years of peace offer a blueprint for resolving the most recent 2012 challenge to central state authority. An analysis of the Malian model of conflict resolution is also timely to better understand potential solutions to the range of conflicts that currently affect the African continent. In the post-cold war era, for example, the number of UN-sponsored peacekeeping and peacemaking interventions has significantly multiplied (e.g., see Schraeder 2004), begging the question of whether foreign-inspired top-down approaches to conflict resolution are more effective than internal "bottom-up" or grass roots approaches (the evidence presented in this article suggests the latter). Equally important, Mali's recourse to traditional conflict medicine provides a potential pathway for resolving other long-running African conflicts which pit guerrilla insurgencies against the state, as in the case of Senegal's long-running insurgency in the southern Casamance region (see Foucher 2007). The Casamance insurgency is not unique, but rather indicative of the flourishing of guerrilla insurgencies in the post-cold war era (see Clapham 1996; 1998; 2007; and Boas and Dunn 2007).

The remainder of this article is divided into four sections. Section I provides an historical backdrop to conflict resolution in Mali by offering an overview of the authoritarian political context that fueled the northern conflict from the colonial era to the beginning of the 1990s. Section II details traditional mediation practices that are derivative of Mali's precolonial independence era and that continue to pervade contemporary Malian society. Section III explores how recourse to these traditional mediation practices enabled a new generation of Malian elites to successfully resolve the northern conflict after a transition to democracy in 1991. A final section IV highlights the lessons that one can draw from the case study of Mali to resolve the 2012 crisis as well as conflicts in other parts of the African continent.

A note is in order about the sources that serve as the basis of this study. First, this article was made possible by the author's involvement in a United Nations Development Program (UNDP)-sponsored project on the role of traditional factors in conflict resolution. The author was responsible for distilling the

“lessons learned” from the case study of Mali by drawing on a wealth of data contained in UNDP field surveys, especially those carried out by Hairy et al. (1996) and Konaté, Sangaré, and Coulibaly (1999). This article also draws on a wider UN literature devoted to Mali, including two studies (Poulton, Youssouf, and Seck 1999; Poulton and Youssouf 1998) sponsored by the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR), as well as an Africanist scholarship devoted to the importance of traditional mechanisms in conflict resolution (e.g., Zartman 2000). A further set of sources focuses on specific aspects of Mali’s experience with conflict resolution primarily written by scholars and especially practitioners from Europe (e.g., Lode 1997), the United States (e.g., see Wing 2008; Pringle 2006a), and Mali (e.g., see Keita 1998).

2. AUTHORITARIAN ORIGINS OF THE NORTHERN CONFLICT

The typical starting point of most studies of African conflicts is the ethnic and racial diversity of the fifty-four independent countries that comprise the African continent (e.g., see Rothchild 1997). Mali is no exception to this general rule. Four major groups dominate Mali’s three northern provinces: the Tuareg (often referred to as *Kel Tamacheq*, which literally means “those of the *Tamacheq* language”), the Moor (Arabic-speaking peoples of Arab descent), the Songhai (the largest group which speaks a language by the same name), and the Peul (also referred to as the Fulani) who also speak a language by the same name (Imperato 1989: 8–13; see also Imperato and Imperato 2008). These groups are often divided according to race, with the Tuareg and the Moor characterized as “white,” and the Songhai and Peul referred to as “black,” although intermarriage has made the application of such categories a risky endeavor at best. These four groups are also distinguished according to the degree to which they historically have pursued pastoral or sedentary lifestyles. Whereas the Tuareg and the Moor are typically classified as pastoral nomads, and the Songhai are often characterized as pursuing a largely sedentary lifestyle based on subsistence agriculture and the raising of livestock, the Peul are usually classified as combining elements of pastoral and sedentary cultures. Once again, however, one must be wary of such characterizations. All northern populations to a certain degree practice a form of agro-pastoralism.

The diversity of Mali’s ethnic landscape was manipulated by a series of authoritarian regimes dating back to the colonial era (Pringle 2006a). For example, northern ethnic groups felt marginalized in a territory that, beginning with the colonial era, was clearly dominated by southern elites; a regional and ethnic reality that continued during the contemporary independence era and specifically under the regimes of Keita and Traore, both of whom hail from southern-based ethnic groups (Kivimäki, Lehtinen, and Laakso 1998: 45). The Tuareg elite in particular believed that their ethnic group was “singled out for

particular discrimination, and were more neglected than others in the distribution of state benefits” (Keita 1998: 10).

Perceptions played a crucial role in the discriminatory policies imposed by a largely southern-based elite against the northern populations (Bratton, Coulibaly and Machado 2002). As was the case in many African countries with sizable nomadic populations at the beginning of the contemporary independence era, Mali’s southern-based political elites maintained a negative stereotypical image of northern pastoralists, including the Tuareg, as irrational beings whose “economically and socially regressive” lifestyles were an “obstacle to national development” (Keita 1998: 9). “The new Malian government was not sympathetic to the traditional relations of production between Tuaregs and their agricultural [sedentary] neighbors, viewing the Tuareg demand for ‘taxes’ as simple extortion,” explains Keita (1998: 9). “Land ownership remained an area of bitter dispute; the new government considered that land belonged to those who tilled it.” Keita (1998: 9) notes that urban-based political elites under the Keita and Traoré regimes perceived the Tuareg as “lazy, prone to violence and criminality, opportunistic, ethnically chauvinistic, and unpatriotic.”

