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*„Mobilising Narratives in a Postcolonial Setting.
Malian-Diasporic Online News and Social Media as Sites
for Intersectional Governmentality“*

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Syntia Hasenöhr, BA, M.A.

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To Dieudonné and Allaye.

And to Essau, Theresa, and Lukia.

For the love and anger that have been driving me ever since.

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Abbreviations

Adema	Alliance for Democracy in Mali / l'Alliance pour la Démocratie au Mali
AFISMA	African-led International Support Mission in Mali
AGEFAU	Agency of Management of the Universal Access Fund – Agence de Gestion du Fonds d'Access Universel
AMAP	Malian Press Agency / Agence Malienne de Presse
AME	Association of Malian Deported / Association des Maliens Expulsés
AMRTP	Malian Authority for the Regulation of Telecommunications/ICT and Postal Services – Autorité Malienne de Régulation des Télécommunications/TIC et des Postes
AMUPI	Malian Association for the Unity and Progress of Islam / Association Malienne pour l'Unité et le Progrès de l'Islam
AOF	French West Africa / Afrique Occidentale Française
CAD	Coalition for African Debt and Development Alternatives / Coalition des Alternatives Africaines Dette et Développement
CEN	Conference for National Understanding – Conférence d'Entente Nationale
CIGEM	Centre for Information on and Management of Migration / Centre d'Information et de Gestion de la Migration
CILSS	Permanent Inter-state Committee for Combatting Drought in the Sahel / Comité permanent Inter-Etats de Lutte contre la Sécheresse dans le Sahel
CMA	Coordination of Movements of Azawad / Coordination des Mouvements de l'Azawad
CNDIFE	National Centre for Documentation and Information on the Woman and Children – Centre National de Documentation et d'Information sur la Femme et l'Enfant
CNRDRE	National Committee for the Redressing of Democracy and the Restoration of the State / Comité national pour le redressement de la démocratie et la restauration de l'État
CNUCED	United Nations Conference for Trade and Development – Conférence des Nations Unies sur le Commerce et le Développement
COREN	Collective of Northern Nationals / Collectif der Ressortissants du Nord
CTR	Committee for Regulation of Telecommunications – Comité de Régulation des Télécommunications
DPST	Declaration on the Sectorial Telecommunication Policy of Mali – Déclaration de Politique Sectorielle des Télécommunications du Mali
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States / Communauté Économique des États de l'Afrique de l'Ouest
EMOP	Modular and Permanent Household Survey – Enquête Modulaire et Permanente auprès des Ménages
EPAs	Economic Partnership Agreements
EU	European Union / Union Européenne
EUTM	European Training Mission in Mali
FAU	Universal Access Fund – Fonds d'Accès Universel
FCFA	Franc CFA (West African currency)
FES	Friedrich Ebert Foundation – Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung
GDPR	Règlement Général sur la Protection des Données / General Data Protection Regulation
GSMA	International industry organisation for mobile network operators

HCI	High Islamic Council of Mali / Haut Conseil Islamique Malien
IBK	Ibrahima Boubacar Keita (Malian president 2013-2020)
ICT	Information and Communication Technologies
ICT4D	Information and Communication Technologies for Development
INSTAT	Malian National Statistical Institute – Institut National de la Statistique
ITU	International Telecommunication Union
MENIC	Ministry for Digital Economy, Information, and Communication – Ministère de l'Economie Numérique de l'Information et de la Communication
MENP	Ministry for Digital Economy and Planning – Ministère pour l'Economie Numérique et Prospective
MiCT	Media in Transition and Cooperation
MINUSMA	Integrated Mission of the United Nations for the Stabilisation in Mali / Mission Intégrée des Nations Unies pour la Stabilisation au Mali
MNLA	National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad / Mouvement National pour la Libération de Azawad
OCRS	Communal Organisation of Sahara Regions / Organisation Commune des Régions Sahariennes
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development / Organisation de Coopération et de Développement Économique
ORTM	Malian Radio and Television Office / Office de Radio et Télévision du Mali
PNPR	National Platform of Rice Producers in Mali / Plateforme Nationale des Producteurs de Riz au Mali
PROCEGEM	Project for the Gender Certification of Malian Companies / Projet de Certification Genre des Entreprises Maliennes
PRODEJ	Promotion of Democracy and Justice / Promotion de la Démocratie et de la Justice
RGPH	General Population and Housing Survey / Recensement Général de la Population et de la Habitation
SAP	Structural Adjustment Program / Program d'Ajustement Structurel
Ujdm	Journalist union for the promotion of diplomacy in Mali / Union des journalistes pour la promotion de la diplomatie au Mali
UN	United Nations / Nations Unies
UNAFEM	National Union of Muslim Women in Mali / Union Nationale des Femmes Musulmanes au Mali
US-RDA	Sudanese Union – Democratic African Assembly / Union Soudanaise – Rassemblement Démocratique Africain

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1 Introduction: from Postcolonial Mobilities to Decolonial Feminist Mobilisations

Bamako, Mali, September 2010. I am sitting in a taxi, driving back to the house of my host family from a research encounter in the centre of Bamako. I am starting a casual conversation with the taxi driver. But before I can do this, he first needs to make something clear. He looks at me with a stern gaze and asks: "Are you French"? As I deny and say that I am German, his face immediately lightens up, as does the atmosphere in the taxi and we start our conversation...

... Bobo Dioulasso, Burkina Faso, February 2014. We came back from the market to the place where we were staying. At the market, we had seen some interesting packages of the Chinese tea brand that everyone I know used for performing the everyday tea ceremonies – here in Burkina Faso as well as in Mali. What was special about those tea packages was that they had a picture of the French president François Hollande printed on them. A friend of mine explained to me that this was one of the things that showed how grateful many Malians were for the French military intervention that had started in January 2013 and had stopped a fast-advancing Islamist offensive in Northern Mali...

... Cologne, Germany, January 2018. I am sitting at my desk and doing my daily review of Malian news to see if anything major has happened. I come across a YouTube video that shows a demonstration in Bamako, on the occasion of the five-year anniversary of the beginning of the French military intervention. A big group of people is gathered around Oumar Mariko, the leader of one of Mali's oppositional parties and a longstanding critic of postcolonial relations between Mali and France. Mariko, who also is the initiator of this demonstration is standing in front of a Malian flag, speaking rapidly in an agitated way, and calls for the departure of the French military forces from Malian territory...

These personal vignettes seem quite random and dispersed over the course of eight years and yet, they capture central controversies that informed this thesis. Their physical locations mirror my own growing physical distance from Malian territory. But they also show my ongoing connections to happenings in Mali through the movement of persons, i.e. my own travelling to and in Mali, the movement of objects like a package of tea, and the movement of information like a YouTube video. In that sense, these experiences not only describe my own attachments to and interactions with Malian-diasporic¹ society, but at their core, they feature the negotiations of Malian relations with France, the former colonial power that continues to

¹ My use of the term "Malian-diasporic society" in this thesis accounts for the fact that mobility has always been an important element of what we know as the Malian nation today (for more on the role of mobility in Malian society, see Subchapter 2.1) and that ongoing transnational connections make it difficult to delineate a Malian society that is confined to Malian territory.

be engaged in Mali. What the examples above unveil is how ambivalent this relationship is and how it is growing increasingly (in)tense. My first mentioned experience with the "country of origin test" – which happened like this several times during my stay – shows that already in 2010, the year of the 50th anniversary of Mali's formal independence from France, many Malians were at unease with French actors, including tourists and researchers.² But since the French military intervention – after a first phase of enthusiasm – feelings of dependency, external control, and mistrust have been increasing among parts of the Malian society to the point where in June 2019, the French journal *Libération's* headline reads "In Mali, 'the anti-French sentiment is at its peak'" (Malagardis, 2019, translation S.H.). The present thesis seeks to explore practices of and possibilities for political mobilisation in this increasingly tense postcolonial context.

The ambivalent relationship with France is thus not only based on memories of French colonialism. Rather, the ongoing engagement and influence of French political and economic elites in Malian political, economic, and social questions in the post-colonial era produce persisting experiences of postcolonial dependencies and forms of domination.³ These experiences were re-actualised with the French intervention in Mali that – after the removal of French military posts, which had been seen as an important moment in decolonisation – led to the ongoing presence of French military forces on Malian territory. For Malian society and politics, this intervention presented an important rupture in Malian post-colonial (military) relations since "for the first time since it gained independence from the former colonial power, Mali asked France to intervene militarily on its territory" (Moseley & Hoffman, 2017, p. 6). At the same time, however, parts of Malian society – including, for instance, the transitional president Dioncounda Traoré and the ruling president Ibrahima Boubacar Keita (IBK) – have been presenting the French and other international interventions in Mali as necessary and beneficial post-colonial engagement (Gavelle & Siméant, 2017, p. 49; Wing, 2016, pp. 59f, 70f). As the involvement of diverse actors in the international military interventions in Mali suggest, contemporary postcolonial relations often focus on Malian relations with France, but also include further actors like, in this case, the United Nations or the European Union.

² Moreover, I have often been told by Malian nationals that they welcomed my German nationality because the German Democratic Republic was the first state to formally recognise Mali as an independent state in 1960.

³ In line with the rationale of postcolonial studies that colonial structures persist and are effective up until today (see, for instance, Hall, 1996; Rutazibwa & Shilliam, 2018; Said, 1994; Tamale, 2020), in this thesis, I use the term "post-colonial" to designate the era after the formal independences of colonised states, the term "postcolonial" to indicate the ongoing persistence of colonial power relations, the term "(post)colonial" to emphasise colonial as well as postcolonial engagement of certain actors, and the term "neocolonial" to point to new actors and/or forms of external engagement that reproduces colonial power inequalities.

At the time of finishing this thesis, Malian postcolonial relations and their involvement with Malian politics and society have become even more complex through, for instance, mass protests against the French interventions and the ruling government from May 2020 on, through another coup d'état that ousted the ruling president Ibrahima Boubacar Keita (IBK) in August 2020,⁴ as well as through the ongoing Coronavirus pandemic that comes with its own restructurations of ambivalent postcolonial mobilities of people (the Malian diaspora, international military forces), objects (relief funds, vaccinations), and ideas (approaches to dealing with the pandemic, health policies, international relations). Whereas these developments provide intriguing continuations to the findings presented in this thesis, I leave these to be addressed elsewhere and will only include events and debates up to May 2019 in the following.

Combining the personal experiences mentioned above with these ambivalent postcolonial relationships leads us to the topic of this thesis. I depart from the last observation of postcolonial mobilities, i.e. the circulation of news about Malian postcolonial relations through online media. Diverse media have long been used for circulating information across space in the historically mobile Malian-diasporic society. In addition, the importance of digital media is increasing, also for political debates in a political field that is otherwise characterised by "uneven pluralism" (Bleck & Logvinenko, 2018, p. 813). In this context, I see online news media and the related mobilities as important sites for negotiating power relations. This approach also ties in with Wale Adebani's (2016, p. 7) exploration of print media as sites for the negotiation of postcolonial nationhood as well as with Majid KhosraviNik's (2014, p. 287ff) understanding of online media as participatory formats for the articulation of alternative voices. In this context, I understand Malian-diasporic online news as a case of negotiating power relations through online media in a controversial postcolonial context. In the present thesis, I thus evaluate the opportunities for political mobilisation that Malian-diasporic online news produce, using the example of the Malian-diasporic online news portal Maliweb and the related social networking sites Facebook and Twitter. In doing so, I do not consider political mobilisation in the narrow (albeit important) sense of mobilising citizens for voting, engaging in party politics, or social movements (see e.g. Collingwood et al., 2014; Hestres, 2014; Murray & Matland, 2014). Rather, I seek to use this thesis to open the notion of mobilisation by explicating the role of mobilities therein in order to explore its potential meanings in a postcolonial digital environment.

⁴ This was followed by another coup d'état end of May 2021, the implications of which are still unclear as I am finalising this thesis.

Between October 2016 and November 2020, I had the opportunity to do so within an interdisciplinary DOC-team project that researched processes of "articulating mobilisation" in different media formations.⁵ Combining perspectives from German literary studies, English and American studies, and political science, we explored potential meanings and workings of mobilisation at the intersection of media and mobilities. In this context, we developed a broad understanding of "mobilisation as the labour of and struggles over *becoming* and *making* mobile by *putting resources in motion*" (Hasenöhl et al., 2021, p. 58, italics in the original). This theoretical idea thus sees mobilisation as a process that unveils the strategic moments in seemingly natural tendencies of ever-increasing (globalised) mobilities as well as the resources necessary for doing so. In this thesis, I depart from this notion of mobilisation to develop my focus on *political mobilisation* as the labour and struggles over becoming and making mobile that puts resources into motion in order to negotiate socio-political power relations and either contribute to their consolidation or transformation.⁶

As a way of further theorising these consolidating or transforming mobilisations, i.e. their contribution to consolidating or transforming a status quo of postcolonial inequalities, I will use the Foucauldian theory of governmentality – and varieties of it – to explicate this differential working through governing others, governing the self, subjectifications, and resistances (Foucault, 1982, 2006). This ties in with my assumption that online news media can work either way: as resources that are mobilised for elite rule, or as resources that are mobilised for the participation of marginalised citizens. In addition, this responds to Foucault's understanding of governmentalisation as reconstructions of power in contexts of transformations of relations between citizens and their states (Foucault, 2006, p. 142f). Even though the context of Foucault's work is situated in Western⁷ states of the 18th century, I argue that we can also observe such transforming relations between citizens and their state(s) in the Malian-diasporic context of this thesis, due to the – to a certain extent – democratisation of information through

⁵ This DOC-team also included Roman Kabelik and Barbara Maly-Bowie and was funded by the Austrian Academy of Sciences (for more see <https://mobilisation.univie.ac.at/>).

⁶ In my use of "consolidation" and "transformation", I follow ideas on the discursive construction of national identities as outlined by Ruth Wodak and colleagues: On the one hand, they identify strategies that establish, justify, and perpetuate national identities, processes I collect under the term "consolidating". On the other hand, they identify "strategies of justification" that aim at transforming said identities, processes that might even result in dismantling or destroying them (Wodak et al., 2009, p. 33). In this thesis, I build on the assumption that narratives and their contextual embeddedness can contribute not only to consolidating or transforming discursive identities in this way, but also influence socio-political power relations more generally (for more see Chapter 4 on my theoretical framework).

⁷ I use the terms "West" and "Western" in accordance with Steve Ouma who states that it refers to "Western Europe, North America, and regions that are predominantly populated by European settlers" in geographic terms "as well as to the characteristics and values that are seen as predominant in this region" such as capitalism, human rights, and individualism (Ouma, 2012, p. 120).

online media as well as to the national and international political contestations in the Malian-diasporic context.

Considering my focus on online media or, more specifically, Malian-diasporic online news, my understanding of political mobilisation in this work revolves around the mobilisation of and through narratives that emerge from such online news articles, and their relation to governmentality. Therefore, I structure the following pages around the notion of *mobilising narratives*. I investigate mobilising narratives (for more on my understanding of narratives, see Section 4.1.1 in the theoretical part), on the one hand, through the question of how they are mobilised in the Malian-diasporic online news environment, i.e. which actors put which resources of governance into motion for making certain narratives circulate between certain actors and online platforms. On the other hand, I explore mobilising narratives in their discursive dimension, asking which topics and subjectifications their circulations mobilise, and how they mobilise through the emergence of emotions inherent in said discursive fragments. Together, this perspective on mobilising narratives as being mobilised in a specific multi-scale context as well as mobilising for consolidating or transforming the – postcolonial and gendered – status quo should answer the following question: *How can the circulation of online news lead to political mobilisation in a postcolonial context?* By exploring this question, the present thesis aims at two conceptual contributions. First, it provides a perspective on political mobilisation that makes diverse – socioeconomic and cultural – facets of mobility in mobilisation through online news explicit. Secondly, by unveiling the political dimension through the entanglement of these mobilities with diverse power relations through governmentality, it contributes to an intersectional understanding of political mobilisation in postcolonial contexts. In the following, I will first explain the notion of mobilities before I turn to the intersectional framework of this thesis.

1.1 Mobility Studies as Inspiration for a Research Framework

I make notions of mobility in political mobilisation explicit by drawing from the field of mobility studies. Departing from an unease with sedentarist notions of society in much of the social research to date, mobility studies understand mobilities of people, objects, and ideas as constitutive for contemporary societies, but also address the unequal power relations that come with the importance of mobilities (see e.g. Hannam et al., 2006; Sheller & Urry, 2006; for more information on the field of mobility studies, see Section 4.1.2). For instance, mobili-

ty scholars have suggested the concept of regimes of mobilities to explain how powerful actors use material and symbolic resources to selectively make some persons or ideas more mobile and keep others from circulating. However, the concept of regimes of mobility also acknowledges that marginalised actors can subvert these regimes (see e.g. Englert, 2021; Glick Schiller & Salazar, 2013; Kesselring & Vogl, 2013). In that sense, mobility studies also allow for considering how im/mobilities are in a mutually constitutive relationship with multiple social categorisations like gender (Cresswell & Uteng, 2016), race (Nicholson, 2014), class (Jansson, 2016), or religion (Selod, 2015).

Mobility studies thus point to processes that are at the core of structuring flows and inequalities in contemporary societies. In this way, they offer a topic-related and analytical approach to this thesis. In relation to topics, the basic premises of mobility studies – the constitutive role of mobilities and their involvement with power relations – have informed my object of research, i.e. the discourse on Malian transnational relations. This takes on several notions of mobility studies. Exploring Malian transnational relations through the movements of people, objects, and ideas accounts for the complex movements that constitute not only societies but also relations between them and thus construct a relational space. This focus, however, also needs to take into account who is not mobile, in order to analyse connections between mobility and immobility, movement and stasis. In this vein, movements that constitute Malian postcolonial relations can describe working regimes of mobility that favour some movements and impede others – with an encompassing perspective not only on people, but also on objects and information.

On the analytical level, the notion of regimes of mobilities allows me to apply a critical intersectional perspective to the mobilising processes of and through narratives in the context of Malian-diasporic online news. In the following, I address this mobilisation on three interrelated levels. First, I explore how narratives are mobilised through online news as they circulate across space through interactions between journalists, journals, an online news portal, its social media accounts, and users. This allows me to show how the different forms of movements described by Urry – physical, imaginative, virtual, and communicative – intersect and influence each other (Urry, 2008). In addition, mobility studies and their considerations for moorings and politics help to connect these movements to their structuration through infrastructures, politics, and platforms. Secondly, the concept of cultural mobility (Greenblatt, 2010) can explain how the circulation of narratives contributes to mobilising narratives on a discursive level by transforming them through diverse interactions and re-contextualisations. And thirdly, mobility studies explicate how physical mobilities and movements of and

through emotions are related (Merriman, 2018; Svašek, 2013) and can thereby lead to (political) mobilisation on the emotional level.

Throughout these analytical dimensions, mobility studies also seek to capture intersectional power relations that, however, as Mimi Sheller (2014, p. 793) admits, "have been somewhat neglected by the proponents of the mobilities turn." In this line of thought, while this thesis focuses on postcolonial aspects in discourses on Malian transnational relations, this postcolonial exploration is complemented by a feminist perspective.

1.2 Malian-Diasporic Online News Discourses and Decolonial Feminisms

Looking back at the vignettes on postcolonial mobilities to and from Mali at the beginning of this introduction, we can see that even in my own narratives, female Malian actors remain invisible: the taxi driver, the friend who explained the meaning of the tea packages with the picture of François Hollande, the persons protesting in Bamako around Oumar Mariko were all male actors. In that regard, my own memories reproduce patterns that have been prominently critiqued by Cynthia Enloe (1990, p. 52): "All of these stories, past, present, and those hinting the future, are typically told as if gender were irrelevant." In the Malian-diasporic context, such omissions reproduce what Aminata Dramane Traoré calls a double mutilation of African women, first through their socioeconomic marginalisation by neocolonial and capitalist exploitation, and secondly through their marginalisation by Western, even feminist, discourses (Traoré & M'Dela-Mounier, 2012, p. 9f). Based on these considerations, I argue that a study of political mobilisation in a postcolonial context needs to consider gendered hierarchies as well because gendered and postcolonial power relations are inextricably linked (see also Section 4.1.3 on intersectionality and Section 4.2.2 on gendered and postcolonial governmentality).

In this context, the intersectional perspective in this work seeks to contribute to decolonial feminist analysis in three ways: First, it seeks to take up the notion of intersectional scholars who have been highlighting the multiple exclusions that arise for women, sexual minorities, and socioeconomically disadvantaged people in postcolonial situations (see e.g. Brah, 1996; Mama, 2020a; Reina Lewis & Sara Mills, 2003; for more on my approach to intersectionality, see Section 4.1.3). Secondly, I go beyond the critique that feminism is often based on Eurocentric structures and draw from scholars who argue the same for gender concepts and relations themselves as they consider gendered and postcolonial structurations as mutually

constitutive, as articulated, for instance, by María Lugones' (2010) "coloniality of gender" or in *The Invention of Women* by Oyeronke Oyewumi (1997, in Graneß et al., 2019, pp. 145–149). In that vein, I also follow authors who consider (racialised) constructions of femininity and masculinity as results of colonial, imperial, and neoliberal encounters (see e.g. R. Connell, 2016; hooks, 2015). Thirdly, I consider unequal gender relations that emerge from such (post)colonial influences problematic because their inherent continuation of a form of coloniality continues to undermine attempts at decolonisation and decolonial knowledge production – in addition to weakening the force of potential alliances between African women and men (see e.g. Tamale, 2020; Vergès, 2021). As, for instance, Sylvia Tamale (2020, p. 63) affirms:

Part of the colonial project was to suppress heterogeneity, therefore, any serious analysis of decolonization and decoloniality must go beyond race and pay close attention to the nuanced and complex intersections of oppressive systems based on gender, sexualities, migration, poverty, religion, etc.