The net result of unequal policies dating back to the colonial era was an intensifying spiral of Tuareg rebellion against central authority and the brutal military response of an authoritarian state. In 1914, for example, a Tuareg chief, Firhoun Ag El Insar, led a revolt against the administrative policies of what was perceived as a highly unjust, authoritarian, and centralized colonial state. The revolt was brutally suppressed by French colonial troops; Firhoun was captured and sentenced to ten years in prison and twenty years of “banishment” from the territory (Imperato 1989: 49). Demands for clemency initiated by other Tuareg ethnic intermediaries prompted French colonial authorities in 1916 to pardon and release Firhoun. Much to the dismay of the colonial regime, Firhoun built upon Tuareg distrust of the colonial regime to launch yet another rebellion. The response of the French colonial regime was swift and brutal, leading to Firhoun’s death on the battlefield on June 25, 1916, and the effective end of the first major Tuareg rebellion against authoritarian rule during the twentieth century (Imperato 1989: 50).

The cycle of Tuareg rebellion against centralized authority and the brutal military response of an authoritarian state intensified during the contemporary independence era. During the First Republic (1960–68), the Keita regime’s creation of a centralized, authoritarian political system perceived as unresponsive to Tuareg interests led in 1962 to what is commonly referred to as the First Tuareg Rebellion (1962–64) of the contemporary independence era. The rebellion began with a series of hit-and-run attacks against government installations that escalated in both scope and intensity throughout 1963. The response of the Keita regime was both swift and brutal. A series of counterinsurgency operations were launched in northern Mali that included the jailing of Tuareg leaders, the summary execution of Tuareg insurgents on the battlefield, the poisoning of nomadic wells and oases, and a campaign of terror against the northern civilian populations deemed sympathetic to the insurgency.

This strategy resulted in a military victory against the insurgency, followed by the institutionalization of a coercive form of military rule over the north. Military success on the battlefield constituted a hollow victory, in that the military campaign had alienated many Tuareg and members of other northern groups, most notably the pastoral Moor, who had never supported the guerrilla insurgency, contributing to a “climate of fear and mistrust” in the north (Keita 1998: 11).

The recurring cycle of Tuareg rebellion against centralized authority and the brutal military response of an authoritarian state reached a turning point in 1990 with the launching of what is typically referred to as the Second Tuareg Rebellion (1990–96) of the contemporary independence era. This rebellion exceeded its 1914–16 and 1962–64 predecessors in terms of both its scope and intensity. Most important, the principal political-military factors driving the 1990–96 rebellion, as aptly summarized by Lode (1997: 410–11), underscored the failure of the Traoré regime to create a polity deemed acceptable to Tuareg and other northern leaders. Among those factors were:

- the lack of proper representation for Arabs and Tuareg in important positions in the government, foreign ministry and army, and at all levels of administration;
- the absence of a policy of decentralization which could have enabled the communities in the North to handle their own business in accordance with the local cultural context;
- the overwhelming majority of civil servants were from the South, all of them sedentarists. They were usually unable to understand the nomads and, on the whole, did not seem interested in trying; and
- the militarization of the North, where the population lived in a constant state of emergency and repression (Lode 1997: 410–11).

In short, a series of unjust authoritarian regimes, beginning with French colonial rule and culminating in approximately twenty-three years of dictatorship under the Traoré regime, were perceived by northern leaders, especially the Tuareg, as determined to destroy their respective cultures and ways of life. It is for this reason that northern leaders, mindful of what happened after regime transitions in 1960 and 1968, were not willing to lay down their arms in 1991 when the Traoré regime was overthrown in a military coup d'état, and a new leadership speaking of democratic change promised to resolve the cumulative effects of dictatorship under both French colonialism and two Malian regimes during the twentieth century.

3. TRADITIONAL MEDIATION PRACTICES IN MALIAN HISTORY

The preceding analysis demonstrates that the intensification of the northern conflict was attributable to an array of factors that long preceded the 1990s and, in some cases, stretched back to the colonial era. An understanding of how that conflict was ultimately resolved must also take a note from Malian history (Pringle 2006a; Konare 2005), particularly the contours of that country's traditional mediation practices derivative of the pre-colonial era that continue to pervade contemporary Malian society and that can serve as the centerpiece of a veritable "culture of peace." Drawing on the field data contained in UNDP-sponsored field reports prepared by Hairy et al. (1996: 10–36) and Konaté, Sangaré, and Coulibaly (1999: 25–31), one can distinguish several distinct components of traditional mediation practices that are critical to understanding conflict resolution in Mali.

A first component of traditional Malian mediation practices involves the interdependency of economic relationships among Mali's highly diverse peoples. The origins of this interdependency are derivative of a distinguished history of centralized empires, including the Ghana or Wagadu Empire (c. 800–1200), the Mali Empire (c. 1100–1700), and the Songhai Empire (1335–1591), that placed Mali at the economic crossroads of West Africa (e.g., see Cissé and Kamissoko 2000). "For more than six hundred years Mali has been at the center of multiple networks of trade and social exchange between the peoples of the southwestern rain-forest zone and those of the Sahel and the Sahara to the north," explains Schulz (1997: 105–6). The Niger river, which serves as the juncture between Mali's heavily pastoral northern populations and those of the largely sedentary economic systems of the south, is critical to the existence of these networks. "Flowing north from the Futa Jalon mountain range (in present-day Guinea) through the center of Mali just over the border of the Sahel and then bending south (through Niger and Nigeria), ultimately emptying into the Bight of Benin, the Niger river has functioned for centuries as a principal artery of traffic and long-distance trade, and sometimes warfare" (Shulz 1997: 106).

The importance of these multiple networks of trade is that the nomadic and sedentary economies of northern Mali, and therefore the peoples who inhabit this area, are inextricably linked together in a diverse web of economic relationships. In many respects, neither side can prosper without the other, forming an economic reality that has prompted northern Mali's sedentary and nomadic populations to interact with and rely on each other. The importance of these links is captured by *alabadia*, a dish of the region that is comprised of a mixture of local rice cultivated by sedentary farmers, and ground beef and butter produced by nomads. The implication of this culinary metaphor for conflict resolution in Mali, which Hairy et al. (1996) adopt as the title of their field study, is that economic interconnectedness breeds mutual understanding and

interdependence, which in turn promote peaceful relations and, in the event of regional hostilities, the basis for conflict resolution.