Therefore, by analysing mobilising narratives in a postcolonial way, I also seek to uncover the lingering effects of as well as resistances to such colonialities of gender on the access, interaction, identification, and emotional dimensions of Malian-diasporic online news as embedded in a regime of gendered and postcolonial governmentality. I therefore argue that a decolonial mobilisation of and through online news can only be effective if it produces feminist decolonial mobilisations that overcome the coloniality of gender.

1.3 Structure of the Thesis

In order to further contextualise the questions and approaches I just outlined, the following chapter on the research field (Chapter 2) provides a general introduction to postcolonial Malian-diasporic society, including the historical development of the Malian-diasporic society and its current socio-political situation. This chapter also seeks to provide relevant background information on the socio-political context of the discourse on Malian transnational relations. Therefore, it introduces intersections and transformations of social hierarchies in Malian-diasporic society, including such categorisations as gender, religion, ethnicity, and class. In addition, this chapter outlines central national political conflicts that evolved around the conflict with Northern separatist groups, the coup d'état in March 2012, and the governance of the Malian president Ibrahim Boubacar Keita (IBK). As a third field of contestation, this chapter outlines contestations around Malian transnational relations, most prominently

the international interventions that have been taking place in Mali since January 2013. The introduction of the research field closes with the observation that these socio-political contestations led to important challenges of and debates on Malian-diasporic identities and belongings and identifies online media as an increasingly important site for articulating these debates.

In the literature review (Chapter 3), I argue that an approach to digital mobilisation in a transnational African setting needs to account for connections between digital media and multiple levels of postcolonialism as well as for the connections with postcolonial relations and national political and social relations. In that regard, I describe research that has captured such relations as forms of digital colonialism. In addition, I draw inspiration from literature that connects digital media with African postcolonial relations, gender relations, and digital migration studies as a way of explicating processes of socio-political mobilisation. At the end of this chapter, I outline in which way I want to contribute to these bodies of research by emphasising the need to combine their perspectives.

Chapter 4 on the theoretical considerations of this thesis introduces the approaches I use to study the different facets of mobilising narratives in Malian-diasporic online communication. I describe how I build on but also go beyond the often-Eurocentric theories of political mobilisation in order to investigate political mobilisation in this postcolonial context as mobilising narratives that I situate at the conjunction of narratives, im/mobilities, and intersectional power relations. As a way of capturing the strategic moments in mobilisation, be it for consolidating or transforming the postcolonial status quo, I furthermore introduce the Foucauldian notion of governmentality and its applications in relation to (social) media, gender, postcoloniality, and affects. Looking through the lens of governmentality in this way is especially suitable for explaining how gendered and postcolonial power relations manifest and become productive on diverse levels that influence the mobilisation of and through narratives, as exemplified through its manifestation in the public. Finally, I introduce the Discourse-Historical Approach in order to capture these different levels as narratives are mobilised in their contextual dimensions but also mobilise culturally through discourses.

The methodological chapter (Chapter 5) starts by explaining my online ethnographic approach to mobilising narratives. It proceeds to delineate the case study setting of this dissertation, namely interactions in the Malian-diasporic online news portal Maliweb and its social media accounts. It then continues with an outline of the ethical considerations and researcher positionalities that informed the methodological approach of this research. The following

sections on the data collection detail the selection and collection of material through archiving parts of the analysed discourse, observing its conditions and practices, and interviewing participants. The last chapter of this part then details how I used the Discourse-Historical Approach by Martin Reisigl and Ruth Wodak as an analytical framework for analysing diverse levels of mobilising narratives.

Building on these theoretical and methodological considerations, Chapter 6 describes the conditions and processes of narratives becoming mobile socio-geographically through Maliweb and its social media accounts. On the one hand, this chapter focuses on the access to online communication as a socio-political and historical context for using online news in the Malian(-diasporic) context. It details the distribution of online communication infrastructure, its socioeconomic implications, and socio-political factors influencing the use of online communication. On the other hand, the chapter analyses the platform interfaces of the Maliweb website, Facebook, and Twitter as institutional situational contexts for the circulation of discourses. Therefore, it shows how access to these specific platforms is negotiated between context, regulations, and user actions. In addition, it demonstrates how platform providers (affectively) govern user interactions on through platform features and how users comply with or resist to this governance. The chapter ends with a brief analysis of advertisements that circulate through Maliweb as effect of platform connectivity and as a vehicle for gendered and postcolonial governmentality. In summary, this chapter shows which mobilities intersect on and through Maliweb and how these are embedded in broader regimes of mobilities that produce power inequalities in the becoming mobile of narratives between actors in different social and geographic positions.

Chapter 7 then outlines connections between mobilising narratives and cultural mobility. It starts with an analysis of social locations of and interactions among users and article authors as a social contextual dimension that influences the contingency of narratives. The rest of the chapter focuses on how the content of narratives that circulate through Maliweb and its social media accounts, especially between journalists and users, can consolidate or transform narratives about Malian transnational relations and related constructions of identities and belongings. Subchapter 7.2 on the topics in the discourse analysis corpus delineates the discourse and shows connections between Malian transnational relations and critical mobilities. The next Subchapter 7.3 unveils how article genres structure the access of potential readers through participatory formats, inclusionary and exclusionary article features, and socio-political purposes to which the above-mentioned topics relate. Moreover, Subchapter 7.4 explores how discursive strategies are used in articles and user comments to construct

consolidating and transforming subjectifications of certain social actors and social actor groups. The last Subchapters 7.5 and 7.6 in this results part, then, outline how emotions are mobilised in the sense of gendered and postcolonial governmentality and how online mobilisation may relate (back) to offline contexts. In addition to searching for instances of cultural mobility in these constructions, this chapter thus also shows how these strategies support consolidating and transforming discourses on socio-political topics in the Malian and African postcolonial context.

The concluding Chapter 8 evaluates the postcolonial and feminist decolonial implications of narratives that are mobilised and mobilise through Malian-diasporic online news. It outlines how the different facets of mobilisation that structured this work connect, overlap, and inform each other. And it reflects on the merits and challenges of the interdisciplinary theoretical perspectives and of the online ethnographic approach applied throughout this thesis, especially for work at the intersection of postcolonial political science and (feminist decolonial) political mobilisation.

2 Malian(-Diasporic) Background: Socio-Political Contestations, Post-colonial Connectivities, and Economic Transformations

This chapter aims at providing a more general introduction of postcolonial Mali, including the historical development of Malian-diasporic society and its current socio-political situation. Thereby, the chapter seeks to provide relevant background information on the socio-political and historical context of the discourse on Malian transnational relations this thesis explores. It introduces intersections and transformations of social hierarchies in Malian-diasporic society, including gender, religion, ethnicity, and class. In addition, this chapter outlines the central national political conflicts that evolved around the conflict with Northern separatist groups, the coup d'état in March 2012, and the governance of the Malian president, Ibrahima Bou-bacar Keita (IBK).⁸ And as a third field of contestation, this part outlines conflicts around Malian transnational relations, most prominently the international interventions that have been taking place in Mali since January 2013. The chapter closes with the observation that these socio-political contestations led to important threats to and needs for re-articulating postcolonial Malian-diasporic identities and belongings and identifies online media as an increasingly important site for articulating these debates.

2.1 A Mobile History of Malian-Diasporic Society

This subchapter describes the development of Malian-diasporic society, starting from the medieval empires on today's Malian territory as a connective history. Therefore, it refers to a mobility perspective. As I have mentioned in the introduction, mobility studies encourage such a perspective since they see societies as constructed through complex movements. For the Malian-diasporic context, such a mobility perspective is additionally important for three reasons. First, mobility and connectivity have been important elements in Malian history, for instance, because of the connectedness via the Saharan trade networks. Secondly, as we will see below, mobility still is an important part of Malian society, with many persons living

⁸ Although IBK was ousted in August 2020, the material in my thesis precedes this coup d'état and thus still treats IBK as the ruling Malian president. The same goes for other political elites that have still been in power until mid-2019 such as, for instance, Donald Trump.

outside of Mali, but also with internal migration being an important aspect of many household and individual livelihood strategies – or of ways of living and fulfilling personal aspirations. Thirdly, Malian-diasporic movements unveil governing practices or political issues that also relate to state sovereignty (G. Mann, 2015, p. 7f; Whitehouse & Strazzari, 2015, p. 216). For instance, we can see this in current movements of NGOs in the Malian Sahel that contrast with the static and immobile activities of the Malian state as Gregory Mann writes elaborately:

Whatever 'government' is on these roads, it is stationary, present at the border crossings between administrative districts, absent for long stretches, immobile. (...) It's the NGOs that are on the move. They are visible, powerful, and appear to be unstoppable. (...) It might not be clear who is sovereign, but the Land Cruiser is the king of the road. (G. Mann, 2015, p. 166).

And we can equally see this in hybrid governance models and the negotiation and questioning of state borders that connect the Malian state to Tuareg rebels, jihadist groups, and smuggling and trafficking networks (Whitehouse & Strazzari, 2015, pp. 217–222).

Another reason that Mann mentions in favour of a mobile perspective on Malian history is that this focus on complex Sahelian connections allows us to go beyond the colonial – post-colonial divide (G. Mann, 2015, p. 2f). I admit that this is an interesting attempt, which is especially relevant for overcoming the Eurocentrism entailed in a focus on the colonial era and its persistencies. In the current thesis, however, exactly the persistence of postcolonial relations is one core research interest. For that reason, I see it fit as to still structure the following overview of Malian history along the lines of pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial while at the same time, giving ample space to the issue of migration and translocal or transnational connections that work as an additional structuring element.

2.1.1 Pre-Colonial "Mali": Multiple Movements, Multiple States

Pi  re Ciss   and Idrissa Doumbia describe the history of Malian society as a history of individual and collective movements, as the territory of current Mali has been a space for immigration, emigration, and transit since the 4th century (P. Ciss   & Doumbia, 2012, p. 3).⁹ A number of reasons produced movement from that time on.

⁹ Sieveking and Fauser, on the other hand, date Malian migration history back to the 9th century (Sieveking & Fauser, 2009, p. 83).

Many groups have been moving for economic reasons (Sieveking & Fauser, 2009, p. 25). This resulted from migration being a livelihood strategy, i.e. a way for populations to cope with environmental changes like recurrent dry seasons or more severe events like droughts and included the movement of individuals as, for instance, hunters or warriors, as well as the movement of whole families in search of possibilities for economic activities (P. Cissé & Doumbia, 2012, p. 3). In this context, the strategic position between the Sahara and coastal areas further encouraged movements of various trading goods through the trans-Saharan trade. The Soninke, for instance, maintained regional trade networks due to their strategic position between the Sahara and the Southern forests and traded salt and acacia gum for kola nuts and cloth (Whitehouse, 2012a, p. 2f). The most prominent trading dispositive in pre-colonial times, however, is transnational slave trade. It developed inside the continent from the 15th century on as an Islamic market for slaves in West Africa, before it transformed into the transatlantic slave trade. When it was abolished in 1807-15, this thus also led to disruptions of migration patterns (Sieveking & Fauser, 2009, p. 26,83).

Another important reason for pre-colonial movements was religion. On the one hand, this entailed movements for missionary motives that also lead to the construction of cities. On the other hand, religious mobility also was a consequence of jihad and related attempts at religious expansion between the 16th and 19th century (Sieveking & Fauser, 2009, p. 25f).

A third reason for movements in pre-colonial times were socio-political instabilities but also possibilities. On the one hand, the now-Malian territory saw a succession of a range of empires and kingdoms, including the Empire of Ghana (5th century), the Empire of Mali (1230/35-1255), the Songhai Empire (15th and 16th century), the Kingdom of Segou and the Kingdom of Macina. The succession of those empires often implied wars that displaced the population. But once in place, these empires also founded important cities that in turn attracted many people (Baudais, 2015, pp. 52–64; Merabet & Gendreau, 2007, p. 11; Sieveking & Fauser, 2009, p. 83).

In this context, movements on the pre-colonial Malian territory are related to governance to an extent that Baudais emphasises the space itself being successively constructed through economic, political, cultural, and religious exchange (Baudais, 2015, p. 86). Within the empires that emerged through these exchanges, she observes the formation of multiple state structures (Baudais, 2015, p. 39). We can see these structures as temporally fixed entities, but also entities that imaginatively become mobile through time. These pre-colonial structures persist in cultural, economic, and political terms up until current post-colonial times such as in

the importance of cities like Djenne or Timbuktu, in the continuing importance of Transsaharan trade, or in the importance of historical figures like Sundjata Keita for the collective memory of Malian society (Baudais, 2015, p. 48). In that vein, Baudais seeks to show that the Malian state was not a colonial invention and also that colonialism did not eradicate all pre-colonial structures (Baudais, 2015, p. 47). It did, however, present a severe rupture, restructuring governing as well as socially constitutive mobility practices.

2.1.2 Colonial Rule on Malian Territory: Regulating Society Versus Breaking the System

As mentioned above, connectivity has already been an important element in pre-colonial societies on Malian territory. During that time, exchanges with Europe took place as well, between the 14th and the 19th century mainly through trade, exploratory and religious missions (Baudais, 2015, p. 87). From 1880 on, however, these exchanges drastically changed. In Europe, nationalism and competition between nation states were on the rise, which ultimately transformed exchanges with African societies into occupational aspirations that were realised through military means, a process described by Baudais as "extension of political and economic domination through military means" (Baudais, 2015, p. 87f, translation from French, S.H.).¹⁰

French colonisers thus occupied the territory of current Mali, a territory which was then called French Soudan and whose arbitrary frontiers were definitely delineated in the Berlin conference of 1884 (Baudais, 2015, p. 17,88; Sieveking & Fauser, 2009, p. 83). After this occupation, the French colonisers also inserted a ruling apparatus. On the institutional level, they deconstructed and reconstructed existing state structures (Baudais, 2015, p. 88). This is why Baudais argues that colonial rule presents an important rupture in Malian state structures (Baudais, 2015, p. 39).

¹⁰ The following, very brief history of colonisation and decolonisation on the Malian territory is by default selective. Also within Malian society, the interpretations of this period have often been contested. Thus, the meaning of the term "anticolonial" changed over time, from making demands on different forms of colonial rule in the 1940s, to a distancing from France in the 1960s. The latter involved an international scale with supporting the Algerian independence struggle and joining the non-alignment states, and forming regional political unions like the Ghana-Guinea-Mali union. On the national level, anticolonial practices included expelling French military bases, creating national currencies, and abolishing the chieftaincy system (G. Mann, 2015, p. 21). Towards the end of colonial rule itself, discussions were held on independence as being best captured by the Bambara terms *hòrònya* or *yèrèta*, with different implications for the relation to France, but also the post-colonial society (G. Mann, 2015, pp. 80, 85). And still at the beginning of the 2000s, the remembering of the colonial era was an issue of debate between the government and its citizens, but also between generations (De Jorio, 2006, p. 99f). Despite these difficulties in giving an overview of colonialism in Mali, the following section is valuable for the present thesis as it outlines how colonial power relations, im/mobilities, and socio-political relations in colonised Mali intersected.

On the society level, the colonial rule became effective in its relations to mobility. French colonisation has led to the territorialising of previously less space-bound, open, and mobile societies (Baudais, 2015, p. 88). However, this did not mean that they curbed all forms of movement. Rather, they used the regulation of movements to stabilise their colonial rule through three forms of dealing with movement: First, colonial rule promoted the movement of French Sudanese population as they made it easier by investing in the transportation infrastructure and granting a certain form of security; and as they made it attractive by fostering export agriculture (also with the building of ports and agricultural development schemes), investing in cities, and building up an extensive colonial administration which all provided potential jobs in rural and urban areas and thus promoted (seasonal) labour migration (Hummel et al., 2012, p. 37; Sieveking & Fauser, 2009, p. 27).

This possibility and attractiveness, however, also took forms of forced mobility, as, for instance, colonial subjects were pressured to move for work in order to pay colonial taxes – and here, the French tax system was a comparatively rigid one. In addition, people were recruited to work (as forced labourers) on plantations in coastal areas such as Senegal, Ghana, or Ivory Coast, in Central African mines, and on colonial construction projects like dam projects in the Malian *Office du Niger* or the *Congo Transrail* train tracks. Other colonial subjects were sent to exile, first as far as Guyana, later to Sahelian desert locations, also in combination with forced labour. And colonial subjects were recruited as soldiers to fight in the French army during World War I and II. Although involuntary created, these migration patterns created networks and routes that persist until today (G. Mann, 2015, p. 217f, 367f; Merabet & Gendreau, 2007, p. 12; Rodet & Tiquet, 2016, p. 363; Sieveking & Fauser, 2009, p. 27, 83; Whitehouse, 2012a, p. 21f). The fostering and forcing of physical mobility, however, also served the colonial administration to prevent the mobilisation of young men against the colonial administration and thereby further stabilised to colonial governance (Rodet & Tiquet, 2016, p. 356).

In contrast to this fostering or even forcing of movements, the French colonisers strictly regulated or even limited other mobilities through legal means and everyday requirements such as identity cards, travel permits, health certificates, also with the help of local authorities. This applied to, for instance, female and nomadic migration or the migration of Muslim scholars, forms of movement the colonial rulers saw as potentially destabilising social order, i.e. the social order they saw as adequate for their (colonialised) society (Boilley, 1999, p. 262f; Dramé, 2017; G. Mann, 2015, pp. 123–129; Rodet, 2015, p. 51). Colonial subjects, however, found ways to circumvent these prerequisites right from the start as they, for

instance, traded the required documents or forged them, or obtained fake documents from other African states. These resistant practices also attained to the construction of citizenship in the (post-)colonial era, in terms of legal questions, but also in terms of political belonging (G. Mann, 2015, pp. 123–158).

In addition to this differential im/mobilising of the colonised population, the colonial administration also changed their approach towards international West African migration (especially to France) throughout time, from a disinterest or a thinking that migration from West Africa was not an important phenomenon, to a mistrust due to health and political reasons, to an encouragement due to economic reasons, to a dismissal due to economic and political reasons (G. Mann, 2015, pp. 123–135).

The thus constructed colonial regulation of French Soudan, however, did not happen without contradictions. In its whole logic, the contradiction between a democratic France and its authoritarian rule in the colonies became increasingly visible – as did (to a lesser extent) the contradiction between the French republican ideals and its colonising ideologies of superiority and submission (Baudais, 2015, p. 137). Such contradictions became more visible with the increasing level of Western education among colonised subjects (Baudais, 2015, p. 137), but they also led to anti-colonial movements in France and ultimately to an slight opening of the colonial structures to include, for instance, the political representation of French Soudanese subjects.

The actual deconstruction of colonial rule integrated a dismantling of colonial structures on the one hand, and the promotion of Malian and (West) African structures and actors on the other hand. One colonial structure that saw its dissolution was the *indigénat*, a central colonial ruling instrument that classified colonial subjects as non-citizens and opened the possibility for rather arbitrary punishment through the French commandants, combining "a set of sanctions and a colonial state of being" (G. Mann, 2015, p. 44). After several opening reforms, this system was abolished by the Constituent Assembly in 1946 (G. Mann, 2015, pp. 42–55).¹¹ In addition, the Malian party US-RDA¹² sought to re-structure and democratise (through elections) the colonial chieftaincy system as they argued that the customary system had been infiltrated and modified by the colonial administration (G. Mann, 2015, pp. 65–75).

¹¹ Whereas Mann argues that one could see the personified culture of rule that was practiced within the *indigénat*, as persisting in non-democratic, despotic, corrupt post-colonial national governing practices, he also points to the differences in those systems with one aiming at excluding, and the other one at (forcefully) including the governed subjects into national citizenship (G. Mann, 2015, p. 55f).

¹² Union Soudanaise – Rassemblement Démocratique Africain / Sudanese Union – Democratic African Assembly

Those structures, however, were not deconstructed without socio-political and sometimes even violent tensions, as especially the commandants and the colonially employed chiefs were not eager to lose their power (G. Mann, 2015, pp. 65–75). In addition, still in the late 1950s, the colonial administration founded the French Sahelian transnational economic entity OCRS¹³ which tied nomadic populations of today's Northern Mali to the French metropolis and made the later acceptance of the independent (Southern!) Malian government even more difficult as it already was due to ethnic conflicts (G. Mann, 2015, p. 168).¹⁴ In addition, the need to still integrate the Northern and Southern part of today's Mali was one reason why the US-RDA officials pledged for accepting the constitution of the 5th French Republic in an equally contested referendum which ultimately postponed French Sudanese independence and just granted them more autonomy within a Community of States (G. Mann, 2015, pp. 78–83). Unfortunately, in its reactions to those opposing the reforms, the US-RDA already showed some signs of authoritarian rule, a streak that would weaken its acceptance in the Malian population.

The other way of deconstructing colonial rule was the affirmation of African or French Sudanese actors and structures. This happened, for instance, through the 1951 legislation of the so-called "mothers' vote" that included a voting right for Sudanese mothers with two and more children and sought to increase the number of voters for West African activists among the colonised society (G. Mann, 2015, pp. 56–62). Another important measure was the Africanisation of the civil service, which was rather successful in today's Mali because of the high prevalence of French schooling. In addition, this measure also increased the power of the US-RDA (G. Mann, 2015, pp. 62–65). Thus, Malian politicians and activists have gradually deconstructed colonial structures in the state and reconstructed Malian or African ones.

In June 1960, French Sudan gained its independence from France and became the Mali Federation. Some months later, however, this Federation was already dissolved, as Senegal left the Federation for a variety of reasons, including rather different experiences with colonisation, different demographics, and different views on the post-colonial relationship with France. This shows that also on a regional level, the road to independence was a contested one. Thus, the Republic of Mali came into being on 22 September 1960 with Modibo Keita as

¹³ Organisation Commune des Régions Sahariennes / Communal Organisation of Sahara Regions

¹⁴ This also corresponds to the differential treatment of nomadic and sedentary populations by colonial authorities: For instance, they identified with nomads as equally living in an inhospitable environment. In addition, nomadic populations were disproportionately affected by (animal-based) taxes, but not by forced labour and military service (see e.g. Bernus, 1993, p. 242).

its first president through the simultaneous secession of Senegal and the declaration of the Republic by Modibo Keita (G. Mann, 2015, p. 77f,83f).

2.1.3 Post-Colonial Mali: Articulating Relations between Citizens and the State through Migration

Looking at Malian-diasporic history post-1960 through a mobility lens unveils how migration has been a way for citizens to express their relations to the state as well as a way for the Malian state to show its ideas and visions for the Malian society.

When the Republic of Mali became independent in 1960, Modibo Keita and the US-RDA pursued a rather particular way of post-colonial relations. This included a quite distinct separation from France and a fostering of national or Pan-African forces with the expulsion of French military forces, the substitution of the French administration, and the creation of a national currency (G. Mann, 2015, p. 85f).¹⁵ In addition, Mali pursued a socialist way, which was a very dominant topic in the first years of independence. During that time, the government opposed migration and rather propagated ideas of "staying home and building the nation" that were based on sedentary views of society and also wanted to prevent the emigration of e.g. students who were critical for the regime (G. Mann, 2015, pp. 74, 135–145). Despite this, or because of this, however, many Malian citizens chose to emigrate, also as a way of articulating their opposition to the (increasingly authoritarian) post-colonial government (Siméant, 2014, p. 23f).

After some years of socialist governance, Modibo Keita was ousted through a military coup led by Moussa Traoré in 1968. While many attribute this to the increasing unpopularity of the US-RDA, Baudais mentions that also the combination of a hasty decolonisation with the internalisation of Eurocentric normative ideas of a state jeopardised the institutionalisation of the post-colonial nation state (Baudais, 2015, p. 187f). Moussa Traoré installed a one-party rule and governed with increasingly authoritarian and dictatorial measures. This rule *inter alia* manifested in movement practices, as during the 1970s droughts, for instance, Sahelian populations fled into Niger, also because of fightings with the Southern government in 1963-1964 (G. Mann, 2015, p. 168f). On the other hand, Moussa Traoré had installed prisons in the

¹⁵ However, the whole process and promise of gaining independence has not been completely fulfilled, as the many voices show that claim that Malian or African independence is incomplete or even just covering up the real persisting dependencies.

Sahel to which he transferred political prisoners, including the former political elites (G. Mann, 2015, p. 214ff).

After increasing economic difficulties and civil unrests and uprisings in 1991,¹⁶ a crucial but still contested time in Malian history (see Section 2.3.4 on the mobilisation of Malian civil society), Mali experienced a democratisation process that manifested in a liberalisation and multiplicity of political structures and was guided by the transitional president Amadou Toumani Touré (ATT) and the 1992-elected Alpha Oumar Konaré (Baudais, 2015, p. 189, also 190–222). On the institutional level, this transformation was articulated in the comparatively inclusive National Conference of 1991, the formulation of the Malian constitution in 1992, and in reforms such as (internationally induced) good governance and decentralisation with the latter also being an attempt to deal with the Tuareg rebellions (Baudais, 2015, pp. 253f, 261f, 356, 524, see also 223–253). However, remains of the past authoritarian governing styles were still at work, as were influences from colonial and pre-colonial eras as well as from international (financial) institutions that all came together and were appropriated in the institutionalisation and everyday enactment of the Malian state (Baudais, 2015, pp. 190, 260, 355ff, see also 222–253).

In this phase as well, migration has become a way of observing relations between the state and its citizens. At first, migration plays a very important role in Malian society, with estimations ranging from ten to more than thirty percent of Mali's population living abroad (Trauner & Deimel, 2013, p. 22; Whitehouse, 2012a, p. 4). Migration is significant in economic terms with seasonal wage labour, remittances and home-town-associations; in social terms with the sustaining of translocal and transnational (family) networks; and in cultural terms with it functioning as a rite of passage (Bocquier & Diarra, 1999, p. 64f; Konaté & Gonin, 2016, pp. 11–14; Trauner & Deimel, 2013, p. 23). In this phase, however, the Malian state has succeeded in incorporating migration. On the one hand, it institutionalised relations with the Malian diaspora through ministries like the *Ministère des Maliens de l'Extérieur et de l'Intégration Africaine* (Ministry of Malians Abroad and African Integration). On the other hand, it recognised the political capital that comes with the importance of migration. Here, the issue of expulsion and repatriation from Europe, but also from other African states, has been a crucial issue (G. Mann, 2015, p. 138ff). Therefore, the post-1991 state has been supporting migration, also and especially in opposition to external attempts to curb it. Following these politics, Mali has become not just an emigration country, but also an immigration and transit country in the

¹⁶ Baudais also sees this uprising for democracy as a heritage of the colonial era when citizens learned how to circumvent authoritarian government structures (Baudais, 2015, p. 523f).

West African migration system (Dünnwald, 2016, p. 129f; Idrissa, 2019, p. 28; Trauner & Deimel, 2013, pp. 23–28).

A last issue I want to address as part of post-colonial Malian history is the 2012 crisis. I will still come back to this in Subchapter 2.3, but just to complete this overview: In 2012 the Malian state – previously perceived as an international donor darling and democratic example – showed its weaknesses. After increasing fightings with Northern rebels in the beginning of 2012, a military coup by army officials ousted president Amadou Toumani Touré on 22 March 2012. Northern rebel groups used the following governing void and paired up with Islamist groups to proclaim an independent state of "Azawad" on 6 April 2012. In the following, the Islamist groups, however, took over control of the offensive and brought increasing parts of Malian territory under their control. This led to a range of international interventions on the Malian territory from January 2013 on, interventions that persist until today. In terms of movements, this has produced big waves of international and internal displacements. In addition, the movements of Islamist groups, rebels, and criminal networks (see above) also show a central characteristic of contemporary Malian state, namely that it currently does not have control over the whole territory of the Republic of Mali (Baudais, 2015, p. 511). Before we engage deeper into these political conflicts, however, I still want to use the next subchapter to give a brief overview of the heterogeneous Malian society as the population that is engaged in and affected by these conflicts.

2.2 Social Hierarchies in Malian Society and their Transformation

This chapter outlines social hierarchies at work in contemporary Malian society, including religion, gender and sexuality, location, ethnicity, age, and class. It shows that Mali is a heterogeneous society and thus prepares the intersectional perspectives I seek to analyse later on. In addition, it indicates processes of social change that affect those hierarchies and the positioning of individuals and social groups within Malian society.

Considering the Malian-diasporic orientation of this thesis and the mobile history of Malian-diasporic society outline above, it is difficult or even questionable to go back to this national container-like understanding of a society (also in opposition to Urry's societies beyond space, see Section 4.1.2). On the other hand, most of the topics and actors that will appear in the next chapters centre around or on the Malian nation. Therefore, it is important to understand crucial dimensions of social hierarchisation in Malian society, as a structuration that is at the

back of reporting on Malian transnational relations, but equally needs to be considered when interpreting the media infrastructure, the journalistic landscape, and the user interactions in online spaces. Of course, it would be desirable to explore those social hierarchies for the whole of Malian-diasporic society, thus also for all those other nations that Malian nationals live in. As the understanding reader will guess, however, this is an endeavour far too extensive for a chapter that functions as context information for further explorations and analyses.

In addition, I admit that such a singling out of social categorisations seems opposed to an intersectional approach. For reasons of understanding, simplicity and clarity, however, I want to detail these single categorisations first (while mentioning some mutual influences in passing), before I engage in their intersectional entanglements.

2.2.1 (Muslim) Religion: a Diverse and Contested, but Important Socio-Political Resource

In contrast to the current situation, Muslims were a minority in Malian society until the 1940s. There have been some Sufi lineages that made places like Djenné or Timbuktu important Muslim centres before, but most of the population only converted to Islam from the 1940s on (Schulz, 2012b, p. X, 2, 28). From the 1980s on, another wave of Muslim adherence gained momentum in Mali with the Islamic renewal movement, also due to funding from countries like Saudi Arabia, the construction of transcontinental networks and the increasing social and political importance of religious leaders and causes (Schulz, 2012b, p. x,2, 11f). In the last Malian census, about 95% of Malian society identified as Muslim, with only 2.4% affiliated to Christian, 2.0% to Animist, and less than 1% to further, or no religious communities (S. M. Traore et al., 2011, p. 74). But the importance of Muslim religious denomination goes further than these numbers suggest – and also is much more diverse and contested. I want to show this on the religious, the social, and the political level.

As indicated above, Islam in Mali is not a homogenous denomination as there are traditional Sufi lineages, those who had converted to Islam since the 1940s, and those who identify with the Islamic renewal movement. Especially the latter is often met with suspicions as its adherents preach and practice a more conservative form of Islam and are thus feared as a source for radicalisation (Schulz, 2012b, p. 6). This concern then is also used by politicians to counter the increasing political importance of members of the Islamic renewal movement (Schulz, 2012b, p. 11). But even within the Islamic renewal movement, some women, for instance,

criticise the increasing influence of Arabian funders on Malian society and politics (Schulz, 2012b, p. 163).

On the social level, Muslim religion works as an inclusive, identifying, but also contested issue. Especially the Islamic renewal movement, on the one hand, promotes the inclusion of marginalised groups like women – also through their national umbrella organisation UNAFEM¹⁷ – and lower social classes (Schulz, 2012b, pp. 2f, 111ff). On a broader social level, and in contrast to the diversity of the different denominations, scholars identify an increasing importance of a common Muslim identity (Siméant & Bergamaschi, 2017, p. 10). On the other hand, debates still persist over the question of how private or public religion should be, as exemplified by debates around the family law (Schulz, 2012b, p. 155, see also Section 2.4.2).

This also ties in with the various relations of Islam in its connection to Malian politics. Already during colonial times, the colonial administration has tried to use Islam as a way to gain alliances with compliant denominations, also by treating different denominations differently in terms of education, freedom of movement, and access to public discourse which, for instance, led to a rather loyal attitude of traditional Muslim groups (Schulz, 2012b, pp. 27–32). After independence, the regime of Modibo Keita mostly banned religion to the private sphere, a move that also strengthened opposition against the US-RDA (Schulz, 2012b, p. 32f). Under Moussa Traoré, Islam became more important on the political level again as he sought to exert control with institutionalising Islam in groups such as the Malian Association for the Unity and Progress of Islam (Association Malienne pour l'Unité et le Progrès de l'Islam, AMUPI) and by giving government posts to religious personae. On the other hand, Islam gained momentum under Traoré's reign as an alternative social network and source of identification (Schulz, 2012b, p. 33ff). This heritage then also informed the political engagement with religion post-1991, as political leaders including the presidents Konaré, ATT, and IBK tried to navigate between the laic Malian constitution and the use of religion as political resource. The latter became increasingly important during the past few years as religious leaders and associations became more engaged in politics and provided an oppositional forum (Schulz, 2012b, p. 33ff, for more, see Subchapter 2.3). But interdependencies also exist as both political and religious leaders depend on each others' resources while publicly distancing themselves from each other (Schulz, 2012b, pp. 33ff, 175; Siméant & Bergamaschi, 2017, p. 10f).

¹⁷ Union Nationale des Femmes Musulmanes au Mali / National Union of Muslim Women in Mali

Due to these different levels, Dorothea Schulz, for instance, concludes that Islam has a great importance for Malian society as it combines prominent issues and leaders, funding, an alternative to political voids in legitimacy, and more broadly a resource in times of socio-economic and moral transformations (Schulz, 2012b, p. 236). One of these transformations can be seen in the gender relations in Malian society.

2.2.2 Gender Relations, Sexuality, and Neoliberal Transformation: Changing Roles, Changing Relations?

The first facet of gender relations that often comes up in relation to Malian society is the discrimination against women. For instance, the Global Gender Gap Report 2020 points out that Malian women (still) lack equal access to economic opportunities, education, and political participation, ranking the country on place 139 out of 153 (World Economic Forum, 2019, p. 237). Moreover, women are discriminated against when it comes to their access to public discourse, their representation, and voicing their concerns, as Rosa de Jorio shows for the example of a conference on women's issues in Bamako (De Jorio, 2009, pp. 97–103). On the other hand, women in Mali also have seen their autonomy and public participation increasing through, for instance, heterogeneous representations of their role in Malian society (De Jorio, 2016), female migration (Hertrich & Lesclingand, 2013), the emergence of female radio preachers (Schulz, 2012b, p. 15f, 2012a) and audience relationalities (Heywood & Ivey, 2021), or simply the increasing generation of income by women (see below). These developments, however, also lead to contestations about the meaning of femininity and urge women to situate themselves between their increasing powers and social pressures to adhere to images of propriety and piety (Schulz, 2012b, p. 71). Therefore, Schulz warns not to portray women as either oppressed by patriarchy or as having full agency, but to acknowledge their embeddedness in these dialectical relations and contexts (Schulz, 2012b, p. 72).

These differing perspectives on the position of women in Malian society also reflect the ambivalent role of feminism in Malian society. On the one hand, Kawélé Togola (2019, p. 135f) argues that the rise of gender equality in Mali is hindered, for instance, by a (post)colonial marginalisation of female education and by social (traditional, religious) resistances to feminist emancipation. In addition, Bintou Sanankoua (2004) identifies the same factors as hindering the increasing participation of female politicians in Malian institutions, despite the important political engagement of women(s organisations) in the anti-colonial fight and the 1991 movement for democracy. On the other hand, other authors and

news reports point to instances of social change that show an increasing emancipation of Malian women in terms of culture (Jansen et al., 2018), education and economic activities (Benbere, 2020; MPFEF, 2017; Semin, 2007), and the fight for women's rights (Budoo, 2018; Burrill, 2020; L'Indicateur du Renouveau, 2020). These mobilisations that, however, often do not explicitly label themselves as "feminist" or even distance themselves from "Western feminism" (De Jorio, 2009, p. 105), tie in with Amina Mama's (2020b, p. 363f) practice-oriented approach to African feminism that puts the improvement of women's lives before ideological struggles about the often-Eurocentric nature of feminism.

Moreover, these dilemmas and contestations are a sign and consequence of the neoliberal transformations that have affected gender relations in Malian society and related them to broader debates on morality and social order (De Jorio, 2009, p. 95; Schulz, 2012b, p. 13f). On a practical level, these transformations inform the division of tasks among men and women in the household. Schulz describes that men are mostly responsible for the outside world like work and politics and the women for the household and family tasks. However, she challenges the Western assumption that the women's tasks are confined to the private realm since the household activities mainly take place in the public courtyard and many (especially lower-class) women have own income opportunities like growing and selling food. In addition, this division of tasks changes with global economic transformations as, for instance, more women have to work outside of the household. On the household level, this also affects the patriarchal division of gendered and aged authority, influencing, for instance, decisions on the education of children, or the performance of household tasks. But Schulz also sees ways of agency for women as they get older and also a bargaining power as women exchange their compliance for the husband's moral obligation to support and protect them (Schulz, 2012b, pp. 51–55). Thus, on a third level, the aforementioned transformations are seen to threaten systems of mutual obligations and solidarity that have been in place between men and women despite their unequal positions (Schulz, 2012b, p. 80).

In addition to implications for femininity outlined above, these transformations also affect ideas of masculinity in Malian society. Schulz and Diallo have shown that between men, competing and heterogeneous ideas of masculinity emerged. They included assertions of Muslim masculinity in reaction to Islamic renewal and the introduction of the Sharia in Central and Northern Mali as well as assertions of Western educated masculinities in the capital Bamako. These ideas differentiate men along the lines of religion, age and generation, education, and access to political support (Schulz & Diallo, 2016, pp. 238, 244). In addition, Susanne Schultz (2020) argues that young Malian men need to renegotiate hegemonic masculinities in times of

crises such as in post-deportation situations. In relation to women, the loss of power that comes with the increasing financial contributions of women challenges traditional ideas of masculinity (Schulz, 2012b, pp. 53f, 58f). In addition, such heterogeneous masculinities are further complicated by traditional imaginations of male Mande (warrior) heroes as the ideal embodiment of political powerful actors (Whitehouse, 2012b, p. 96ff), and by the conflict-related promotion of militarised ideals of masculinity as "armed groups offer opportunities to fulfil expectations linked to the male identity" (Lackenbauer et al., 2015, p. 67). These challenges and contradictions then also produce a number of fears, as many men are afraid of losing authority and control in their relationships. In this context, constructions of Malian masculinity often produce a counter-image of immoral educated women that are only in relationships for material gains and are prepared to engage in promiscuous behaviour because of this (Schulz, 2012b, pp. 57, 66–69). This also shows the erosion – or the fear thereof – of the mutual obligations mentioned above. As these transformations are not confined to the position of men but also include, for instance, the position of fathers in the household, Schulz argues that neoliberal transformations not only affect gender relations but patriarchy as a whole (Schulz, 2012b, p. 69f).

In addition to gender equality and gendered identifications, sexuality is another important, changing structuration in Malian society. Research in this vein has mostly investigated the attitudes of the Malian state and civil society towards homosexuality.¹⁸ Following Cristophe Broqua's argument that writing about homosexuality in African states is a challenging endeavour that is (especially for Western researchers) in danger of reproducing Western-centric and modernist ideas of sexual rights (Broqua, 2012, p. 122), the following should not reproduce such a discourse but rather give a brief overview of the ambivalent workings of sexuality as social categorisation in Malian society. In this line of thought, Broqua identifies a context-specific manifestation of homosexuality in Malian society or, more specifically, in Bamako, that adapts homosexual relations to local sexual norms, including transactional relations, only implicit display or debate of intimate relations,¹⁹ and the combination of homosexual relations with heteronormative, sexually reproductive marital relations (Broqua, 2012, p. 126ff).

Despite this adaptation to social norms, non-heteronormative sexuality is a fairly sensitive issue in Malian society. Although homosexuality has never been criminalised in Mali, homo-

¹⁸ In the research context of Bamako, Broqua has described a diversification of homosexuality that included gendered and generational structurations as well as egalitarian homosexual relations (Broqua, 2012, pp. 117ff, 124f).

¹⁹ Mobilisations "for" homosexuality thus mostly occur in the name of HIV/AIDS-prevention in Mali (see Broqua, 2012, pp. 128–131).

sexual practices are neither legally protected nor socially accepted (Broqua, 2012, p. 121; Mendos et al., 2020, p. 325). Accordingly, the most recent Afrobarometer²⁰ survey unveils a predominance of negative attitudes towards homosexuality in Malian society, as 98.1% of the respondents state to strongly or somewhat dislike the idea of having homosexual persons as their neighbours. In addition, the number of the respondents who say that they would somewhat or strongly like to have homosexual persons as neighbours decreased from 6.4% to 3.9% between the 2014/2015 and the 2017/2018 survey (Afrobarometer, 2018a). Related fears of being "uncovered" as homosexual even lead to homosexual persons themselves criticising explicit expressions of homosexuality by others (Broqua, 2012, p. 121).

However, the percentage of Afrobarometer respondents who voice negative attitudes towards potential homosexual neighbours also diminished in comparison to the previous 2014/2015 survey, in which 90% gave this answer. In addition, the percentage of those respondents, who state that they "would not care" if they had homosexual neighbours, rose from 3.5% in 2014/2015 to 6.7% in 2017/2018 (Afrobarometer, 2018a). With about 11% stating that they would not care, somewhat, or strongly like to have homosexual persons as neighbours, Malian society thus occupies a position in the African middle between Cap Verde with 80% and Gambia and Uganda with 3% of respondents voicing such tolerance toward people of different sexual orientation (Howard, 2020, p. 12). This range thus reflects the diverse contestations over gendered and sexual rights in diverse African states that are closely entangled with context-dependent ideas on morality and political sovereignty (Boyd & Burrill, 2020, pp. 4, 7).

Accordingly, this context-sensitivity of sexuality as social location in Malian society is also entangled with questions on postcolonial relations. On the one hand, heteronormative legislations and denigrating social attitudes in Mali – and many other African states – have been introduced by colonising actors and institutions such as with the French Penal Code (Broqua, 2012, p. 122f; Niang et al., 2020, p. 156).²¹ This is further complicated by the fact that, later on, many (gender-related) human rights projects in post-colonial states in the Global South

²⁰ "Afrobarometer is a pan-African, non-partisan research network that conducts public attitude surveys on democracy, governance, economic conditions, and related issues in African countries. Six rounds of surveys were conducted in up to 37 countries between 1999 and 2015, and Round 7 surveys were conducted in 2016/2018. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice with nationally representative samples. The Afrobarometer team in Mali, led by Groupe de Recherche en Economie Appliquée et Théorique (GREAT), interviewed 1,200 adult Malians in February 2017. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-3 percentage points at a 95% confidence level. Previous surveys were conducted in Mali in 2001, 2002, 2005, 2008, 2012 (did not include the regions of Tombouctou, Gao, and Kidal due to the security situation), 2013, and 2014." (Haidara & Isbell, 2018, p. 1)

²¹ As Cheikh Ibrahima Niang and colleagues show for the case of Senegal, colonising actors have thereby often oppressed traditional practices of sexual fluidity (Niang et al., 2020, p. 151).

had started as colonial projects of controlling colonised societies under the guise of protecting colonised women from colonised men and thereby legitimising imperial expansion (Boyd & Burrill, 2020, p. 7f). As a consequence, attitudes towards homosexuality are closely related to external interventions, as international initiatives for the rights of sexual minority are often perceived as neo-colonial import of foreign values (Broqua, 2012, p. 123f; Niang et al., 2020, p. 164f). In light of these historical trajectories, Broqua argues that "the conceptualisation and treatment of homosexuality in Africa often appears as an avatar of the relations to the former colonising countries" (Broqua, 2012, p. 123, translation from French, S.H.).

This further underlines the observation that questions of gender and sexuality are intricately linked with other social positionalities along lines such as location, religion, ethnicity, neoliberalism, and postcoloniality (De Jorio, 2009, pp. 103–106; K. Togola, 2019, pp. 148–154). However, as another important category constitutive of the patriarchal system mentioned above, we will first turn to the issue of age.