An outgrowth of this economic interdependence has been a remarkable degree of ethnic interdependence in which intraregional ties between different ethnic groups within Mali are often more important than trans-regional ties between members of the same ethnic group. In the context of the northern conflict, for example, this second aspect of traditional Malian mediation practices suggests that a northern pastoral Tuareg will potentially share a more intimate relationship with a sedentary Songhai from the same region, than with a Tuareg from another region of the country. As described by Poulton and Youssef (1998: 17):

Each person in northern Mali has a “double label.” The first label is his vertical family (or ethnic or cultural) label; the second label is stronger and is the horizontal geographical label which links him to his neighbours. In economic terms, your neighbor is more important than your blood relative. Ibrahim ag Youssef [one of the two coauthors of the quoted report] is a full-blooded Touareg [Tuareg], but born and raised by the river with Songhoy [Songhai] neighbours. His links with his neighbours are normally stronger than the blood-ties with his geographically distant relatives in Adghagh or near Menaka. His family has been cultivating rice (traditionally a Songhoy [Songhai] occupation) since 1720. Ibrahim’s links with Songhoy [Songhai] are stronger than the blood links with the cousins of his father, Youssef. The links of blood remain: cousins are cousins and the affection of lineage is permanent. But the links of true friendship and partnership develop with the neighbours you see every day.

The implication of this double label is more precisely captured by the Bambara term, *siguinyogonya*, which translates as “the ideal of living in harmony with one’s neighbors.” Malian society places a premium on getting along with and demonstrating hospitality to one’s neighbors, regardless of ethnic or racial origins. Indeed, there exists a saying in Malian society that, “Your neighbor is your first point of reference because he is the first to know what happens to you.” The sacred nature of this neighborly imperative is that one should never risk quarreling with one’s neighbor, and if one does, a strong cultural imperative exists for the resolution of that conflict.

A third aspect of traditional Malian mediation practices is the highly regarded role of intermediaries in the creation and maintenance of a social compact. Simply put, an intermediary is a “go-between” who represents and channels the demands of his/her group to the political leadership, and who also transmits the demands and expectations of that leadership to his/her constituents (Chazan et al., 1999). Intermediaries are highly prized in Malian culture. They constitute a natural and important part of almost any conflict resolution process and employ a variety of tactics to promote the interests of their respective groups. They may issue private appeals to political leaders, public statements of

support for sympathetic political leaders, or public threats of noncompliance and noncooperation to those initially unwilling to listen (Chazan et al., 1999). The level of success is influenced by the intermediary's diplomatic and political skills; they not only must seek agreement among potentially competing factions within their own group, but must also be capable of negotiating and seeking agreement with counterparts from other groups and regions when pressing their groups' demands in the national political arena.

The caste-based nature of most of Mali's ethnic groups serves as an important dimension of the role of intermediaries in Malian society (N'Diaye 1995). It is not uncommon for individual Malian ethnic groups to be divided among three sets of social categories: Individuals of free or "noble" birth, the descendants of slaves, and, most important from the perspective of conflict resolution, the *nyamakala* or "professionals," inclusive of *griots*, leathermakers, and blacksmiths. This latter category, described by Konaté et al. (1999: 28) as "artisans of peace," occupy a special role due to a belief that they control *nyama*, a powerful force that, although it can be used for the common good, is nonetheless "impure and potentially destructive" (Schulz 1997: 106). *Griots* occupy a special place in conflict resolution matters due to their status as advisers to princes, diplomatic agents, appointed mediators, and, most important, their almost universal perception as neutral arbiters.

The concept of intermediaries in its largest sense encompasses a wide-ranging number of influential individuals throughout traditional society that includes elders, the heads of ethnic groups, individual clan leaders, religious leaders, and women. The role of women, typically ignored in earlier studies of conflict resolution in Africa, is particularly relevant to understanding the evolution of conflict resolution in Mali, not least of all due to their prominent status in Malian culture. Among the Tuareg, for example, women are considered to be the "true guardians of the pure [Tuareg] tradition," although their formal political role is limited (Hairy et al. 1996: 19; see also Diallo and Vaa 2001).

A fourth enduring aspect of traditional Malian mediation practices is the special role played by alliances in linking Mali's disparate social groups. Marriage, either within the same ethnic group or between ethnic groups, serves as the oldest form of alliance in traditional Malian society. The latter condition of marriage between different ethnic groups is of particular importance in the Niger River delta area of northern Mali where intermarriage is more common than in the northern reaches of the three northern provinces. Marriage creates a special relationship between family "allies" that are referred to in the Bambara language as *buranya*. This relationship is considered sacred by all of Mali's ethnic groups. Most important from the perspective of conflict resolution, however, is that the alliances formed by marriage embody a wide number of responsibilities for both sets of families, including reciprocal obligations, family solidarity, mutual respect, and self-restraint in all circumstances. When conflicts occur, they are simply between two individuals, but quickly become the responsibility of their extended families and the ethnic groups they represent.

Sanankouya constitutes a second form of alliance that is not based on family ties. Awkwardly translated into French as an *alliance à plaisanterie* (literally, “joking alliance”) and into English as a “joking relationship,” *sanankouya* is expressed on a daily basis in the form of the exchange of jokes between *sanankoun* (allies). The irreverent, sometimes insulting and mocking nature of the jokes exchanged between allies are not without their more serious side, however, especially from the perspective of conflict resolution. Going beyond the more spectacular, playful aspects of this tradition, one finds that *sanankouya* embodies the obligation of mutual assistance between those allies in all circumstances. Above all, the alliance imposes an obligation of mediation on an individual, each time that one of his/her allies finds himself/herself in conflict with a third party. In essence, an important component of traditional mediation practices with direct relevance to contemporary conflict resolution in Mali is the forced recourse to third party mediation.