2.2.3 Age: Generational Relations Transformed and Contested

Generally, Malian society shows a classical pyramid age structure with 48,6% of its population being younger than 15 years (INSTAT, 2019, p. 2). In terms of patriarchal hierarchies, Helené Lackenbauer and colleagues (2015, pp. 23, 31) identify gerontocracy as a crucial form of stratification in Malian society that they see as even preceeding gendered hierarchies. Therefore, older women, for instance, can have power over younger men in the household and – in contrast to younger women – are appreciated as actors for political mobilisation in parties and movements. In opposition to this gerontocratic structure however, relations between different age groups or generations have been subject to severe transformations due to economic changes. On the one hand, the elder generation sees its authorities weakened as the heads of the household often cannot provide financially for their families as before (see above) and, at the same time, younger generations experience more autonomy due to national and international migration, increasing education, and their contributions through wage labour (Schulz, 2012b, pp. 37, 69f). On the other hand, however, the younger generation is often disadvantaged in economic terms, as they are, for instance, disproportionally affected by unemployment (INSTAT, 2019, p. 42). This, in turn, means that they often have problems as well to contribute to the household income and take care of the elder generation, an obligation they are expected to fulfil (Schulz, 2012b, p. 64).

This impossibility to provide for each other and to fulfil traditional roles in Malian society also creates conflicts between generations. Such conflicts, however, are not confined to the economic sphere. Schulz, for instance, describes how generations negotiate on universalist vs. local interpretation of Islam (Schulz, 2012b, p. 31) and – as mentioned above together with Diallo – on the interpretation of Muslim masculinity and the power of elder generations in the face of Islamic reforms (Schulz & Diallo, 2016, p. 233ff). Moreover, Johanna Siméant outlines how the younger generation is often portrayed as irresponsible and uncontrollable when it comes to political protests (Siméant, 2014, p. 59). But she also shows the ambivalence in these representations: As they originate from the 1991 youth riots against the Moussa Traoré regime, they evoke associations of heroism and liberation as well as of violence and immaturity (Siméant, 2014, p. 106). This shows that the public and private place of younger people are an issue of contestation based in Malian history but an issue that is additionally influenced by external factors like the neoliberal transformations.

2.2.4 Malian "Couches Sociales" Related to Income, Living Conditions, and Education

Another social categorisation that is severely affected by neoliberal transformations is that of classes. The term itself, however, is not an uncontested one. In Malian history, for instance, the first government under Modibo Keita refused the term and rather spoke about "couches sociales" ("social layers") – and ultimately used the discourse to justify one-party-rule arguing that the party would replace the proletariat in the struggle for social justice (G. Mann, 2015, p. 36ff). But also in academic circles, the use of "class" for African societies is debated as, for instance, Mama emphasises the connections between different classes through extended family relations and their working outside of capitalist structures (Amina Mama in African Feminist Forum, 2017, sec. 14:12-15:26). One system of social stratification that could be interpreted as classed categorisation in Malian-diasporic society, is the system of domestic slavery. After the French colonial administration had prohibited forms of domestic slavery in 1905, social differentiations and (gendered) relationalities between freeborn, politico-economically influential noblemen, and slaves have been persisting – albeit in often transformed ways – on discursive, plural institutional, and performative levels, with the most prominent example being the master-slave relations between the Tuareg and Bellah ethnic groups (Moseley & Hoffman, 2017, p. 8; Pelckmans, 2015, pp. 181–184; Pelckmans &

Hardung, 2015, pp. 15–20).²² In the present thesis, however, I use the term "class" to refer to the embeddedness of individuals in national and international socioeconomic systems, including their relation to socioeconomic vulnerabilities and economic opportunities.

In the (urban Southern) Malian context, Schulz, for instance, differentiates the socioeconomic position of households as a combined product of their income sources (formal and/or informal), housing and infrastructure, and their possibility to participate in social networks of exchange (Schulz, 2012b, p. 49ff). As an example, she introduces three groups of women: (1) successful international businesswomen; (2) local traders who have, for instance, stands at night markets which need some investment but also promise a regular income; (3) and women who engage in small trade, shift activities, and depend on loans for (re-)starting their business (Schulz, 2012b, p. 60ff). In terms of income generation, we can see that people in Malian households are mostly self-employed or helping in family businesses, which rather points to informal sources of income. However, there is a big disparity between Bamako and the rest of the country, and between bigger cities and rural areas when it comes to the availability of formal employed work (INSTAT, 2019, p. 46f). This pattern, then, already points to interrelations between class and location.

Another issue that I want to include in this class categorisation is that of education. Malian society has seen diverse influences on education from Arab countries like Egypt and Saudi Arabia, from Western NGOs, and from local Muslim conventions (Schulz, 2012b, p. 123). This also manifests in the diverse forms of education that co-exist in Mali, including public schools, private schools, community schools, and *medersas*, i.e. local forms of qur'anic schools (INSTAT, 2018, p. 25). Who gets to go to which school, however, also is a severe income issue as, for instance, *medersas* are often chosen by families with lower income. In the long term, the form of education influences later job opportunities and economic trajectories. In addition, education is one ground of identification in terms of masculinities that sometimes contrastingly constructs, for instance, young men with Western education against young men with Islamic education (Schulz & Diallo, 2016, p. 238ff). However, we see big inequalities within Malian society as over 60% (61,1%) of people older than 6 years have no form of (Western) education and 66,2% of those of 15 years and older also cannot read and write (INSTAT, 2019, pp. 2, 10). Here again, differences are structured along location in

²² Because it would go beyond the scope of this thesis, I cannot give a more detailed account of the issue of domestic slavery in Malian-diasporic society. I advise the interested reader to consult further literature in order to learn more about, for instance, gendered dimensions of domestic slavery (Pelckmans, 2015), its impact on (inter)national migration (Pelckmans, 2012), or anti-slavery movements in Malian-diasporic society (Hahonou & Pelckmans, 2011; Pelckmans & Hardung, 2015).

terms of regions and rural/urban distinctions. In addition, also gender plays a role as women are more affected by illiteracy and lack of (higher) education than men (INSTAT, 2019, pp. 11, 24, 35). The former differentiation, i.e. the one based on locations points to our next social categorisation.

2.2.5 Location: Diversities and Diversification between Cities and Regions

As indicated above, the distinction between rural and urban areas in Mali is an important one with many implications. According to the Malian National Statistical Institute INSTAT, 26% of the population have been living in urban areas in 2019 (INSTAT, 2019, p. 2), meaning that 74% of the population live in rural environments. In this case, location has an important impact on the opportunities and chances the respective population has since it influences access to such basic needs as infrastructure (e.g. electricity, see INSTAT, 2019, p. 51), education and literacy (INSTAT, 2019, pp. 11, 31f), and income opportunities, especially differentiated between agriculture and opportunities for formal employment (INSTAT, 2019, p. 46f).

Another factor where location comes in is that of the regions. Mali has had eight regions, namely Kayes, Koulikoro, Sikasso, Segou, Mopti, Timbuktu, Gao, Kidal, and Bamako. Since a territorial reform in 2015, following the post-2012 peace process, the Northern regions of Taoudenit and Menaka have been added to this list. The different regions as well have very different characteristics, as, for instance, the regions in the North of Mali are located in the Sahel, have a much more arid climate and thus also support different population densities, occupations, and lifestyles – like nomadism – than the more humid regions in the South of Mali. In addition, many regions are also affiliated to certain ethnic groups, an issue we will turn to in the next section. And they are differentiated along social relations like the persistence of slavery in Northern regions (Moseley & Hoffman, 2017, p. 7f). However, here as well, we can identify different opportunities as with different access to electricity (INSTAT, 2019, p. 51) or health care (INSTAT, 2018, p. 13).

The most important distinction when it comes to regions is probably the one between the North and South of Mali. Whereas Moseley and Hoffman indicate that people in Mali have different understandings of which areas these designations actually encompass (Moseley &

Hoffman, 2017, p. 7),²³ it is clear that this differentiation has been extremely politicised since the separatist attempt and Islamist occupation of Northern territories in 2012 (see Subchapter 2.3). The discourse on the North and South of Mali thus is closely linked to one on national unity. And this also is closely related to the question of ethnicity and ethnic relations.

2.2.6 Ethnicity: Malians United in Diversity?

On the Malian territory, a great number of ethnic groups live together. In the Afrobarometer survey of 2018, respondents mention belonging to 19 different ethnic groups with the most important being the Bambara (31,4%), the Fulani (12,0%), and the Dogon (9,0%) (Afrobarometer, 2018b).²⁴ Traditionally, the most important differentiations between these ethnic groups – apart from racialising somatising descriptions – are their predominant language, location and occupation. The Bozo, for instance, are said to live along the Niger and earn their living from fishing, the Dogon are portrayed as farmers in the Dogon area, and the Fulani as agro-pastoralists living across the Centre of Mali. The Bambara, Malinke, and Sarakole, who constitute the group of Mande speakers and are the biggest group, live as farmers in Southern Mali and have had most access to government positions (Moseley & Hoffman, 2017, p. 7f). In addition, some ethnic groups like the Tuareg, the Fulani, or the Songhay are especially known for their transnational occupational structures, be it through nomadic pastoralism and trade, or through transnational diasporic networks (see e.g. de Bruijn et al., 2016; Galtier, 2011).

An important issue that also informed the past several years' crisis is the differential treatment of these ethnic groups. This dates back to pre-colonial relations within and between empires and kingdoms. But it also has been sustained and institutionalised during the colonial occupation when, for instance, nomadic and sedentary groups were treated differently, as, for instance, nomadic populations were disproportionately affected by (animal-based) taxes, but not by forced labour and military service (Bernus, 1993, p. 242). On the other hand, the colonial and post-colonial demarcation of borders also disrupted the pre-colonial, racialised, dominant position of the Tuareg in the Sahel by making them minority ethnic groups in

²³ Whereas they designate the whole area as the North of Mali that has been controlled by armed groups between March 2012 and January 2013 (Moseley & Hoffman, 2017, p. 7), I include the regions (Taoudénit, Menaka,) Gao, Kidal, and Timbuktu into the term "North of Mali" but count the Mopti region as Centre of Mali, following the designations that emerged from my own material and also because I would argue that the population of the Mopti region still has different characteristics (climate, occupational opportunities) than the "Northern" regions. In all this, I want to acknowledge, however, that every demarcation like this necessarily is constructed.

²⁴ The other ethnic groups that respondents identify with through their "mother tongue" are Soninke/ Sarakolle (8,0%), Malinke (7,2%), Senufo (5,8%), Minianka (5,6%), Sonrhail (4,8%), Tamasheq/Tuareg (2,7%), Bozo (2,3%), Bobo (2,2%), Mossi (1,0%), Maure (1,0%), Arab (2,0%), Khassonke (0,9%), Bella (0,4%), Kakolo (0,2%), Haoussa (0,1%), Samogo (0,1%), others (3,3%), and no answer (0,1%) (Afrobarometer, 2018a).

diverse West African nation states (Bøås, 2015, p. 303f). Since the end of colonial administration, the treatment of especially Northern ethnic groups has become an important political issue that regularly led to rebellions and quests for autonomy or – as happened with the proclamation of an independent state of "Azawad" in 2012 – even separatism. Accordingly, almost one fourth of the respondents of the Afrobarometer survey state that they feel that their ethnic group is sometimes (10.2%), often (5.2%) or always (8.7%) discriminated against by the government (Afrobarometer, 2018b). Moreover, in the Centre of Mali, tensions between ethnic groups, especially between farmers and pastoralists have been rising again during the past several years. And some ethnic groups also resent the (political) domination by the Bambara group which is why, for instance, in linguistic terms, some even privilege the former colonial language French over Bambara as official Malian language (Skattum, 2008, p. 115).

The other side of ethnic relations in Mali is the narrative of their peaceful coexistence. For a long time, the concept of *senankuya*, or *cousinage* – humour-based relations between different (related) clans and ethnic groups – has been portrayed as the key to this coexistence. In addition, a strong identification with the Malian nation supports putting the nation first, before ethnicised issues. Thus, almost half of the Afrobarometer survey respondents argue that they only identify with their nation (42.7%), or that their national identification is more important than their ethnic one (4.7%). However, 10.9 % also say to only identify in ethnic terms or privilege their ethnic affiliations over their national ones (9.6%) (Afrobarometer, 2018b). Thus, national identification seems to be unifying but not embraced in that way by the whole population. Accordingly, Mirjam de Bruijn and Jonna Both as well have observed an increasing articulation of ethnic identities, especially among marginalised ethnic groups and with the advent of new media (Bruijn & Both, 2017, pp. 784f, 789f). We will come back to this issue in relation to the current situation in Subchapter 2.5.

2.2.7 Concluding Thoughts: Intersectional Malian Positionalities and their Transformation

The previous sections have shown that "the" Malian society is a very heterogeneous society with differentiations along lines of, for instance, ethnicity and – to a much lesser extent – religion. In addition to this diversity, these categorisations also indicate power relations and differentiated access to opportunities. As many of these categorisations constitute each other, the social positioning of individuals in Malian society emerges from an intersectional combination of religion, gender, class, ethnicity, location, and age.

However, these categorisations and social positionings also have seen important transformations and changes during the past several years and decades. Some of these, especially with regard to gender, class, and generational relations can be seen as resulting from a neoliberal transformation. Others, especially those relations among ethnic groups and regions, have become more prominent and politicised during the political crises of the past few years, an issue to which we will turn in the next subchapter.

2.3 Conflicts and Contestations on Malian National Politics

This subchapter presents political conflicts and contestations that evolve around and about Malian national politics. It will move towards ideas on the mobilised civil society in Mali, but first outline some political causes for this mobilisation. The most important among these are the conflict with armed groups in Northern Mali, the coup d'état of 2012, and the persistent crisis of governance. Although these three issues are closely related, I will try to describe them separately here for reasons of clarity.

2.3.1 Armed Conflicts in Northern Mali: Complexity and Politicisation

The conflict with Northern Mali has a painfully long history.²⁵ Tensions date back to the pre-colonial era when social groups from today's North and South of Mali were waging wars and engaged in master-slave relationships. As I have mentioned above, these tensions were partly even promoted during colonialism due to differential, racialising treatment as well as due to the institutionalisation of the division between the North and South of Mali through the OCRS (see Section 2.1.2). When Mali became independent under the rule of a Southern Malian government, relations became even tenser as this government was perceived as marginalising and patronising Northern populations. These tense relations erupted in a circle of armed Tuareg²⁶ rebellions, brutal military interventions, failing peace processes with attempts at decentralisation and integration, and recurring armed rebellions due to the breaking of said peace agreements – starting from the first post-colonial rebellion in 1963 and re-emerging in the early to mid-1990s, and late 2000s (Bergamaschi, 2013, p. 2; Bøås & Torheim, 2013, p.

²⁵ In contrast, I deal with this history in an almost painfully short way here. Due to restrictions of space, however, I cannot engage deeper into this crucial issue. I refer the interested reader to, for instance, Georg Klute (2013) or Baz Lecocq and colleagues (2013) for a more adequately sized engagement.

²⁶ Although Whitehouse and Strazzari (2015, p. 218) emphasise that the Tuareg population is in no way unified in these rebellions, it is the most commonly way to refer to them.

418; Hagberg & Körling, 2012, p. 115f; Kone, 2017, pp. 60f, 64; Lecocq et al., 2013, p. 344f; Whitehouse & Strazzari, 2015, p. 215f).

During the 2000s, these longstanding tensions transformed, as Islamist groups like AQMI (Al-Qaida Maghreb) became engaged and influential (Siméant & Bergamaschi, 2017, p. 7). The recently most crucial event in this history took place in the year 2012. After (Tuareg) fighters had returned from post-Qaddafi Libya in 2011 and supported another round of increased fighting and losses, the Malian army withdrew from Northern parts of the country and during negotiations for better working conditions, a military coup "happened" (see below). This led to a governing void in (Northern) Mali, which the rebel groups, and among them mostly the MNLA, AQMI, and Ansar Dine, used to pair up with Islamist groups and proclaim a considerable part of the North of Mali as an independent state of "Azawad"²⁷ on 6 April 2012. This secession was, however, never accepted internationally (Bøås & Torheim, 2013, p. 418f; Hagberg & Körling, 2012, p. 116f). After Islamist groups hijacked the Northern rebel fight and started to occupy even more parts of Malian territory, an international intervention stopped the process (see Subchapter 2.4). Since then, a diverse range of actors tried to solve or mediated the conflict through the international interventions and a peace process whose most visible sign was the Algiers Agreement, signed by some conflict parties in 2015 and contested ever since. Baudais outlines how the peace process has been undermined by the defeat of the Malian army in Kidal and the following losing of state presence, by the arming of rebel groups which ultimately led to a tribalisation of the crisis, by the insufficient signing parties of the Algiers Agreement, and by the continuing presence and strength of Islamist groups despite international financial and military support (Baudais, 2015, pp. 514–517). Thus, this painful history is an unfinished one and still awaiting its resolution.

One reason for the difficulties to describe this conflict adequately in this brief manner is its huge complexity. On the one hand, this complexity comes from the multitude of actors involved, including the above mentioned difficult construction of who even belongs to the "North" and "South," but also the multiple armed groups such as Tuareg rebels, Islamist groups, and criminal networks (Whitehouse & Strazzari, 2015, p. 220ff). Added to these have also been the international military interventions. On the other hand, this conflict is such a complex one because – as any conflict – it combines multiple interpretations, even within those fighting on the same side. Some see it as a result of longstanding discrimination of the North, some as an "ethnic issue", some (often Malian media) as a struggle of illegitimate "armed bandits" or (Malian government) "terrorists", some (French forces) as a plain manifes-

²⁷ On the history and construction of the term "Azawad", see, for instance, Isaline Bergamaschi (2013, p. 2).

tation of Islamist terrorism (Bergamaschi, 2013, p. 9; Bøås & Torheim, 2013, p. 422; Hagberg & Körling, 2012, p. 121; Whitehouse & Strazzari, 2015, p. 218f). Some interpret this conflict even as the beginning of Mali entering the league of "failed states" (Whitehouse, 2013, p. 38). These interpretations hint to the contested reasons for these tensions but they also influence attempted solutions.

With its longstanding history, complexity, and crucial influence in recent events, the conflict about Northern Mali has severe socio-political consequences. Whereas governance is seen as one possible reason for its persistence, the conflict has also repeatedly led to a decreasing trust in and legitimacy of the respective Malian government, for instance when the former president ATT failed to successfully negotiate with (and was even reproached for favouring) Northern rebels and especially to integrate fighters returning from Libya after 2011 (Whitehouse, 2013, p. 43). In addition, this conflict produced a social division within Malian society that also manifested in violence against Tuareg population during the liberation process in Northern regions (Bergamaschi, 2013, p. 7). And especially since 2012, the conflict has been increasingly politicised on the national level, but also internationalised (Bøås & Torheim, 2013, p. 418; Kone, 2017, p. 55). The coup d'état of 2012 can be seen as one reason for this development.

2.3.2 The "Accidental" Coup d'État of 2012: Saving Malian Democracy? Dividing Malian Society

As mentioned above, the conflict about Northern Mali is closely related to the coup d'état in 2012. At the beginning of this coup stood the protest of soldiers from the Malian army against their fighting conditions, their poor equipment, and their helplessness against their adversaries. On March 21, a group of them started a protest march from their barracks in Kati, approximately 15 kilometres from the capital Bamako. The destination of their march was the presidential palace where they had wanted to state their claims. But a series of events led to their invasion into the palace, president ATT fleeing from the palace, and further mutiny-related happenings. These events culminated in a group of soldiers appearing on national television in the early morning of 22 March with one of them, Captain Amadou Haya Sanogo, declaring that they had taken over the Malian state and had formed the National Committee for the Redressing of Democracy and the Restoration of the State CNRDRE (Comité national pour le redressement de la démocratie et la restauration de l'État) to govern it (Hagberg & Körling, 2012, p. 112).

This was a shock to many observers who had seen post-1991 Mali as an example for democracy, and who knew that elections were planned to take place weeks after the coup, elections in which the now chassed president did not even present himself as a candidate.²⁸ This timing is one reason why many see this coup as accidental. However, several reasons indeed had rendered not only the Malian army, but big parts of the Malian population increasingly unsatisfied with the performance of Malian democracy. On the institutional level, many bemoaned far-reaching practices of corruption, land extraction and a defunct justice system that prevented social change. In addition, ATT had sustained a governing style aimed at consensus that effectively silenced the opposition (Hagberg & Körling, 2012, p. 113ff; Siméant & Bergamaschi, 2017, p. 7; Whitehouse, 2013, p. 39ff). As mentioned above, ATT also received a lot of critique for his alleged favouring of Tuareg rebels in the conflict in Northern Mali (Whitehouse, 2013, p. 43). And on an international level, many accused the government of being too submissive to foreign rule, be it by Western powers or the then previously important funding power Libya (Whitehouse, 2013, p. 42). All this had lead to a deep mistrust of and dissatisfaction with the Malian government and democracy as a whole.

Therefore, one central strategy of the junta, of Sanogo, but also of (parts of) the media was to portray Sanogo as restoring Malian democracy (Whitehouse, 2013, p. 44). On a symbolic level, he drew on the cultural repertoire of Manding heroes, especially hunters and religious figures, to reinforce the (mediated) image of his competence, divine support, and strength (Whitehouse, 2012b, pp. 100–105, 2013, p. 46f). But he also used some Western symbols to stress his education and connections to potential external partners (Whitehouse, 2012b, pp. 100–103). And on a rhetoric level, he used several frames of oppositional parties and activists such as Sadi, Aminata Traoré, or the *Mouvement des sans voix* (Siméant, 2014, p. 229f). Thereby, Sanogo provided an inclusive, traditional and modern connected Malian imagination of political change.

Looking at the reactions to this coup, parts of the opposition thus at first welcomed it, given that the junta seemed to share grievances and potential solutions (Hagberg & Körling, 2012, p. 117f; Siméant, 2014, p. 229f; Whitehouse, 2013, p. 45). The population, in contrast, was more worried about the impact on their everyday lives (Siméant, 2014, p. 230). While Malians were rather united in their dissatisfaction with ATT, they were thus divided in their view on potential solutions to this political crisis that ranged from merely replacing ATT to dis-

²⁸ Critical political and media voices, however, had already voiced suspicions prior to the coup that the elections would not be really fair and free but rather orchestrated by foreign powers, mostly France (Whitehouse, 2013, p. 45) – an issue that hints to the postcolonial complications of Malian democracy.

mantling and rebuilding the democratic institutions of the Malian state (Whitehouse, 2012b, p. 95, 2013, p. 44). Bergamaschi thus describes the opposition for or against the coup as a new dividing line in Malian society (Bergamaschi, 2013, p. 2f). Accordingly, the media were equally divided in their interpretation of the coup, with some seeing it as saving and others as endangering Malian democracy (Hagberg & Körling, 2012, p. 118).

On 25 April 2012, a transitional government was announced to take over officially from the junta. This government as well was divided on a number of questions, including their relation to the former regime and the junta, their dealing with the North of Mali, and their attitude towards potential international interventions (Bergamaschi, 2013, p. 4). Although not officially in charge anymore, Sanogo continued to mingle and tried to influence and interfere in the work of this transitional government – until he was arrested on 27 November 2013 (Gavelle & Siméant, 2017, p. 49; Hagberg & Körling, 2012, p. 119f; Whitehouse, 2013, p. 37f).²⁹ The transitional government organised elections in October and November 2013. These elections brought the current president Ibrahima Boubacar Keita (IBK) to power, a contested political person whose influence on Malian politics is one focus of the next section.

2.3.3 Governance of the (IBK) Government: the Weak Performance of a Formerly "Strong Man"

Whereas many have seen Malian democracy as a role model for African countries, the 2012 crisis has taught us otherwise and unveiled several weak points of its governing elite, points against which the Malian population had been protesting also before the coup. The most important among these were that the state lacked real oppositional politics due to ATT's and others' strategy to co-opt the opposition with his focus on consensus, that many citizens faced severe socioeconomic difficulties while the political elites used corruption to profit from state funds, and that many citizens did not feel safe due to rebellions and Islamist and criminal networks in the North of Mali while they heard about political elites being complicit with these actors (Baudais, 2015, p. 512; Siméant & Bergamaschi, 2017, p. 7).

The hastily organised elections in November and December 2013, organised under the pressure of the international community and especially of France, excluding parts of the Malian population in less secured areas. Nevertheless, these elections presented the hope of Malians but also of international observers that the aforementioned governing practices would change. But already during the election campaigns, persistencies of corrupt practices emerged

²⁹ At the time of writing, his criminal proceedings were still ongoing and regularly sparked heated debates.

(Siméant & Bergamaschi, 2017, p. 8). The politician, who won these elections, was Ibrahima Boubacar Keita (IBK) who had cultivated an image of a "strong man" during his time as prime minister between 1994 and 2000, an image Baudais suggests could have helped him, as many Malians at the time yearned for a strong state (Baudais, 2015, p. 511). In addition, he delivered on that image during the first months after his election, internally and externally, as he held two events on decentralisation and assistance for the North and reconciliation right in October and November 2013 (although not including the most important rebel organisations); or as he emphasised Malian sovereignty towards the international community in the peace process (Baudais, 2015, p. 512f). After those first months, however, IBK's governing style increasingly showed signs of corruption, centralisation, mismanagement of (international) funds, and mismanagement or even neglect of crucial political issues like the forming of governments, institutional reforms, the peace process, and the conflict in the North of the republic (Baudais, 2015, pp. 513f, 519). However, due to lacking internal mobilisation and the continuing co-optation practices, there has not been a viable oppositional alternative (Baudais, 2015, p. 517f), maybe one of the reasons why IBK was still re-elected in 2018 despite widespread critique of his governing style.

This "bad governance" of Malian political elites and especially of the IBK government has a number of effects on the relations between the state and its citizens. First, the neglect of important issues represents and increases inequalities between Northern and Southern Mali (Baudais, 2015, p. 514). Secondly, the weakness of state actors leads to the strengthening of religious movements, which provide alternative socioeconomic support, but also a means for political identification, especially for Malian youth. Accordingly, although IBK often uses religion as a political resource, many political leaders also criticise him (Baudais, 2015, p. 518). Thirdly, related to this last issue, the failures of the political elites have led to aspirations for a strong state combined with a sinking trust in the responsible elites. Debates about the "integrity" of the Malian state post-2012 thus not only related to its territorial unity, but also to moral governing practices (Baudais, 2015, p. 517; Siméant, 2014, p. 232f). This has further produced nostalgia for past regimes and for some (in the North) even of the times of Islamist occupation (Baudais, 2015, p. 518). Together, all these processes and developments supported the mobilisation of Malian civil society in relation to national but also international politics.

2.3.4 Civil Society in Mali between Regulation and Mobilisation

The socio-political history of Malian civil society shows a myriad of struggles for the public articulation of the society's concerns. In the wake of colonialism, the post-colonial Malian state rather discouraged a critical civil society because politicians and researchers saw it as detrimental to the economy. This was further supported by neoliberal reforms under Moussa Traoré since the 1980s (G. Mann, 2015, p. 8f). In addition, as we have seen above, Malian politics were characterised by a constant search for consensus. And this does not only manifest on the political level. Also on the social level, consensus plays an important role in Malian society. As one sign of this, Siméant outlines how Bambara terms for protesting against or contesting something mostly carry negative connotations (Siméant, 2014, p. 19ff). However, post-colonial Malian history has also seen important events of public contestation, most prominently the 1991 youth protests leading to the overthrowing of the authoritarian president Moussa Traoré (Siméant, 2014, pp. 25–28). In addition, the 2012 political crisis has led to an increasing mobilisation among the civil society as the "weaknesses of Mali's institutional and democratic framework since the early 1990s (...) were debated in the public arena with more strength than ever before" (Siméant & Bergamaschi, 2017, p. 7). In this section, we will explore who is engaged in Malian civil society, what for, and how, in order to contextualise processes of mobilisation through online news.

When it comes to the actors of public contestation, Siméant first of all distinguishes between a specialised, mostly anti-imperialist, protest milieu (in Bamako) and everyday contestation through news media, religion, or music (Siméant, 2014, p. 34f). For the participation in protest, several groups are relevant. First, there are the affected persons who demonstrate for their cause. Secondly, there are sponsored persons who demonstrate for someone else's cause in return for, for instance, hot meals, daily compensations, or clothing (Siméant, 2014, p. 64ff). Thirdly, there are formal political movements and politicians like the *altermondialist* movement.³⁰ Especially important for mobilising within the specialised protest milieu in Bamako are also NGOs and associations such as (female) Muslim activist groups that negotiate between state and non-state actors and institutions (Schulz, 2012b, p. 134f). Related to this are religious associations and movements that become increasingly important in the Malian protest landscape (Siméant, 2014, p. 63).

³⁰ I am using the French term "altermondialist" here as the French connotation does not only include anti-globalisation but also the search for alternatives.

So what are these diverse actors protesting for or against, contesting and criticising? Siméant identifies three crucial issues here: transnational connections of the Malian state and anti-imperialism; nationalism; and morality (Siméant, 2014, p. 36). That these are often connected shows her use of the term "extraversion" in relation to political contestation as transnational connections provide material and moral resources for protest (Siméant, 2014, p. 32f). Thus, mobilising practices in the Malian civil society show important connections to transnational relations, especially to the international aid dispositive, but those connections are not only materially, but also symbolically, not least in the critique of the former colonial power France (Siméant, 2014, p. 231).

In terms of practices, i.e. looking at how civil society mobilisations happen in Mali, three continuums or differentiations are of central importance: First, the relation with the state ranges from the state organising demonstrations itself,³¹ via regulating and disciplining them, up to plain discouragement or sometimes even prohibition of public protest (Siméant, 2014, p. 41). Another continuum that crucially informs Malian society's unease with public contestation is the continuum between peaceful verbal critique and violent attacks, although mostly against material objects (Siméant, 2014, p. 90). The latter are engrained in public memory with the 1991 uprising, but lately have also gained prominence with violent incidences of self-justice (Siméant, 2014, p. 94). And on a more analytical level, we can distinguish between material and symbolic dimensions of contestations in post-colonial Mali. As a graphic example, Siméant describes protest signs during protest marches as being mostly in French and sometimes in Arabic, very rarely in the national language Bambara. Thus, when signs were written in Bambara during protests against an international intervention in 2012, the languages in themselves also supported the political claims of the protesters (Siméant, 2014, p. 51ff).

The mobilisation of Malian civil society thus is a very heterogeneous and contested issue. But as we have seen, in terms of actors and issues, Mali's transnational relations feature prominently here which is why we will explore them more deeply in the next subchapter.

2.4 Malian Transnational Relations – Military Interventions Contextualised

Describing Malian transnational relations is an extensive endeavour and, as any previous subchapter, could easily fill its own book. Thus it is necessary to focus and select what is

³¹ Siméant however warns of too easily denigrating such organised forms of protest (Siméant, 2014, p. 29f).

most important for understanding the current situation of Malian-diasporic society and its relation with the discourse on Malian transnational relations. Following my interest in post-colonial relations in this thesis, I mostly focus on relations between Mali and non-African, and here mainly Western states, thereby unfortunately marginalising regional or Pan-African movements. In general, Malian transnational relations show interdependencies but also tensions that in turn lead to contestations by political and social actors. What I will do here to capture these complex relations is to first introduce some general issues in Mali's transnational relations that have been subjects of debates for the past decades. Based on these examples, I will outline some approaches of political actors and the (civil) society towards Malian transnational relations in general. The remainder of the subchapter, however, will focus on the issue of Malian transnational relations that is most prominent at the moment, namely the international military interventions in the country since 2013. But to show in which environment these military interventions took place or are taking place, I first contextualise them within broader issues of Malian transnational relations.

2.4.1 Transnational Relations as Politicised Movements of People, Objects, and Ideas

Thinking about the historical development of Malian transnational relations highlights its postcolonial component which is nicely captured by Mann's statement on relations between Mali and France: "After 1960, such once-imperial relationships simply became transnational ones. In decades to come, they would continue to evolve" (G. Mann, 2015, p. 244). However, Mann equally highlights the influences of Sahelian history as well as external events like the Sahel droughts or human rights developments in post-1968 France and post-Civil Rights America. These postcolonial interdependencies and their geopolitical implications translate into a myriad of relations, including diplomatic relations, trade relations, and cultural relations. In the following, however, I will outline three other fields that were at the focus of political contestations during the post-colonial history of Mali, namely migration politics, international (humanitarian) assistance, and human rights.

Negotiations about migration from and to Mali have a long history. France plays an important role in these long-lasting migration patterns and networks. The French state is the biggest European recipient of Malian migrants, receiving 69% of Malian citizens who migrated to the European Union (EU) in 2016 (Urso, 2017, p. 2). In addition to the changing French approaches to and attitudes on immigration from Mali described above, Malian migrants in France, however, similar to other African migrants, experience severe forms of discrimination

through media discourses and in everyday situations related to health, housing, and employment (Sargent & Larchanché, 2014, pp. 455–464). Mann shows how these discriminations have led to instances of political mobilisation among Malian migrants in France. However, this increased visibility also provoked more aggressive French immigration politics (G. Mann, 2015, pp. 145–161).

In addition to France, other European states and the EU itself have been working out agreements with the Malian state to (allegedly) diverse ends. One important issue is the control of emigration from Mali, including the management of borders as part of European securitised foreign policies through the provision of equipment and education for border control posts (Trauner & Deimel, 2013, pp. 20–24). The most contested issue, however, is the debate around deportations and readmissions of Malian citizens from the EU. The pressure from Western states also led other African countries to illegalise and deport Malian citizens, thus turning Mali into a receiving country for refused migrants. How Malian politicians deal with the migration issue therefore also is part of their political capital. Although signing some bilateral agreements with, for instance, Spain, at the time of writing, the Malian government still supports legal emigration policies and – despite increasing pressure – has until now refused to sign a readmission agreement with the European Union (Dünnwald, 2016, p. 129f; Idrissa, 2019, p. 28; Trauner & Deimel, 2013, pp. 24–28).³²

The other aspect of transnational migration politics is the attempt to eliminate "root causes". This is done via specialised programs, as through longstanding agreements between Mali and France on "co-development", i.e. the facilitating of "development"³³ through the engagement of Malian migrants, or on the EU level through the Bamako-based Centre for Information on and Management of Migration (Centre d'Information et de Gestion de la Migration, CIGEM). The CIGEM was initially promoted as a form of job centre for Malians wanting to go abroad but in the end rather became a centre for preventing migration through awareness raising (Trauner & Deimel, 2013, p. 23f).

Beyond this engagement of migrants, international assistance manifests in the form of international "development" cooperation and humanitarian assistance. International assistance has been an important issue in Malian transnational relations, not least since the droughts of the 1970s and 1980s. During that time, some institutions emerged as a way of formalising and organising (claims about) international aid. On the side of the Sahelian countries, this includ-

³² As mentioned in the introduction, this precedes the development of new migration regimes during the Coronavirus pandemic.

³³ In order to distance myself from normalising ideas of Eurocentric development, I use the term "development" with quotation marks in cases in which it refers to this concept.

ed the Permanent Inter-state Committee for Combatting Drought in the Sahel (Comité permanent Inter-Etats de Lutte contre la Sécheresse dans le Sahel, CILSS), whereas on the OECD level, several countries founded the *Club du Sahel* that should integrate donor nations (G. Mann, 2015, p. 173f). The (entrepreneurial) "development" sector has thus been taking up governmental aspects, thereby substituting the often too absent Malian state as well as its former empires (G. Mann, 2015, pp. 171–176), a function that would become even more important in light of Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) and further political crises. After the 2012 crisis, however, the landscape and patterns of international donors in Mali changed again with a focus on emergency conflict relief, stabilisation, and peace building (Siméant & Bergamaschi, 2017, p. 10).

Closely related to the issue of aid is also the one on human rights. During the regime of Moussa Traoré, human rights organisations like *Amnesty International* have been engaged with the fate of political prisoners in Mali. Already then, these interventions showed diverse political implications like, on the one hand, hardening Traoré's position and provoking rejection by oppositional groups in order to counter reproaches of allowing postcolonial interventions; and, on the other hand, a subsequent giving in by Moussa Traoré as humanitarian aid (during the droughts) was conditioned on human rights (G. Mann, 2015, pp. 214–233). Later on, considering the relative democratic nature of the Malian state, the focus of the international community on human rights in Mali was mainly on issues like the freedom of expression. But already this can be seen as an issue of contestation as, for instance, Aminata Traoré has argued that the right to food and mobility were equally important (G. Mann, 2015, p. 210ff) – issues that relate back to questions on migration and trade policies. Another issue that has lead to a politicisation of transnational human rights engagements was the dilemma between universalist claims and local contexts and especially the implications for national sovereignty (G. Mann, 2015, p. 212ff).³⁴ Schulz, for instance, describes the Promotion of Democracy and Justice (Promotion de la Démocratie et de la Justice, PRODEJ) project attempt to strengthen human rights in Mali with a law reform supported by international organisations, the Family Ministry and women's rights activists. The project, however, was critiqued from many sides based on the assumption that the internationally funded project was indicative of increasing external (neoliberal) influence of, for instance, international monetary

³⁴ Mann sees one potential way out of this dilemma in the Kurukan Fuga and the Hunters' Oath, the so-called Mande Charters of Human Rights. They were collected and transformed from orally transmitted accounts to written form the 1960s on and integrate interests of foreign actors and Malian neotraditionalists. However, Mann also points to the differences in those texts – e.g. the existence of slaves – and their actual intent to offer governing advice that were often neglected in favour of their application for the national decentralisation project (G. Mann, 2015, pp. 238–242).

institutions, that it would only support the corrupt elite, that the law on paper would not translate into actual changes, and that there was too much influence of urban privileged groups (Schulz, 2012b, pp. 37–40).

These three examples indicate that Malian transnational relations are imbued with many contestations and political dimensions. Next, we will see how this translates into approaches by national politicians as well as the Malian (civil) society.

2.4.2 Malian Civil Society and *Altermondialist* Critique

The altermondialist engagement of Malian civil society is closely connected to historical and contemporary political projects that support critique of Malian transnational relations, especially with Western states. These projects date back to the beginning of Mali's post-colonial history, when the president Modibo Keita and the prominent politician Madeira Keita promoted an anti-imperialist, anti-Western but also slightly pro-Soviet position of Mali (G. Mann, 2015, p. 33f; Siméant, 2014, p. 120). Their engagement is an important resource for contemporary political movements, actors and parties that take an *altermondialist* stance and connect anti-imperialism to nationalism (Siméant, 2014, p. 120). One of the most prominent Malian persons in this regard is Oumar Mariko, a long-standing political activist, radio-owner, and leader of the oppositional party Sadi. He draws from the political projects of the early post-colonial government, criticises the engagement of political elites, and also promotes a Pan-Africanist vision (Siméant, 2014, pp. 206–213).

In addition, Siméant identifies Mali together with Senegal and South Africa as important sites for structuring the African *altermondialist* movement. For instance, the first *African Social Forum* was held in Bamako in 2002, promoting critical voices on African relations with the Global North,³⁵ but also supported by Northern organisations like ATTAC, Oxfam or UNESCO. This was followed by another *Global Social Forum* held in Bamako in 2006. These developments also strengthened an *altermondialist* connection between Senegal (with its early education of African elites during colonial times), and Mali (with its socialist anti-colonial and anti-French history) (Siméant, 2014, p. 151f).

³⁵ I apply the designations Global South/North, as they describe socioeconomically and politically disadvantaged/privileged positions in the global system and avoid normative connotations such as "developing countries"/"developed countries" or the "Third World"/"First Worlds". In contrast to Chandra Talpade Mohanty who suggests using "Two-Thirds/One-Third" in order to underline the numerical inequalities in privilege and domination, I stay with the "Global", as it still emphasises that this position is not necessarily tied to distinct geographic locations but also includes connotations of these geographic locations and their imperial and (post)colonial connections (Mohanty, 2003, p. 505f).

In addition to these political actors, some groups and persons could be described as being situated in-between Malian politics and civil society. In relation to Oumar Mariko, this applies to the "jeunes de Mariko" ("young people of Mariko") who form a group of people that has international aspirations but also a strong affiliation to the Modibo Keita/US-RDA time, and pursues a Pan-African nationalism (Siméant, 2014, pp. 213–216). Two other important figures of the Malian altermondialist movement that are also connected to Malian politics and have different approaches to Malian authenticity, internationalisation, and politics (like women's rights), are the activists and (former) politicians Aminata Dramane Traoré and Aminata Barry (Siméant, 2014, pp. 175, 181f). The engagements of these actors and the debates among and about them show that delineating Malian civil society and closely separating it from Malian politics is a difficult endeavour. In addition, it shows generational conflicts when, for instance, younger activists criticise Aminata Barry and especially Aminata Dramane Traoré for their economic and political privileges (Siméant, 2014, pp. 198–204).

Looking at the altermondialist engagement of Malian civil society, their main critique is that of postcolonial interdependencies with Western states that they contrast and see as encroaching on Malian or African sovereignty (Siméant, 2014, p. 154f). This focus on sovereignty often translates into nationalism (and Pan-Africanism). During the past several years, Malian *altermondialist* civil society has, for instance, engaged with the following issues:

- The Coalition for African Debt and Development Alternatives (Coalition des Alternatives Africaines Dette et Développement, CAD), for instance, has critiqued the dependencies and negative effects of debt³⁶ on Malian society (Siméant, 2014, p. 155f).
- The *altermondialists* have critiqued Western approaches to migration and their practices of expulsion and readmission, with the AME being a prominent actor (Siméant, 2014, p. 156ff).
- They have critiqued the economic relations between Mali or Africa and Western states, including the extraction of Malian resources like gold or cotton by external companies, the discrimination of economic interests within the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs), but also the connections of the own political elites with international organisations like the World Bank (Siméant, 2014, pp. 158–162, 212f).
- They have critiqued international interventions like the one in Libya in 2011, relating to Qaddafi's anti-imperialism, his Pan-African project, his financial engagement in

³⁶ On a socio-cultural level, Siméant introduces *juru* (cord, connection, but also debt) as a Bambara word that is often used to describe Mali's unequal embeddedness in the global economy (Siméant, 2014, p. 119).

Mali, and his support of Malian Islam, while not forgetting the denigrating racist treatment of many African migrants in Libya (Siméant, 2014, pp. 220–223).

- They have critiqued international engagements in national laws, with the Family Code and Family Law debates in 2000 and 2009 – on, for instance, the authority of the husband, female economic activities, or possibilities for divorce – being very prominent. Both projects were supported by Western donors and produced important mobilisations based on the contrasting of external Western gender values with internal Malian values and morals. Related to this is also the critique that these reforms were not adapted to everyday life in Mali. In addition, they were examples for the increasing mobilisation through (international) religious actors and movements (Schulz, 2012b, p. 24f; Siméant, 2014, pp. 224–228).

This shows that the critique of Malian civil society encompasses a great variety of political, economic, social, and military issues. In their diversity, however, the different actors of the *altermondialist* movement are connected by "a long history of moral discomfort, a bitter connection to France, and nostalgia for the state" (Siméant, 2014, p. 120, translation from French, S.H.).

As multiple and comprehensive as these points of critique are, as diverse are the forms of engagement with which the Malian civil society voices their critique. They do so via marches and demonstrations. But they also articulate their critique through books, theatres, documentations, and recently, websites (Siméant, 2014, pp. 162–168). These diverse forms show that the critique of Malian altermondialist civil society connects material (actions on the street) and symbolic (defining critical issues through diverse media) dimensions (Siméant, 2014, p. 149).