A vibrant role for associational activity within civil society constitutes a further important element of traditional Malian mediation practices. Traditional Malian society embodied a rich array of traditional associations, referred to as *ton* in Bambara. As explained by Docking (1997), a *ton* is a “group of people from a community who are selected according to a common characteristic (e.g., age, belief, activity), who submit to a certain set of rules and who organize hierarchically. Among the wide number of traditional *ton* that have continued into the contemporary political era include the *sene-ton* (a farming or general working group), the *donso-ton* (a hunting group), the *fla-ton* (an age-set), the *bila-ton* (uncircumcised boys between the ages of 8–15), and the *koteba-ton* (which produces satirical theater) (Docking 1997: 204–5).

The importance of traditional associations to the concept of conflict resolution revolves around the cultural assumptions that individuals should be free to join associations of like-minded people; that culturally inspired groups (such as age-sets) constitute a critical ordering principle within society; and that such groups, when allowed to organize freely, play a crucial role in the resolution of community conflicts. Although focusing primarily on the nature of traditional associations among the Bambara, Docking (1997) captures the importance of such groups (which, in any case, exist to varying degrees among all of Mali’s ethnic groups) to the creation and maintenance of a democratic culture capable of resolving conflicts peacefully. “Together, the rich network of social organizations and associational groups found within Bambara culture form a complex political structure which is infused with two of the key ingredients of all stable democracies: popular participation and political accountability,” explains Docking (1997: 205). “Nevertheless, while these norms and tenants resemble those embodied in the Western concept of democratization, Bambara institutions are clearly unique, homegrown structures, which developed over centuries in West Africa and therefore present an appropriate foundation upon which to build an improved national system.” To this eloquent portrayal one can add that these homegrown structures remain

equally important to one of the most crucial elements of a successful democracy: the peaceful resolution of conflicts.

A final component of traditional Malian mediation practices is the cultural imperative of seeking consensus through the tradition of “palaver” (open dialogue) when a challenge to society requires a societal response, such as the outbreak of violence and the subsequent search for its resolution. This form of decision-making was widely diffused throughout precolonial African society, and remains an important component of conflict resolution measures during the contemporary independence era. In contrast to the “winner-take-all” mentality of most Western democracies, consensus-building is based on the twin principles that all male members of society have the right to voice their opinions in open fora, and that decisions for the community as a whole are made only when agreed upon by all present.

Returning once again to the example of the Bambara, the traditional practice of talking collectively to achieve consensus within the community is known as a *ton-sigi*. Men and women of all ages could participate in a *ton-sigi*, whereas the practice in many African societies, especially when discussions revolved around a political necessity, typically excluded women (Docking 1997: 204). A *ton-sigi* was typically carried out in an open, but structured fashion, and participants were required to follow strict rules and discipline (Docking 1997: 204). One such meeting was described as follows:

No one is allowed to gossip during the session, under penalty of fine. No one may take the floor without asking, but everyone is invited to express his opinion. Only one person at a time may speak and this is always done through a *dalamina* (*da*, mouth; *la*, in; *mine*, to take), usually a man of caste who repeats aloud the words of the speaker, sentence by sentence. Ton-Sigi[s] are frequent, sometimes taking place every day (Meillassoux 1968: 52, quoted in Docking 1997: 204).

Although specific aspects of the Bambara *ton-sigi* may or may not exist in similar gatherings held among other Malian ethnic groups, its primary function of building consensus within the community has served as an important component of traditional Malian mediation practices. Most important, the prevention and resolution of conflicts has always constituted a priority of the majority of Malian ethnic groups that have granted importance to the search for consensus as a customary function of society.

4. TRADITIONAL MEDIATION PRACTICES AND RESOLVING THE NORTHERN CONFLICT

Together, the above-noted components of traditional Malian mediation practices have served as the centerpiece of a veritable “culture of peace” that, despite decades of authoritarian rule under French colonialism and Mali’s first two

republics, continues to pervade contemporary Malian society. It is precisely the recourse to this “traditional conflict medicine” that enabled Mali to successfully resolve the northern conflict under the democratic era of the Third Republic (1992–2012). It is to the specifics of how these traditional factors influenced actual conflict resolution practices in northern Mali that the discussion now turns.

4.1 CREATION OF A NEW DEMOCRATIC CONTEXT

The emergence during the 1990s of a new generation of African ruling elites committed to the establishment of democratic practices in their respective countries serves as one of defining moments of contemporary African politics. Specifically, the spread of the “third wave” of democratization to the African continent in the post-cold war era has increasingly facilitated the alternation of power between competing portions of African national elites. For the purposes of this article, the ruling elite is defined as that small, privileged leadership sector of African societies that controls the reins of government and sets the rules of the political system. Although critics in the extreme have warned of the “democratization of disempowerment” (e.g., Ake 1996) – the process whereby multiparty elections in Africa’s new democracies allow for the rotation of similar, self-interested elites of different parties, while the vast majority of the population remains disenfranchised from the political system – it is clear that the process of democratization in several cases has ensured the alternation of power between long-entrenched (often authoritarian) elites and democratic successors who have very different visions of how best to structure their domestic polities (see Villalon and VonDoepp 2005; Villalon and Idrissi 2005).