This last point already hints at one of the dilemmas the *altermondialist* civil society in Mali faces. Whereas they are very critical of Mali's transnational relations, especially with Western states, they also depend on the financial, personal, and often ideological support from Western actors, especially in the "development" system (Siméant, 2014, pp. 122–129, 149, 173f). In addition, whereas several civil society actors criticise the approaches and also entanglement of political elites to Western governments and international organisations, they are connected with these political elites themselves (Siméant, 2014, pp. 122–129).³⁷ Related to this is the fact that many of the prominent actors and their supporters have themselves more privileged positions in Malian society, being rather urban, well educated, French speaking and connected

³⁷ Based on such ambivalences between embeddedness and critique, Siméant distinguishes between protest and mobilisation (Siméant, 2014, p. 123).

to political elites (Siméant, 2014, p. 153).³⁸ Moreover, within the civil society section, the drawing on religious mobilisation vs. laïcité is another point of debate as, for instance, the family law debate showed conflicting interpretations of religion, between the French laïcité approach that sees religion as a private issue, and those who emphasise its public value, e.g. with public performances of piety that aim at social transformations (Schulz, 2012b, p. 155). This shows that the engagement of Malian civil society towards Malian transnational relations is not without contestation and ambivalences. We will see this as well when we turn to the most pressing issue of current Malian transnational relations, the international military interventions that have been taking place in Mali since 2013.

2.4.3 Changes in and Politicisation of Post-2012 International Military Interventions in Mali

The connections of the Malian state with other (Western) countries outlined above point to important issues, including, for instance, the critical examination by Malian oppositional politicians and civil society or questions around sovereignty and morality in relation to Western states. All these issues have become even more pertinent with the international military interventions in Mali that are at the centre of this section.

After the coup d'état by parts of the Malian military in March 2012 and the proclamation of an independent state of "Azawad" by Tuareg rebel groups in April 2012, armed Islamist groups had taken over the rebellion and had started an offensive occupying Malian territory. As they progressed further and further – by the end of 2012, they had almost reached Mopti in the Centre of Mali – and as the Malian army could not stop them, the Malian interim president Dioncounda Traoré called for an international military intervention. On 11 January 2013, the French military operation *Serval* took off to Mali (Wing, 2016, p. 59).

The following military interventions in Mali combined a diverse range of actors with their own visions and intentions. In addition to the French operation *Serval*, which later in 2013 became (the more regionally counter-terrorism oriented operation) *Barkahane*, one of the most prominent other intervening forces is the UN mission MINUSMA (Mission Intégrée des Nations Unies pour la Stabilisation au Mali / Integrated Mission of the United Nations for the Stabilisation in Mali) who took over the leading part in stabilising Mali in July 2013 (Wing, 2016, p. 65). But also the African Union and the ECOWAS participated through the AFISMA

³⁸ In this context, Siméant observes a traditional problem between the agendas and relatively privileged positions of those who speak and those on behalf of whom they speak or whom they "use" as visible victims for supporting their causes (Siméant, 2014, pp. 168–171).

(African-led International Support Mission in Mali) though with very limited resources and later were placed under MINUSMA authority (Wing, 2016, p. 65f). In addition, also the EU engaged through the EUTM (European Training Mission in Mali) as part of its European Security Integration efforts (Dicke, 2014). During these interventions, the vision of French forces and regional forces like the ECOWAS – and also those of African countries within MINUSMA – differed in that the former ones framed, some even say instrumentalised, their intervention as "war against terrorism" and often neglected its context, whereas the latter rather voted for a more differentiated, context-sensitive approach and, for instance, tried to separate Malian and non-Malian Islamist groups (Bøås & Torheim, 2013, p. 422f; Wing, 2016, p. 60f). Another actor that is often neglected in public debates about the interventions – as well as in this section – is China. The Chinese government saw the intervention in Mali as a possibility to deepen their relations with the African continent and gain international credibility and importance (see e.g. Cabestan, 2018; Duggan, 2017; Lanteigne, 2019).

The effects of the French military intervention are debated rather ambivalently. For Malian society and (geo-)politics, this intervention presented an important rupture in Malian post-colonial (military) relations:

For over fifty years, until the crisis of 2013, it [the lack of French military bases in Mali, S.H.] distinguished Mali from its francophone and Sahelian neighbors, where French bases remained, and it helped to make Mali a key diplomatic player in Africa and in the Third World. (G. Mann, 2015, p. 85)

This intervention thus has important implications on the perception of Malian sovereignty and international importance. On the positive side, the French forces succeeded in stopping the acute offensive of the Islamist groups. However, they have not been able to secure long-term stability in Mali and some even argue that they could rather increase instability and incentives for continuing terrorist attacks (Wing, 2016, p. 70). Nevertheless, French forces succeeded in securing more regional influence, also in opposition to regional players like Algeria (see e.g. Houria, 2017) or Nigeria (see e.g. Adebajo, 2018).

In line with these ambivalences, the reactions of Malian politicians and the population to the military interventions have changed throughout time. In the beginning, although some groups voiced concerns related to neo-colonialism (Bøås & Torheim, 2013, p. 421), the political elites and at least parts of the Malian population supported the French intervention as a way of restoring territorial integrity, stability, and security in Mali that the state could not provide (Bergamaschi, 2013, pp. 5ff, 9; Wing, 2016, p. 60). The Malian and French governments

thereby stressed the importance of Mali-French relationships and both sides interpreted them as a sign for a deepened bilateral engagement (Bergamaschi, 2013, p. 8; Wing, 2016, p. 72). At the same time, however, the Malian (and partly French) state and the media cooperated to silence oppositional voices that did not agree with the French military intervention (Bergamaschi, 2013, p. 7; FES, 2016, p. 81; Gavelle & Siméant, 2017, p. 51).

Since those first months, the public opinion has shifted. Reasons for this change are the lacking long-term success of the (French and UN) interventions and the reproach that French forces would favour Northern rebel groups in the peace process, but also the re-emergence of anti-imperial sentiments and neo-colonial suspicions including French interest in securing access to resources like uranium in Niger. Thus, mobilisation against the international and especially French interventions by civil society, oppositional parties, and religious leaders has been rising during the past few years (Gavelle & Siméant, 2017, p. 49; Siméant, 2014, p. 159f; Wing, 2016, p. 66).

In this context, the international military interventions also experienced an important politicisation. On the international level, the intervention has been seen as a sign of the new Africa strategy of the French government towards an increasing military presence in the region (Wing, 2016, p. 69; see also Chafer, 2016). In addition, it has been perceived as a way of (re-)establishing French hegemony in the West African region. On the national level, the interventions have increased debates about who are the "friends" and the "enemies" in this conflictive situation (Wing, 2016, p. 67ff). Especially this construction of friends and enemies also relates to the last subchapter of this contextual part, outlining the explorations of Malian-diasporic identities of belongings in the face of the multiple threats, conflicts, and changes mentioned so far.

2.5 Threatened Identities and Belongings (in an Emerging Digital Era) Post-2012

The different challenges that Malian-diasporic society currently faces – social transformations, political conflicts, and international interventions – have lead to a re-emergence of negotiated identities and belongings in the Malian public space. As we will see later on (especially in Chapter 7), several of these identities and belongings also re-appear in the online news discourse on Malian transnational relations, which is why we can see the following as a repertoire for this discourse. I will first outline which different affiliations different

actors create, and secondly I will address the question of where and how they articulate these belongings.

2.5.1 Enemies, Friends, and Common Values of (Southern) Malian-Diasporic Society

As mentioned above, especially the international interventions and the political conflicts since 2012 have led to a re-emergence of public constructions of friends and enemies. Although these constructions face temporal fluctuations, as shown with the attitude towards the French intervention above, this section focuses on the ones towards which trends have developed.

Especially the question of international interventions has produced several external "enemies" or parties that are constructed as they-groups, as external and opposed to Malian society. These include, most obviously, neo-colonial powers that are said to restrict Malian sovereignty (Hagberg & Körling, 2012, p. 120). Especially France is additionally criticised for its meagre results in combatting Islamist and separatist movements and, in that context, for engaging with the MNLA while not adequately cooperating with the Malian army (Gavelle & Siméant, 2017, p. 49; Kone, 2017, p. 71; Saddier, 2017, p. 63; Wing, 2016, p. 66). At the beginning of the French intervention, many were opposed to the ECOWAS as an organisation that had put pressure on Mali, and more specifically, the Malian junta, to install a weak transitional government – also a breach of national sovereignty that was seen as transmitted through ECOWAS from the international community (Hagberg & Körling, 2012, p. 120). In addition, further non-democratic regional governments such as Algeria that were involved in the peace process were also seen as restricting Malian sovereignty (Hagberg & Körling, 2012, p. 120; Kone, 2017, p. 55). Accordingly, the Burkinabe president Blaise Compaoré was rejected as a moderator because of his attempt to use his mediating role to improve relations between France and his favouring of rebel movements (Bergamaschi, 2013, p. 5).

As another set of they-groups that is constructed internally on the social level, separatist movements like the MNLA are portrayed as enemies of Malian-diasporic society. Media, the Southern population, but even the *Coren*, an association of persons from Northern Mali living in Bamako, delegitimise separatist claims, for instance, as ethnic agenda, and argue that they have no support within the population. The separatist groups are degraded as armed rebels, terrorists, and discursively placed outside Malian society as foreigners or stateless groups (Hagberg & Körling, 2012, p. 121; Saddier, 2017, pp. 60–63; Wing, 2016, p. 67f). This partly also extends to the Tuareg ethnic groups as such. Here, prejudices have increased and many

focus on their complicity with the former colonial power and on their violent acts (Gavelle et al., 2013, p. 25; Kone, 2017, p. 70f).

Another set of internal enemies is seen in central institutions of the Malian state. During the 2012 conflict, several agents (media and civil society) have constructed the military junta and Sanogo as enemies of Malian society, as they would endanger democracy and, once in power, neglect political claims of their former supporters (Bergamaschi, 2013, p. 3; Gavelle & Siméant, 2017, p. 48; Hagberg & Körling, 2012, p. 118). But also before this coup (and afterwards), the political elite and the governing president have faced severe critique that places them as "other" of Malian society. Media, civil society, and big parts of the population often portray the political elites as corrupt and incompetent, ultimately failing to fulfil their duties of democracy and thus, for instance, at least partly responsible for the 2012 crisis (Bergamaschi, 2013, p. 2; Coulibaly & Bratton, 2013, pp. 3–7; Gavelle et al., 2013, p. 37; Hagberg & Körling, 2012, p. 118f). In addition, the (former) president ATT himself was also seen as weak and complicit to armed rebel movements (Gavelle et al., 2013, p. 26).

We can thus see that Malian society is constructed as opposed to external and internal enemies with the latter residing in the Northern population as well as in central state institutions.

Constructions of in-groups, we-groups, and friends, on the other hand, mostly relate to (Southern) Malian society itself, revolving around ideas of being a "good Malian" or good citizen. This mostly refers to Malian society in general. Sometimes, however, these constructions included certain "friends" and made explicit references to the junta as an agent that is saving Malian democracy from corrupt political elites (Bergamaschi, 2013, p. 3f; Hagberg & Körling, 2012, p. 117f); to the Malian army that is fighting against separatist groups and protecting the integrity of the Malian state; or to the ECOWAS that protected the Malian democracy from the junta (Hagberg & Körling, 2012, p. 120). Especially these constructions of "friends" that are equally constructed as "enemies" by others, show that constructions of in-groups of Malian society are also issues of debate.

One reason for such debates is the foundation for these constructions of we-groups. For many Malians – and I say many, as I mostly draw on research about Southern Malian we-groups –, the Malian nation or Malian nationalism, based on the narrative of a great Malian nation, is an important reference (Gavelle et al., 2013, p. 44). This nationalism is often connected to former Malian empires and, more specifically, the Manding history, as, for instance, participants of a national convention following the coup in 2012 suggested Mande hunters as important actors in solving the political crisis in Northern Mali (Gavelle & Siméant, 2017, pp.

52, 55; Saddier, 2017, p. 69). Another important source for the imagination of the Malian nation is the 1991 uprising. Whereas this is sometimes used to legitimise violent protest as means to "revolt against an unjust order" (Gavelle & Siméant, 2017, p. 45; see also Gavelle et al., 2013, p. 30), this uprising against the Moussa Traoré regime was a collective experience that strengthened the awareness for the importance of hard-won democracy and constitution (Gavelle et al., 2013, p. 44). And a third important element of Malian nationalism that also became more prominent (again) during the past few years is the emphasis on Malian sovereignty with anti-imperial and anti-colonial discourses, especially in opposition to the international interventions (Gavelle et al., 2013, p. 33; Siméant, 2014, p. 206).

In addition to Malian nationalism, a value or concern that relates many actors in the construction of we-groups is the desire for moral reform that has emerged since the 1990s and became visible, for instance, in the debates about the Family Code in 2009 mentioned above (Gavelle et al., 2013, p. 31; Siméant, 2014, pp. 224–228). Here, morality is the important connecting concept. The implications of moral reform, however, can draw on nationalism as well as an authentic Malian or African culture, or on more or less moderate forms of Islam (Siméant, 2014, p. 111). Especially the latter is also an issue of debate when it comes to the in-group of "Maliens". On the one hand, there have been debates within the Muslim communities about different values of Islam (Schulz, 2012b, p. 26f). On the other hand, debates arose on the question if Islam is or should be part of Malian identity at all (Schulz, 2012b, p. 173f).

A last issue related to the foundations of we-groups is the question of ethnicity. Generally, Malian society is celebrated, and also celebrated itself, for successfully integrating diverse ethnicities into their image of the nation, an image that, however, was mostly based on Mande history (Gavelle et al., 2013, p. 44; Saddier, 2017, p. 69). As mentioned in Subchapter 2.3, however, there have been longstanding discriminations and tensions if not violent conflicts between ethnic groups. And especially during the past several years, some actors have also started to construct nationality based on ethnicised inclusions and exclusions, thereby questioning the aforementioned success story. On the other hand, actors affiliated to Northern ethnic groups like the Collective of Northern Nationals (Collectif des Ressortissants du Nord, COREN), for instance, worked for including Northern ethnic groups like the Songhay or the Fulani into imaginaries of a unified Malian nation by portraying themselves as "good citizens" and dissociating themselves from separatist groups they portray as non-Malian (Saddier, 2017, p. 60ff). In which way ethnicity contributes to the construction of a Malian society thus remains an ambivalent issue.

In this section, I have outlined rather general trends in the construction of Malian we-groups and they-groups. I have tried to show that those constructions are not always homogenous but that different voices cooperate with and contest each other in doing so. The next section will shed more light on these contestations by foregrounding the different voices and mediated outlets for such constructions of Malian society.

2.5.2 Voices in the Construction of Friends and Enemies, Mediated and Digitised

These different debates about we- and they-groups in relation to Malian society post-2012 emerge through a diverse set of voices. These include the Malian civil society, the broader Malian public, the government, and the media. Mass media have been contributing through debates about social relations, the coup d'état, the conflict with Northern Mali, and the international interventions since 2013 (e.g. Hagberg & Körling, 2012; Whitehouse, 2012b), and thus also influenced processes of identification and politics of belonging in Malian society.

This is even more so since media play an important role in Malian society. They are a site for debating social transformations of values and social relationships as, for instance, gender relations. In that regard, they also provide room for debating transnational relations of Mali (Schulz, 2012b, pp. 76–89). On a functional level, Schulz has emphasised that media contribute to sociality, identities, and belongings (Schulz, 2012b, p. 201ff). In addition, different media also have a political dimension (for more, see Section 6.1.3). On the one hand, the government and political actors sometimes (try to) influence news content (Gavelle & Siméant, 2017, p. 50f; Schulz, 2012b, p. 177f). On the other hand, media are also a site for political critique. Potential outlets for political critique are the written press and books, tools that also the Malian civil society uses. But those forms only reach part of the population that is, as we have seen above, only partly alphabetised. Thus, more accessible sites for political critique can be seen in religious media, radios, (rap) music, but also the internet (Siméant, 2014, pp. 110–116). As de Bruijn concludes on this issue, especially with regard to new media:

Access to information is, therefore, part of political agency. New ICTs, or small media, give people in different parts of Authoritarian Africa access to new/ other information that helps them to develop their opinions and to formulate a political position; in short, it influences their political agency. (de Bruijn, 2017, p. 403)

In this context, mobile media – including mobile phones and internet connectivity – have been on the rise in Mali. On the one hand, they have become increasingly important during the multiple crises since 2012, as a means to provide translocal news about family, friends, but also more general the happenings in (other parts of) Mali (de Bruijn et al., 2015; Sangaré, 2013; Whitehouse, 2017, p. 26). In addition, online media have also become a way for discriminated groups of Malian population as, for instance, Fulani nomads, to articulate their concerns and organise social and political actions (Bruijn & Both, 2017, p. 784; de Bruijn, 2017, p. 398ff). And online media have become an important communication tool for armed separatist, rebel, and Islamic groups (Bos & Melissen, 2019). On the other hand, online media have facilitated the communication and connectivity in a society that is, as we have seen at the beginning of this chapter, characterised by mobility and diasporic connections (see e.g. Damome, 2011; de Bruijn et al., 2016; Galtier, 2011). In that regard, the use of online media contributes to constructions of narratives within Malian-diasporic society, especially in times of multiple crises and threatened identities and belongings.

The aim of this chapter was to provide the reader with information on the broader socio-political and historical context of Malian-diasporic society and transnational Malian relations. It illustrated how colonial and postcolonial power relations transformed Malian political and social structures. In addition, the chapter introduced important social hierarchies in Malian society that intersect along the lines of religion, gender, age, class, location, and ethnicity. Moreover, the chapter presented national and international conflict lines that are at the core of current socio-political contestations and materialise, for instance, in threatened (national) identities. Building on the importance of online media for the articulation of such identities and on the ongoing importance of the national and international socio-political crises outlined in this chapter, one aim of this dissertation is to explore how digitally mediated and identity-related mobilisations have developed since the direct aftermath of 2012. In addition, we will come back to the background information outlined here for the second aim of this thesis, namely evaluating the context of mobilising identifications and belongings. In order to approach these aims, however, we will first situate this thesis in research on digital media and the intersectional mobilisation of postcolonial power relations.

3 State of the Art: Digital Media and the Mobilisation of Postcolonial and Gendered Power Relations

In the introduction of this thesis, I have outlined how I seek to approach the political mobilisation of Malian postcolonial relations in and through Malian-diasporic online news from intersectional and mobility perspectives, asking about how certain actors mobilise narratives online and how the resulting circulation consolidates or transforms postcolonial power relations. The research field above, then, unveiled the complex entanglements of Malian transnational relations with national politics, intersectional social structures, and also the Malian conflict. As I am reading this research interest and its context together, I argue that an approach to online political mobilisation in a transnational Malian setting needs to account for connections of digital media and multiple levels of postcolonialism as well as for the connections between postcolonial relations and national political and social relations. In that vein, I seek to, on the one hand, draw inspiration from literature that connects digital media with African postcolonial relations, gender relations, and mobilities as a way of explicating processes of mobilisation. On the other hand, I want to contribute to these bodies of research by emphasising the need to combine their perspectives. In the following, I will present central arguments from these research bodies. Considering the interdisciplinarity and thus vast amount of this literature, this state of the art can admittedly only present a selective picture. Within this selection and the related decision on whose work to present in such a literature review, I tried to include the work of Southern and female authors more prominently. For more detailed information on terms and concepts, I refer the patient reader to the theoretical considerations that follow this state of the art.

3.1 Digital Colonialism and Decolonisation

Research on digital media and the mobilisation of postcolonial power relations over the past few years has importantly developed around the notion of digital colonialism. The concept of digital colonialism describes that in recent times, digital media have come to be a new vehicle for colonial exploitation, be it through the external control of infrastructures, through the

exploitation of data, or through Eurocentric norms of digital "development" (Kwet, 2019).³⁹ This notion of online mobilisation in relation to postcolonial relations – not exclusively but in my research context, most importantly African – rather focuses on the consolidating side of mobilising narratives in a postcolonial setting.

Research on digital colonialism in African contexts, on the one hand, shows that diverse actors are involved. In this context, not only the (former) colonial and colonised governments are engaged in maintaining colonial relations, but scholars have identified digital corporations such as Google, Facebook, and Alibaba as crucial actors in this form of neo-colonialism (see e.g. Kwet, 2019; Tamale, 2020).⁴⁰ In addition, international NGOs are seen as engaged in providing an ideological foundation for digital colonialism through the use of digital data and a narrative of digital "development" (see e.g. Flew & Rui Liu, 2016; Isin & Ruppert, 2019).

Moreover, researchers have demonstrated that these different actors are working on different levels of digital (post)colonial engagement. For instance, scholars have identified China as an important new force engaged in Africa through *inter alia* digital colonialism. Here, we can see that work from different disciplines – including, for instance, political science, African studies, or legal studies – sees this engagement working on different levels, including infrastructure projects, the transfer of digital politics (see e.g. Gravett, 2020), and online debates about the role of China in African societies (see e.g. Braun, 2015; Matingwina, 2020).

Accordingly, academics who research online communication from a postcolonial perspective perceive the manifestation of this phenomenon in African societies on different levels that affect online communication. First, they see neo-colonial structures in the provision of digital infrastructures, with foreign countries and transnational corporations providing but also controlling online communication infrastructures (see e.g. Gagliardone, 2016; Mutsvairo & Ragnedda, 2019a; Wilson III & Wong, 2007).⁴¹ Secondly, an important part, or even the crucial part, of digital colonialism is the data extraction that happens through digital corporations. In this line of thought, academics see the exploitation of data as parallel to the colonial exploitation of natural resources (see e.g. Arora, 2016; Isin & Ruppert, 2019; Kwet, 2019).⁴²

³⁹ At the same time, this body of work acknowledges that means of transport and communication have always been instruments for colonial domination (see e.g. Mutsvairo & Ragnedda, 2019a, p. 19).

⁴⁰ This is not to dismiss the role of, for instance, commodity racism and private corporations in colonial times (see e.g. McClintock, 2009), but rather to emphasise the emergence of different power relations between states and digital corporations.

⁴¹ But see also Jonas van der Straeten and Ute Hasenöhl (2016) for an alternative perspective on postcolonial infrastructures.

⁴² Nick Couldry and Ulisses Meijas have been instrumental in disseminating this notion of digital colonialism in Western academic circles. Although I agree with their illustrations of how digital colonialism works on an analytical level and also acknowledge their awareness of diverse inequalities in the effects of digital colonialism

This exploitation of natural resources is consequently another form of domination that is not overcome but, for instance, as Sylvia Tamale (2020, p. 393f) warns, is still an important aspect when connecting digital media to postcolonialism. And thirdly, research on digital colonialism also features the underlying Eurocentric assumptions that the Western way of engaging with online media is the best way, assumptions that some have described as modernisation developmentalist or neo-Gramscian nature of Information and Communication Technologies for Development (ICT4D) (see e.g. Arora & Rangaswamy, 2013; Braune, 2013; Flew & Rui Liu, 2016; Ojo, 2016). Related to this normative use, Adam Taskeen (2019) raises further awareness to the functioning of digital learning platforms as vehicles for neo-colonial knowledge transfer.

In addition to this prevailing focus on consolidating neo-colonial exploitations and forms of domination that emerged through digital media, some researchers have also mentioned possibilities for decolonising digital media through decolonial data politics or platforms (see e.g. in Arora, 2019; Kwet, 2019; Mutsvairo & Ragnedda, 2019a).⁴³

What this work has missed so far, however, is a systematic engagement with gendered power relations. In recent years, some scholars have highlighted these connections. In that literature, some stayed more on an essayist level but still emphasised the connections of digital colonialism with capitalist and gendered power relations (see e.g. Tamale, 2020, pp. 385–395; Vergès, 2017). Work that addresses this in a more systematic and empirical way is still rare. One example in this regard is Assata Zerai (2019), who argues that ICT paradigms that are externally imposed on African societies, more specifically the World Bank understanding of ICT for governance, follow neoliberal and androcentric ideologies and do not sufficiently recognise the role of gender and patriarchal power relations. Considering that the transforming decolonial potential of digital media as well as the gendered implications of digital colonialism are still at the margins of this scholarly landscape, I argue that work on mobilisations of digital colonialism in Africa can benefit from further insights on digital media and socio-political relations like gender relations and national politics.

(Couldry & Mejias, 2019, p. 345), I argue that their attempt to extend this notion of colonialism to a global phenomenon still needs to account for the crucial entanglements of colonialism with racism and gender.

⁴³ This could also be seen in research that views digital media as sites for articulating Pan-African identities (Cheruiyot & Uppal, 2019, p. see e.g.; Jacobs, 2015), with Pan-Africanism as an essential although also controversial element of African decolonisation (see Tamale, 2020).

3.2 Digital Media, Gender Relations, and National Politics in African Societies

This work on digital colonialism seems to be in contrast with research that often identifies the introduction of digital media as an emancipatory instrument in national African politics. Most prominently, social media have been described as facilitators of protest movements in the wake of the Arab Spring (see e.g. Aboubakr, 2013; Papacharissi & de Fatima Oliveira, 2012). Since then, researchers have stressed the function of online media as spaces for political contention (see e.g. de Bruijn, 2017; Okoth, 2020; Omanga, 2019; Uwalaka et al., 2018). In contrast to the work on digital colonialism that is more oriented towards powerful actors like states, digital corporations, and international NGOs or financial institutions, this body of literature mostly focuses on practices, i.e. ways in which African citizens use digital media in order to engage with political power relations. Whereas this bottom-up use of online communication is a dimension of digital colonialism that is marginally mentioned in the attempts at decolonising these relations, I argue that we need to integrate the practices of African citizens that deal with digital colonial structures more systematically.

In terms of social power relations, it is also important to look more generally at the impact that digital media can have on social relations in African societies. Considering the interest in gender-sensitive perspectives outlined in the introduction, I more specifically look into gendered social relations. On the one hand, scholars working on gender relations and digital media in African contexts emphasise the multiple forms of exclusion women face in the sense of a digital divide in accessing and using digital media (see e.g. Alozie & Akpan-Obong, 2017; Iwilade, 2015). In addition, some researchers argue that gendered exclusion also works on a discursive level through androcentric discourses that circulate through online media and delegitimise the (political) participation of women in public debates (see e.g. Bruktawit & Sarikakis, 2019; Worthington, 2010). On the other hand, some researchers highlight digital media as opening possibilities for feminist emancipation as they offer a space in which women and sexualised minorities can connect and articulate their concerns (see e.g. Nyandiko Sanya, 2013; Prinsloo, 2011; Somolu, 2007; Strand, 2019; Zlitni & Touati, 2012).

As these considerations of national politics and gender relations show, power relations do not only unfold in the access to and control of digital media but also in the debates that circulate through digital media. Therefore, an exploration of digital media and postcolonial relations also needs to take into account the discursive level. What these bodies of work could benefit from, however, is more integration with postcolonial power relations that responds to the crucial entanglements of colonial relations and gender relations outlined in the introduction of

this work as well as to the entanglements of postcolonial relations and national politics outlined in the research field chapter. An example for this is the work by Henriette Gunkel (2013), who highlights the postcolonial and thus counterproductive moments that emerge from Western online petitions against homophobia in African states. In line with her observations, I argue that a research focus on mobilities can unveil connections of postcolonial, gendered, and political power relations in digital mobilisation.

3.3 Digital Media and Mobilities in Postcolonial Settings

In order to further connect this work on digital colonialism, national politics, and gender relations to forms of mobilisation, I suggest a dive into digital migration studies that deal with digital media and migration in postcolonial contexts and allow for making the role of postcolonial im/mobilities in the workings of mobilisation more explicit. Although this body of research goes beyond the African continent, it provides important insights into the differential workings of digital media in relation to im/mobilisation as it stresses the entanglement of media and migration for mobilising – i.e. consolidating or transforming – socio-political power relations, especially since the so-called refugee crisis of 2015 (see e.g. Krzyzanowski et al., 2018).

On the one hand, some authors argue that digital media open new possibilities for migrant emancipation by connecting migrants with other migrants, with their places of residence, and with their so-called home countries, especially in times of forced immobility (see e.g. Almenara-Niebla, 2020; Böhme, 2019), and by offering spaces for developing their own representations (see e.g. Risam, 2018). In this line of thought, such work sees digital media as a way for negotiating, for instance, racialised, gendered, and sexualised power relations in postcolonial migratory contexts (see e.g. Dhoest, 2018; Hassane, 2010; Witteborn, 2018). On the other hand, research on digital media and migration is embedded in a broad body of work that combines this potential with a focus on how digital media are used by national and international authorities for controlling, surveilling, isolating, and delegitimising migrants. Authors in this field argue that this works on the material level, for instance, through biometric control, but also on the symbolic level through discriminating discourses (see e.g. Chouliaraki, 2017; Georgiou, 2018; M. Gillespie et al., 2018; Leurs & Ponzanesi, 2018; Ponzanesi, 2019; Vukov, 2016).

Due to these complex relations between digital media, migration, and power relations, such a perspective can help to make the connections between (mediated) mobilities and power explicit in order to arrive at an understanding of how mobilisation can work on diverse levels and for multiple purposes in a digital postcolonial context.

Drawing inspiration from this work on digital media and migration, gender relations, and national politics, I seek to contribute to the multi-level and intersectional work that is currently emerging in research about digital colonialism in Africa. Moreover, this thesis should enrich the perspective on digital colonialism with further perspectives on its relation to diverse contexts, structures, and practices, as suggested by the research on digital media, politics, gender relations, and migration outlined above. I will do so by explicating the inner workings of mobilities and power in digital political mobilisation through a theoretical perspective that uses the theory of governmentality as a way of uncovering the machinations of consolidating and transforming power relations on their diverse levels. Whereas, for instance, Julio Cesar Castro (2016) has applied this idea of governmentality for the functioning of social networking platforms in a neoliberal context, I seek to go beyond a focus on neoliberal media governmentality and argue for including postcolonial and gendered power relations into questions of online mobilisation (for more see Subchapter 4.2 in the theoretical part).

In doing so, I seek to contribute to the field of postcolonial political science in the sense of Aram Ziai (2016), who argues for postcolonial sensibilities to political phenomena – in this case, by using digital media for political mobilisation – as well as for systematic and empirically grounded research on postcolonial phenomena, like the diverse levels of mobilisation of and through narratives that I explored for the case of Malian-diasporic online news. Therefore, I combine insights from research on digital colonialism with work on media and migration in postcolonial contexts and integrate them through a theorisation of online postcolonial mobilisation. Thereby, this thesis also seeks to contribute to the research that combines this focus on digital colonialism with a gender-sensitive perspective. In that regard, I also draw from Heike Mauer and Johanna Leinius who suggest using intersectional and postcolonial perspectives in order to develop "critical feminist perspectives on power and politics" (Mauer & Leinius, 2021, p. 16, translation from German, S.H.). The next chapter will thus outline how I developed such perspectives through my theoretical considerations on mobilising narratives.

4 Theoretical Approaches to "Mobilising Narratives" in a Digital Post-colonial Setting

I was also thinking, when we were talking about the digital Africa, that what Africa has brought about would be a new epistemology about voice-activated technology, of the presence of languages, so that is also a promise of emancipation and decolonization — through that possibility of representing languages and narrations and imaginations more evenly. So (how) will the humanity of the digital, how will the world's digital native, map out a new cartography of solidarity? (Vergès, 2017, p. 48)

In the following chapter, I outline my theoretical approaches to "mobilising narratives" on Malian transnational relations through circulating online news. As stated in the literature review above, this thesis uses a feminist decolonial perspective to explore the multiple conditions and processes of political mobilisation in a postcolonial and digital setting. As Figure 1 shows, I seek to build on but also go beyond often-Eurocentric theories of political mobilisation in order to investigate political mobilisation as mobilising narratives that I situate at the conjunction of narratives, im/mobilities, and intersectional power relations. As a way of capturing the strategic moments in mobilisation, be it for consolidating or transforming the postcolonial status quo, I furthermore employ the Foucauldian notion of governmentality. Looking through the lens of governmentality is especially suitable for explaining how gendered and postcolonial power relations manifest themselves and become productive on diverse levels that influence the mobilisation of and through narratives, as exemplified through its manifestation in the public sphere. Finally, I introduce the Discourse-Historical Approach in order to capture these different levels, as narratives are mobilised within their contexts but also contribute to mobilisation through discourses.

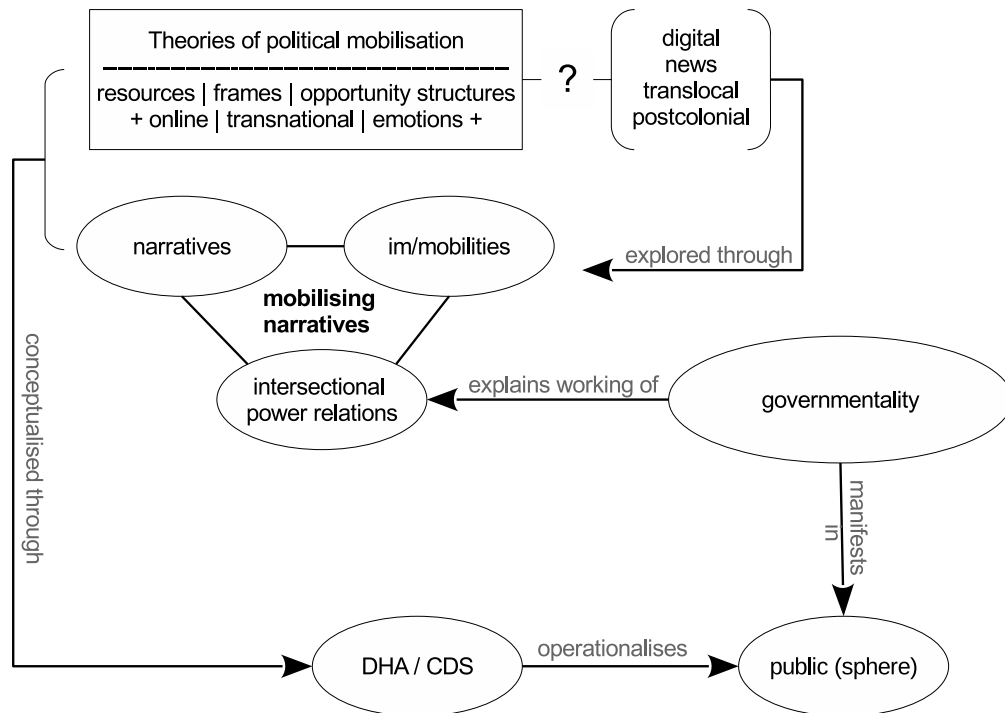


Figure 1: Theoretical framework for exploring political mobilisation in a postcolonial digital news context through mobilising narratives (own visualisation)

By combining these diverse approaches, I draw inspiration from Khosravini, who states that "[c]ritical textual studies such as CDA [Critical Discourse Analysis, S.H.] may draw on Foucault within their macro-structural theorization, while devising a Habermasian notion of communicative action to leave room for processes of formations of discourses in their case in point, for example, in the Discourse-Historical Approach to CDA" (KhosraviNik, 2014, p. 290). In the following, I will outline these theoretical approaches and their connections in more detail, starting with my central concept of mobilising narratives.

4.1 Mobilising Narratives as a Way of Capturing Processes of Political Mobilisation in a Digital Postcolonial Context

During the past few decades, several theories have been pivotal for approaching political mobilisation from different angles. The most prominent among these are resource mobilisation theories, framing theories, and political process models. Resource mobilisation theories apply a rational-choice perspective and explain how resources such as money, skills, or more

socio-psychological dimensions influence the varying participation of individuals and groups in political processes (see e.g. Brady et al., 1995; Klandermans, 1984). Framing theories outline how the construction of meaning of social problems, their potential solutions, and means of reaching these solutions facilitates or hinders political mobilisation (see e.g. Snow & Benford, 1988). Lastly, political process models see changing political opportunity structures, i.e. power relations between political elites and excluded groups, as a fundamental condition for the emergence and success of political mobilisation (see e.g. McAdam, 1982). Considering the critique of some approaches and their selective choice of factors (such as the political process model and its focus on structural elements (Goodwin et al., 1999)), Koopmans and Statham (1999, p. 203) have argued for a more integrative approach by, for instance, combining social power relations and meaning-making. Moreover, they suggest extending the focus on political mobilisation to political claims-making and contention via political discourse analysis. Others have called for extended research perspectives on mobilisation that involve, for instance, the construction of collective identities and gender relations (see e.g. V. Taylor, 1999; V. Taylor & Whittier, 1992).

In recent years, mobilisation scholars have increasingly applied theories of political mobilisation to digital environments, transnational contexts, and the rising importance of emotions (see e.g. Beyer, 2014; Goodwin et al., 2000; Kastoryano & Schader, 2014; Koopmans, 2004; Vissers et al., 2012). Whereas these theoretical approaches are all valid in their own terms (despite their limitations), my own approach to political mobilisation presented here takes a different route. On the one hand, and as mentioned above, this is due to my dealing with debates through online news as a different form of political mobilisation than the more classical acts of voting, protesting, or participating in social movements. The discourses constructed in such online debates could precede all those actionable forms but they could also entail a parallel engagement or one following (un)successful political action. Thus, I do not want to confine them to belonging exclusively to "resources", "frames", "collective identities" or "opportunity structures". Therefore, I apply a more open approach to political mobilisation due to the translocal, non-Western context of my research field of Malian-diasporic online news portals. In this context, Siméant (2013, pp. 127–134) draws attention to the problems related to importing Western theories of mobilisation and social movements, as most of these theories support a normative, Eurocentric understanding of political engagement. She accordingly calls for more attention to the specific contexts of processes, actors, and conditions that go beyond conventional Western theories of political mobilisation (see also Siméant, 2019).

With the following theoretical framework, I thus seek to explore the mobilising elements in Malian-diasporic online debates about Malian transnational relations from a comprehensive perspective that, in the end, can become fruitful for theoretical debates on political mobilisation in translocal, online, postcolonial settings.⁴⁴ The aim of this theoretical part, then, is to suggest an integrated approach that derives from different disciplinary perspectives on mobilisation in the context of online news. Consequently, it cannot offer a comprehensive overview of the different disciplinary developments and debates, but rather seeks to show which value those different perspectives have for better understanding processes and conditions of political mobilisation through online news in a postcolonial setting. I thereby seek to contribute to the search for more comprehensive approaches to understand political mobilisation while, at the same time, providing a framework that allows for a context-sensitive exploration of forms of political mobilisation that might not adhere to the premises of Western theories of political mobilisation.

I start this endeavour by outlining the core of my approach, i.e. the idea of mobilising narratives that emerge at the conjunction of narratives, im/mobilities, and intersectional power relations before I turn to theorisations of governmentality, the public sphere, and Critical Discourse Studies.

4.1.1 Narratives

The first element of my conceptualisation of "mobilising narratives" is the notion of narratives. Narratives, in a sense of storytelling, have been considered central to the human condition and processing of life events for ourselves and others (de Fina & Johnstone, 2015, p. 152), with scholars identifying a narrative paradigm in a society of storytellers (Fisher in Adebani, 2016, p. 17) or a narrative turn in human and social sciences (de Fina & Johnstone, 2015, p. 159f). The reason why I am considering narratives as important for researching political mobilisation is their strong but sometimes also indirect, hidden, or forgotten relation to the political sphere that manifests in their crucial contribution to social cohesion as well as social power inequalities and related conflicts (de Fina & Johnstone, 2015, p. 161).

Throughout the past decades, narratives have been researched in relation to three approaches: (1) a structural approach that examines and compares the composition of narratives; (2) an

⁴⁴ Although the aim of this dissertation is to research and contribute to decolonial knowledge production, I often draw on the work of Western scholars. Their combination with postcolonial and decolonial approaches also represents my own academic socialisation and my attempt to work with Western approaches and to adapt them to postcolonial research questions (for more on this dilemma, see Section 8.1.1).

interactional approach that considers the social environment of narratives and, for instance, also investigates narratives as instruments for identity constructions; and (3) a sociocultural approach that considers narratives as crucial elements in societies themselves, for instance, through the formation of cohesive communities (de Fina & Johnstone, 2015, pp. 152–159). In recent research, the contextualisation of narratives has become an especially important goal. In addition, academics have begun to study narratives in multiple and multimodal forms, also including the internet and social media. The importance of combining narratives and identities, although with an increasing interest in related power issues, persists throughout these new endeavours (de Fina & Johnstone, 2015, p. 160f).

Building on narratives as politically relevant in societies, I consider them a suitable tool for exploring political mobilisation in and through online news in a postcolonial context. In that vein, I also draw inspiration from Wale Adebani, who, in his book *Nation as Grand Narrative*, suggests a "theory of narrative metacode" that "would emphasize the interaction of narrative *content* and *function* in the construction of social and political consciousness in the context of relations of domination" (Adebani, 2016, p. 17, italics in the original). In that passage, he stresses the important connection of narratives to power in and through discourses, that, for instance, manifests in the conflictual interactions of narratives and counternarratives, a connection he analyses through the mobilisation of meaning in media discourses (Adebani, 2016, pp. 18, 25). Following Norman Fairclough and Michel Foucault, Adebani proposes media discourses as important loci for narratives and their relation to social power relations as media discourses would contribute through representations of the world and of social identities as well as through the construction of social relations in themselves. In that sense, however, they still are situated in relations of political and cultural dominance (Adebani, 2016, p. 26).

Using the example of narratives in the Nigerian press, Adebani shows in which ways narratives contribute to consolidating and challenging socio-political power relations in multi-ethnic postcolonial states. On the dominant side, he stresses that some narratives develop into dominant grand narratives that constitute (ideas and ideologies about) the Nigerian nation as a multi-ethnic postcolonial state. Therefore, he emphasises the need to consider (grand) narratives as functioning beyond the linguistic level "by using narrative not just as a process of bringing a nation into being through telling stories, but also as the nation itself. That is, the nation exists in and through its narratives; thus the nation is a grand narrative" (Adebani, 2016, p. 18).

In another article, however, Adebani also stresses the importance of narratives for marginal groups. He outlines how they need to negotiate their access to narratives through the who, what, and how of national narratives, i.e. through entitlement (who can decide on topics of discourses?), tellability (what is an event worth being told?), and storyability (how can narratives be appropriately told?) (following Shuman 1986, 1-2 in Adebani, 2004, p. 768f). In addition, he emphasises the political importance of narratives, arguing that they are

central to the politics of marginal groups particularly because the great battles in the modern world are fought in people's hearts. And since the media are the agents of reflection, contestation, and decision, it is through their narratives that what people think about and, to some extent, how people think about events, is decided. Thus the fate of the marginal rests heavily on narratives. (Adebani, 2004, p. 769)

Considering this socially constitutive function of narratives as well as their mutually influencing relation to social and political power relations, I see narratives as a crucial cornerstone for developing a perspective on online political mobilisation, not only on the national level of postcolonial African states but also on the transnational level of their postcolonial relations.⁴⁵ Therefore, the notion of "mobilising narratives" fits the idea that narratives are mobilised, i.e. circulated, for specific purposes, but also suggests that narratives mobilise for consolidating or transforming socio-political power relations. The next section on critical im/mobilities will further explain what role mobility studies play in this understanding of mobilisation and why I suggest connecting narratives with im/mobilities.