The transition to democracy in Mali was initially ushered in during 1991 through a more nefarious form of regime change – a military coup d’état – typically associated with the replacement of authoritarian civilian elites by their equally authoritarian military counterparts. In this case, however, the leader of the coup, then Lieutenant Colonel Touré, oversaw the creation of the *Comité de Transition pour le Salut du Peuple* (CTSP, Transitional Committee for the Salvation of the People), that handed power back to a democratically elected civilian elite. This act made Touré a hero within many sectors of Malian society and throughout francophone West Africa, where military leaders typically refused to yield power. This process of democratization was further strengthened in 1992 by the election of President Konaré in what constituted Mali’s first experiment with democratic, multiparty elections. Although there were irregularities associated with Konaré’s reelection to a second five-year term in 1997, there is no doubt that both he and other members of the new generation of Malian political elites “actively encouraged” the development of national democratic institutions, most notably a free press and an independent legislature (Diawara 1997: 105). Most important, they largely abided by the

rules of this democratic system, as noted by the fact that, unlike several of his contemporaries, Konaré announced that he would be stepping down from office in 2012 after serving his constitutional limit of two terms of office.

The most noteworthy aspect of the example set by Touré and Konaré, however, was their firm commitment to promoting a new social compact in Malian society that would be capable of resolving the northern conflict. Toward this end, both leaders drew on traditional Malian mediation practices in the pursuit of peace. For example, something as simple as the composition of the CTSP demonstrated from the beginning that both of these leaders were interested in developing a path to conflict resolution that deviated from the authoritarian paths of their predecessors, choosing instead to draw on the traditional African concept of consensus-building. This twenty-five member committee was carefully structured to include representatives from the major factions within both the military (which received ten slots) and the civilian pro-democracy movement (which received fifteen slots), including two spots reserved for representatives of the northern insurgency. The decision to include two northern leaders who were chosen by the guerrilla groups served as a powerful example that the days were past when the southern elite would dismiss their northern pastoral counterparts as illegitimate members of society, unworthy of national leadership.

One must be careful, however, not to overestimate the impact of individual leaders. They are, after all, only individuals, and if their policies are not grounded within the cultures of their larger societies, those policies are destined to fail. This is perhaps the most poignant lesson of the African continent's experience with authoritarianism during the contemporary independence era. If one relies upon the emergence of so-called "princes" within African politics, to coin the terminology of Jackson and Rosberg (1982), one may just as easily wind up with an "autocrat" or a "tyrant." Levitsky and Way (2010) demonstrate how the "third wave" of democratization has resulted in the emergence and strengthening of "competitive authoritarian regimes": "civilian regimes in which formal democratic institutions exist and are widely viewed as the primary means of gaining power, but in which incumbents' abuse of the state places them at a significant advantage vis-à-vis their opponents." Although such regimes embody a certain degree of competition as "opposition parties use democratic institutions to contest seriously for power ... they are not democratic because the playing field is heavily skewed in favor of incumbents" (Levitsky and Way 2010).

4.2 SEEKING A NATIONAL CONSENSUS VIA THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE

The search for a nationally acceptable social compact that could forge the outlines of a new democratic system capable of resolving the northern conflict was much more forcefully driven by the holding of a *Conférence Nationale*

(National Conference) in 1992 (Wing 2008: 61–80; see also Martin, 1993). Under this transition scenario, which became influential in francophone West Africa during the 1990s, an extended national gathering serves as the basis for debating the outlines of a new democratic political order (Robinson 1994). The strong appeal of the national conference model, demanded in some shape or form by pro-democracy movements in almost every non-democratic African country, was aided by the success achieved in Benin in 1990. More than eighteen years of authoritarian rule under the Marxist dictatorship of Mathieu Kérékou were peacefully overcome by a 488-member national conference that lasted ten days (Nzouankeu 1993).

Mali's National Conference lasted two weeks, and succeeded in fashioning the constitutional and multiparty framework that for two decades served as the basis for democracy within the Third Republic. The success of the National Conference experiment, including within the Malian context, was due to its recourse to pre-colonial African traditions. Specifically, the National Conference embodied two critical elements of Malian traditional mediation practices: (1) the vibrant interaction of largely unfettered traditional associations, in which a broad coalition of leaders from all sectors of civil society, including elders and the heads of women's organizations, ethnic and religious leaders, labor and student activists, and ruling and opposition political leaders, takes part in the extended meeting; and (2) consensus-building through the tradition of palaver: in its ideal form, the National Conference builds upon the traditional African concept of consensus building, in which every participant has the right to voice his/her opinion, and decisions are made only when agreed upon by all members present (unlike the more widespread Western concept of majority rule). Both of these processes were clearly evident in the Malian case.

However, Mali's National Conference was much more successful in terms of resolving the "national" issue of what form the future polity should take, as opposed to the "regional" question of how best to resolve the northern conflict. The National Conference rejected the demands of northern guerrilla leaders to include a special status for the north in the new constitution, proposing instead to hold a *Conférence Spéciale sur le Nord* (Special Conference on the North) before the end of the year. The two-fold effect of this decision (i.e., rejecting federalism as a solution to the northern conflict) was that government proponents of seeking a military solution were emboldened, and northern guerrilla leaders were left with the perception that democratic transition would mean very little for the northern provinces (Poulton and Youssouf 1998: 61).

Violence remained a staple of northern politics during this transition period. In addition to witnessing the emergence of two new guerrilla groups, the *Armée Révolutionnaire de Libération de l'Azawad* (ARLA, Revolutionary Liberation Army of Azawad) and the *Front Populaire de Libération de l'Azawad* (FPLA, Popular Liberation Front of Azawad), the transition period was marked by the emergence on December 13, 1991, of the *Coordination des Mouvements et Fronts Unifiés de l'Azawad* (MFUA, Coordination of Movements and Unified Fronts of Azawad), an umbrella group designed to negotiate with the transitional

authorities from a position of strength. The strategy worked in the sense that, the transitional authorities, desirous of achieving an agreement prior to Konaré's inauguration, announced the signing on April 11, 1992, of a *Pacte National* (National Pact), that, among other elements, embodied a cease fire in which the Malian military would significantly reduce its presence in the north and the insurgent forces would withdraw to cantonments. Largely following the outlines of the Tamanrasset Accords negotiated by President Traoré during the final days of his regime (Keita 1998: 17), the National Pact suffered from the same shortcomings of its predecessor: the northern sedentary populations continued to feel threatened by an agreement negotiated without their input, and guerrilla leaders questioned the ability of the new government to reign in the military, not to mention the true commitment of the newly elected administration to keep its side of the bargain (Lode 1997: 414).

Although one could argue that the northern conflict simply was not "ripe" enough (Zartman 1989) to permit its resolution at the National Conference, a more plausible dilemma was derivative of traditional Malian mediation practices: the primary importance of region, and therefore the need for a regional as opposed to a national approach. Other problems also emerged. Among the most notable was that the proceedings "were conducted in French, Mali's 'national language,' effectively eliminating many of the rural delegates from the discussions" (Docking 1997: 196). In the end, the "National" Conference was incapable of dealing with what constituted a regional rebellion, regardless of that rebellion's impacts on the country as a whole. A more integrated approach was necessary (Kivimäki 2000).

4.3 SECURITY FIRST: WITHDRAWAL AND DEMOBILIZATION OF THE MILITARY

A series of conflict resolution efforts drew upon the Malian military's presence in the northern provinces provided the regional dimension lacking in the National Conference. A critical theme of this dimension of conflict resolution was "security first": the necessity of halting military conflict on the ground to create an environment conducive to the entry of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and international organizations interested in supporting national development policies designed to alleviate poverty and socioeconomic inequality, typically perceived as the true root cause of most conflicts.

The 1992 National Pact provided the regional framework within which conflict resolution mechanisms could be launched. An important initial effort was the implementation of an array of "confidence-building" measures that included the formation of joint security forces of Malian Army regulars and northern guerrilla fighters, that together would garrison and patrol the northern provinces on a temporary basis, and the gradual absorption of former guerrilla fighters into the Malian Army, police force, and civil administration (Keita

1998: 17–18). Although these efforts proceeded well at first, their shortcomings were highlighted by the periodic mutinies of former guerrillas, most notably a 1994 incident in which approximately a dozen Malian troops were killed by former guerrilla soldiers in Tonka and Kharous. The primary problem associated with these measures is that they were incapable of resolving what Keita (1998: 19) aptly describes as the “most pervasive and intractable problem ... the climate of fear in the north” that was the direct result of a long tradition of heavy-handed military operations within the region.

The solution to this problem was the recourse once again to a classic element of traditional Malian mediation practices: the classic role played by traditional intermediaries. “To win Tuareg confidence, the Army instituted recurring consultations between senior military officers and Tuareg community leaders,” explains Keita (1998: 21). “These meetings provided *fora* to discuss grievances, address allegations of criminal activity, and examine accusations of human rights abuses.” One outgrowth of these meetings was that the Malian military became directly involved in relief efforts, including the provision of medical care from mobile medical units. “The Army also organized regular meetings between Army units and Tuareg communities, in which the Tuareg were encouraged to share and explain their arts, dances, singing, and other unique features,” continues Keita (1998: 22). “This demonstrated to the Tuareg that the Army valued their traditional culture, but also generated some appreciation for the Tuareg within the rank and file of the Army itself.” The success of these consultations could be measured by the number of former guerrilla fighters ultimately incorporated into the Malian security forces and civil administration (over 3,000), as well as the implementation of a wide number of measures envisioned by the National Pact, most notably the withdrawal of a significant number of military forces from the northern provinces.

The inherent problem with the military approach, however, is that “success” was principally based on the withdrawal of the Malian military from the north. The adoption of joint patrols, for example, was perceived by the northern guerrillas as simply a temporary measure. Their ultimate goal was control over their own territories. Moreover, the initial success of the redeployments of Malian troops created problems of their own, as witnessed by the emergence in 1994 of the *Mouvement Patriotique Malien-Ganda Koy* (MPMGK, Malian Patriotic Movement-*Ganda Koy*; hereinafter referred to as *Ganda Koy*), an armed movement among the northern sedentary peoples that sought to stem the unrelenting violence affecting their communities. Tired of being pawns in the constant military conflict between the government and the guerrilla groups, *Ganda Koy* quickly obtained “enormous popular appeal” as both willing and able to exact military retribution through a well-coordinated policy of terror against the northern pastoral peoples. “Well-educated mild-mannered people started uttering violent opinions which were closer to European ideologies of ethnic cleansing, than to the Malian President’s African consensus-building approach,” explain Poulton and Youssouf (1998: 71). “Mass hysteria was not far away.” With less hyperbole, Lode (1997: 414) nonetheless captured the import

of *Ganda-Koy*'s emergence: "Mali was by now [mid-1994] on the brink of a full-scale civil war." In short, the military approach, regardless of the degree to which it promoted mutual understanding, was incapable of resolving the core issues of the northern conflict.

4.4 PROMOTING INTRA-REGIONAL DIALOGUE

The emergence of the *Ganda Koy* movement and the specter of a full-blown civil war served as a wake-up call to both northern and national elites, who fashioned a two-fold response based on community dialogue (Wing 2008: 125–53) that went to the heart of the northern conflict. The Konaré administration responded to the deepening crisis by launching in 1994 a series of seventeen *concertations regionales* (regional dialogues) in each of Mali's regions (including the various communes of Bamako). These regional dialogues, which fostered a national consensus in favor of "equal treatment" for all northern populations that nonetheless did not grant a special status to the north (the primary stumbling bloc of the National Pact) were typically facilitated by two or three government ministers, lasted three days, and attracted the participation of nearly 3,000 participants. These efforts were followed by literally hundreds of *rencontres intercommunitaires* (intercommunity meetings) beginning as early as November 1994 and continuing throughout 1995. The intercommunity efforts were either organized by or in conjunction with a blossoming array of civil society groups. The political efficacy of the meetings was demonstrated by the dramatic signing on January 11, 1995, of the *Accords de Bourem* (Bourem Accords), effectively ending conflict between the FPLA and *Ganda Koy*. In short, the regional dialogues and intercommunity meetings had successfully reduced tensions and paved the way for peace.

The most noteworthy aspect of this series of regional dialogues and especially intercommunity meetings was their reliance, more so than any of the other processes heretofore described, on all aspects of traditional Malian mediation practices in the pursuit of a new, comprehensive social compact for the Third Republic:

- the meetings built upon the *historical interdependency of economic relationships* within the northern region by recognizing that a comprehensive solution required the creation of a political *alabadia*;
- an emphasis was placed on the overriding importance of resolving the *regional dimension* of the northern conflict, which nonetheless would have to be acceptable to the rest of the country;
- *intermediaries*, most notably those from neighboring countries and the larger international community, were widely welcomed as impartial facilitators (discussed below);

- the regional focus of the meetings ensured a prominent place for third-party mediators derivative of *social alliances*, whether based on marriage or the irreverent nature of *sanankouya*;
- *traditional associations* took the lead in sponsoring meetings and set the agendas of those facilitated by external mediators;
- finally, and perhaps most important, every event was driven by the need to *achieve consensus through the tradition of palaver*.

These talks, which essentially constituted an extended family discussion that lasted more than a year, encompassed all levels of society from an individual *griot* in the north to President Konaré. The net result of this extended family discussion was the birth of a new social compact that not only reinforced the traditional concept of *siguinyogonya* (the ideal of living in harmony with one's neighbors), but that was politically acceptable to Mali's disparate peoples. The meetings were followed by the successful cantonment and demobilization of 10,000 former guerrillas, 3,000 of whom turned in the weapons that were burned in the Flame of Peace.

4.5 DECENTRALIZATION IN THE PURSUIT OF NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

A policy of decentralization served as the economic capstone to the resolution of Mali's northern conflict (Seely 2001; see also Rawson 2005). Although President Konaré entered office on a pledge to decentralize authority to Mali's diverse regions, the intensification of the northern conflict ironically both impeded the implementation of that policy, as well as making it more critical than ever before. Indeed, the northern guerrilla insurgency pushed for more than would have been acceptable to the other provinces (i.e., special status for the north within the constitution), and any solution fully implemented prior to the resolution of the northern conflict would have fostered the impression within the other provinces that the Konaré administration had given into military blackmail.

In the end, the regional meetings produced a national consensus that, although denying the granting to the north of a special constitutional status different from that enjoyed by the other provinces, nonetheless "stipulated the creation of local municipalities which will give the people of the North the possibility of handling their own affairs according to their culture and traditions"; a demand that had served as the basis of recurring guerrilla insurgencies beginning with the colonial era (Lode 1997: 420). Of particular interest from the perspective of conflict resolution is that the solution that emerged from the regional meetings is derivative of traditional Malian mediation practices: the overriding importance of intra-regional ties between different ethnic groups as opposed to transregional ties based on ethnicity. This

once again reinforces the overriding importance of the traditional concept of *siguinyogonya* in the Malian social compact. Such an approach stands in sharp contrast to other attempts at restructuring state-society relationships, such as the controversial case of Ethiopia in which the solution was to create twelve ethnically based states.

4.6 SUPPORTING ROLE OF REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL INTERMEDIARIES

A final important element of resolving the northern conflict which is also highly derivative of traditional Malian mediation practices is the highly regarded role of intermediaries in the creation and maintenance of a social compact. Although one typically thinks of intermediaries as constituting prominent members from within society, the regional dialogues and intercommunity meetings from 1994 to 1996 demonstrated the openness – indeed, the active search of – a wide variety of international intermediaries.

At the level of the foreign individual, it is commonly recognized that Edgar Pisani, a former French Minister and Director of the *Institut du Monde Arabe* (Institute of the Arab World), played an influential intermediary role (Konaté, Sangaré, and Coulibaly 1999: 34). At the regional level, the elites of neighboring countries, most notably Algeria, similarly played important intermediary roles, not least of due to the fact that Mali's northern pastoral populations straddle international boundaries. At the level of the international system, the role of NGOs has been particularly influential, as witnessed by the extensive involvement of Norwegian Church Aid (NCA) under the guidance of Kåre Lode. The NCA alone facilitated thirty-seven intercommunity meetings in northern Mali from October 1995 through March 1996, with participation in each meeting varying from 300 to 1,500 (Lode 1997: 419).

Finally, one must also mention the role of a wide variety of international organizations, most notably the extensive UN system. The extent of UN involvement, ranging from UNDP financial support for the demobilization of guerrilla soldiers, to UNIDIR's support for the negotiation of a light weapons moratorium in West Africa, is too vast to analyze in any great detail in the confines of this article. Suffice it to note that the vast literature on these various types of intermediaries invariably concludes that they have played an important, albeit supporting role in Mali's peace process, or what Lode (1997) has referred to as "oiling the works."

5. LESSONS LEARNED: IMPLICATIONS FOR CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Mali's successful conflict resolution efforts during the 1990s, which prompted a guerrilla insurgency to voluntarily lay down its arms in return for receiving greater rights for its region of origin, provide five sets of practical lessons for practitioners interested in resolving Mali's 2012 conflict as well as those in other parts of the African continent. The first lesson revolves around the importance of democracy and particularly the emergence of a new generation of elites strongly committed to the pursuit of democracy as critical to the success of conflict resolution measures. The evidence demonstrates that the democratic opening of the Malian political system, further strengthened by the holding of a National Conference and the holding of free and fair elections, provided an important political framework within which civil society could flourish and make its voice heard. It is no accident that Mali's northern conflict ended during the 1990s within the context of a democratic polity, as opposed to its intensification during three authoritarian periods (i.e., the French colonial period and the Keita and Traoré eras). Unlike their authoritarian predecessors and counterparts throughout the African continent, who more often than not sought legitimacy and support from abroad, Mali's democratically elected elites (especially if they wish to be reelected) must search for that legitimacy at home. One must be careful, however, not to overestimate the impact of or to rely too heavily on individual African leaders – the so-called “big man” theory of African politics and society – regardless of how democratic they may be. They are, after all, only individuals, and if their policies are not grounded within the cultures of their larger societies, those policies are destined to fail. Nonetheless, the Malian case offers strong support to the thesis adhered to by proponents of international democracy promotion that democratic polities do a better job than their authoritarian counterparts in resolving domestic conflict.

The Malian case also demonstrates that the successful resolution of internal conflict depends on a series of interconnected steps and strategies. Specifically, the Malian case suggests that efforts designed to resolve a regionally based insurgency ideally should include at least four elements: (1) the creation and consolidation of a new democratic context, which in the case of Mali unfolded against the backdrop of the National Conference (a strategy that has been particularly influential and successful in francophone West Africa); (2) aggressive pursuit of a demilitarization strategy that recognized the necessity of halting military conflict on the ground, including the withdrawal of government forces from the north; (3) promotion of an intra-regional dialogue designed to understand the grievances to all parties to the conflict that literally included hundreds of intercommunity meetings throughout northern Mali; and, finally (4) the pursuit of a policy of decentralization (i.e., the devolution of power to subnational units) that recognized the right of the northern peoples to manage their own political, economic, and especially cultural affairs according to their

local traditions. All four elements are mutually reinforcing, with the absence of any one calling into question the long-term resolution of a regionally based reform insurgency. For example, it is hard to imagine the unfolding of an effective intra-regional dialogue in the absence of the demilitarization of the conflict, just as it is hard to imagine an effective policy of decentralization in the absence of democratization.

A third lesson of this study is that traditional mediation practices are extremely influential in understanding why Malian proponents of conflict resolution did what they did, and why they were successful in doing so. Success was achieved in Mali due to the simple fact that conflict resolution strategies (e.g., the promotion of intra-regional dialogues) were intimately linked to and based on at least six sets of traditional mediation practices that are derivative of Mali's pre-colonial independence era: intimate interdependency of economic relationships among highly diverse peoples; high degree of ethnic interdependence in which intra-regional ties between different ethnic groups are often more important than trans-regional ties between members of the same ethnic group; classic role played by intermediaries; enduring importance of social alliances; vibrant role of traditional associations; and consensus-building through the tradition of palaver. Together, these components of traditional Malian mediation practices have served as the centerpiece of a veritable "culture of peace" that, despite decades of authoritarian rule under French colonialism and Mali's first two Republics, continues to pervade Malian society. At least two of these mechanisms – the intimate interdependency of economic relationships and the importance of region over ethnic affiliations – are derivative of Mali's unique position as the contemporary embodiment of a rich history of powerful, centralized kingdoms. As such, their applicability is perhaps limited to other African countries that also represent the contemporary embodiment of centralizing political kingdoms from the pre-colonial independence era (e.g., Senegal and Tunisia). The remaining four factors, however, are evident in varying degrees throughout most (if not all) African societies, and can be employed in varying degrees by those interested in facilitating conflict resolution throughout the African continent. At the bare minimum, the African subfield of conflict resolution would be greatly enhanced by the systematic categorization and analysis of the wide array of traditional conflict mechanisms that exist throughout the African continent.

Those interested in the long-term resolution of Mali's 2012 conflict as well as those in other African countries should pay special attention to the important role played in the Malian case by the process of consensus building through the tradition of palaver. This aspect of traditional Malian mediation practices served as the cornerstone of the National Conference of 1991 that successfully established the outlines of the current democratic political system (and therefore provided the democratic framework within which the conflict could be resolved). It was also crucial to the successful demilitarization of the conflict. Regularized meetings between senior military leaders and Tuareg community leaders significantly reduced the "climate of fear" in the north, an important

stepping stone to ultimately resolving the conflict. Indeed, the importance of consensus building through palaver in Malian conflict resolution was best demonstrated by the critical role played by the seventeen regional dialogues and the hundreds of intercommunity meetings that took place between 1994 and 1996. These regional meetings were crucial to the development of a new social compact in Mali that subsequently became the basis for an effective policy of cultural, economic, and political decentralization. Together these two developments ensured widespread acceptance of a national framework for peace that made the reemergence of conflict in the north at worst highly unlikely and at best a memory of the past.

A final lesson derivative of the Malian case is the importance of pursuing a grass-roots (i.e., “bottom-up”) approach to conflict resolution as opposed to the more typical “top-down” approach often associated with recourse to the international community. In the case of Mali, neither the creation of a national democratic framework, the holding of a National Conference, or the reordering of civil-military relationships was sufficient to resolve what in essence constituted a regionally based reform insurgency intent on seeking greater rights for the northern populations. Top-down approaches to conflict resolution, regardless of how democratic a regime may be, ultimately will be insufficient. It was only after months of intense and time-consuming regional dialogues that a consensus on a new social compact could be reached, suggesting that grass-roots initiatives stand the best chance of resolving conflicts in the long-term. It is for this reason that only minimal amounts of foreign mediation and financial resources were necessary in the Malian case. Although these international resources were credited with “oiling the works” and therefore served as an important piece of the conflict resolution puzzle, the Malian peace process for the most part drew upon traditional Malian resources and practices. In short, no amount of external involvement will be sufficient if conflict resolution measures are not derivative of and accepted by the affected peoples within a given region.

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