4.1.2 (Critical) Im/mobilities

In this thesis, I focus on the circulation of narratives in the context of Malian-diasporic online news. I argue that a perspective from critical mobility studies can further inform my take on mobilising narratives and its theorisation of communication in an increasingly connected world with media formats that allow for more participation from non-elite agents. In the following section, I want to outline in which ways critical mobility studies have informed my approach to analysing narratives in terms of mobilisation and to make the role of mobilities in my concept of mobilisation explicit. As a result, mobility studies also are part of my analytical lens for researching the conditions, processes and practices of mobilisation. Both mobility and mobilisation thus function as an object of study and as an analytical perspective in this

⁴⁵ As I also outline in Section 4.1.3 on intersectionality, I consider marginality as context-sensitive and as manifesting differently on different scales so that groups that could be dominant on the national level could still be marginalised on the international, postcolonial level.

thesis. Whereas critical mobility studies are not confined to the analysis of discourses, I want to show how a focus on mobility has informed this research of online discourses. Before I do so, however, I will first introduce the most important developments in mobility studies.

Mobility studies emerged from several scholars' unease with the static assumptions in social sciences that they saw as contradicting current trends in increasingly mobile contemporary societies. Most prominent here were academics like Mimi Sheller, John Urry, Peter Merri-man, and Tim Cresswell. Many see the formation of the journal *Mobilities* as a founding moment of mobility studies. In addition, two seminal texts that were both published in 2006 are seen as inaugural publications of the mobility studies school: *The new mobilities paradigm* by Mimi Sheller and John Urry (2006) and *Editorial: Mobilities, Immobilities and Moorings* by Kevin Hannam, Mimi Sheller, and John Urry (2006), the editorial article to the first issue of said *Mobilities* journal. These two texts also outline the central premises of the mobility studies framework. On the one hand, they introduce mobilities as a crucial perspective for analysing contemporary societies that are constituted by multiple forms of mobilities. They especially emphasised the connections of physical movement and communicative practices (Hannam et al., 2006, p. 11f; Sheller & Urry, 2006, p. 212). In his ideas on a mobile sociology, Urry (2010) even encouraged researchers to go beyond societies and also consider relationalities when researching social phenomena. The consideration of multiple forms of movement also was an important reason for mobility studies as an interdisciplinary endeavour (Sheller, 2014, p. 790).

On the other hand, the founding texts of mobility studies already emphasise that this increasing awareness of pervasive mobilities does not mean that everything and everyone are just becoming ever more mobile. They rather stress the importance of infrastructures and moorings as enablers of movements, but also the power relations that allow for some social groups to be mobile and impede the mobilities of others (Hannam et al., 2006, p. 3f; Sheller & Urry, 2006, p. 221). Later on, others have taken up these inequalities related to mobility with diverse concepts such as the politics of mobility (Cresswell, 2010), regimes of mobility (Glick Schiller & Salazar, 2013), uneven mobilities (Sheller, 2015), mobile commons (Trimikliniotis et al., 2016), and mobility justice (Sheller, 2018). A central claim of mobility studies in this regard is that movements are unequally accessed, distributed, and valued, depending on the positioning of different social groups along intersectional lines of exclusion, including gender, race, sexuality, religion, class, and many others. In that sense, Elliot and Urry (2010, p. 46f) emphasise that mobility has become an increasing category for othering, for distinguishing a hypermobile Northern elite from immobile societies in the Global South.

However, as a lot of research in mobility studies has focused on and rather uncritically reproduced the imperative of increasing mobilities, some scholars introduced the notion of critical mobility studies (see e.g. Salazar & Jayaram, 2016; Söderström et al., 2013). They basically argued for a critical view on the normalisation of ever more movement, the neglect of immobilities, of socioeconomic structures, and underlying power relations (Glick Schiller & Salazar, 2013, p. 185ff; Salazar, 2016, p. 3). Whereas I see their claims and critique as highly relevant, I do not employ this distinction between mobility studies and critical mobility studies in my work. On the one hand, exactly those points brought up by critical mobility studies are continually stressed in mobility studies, especially by the founders (see e.g. Sheller, 2019). On the other hand, I think that we can profit more from seeing critical mobility studies as a corrective influence within mobilities research and as a reminder of those original claims of mobility studies instead of separating them into two different fields of research and theory production.

Following the initial combination of transport and communication issues in the founding moments of mobility studies, several researchers have also acknowledged the importance of media and discourses in mobilities and also in the construction of uneven mobilities and mobility regimes. One concept here involves mediated mobilities by Emily Keightley and Anna Reading (2014) that also include questions around experiences, infrastructures, and control. And John Downey has brought this to a transnational level by labelling negotiations over the movement of images and ideas "transnational politics of mediated mobilities" (Downey, 2014, p. 370). In recent years, mobility research has thus begun to focus somewhat more on the media facet of interrelated movements.

Mobility studies thereby point to processes that are at the core of structuring flows and inequalities in contemporary societies. In that regard, mobility studies offer a topic-related focus and an analytical focus for research. In this thesis, both levels are relevant. Whereas I focus on the topic-related contribution of mobility studies toward the capturing of Malian transnational relations in the analysis of the respective discourse (see Subchapter 7.2), the following paragraphs outline in which way mobility studies can help in capturing the mobilisation of narratives on an analytical level.

For mobility studies, mobilities do not only include the physical movement of people and goods but also imaginative mobility, virtual mobility, and communicative mobility (Urry, 2008, p. 14). Applying this understanding of mobilities to the analysis of online news platforms and their user engagement, then, means considering:

1. the physical mobility of users, media agents, and media devices;
2. the imaginative mobility of narratives across space through articles (and their images);
3. the virtual mobility of users who visit and experience diverse online platforms; and
4. the communicative mobility as these users interact via comments and other means of online communication on these platforms.

Thus, a first dimension of mobilising narratives I consider in this thesis is becoming mobile in socio-geographic terms through circulating. Here, the socio-political and historical context of online communication includes information about the concerned communication infrastructures in Mali and the development of transnational communication within the Malian diaspora. They provide the overall parameters for the circulation of narratives. In addition, this "becoming mobile" in socio-geographic terms can be captured with the situational context of online communication. In its institutional manifestation, the situational context, moreover, points to the platform characteristics that provide users with affordances and certain forms of agency to circulate narratives. Related to this is the analysis of the movement of narratives through different genres that facilitates interaction between media agents and users through technological and article features.

The second dimension of mobilising narratives entails their becoming mobile in cultural terms as outlined by Greenblatt's (2010) notion of cultural mobility (for more, see Section 4.4.4), which is used to illustrate or conceptualise the transformation of identifications and belongings through the circulation of articles through a Malian-diasporic online news portal. The social manifestation of the situational context allows for analysing the transformation of narratives through the interaction between media agents and users in different socioeconomic and political positions. This social context also includes different discussion dynamics and hierarchies among engaged actors. This level shows that narratives are also mobile in terms of being transformed by user negotiations.

The third facet of mobilising narratives pertains to the act of making mobile through and beyond narratives, i.e. their strategic employment contributing to the consolidation or transformation of power relations based on ideas about online news as providing a public sphere or facilitating the emergence of publics. For this dimension, the other two levels of mobilities serve as starting points for analysing which effects these context and analytical levels have in relation to power inequalities. I investigate such mobilising – for consolidating or contesting ends – in terms of constructing political identities, emotions, and post- or decolonial moments in the discourses studied.

Since one of the aims of critical mobility studies is to analyse the nature of power inequalities, and in order to explicate the nature of the power relations I am looking at when talking about narratives mobilising in a consolidating or transforming way, I am outlining my take on the intersectionality of power relations in mobilising narratives in the next section.

4.1.3 Intersectionality

In this thesis, intersectionality works as a sensitising concept to approach the idea of mobilising narratives. The selection of which narratives are mobilised socio-geographically between which agents is structured along multiple lines of power inequalities that relate to the positionalities of actors. Moreover, narratives are mobilised culturally as the agents themselves articulate intersectional positions through the construction of identification and belonging. Further, narratives mobilise through the articulation of political identities and related emotions that consolidate or transform political power relations. But also, an intersectional perspective can provide important insights for the integration of narratives and mobility studies, a connection that still needs more research-based exploration (Sheller 2014: 793). Therefore, the idea of mobilising narratives can benefit from an intersectional approach to power relations.

Initially, intersectionality studies emerged when especially racialised women critiqued the second wave of the feminist movement of the 1970s and 1980s for not taking its internal power relations into account. They claimed that the universalising stake of the movement would neglect the realities of women who were additionally concerned by social differentiations such as ethnicity and class (Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1983, p. 62; Brah, 2007, p. 249f; Brah & Phoenix, 2004, p. 76). In a famous statement, bell hooks, for instance, criticised that the situation of women was often equated with the situation of Black people, implying "that all women are White and all Blacks are men" (hooks 1981 in Yuval-Davis, 2006b, p. 193).

The term "intersectionality" itself was introduced by the American Black feminist Kimberlé Crenshaw in her 1989 work on the intersection of gender, class and race in Black women's employment in the USA. With her two important works on intersectionality (published in 1989 and 1991), Crenshaw emphasised two issues of marginalisation: power inequalities in institutionalised discourse and tendencies of marginalisation in movements resisting these power inequalities (Carbado et al., 2013, p. 304; Yuval-Davis, 2011b, p. 4f). At the same time, European and postcolonial feminists conducted intersectional analyses as well (Yuval-

Davis, 2011b, p. 4f). From the 2000s on, intersectionality was thus no longer an issue of ethnicised feminists but had become essential for feminist theory and practice (Yuval-Davis, 2006b, p. 194).

Intersectionality as a concept was then pushed by several movements including, for instance, the Combahee River Collective, the anti-colonial movements, the Civil Rights and the Black Power movements, the Peace movements, the Workers' movements, the Women's Movement, and the Gay and Lesbian Movement. These movements critiqued modern conceptualisations of subjects and were aiming at "the development of integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking" (Brah & Phoenix, 2004, p. 78). Brah describes the emergence of Black British Feminism as one consequence of these developments consisting, for instance, of associations such as the *Organisation of Women of African and Asian Descent*, and of intellectual work such as with the journal collective *Feminist Review* (Brah, 2007, p. 250f). On the academic level, intersectionality led to a critique of the modernist theoretical and philosophical traditions referred to in feminist theories of the 1970s and 1980s. This entailed new perspectives on agency, subjectivity, experience, and difference (Brah & Phoenix, 2004, p. 82).

On the conceptual level, the social divisions considered by intersectional research have increased considerably. Floya Anthias and Nira Yuval-Davis, for instance, built on the Black feminist movement's assumption that Black women are oppressed on the basis of gender, race, and class. However, they broadened this focus and accounted for the specific intersections of these divisions, on the one hand, and for ethnic divisions as a "more comprehensive conceptual category for struggling against racism" than the Black/white⁴⁶ divide (Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1983, p. 62f). In that sense, they see ethnic groups as ideological constructs – with materially manifested practices and effects – that create boundaries of communities or collectivities based on the myth of a common biological, cultural, or historical origin (Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1983, p. 66). In the following years, the "intersectional triad" of race, gender, and class was thus joined by a wide range of other social differentiations such as, for instance, ethnicity, sexuality, or religion (Brah & Phoenix, 2004, p. 79).

Over the course of time, further debates emerged around the understanding and use of intersectionality. Whereas in its original sense, intersectionality draws on a metaphor of intersecting roads that stand for different social divisions, others call for a less static use of terms such

⁴⁶ In order to emphasise the constructed nature of skin colour and race as well as the related struggles over domination and resistance, I use the term "Black" to designate groups and persons that are marginalised within racialising power relations, and I use the term "white" to designate groups and persons that are privileged and dominant within these relations.

as social configurations or social dynamics (Yuval-Davis, 2011b, p. 6). Another discussion evolved around the question of whether the intersectionality of social divisions is rather to be seen as additive or constitutive. Anthias and Yuval-Davis (Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1983, p. 62f), for instance, critiqued the "triple oppression approach" that provided an essentialised and additive notion of oppression of Black women on the basis of gender, race, and class. These debates are further reflected in debates on identity or transversal politics. Yuval-Davis thus advises not to consider different social categories as additive but rather as mutually constitutive and as depending on the specific historical, socio-cultural context (Yuval-Davis, 2011b, p. 7f).

According to Yuval-Davis, intersectionality theory draws attention to the mutually constitutive positioning of agents along different lines of social divisions (Yuval-Davis, 2011b, pp. 3–8). In this way, an intersectional approach can apply to any group of advantaged or disadvantaged people (Yuval-Davis, 2006b, p. 201), while still paying special attention to the situation of subaltern groups as those who are marginalised (on multiple levels) in relation to dominant elites (see e.g. Ashcroft et al., 2007, pp. 198–201; Spivak, 2010). Moreover, the intersectional approach also accounts for the fact that each social division itself encompasses power relations of domination and subordination (Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1983, p. 65). Accordingly, Yuval-Davis argues that the empirical analysis of intersectional power relations and its respective social divisions is always dependent on the respective historical, political, and ontological context (Yuval-Davis, 2011a, p. 4). Yuval-Davis equally argues for recognising four different levels of analysis, namely the organisational, intersubjective, experiential and representational ones. However, she emphasises as well that one has to consider that "each level of analysis has both material and symbolic production and effects" (Yuval-Davis, 2006b, p. 197f). This approach to intersectionality accounts for the complexity of power relations in multiple contexts as a person might, for instance, be marginalised on an international scale due to her nationality but may be privileged on a national scale due to gender or class relations. In addition, certain groups may be positioned differently in different forms of communication, e.g. the platform environment, articles, or comments.

In addition to being an analytical lens for tracing conditions and effects of "making" and "becoming" mobile, intersectionality also points to socio-political and academic practices that are able to destabilise the hegemonic power relations entailed in the differential "making mobile" of social agents. For instance, Brah and Phoenix argue that recognising the intersectional workings of power relations is a means of deconstructing hegemonic knowledge formations (Brah & Phoenix, 2004). As bell hooks outlines in an interview on her practice of

intersectionality, on the one hand, intersectional perspectives allow for raising awareness that is informed by a comprehensive analysis of situations of exclusion and oppression "so that people are able to not focus on one thing and blame one group, but be able to look holistically at the way intersectionality informs all of us: *whiteness*, gender, sexual preferences, etc." (Lowens & hooks, 2012). On the other hand, bell hooks highlights that intersectionality can become a starting point for channelling resistance by highlighting the most important form of oppression in a specific spatial and temporal context (Lowens & hooks, 2012). However, it is important to consider that social divisions are not reducible to each other, i.e. that there is not one social division that can stand for all the others. If there is one social division that is prevalent (in the case of this thesis, it might be the postcolonial division), it occurs in a very historically specific situation and needs to be analysed as such (Yuval-Davis, 2006b, p. 200). In such ways, intersectionality can be a mode of enquiry related to mobilisation that produces an activist (research) agenda and highlights the emancipatory potential of mobilising narratives.

In the context of a Malian-diasporic online news portal, an intersectional perspective can thus highlight the workings of power inequalities along diverse lines of social divisions, in diverse situations and on diverse levels. Moreover, it points to the potentials for contesting such power inequalities. When I seek to address intersectionality in online news discourses, then, I also have to account for the specificities of online communication here, i.e. how intersectional power relations structure the engagement of users in online communication. This also pertains to the different levels mentioned by Yuval-Davis above, i.e. the organisational, intersubjective, experiential, and representational levels. This means analysing intersectional power relations as constructed in the organisational domains of different platforms, in user interactions, in experiences of online environments, and in the representation of different social actors (for an application of these levels, see the analytical framework in Subchapter 5.5).

In addition, while I consider a myriad of categorisations relevant in the Malian-diasporic postcolonial context – including but not limited to nationality, location, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class, ability, and religion (as outlined in Subchapter 2.2) – my main analytical focus in this thesis will be on the workings of postcoloniality and gender. In that regard, I seek to highlight these two categories of structuration that I consider imperative for consolidating or transforming socio-political power relations in the postcolonial setting of the present thesis. Many scholars have emphasised that imperial and colonial rule were crucial in constructing current gender relations as well as ideas about femininity and masculinity in African and, more generally, former colonised societies (see e.g. Boyd & Burrill, 2020; R. Connell,

2016; Lugones, 2010; Tamale, 2020). Moreover, many have shown as well how such colonial patterns persist in current postcolonial relations and how this colonial formation is further recontextualised and reproduced through neoliberal developments and capitalist domination (see moreover e.g. Lewis, 2021; Mama, 2020b; Mohanty, 2003; Vergès, 2021).

In this regard, I focus on constructions of contextualised masculinities as one element on the representational level of intersectional relations. Raewyn Connell develops multiple conceptualisations of masculinity and defines a normative hegemonic masculinity as "a collective project for realizing gender hierarchy" (R. Connell, 2016, p. 306), creating a norm that would establish hierarchies between men and women but also between hegemonic and non-hegemonic, i.e. subordinate or marginalised masculinities (R. W. Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 844). During the past several years, these were enriched with further conceptualisations of masculinities, including a transnational corporate masculinity that integrates traits such as mobility and technological affinity with secularism and transcultural communication skills (R. Connell, 2016, p. 312), a colonial masculinity that re-interprets gender hierarchies among colonising and colonised groups in relation to traditional forms of masculinity (R. Connell, 2014, p. 220),⁴⁷ a resistant masculinity that revolves around challenging (post-)colonial external domination (R. Connell, 2014, p. 224), and also a form of alienated masculinity that emerges at the intersection of neocolonial influences and the loss of traditional masculinities (R. Connell, 2014, p. 222).

In the Malian context, for instance, although pre-colonial imaginations of Mande (warrior) heroes influence ideas of male power in Malian society (Whitehouse, 2012b, p. 96ff), I argue that an ideal of militarised masculinity has still been reinforced during French colonialism, considering that "no imperial power militarised colonial societies to the extent France did" (Schmitt, 2020, p. 218). When I speak about imperially militarised masculinities in this thesis, I thus refer to this confluence of pre-colonial and post-colonial influences that are further re-actualised by the Malian conflict and neoliberal transformations (as outlined in Section 2.2.2).

In order to capture such intersectional workings of power relations, I now introduce the theory of governmentality as a way of explicating the functioning of consolidating and transforming power relations in the context of Malian-diasporic online news as well as the lingering of coloniality and gender in mobilising narratives.

⁴⁷ Connell, however, also critiques linear notions of historically succeeding forms of masculinity (R. Connell, 2014, p. 224).

4.2 Governmentality: Mobilising Narratives between Consolidation and Transformation

Through governmentality, I seek to explicate the consolidating and transforming dimensions of mobilising narratives, considering that mobilisation is not per se transforming but that narratives can also be mobilised in order to consolidate the status quo, as Siméant has also emphasised for the Malian context when she identified mobilisation as "an instrument of the state as well as a technique of protest" (Siméant, 2013, p. 138, translation from French, S.H.). With governmentality, I thus seek to go beyond (online) narratives having denigrating or appreciative effects and include their strategic relations to socio-political power. Governmentality thereby allows for going beyond the mere identification of intersectional power inequalities and for analysing their actual functioning in specific institutional contexts. At the same time, feminist and postcolonial applications of governmentality allow for adding insights to these intersectional power relations – and here especially postcoloniality and gender – that are at work in mobilising narratives.

Michel Foucault developed the theory of governmentality during one of his lectures at the *Collège de France*, responding to a "problematic of government" he saw as emerging from the decline of feudalism and religious authority and the rise of central state authority between the 16th and 18th century (Foucault, 2006, p. 131f). In contrast to a Machiavellian idea of sovereignty and legal-coercive rule, Foucault's notion of a new "art of government" is based on his observations that governing became applicable to various contexts within the state, including, for instance, families, households, religious communities, or individuals. Furthermore, he suggests that government manifests through three types of government, i.e. morality (for self-governance), economy (for governing the family), and politics (for governing the state). Thereby, Foucault emphasises that this new art of governance does not only include the power of sovereignty over a certain territory but also the government of things, meaning the complex assemblage of persons and things, i.e. the diverse elements that make up people's lives. For performing this governance, the state does not refer to laws or coercion but to tactics, wisdom, and diligence that are used to align these elements to the diverse yet specific purposes of this governance (Foucault, 2006, pp. 134–137). With these new means of governance, Foucault also shows that knowledge of the state (still) is a crucial resource and – as we will also see below – an increasingly important technique for ruling.

As one of the crucial processes that fostered this new art of government in the 18th century, Foucault highlights that the population emerged as a central issue of governance, transform-

ing the family unit from a model of society into an instrument of rule, with the welfare of the population as the ultimate goal of governance as well as the population itself being the principal locus of governance. By using subtle knowledge-related instruments like statistics and campaigns, the state aims at steering the population in certain directions, for instance, in terms of birth rates or migration (Foucault, 2006, p. 139f). Foucault thus describes a complex relationship between the population and the state as "the population is the subject of needs, of aspirations, but it is also the object in the hands of the government, aware, vis-à-vis the government, of what it wants, but ignorant of what is being done to it" (Foucault, 2006, p. 140). In that vein, Foucault further develops his understanding of biopower into biopolitics that describe how the life of individuals and the population are utilised for the ruling of the state (Bargetz et al., 2015, p. 11).

Considering these fundamental changes, Foucault speaks of an "era of governmentality" in which it is crucial to acknowledge the governmentalisation of the state. In all this, however, Foucault does not see a "replacement of a society of sovereignty by a disciplinary society and the subsequent replacement of a disciplinary society by a society of government; in reality one has a triangle, sovereignty–discipline–government, which has as its primary target the population and as its essential mechanism the apparatuses of security" (Foucault, 2006, p. 142). The new era of government he proclaims thus builds on and intersects with prior forms of rule.

Toward the end of his governmentality lecture, Foucault summarises the aforementioned changes as he outlines three meanings of governmentality:

1. The ensemble formed by the institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, the calculations and tactics that allow the exercise of this very specific albeit complex form of power, which has as its target population, as its principal form of knowledge political economy, and as its essential technical means apparatuses of security.
2. The tendency which, over a long period and throughout the West, has steadily led towards the pre-eminence over all other forms (sovereignty, discipline, etc.) of this type of power which may be termed government, resulting, on the one hand, in the formation of a whole series of specific governmental apparatuses, and, on the other, in the development of a whole complex of *savoirs* [knowledges, S.H.].
3. The process, or rather the result of the process, through which the state of justice of the Middle Ages, transformed into the administrative state during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, gradually becomes 'governmentalized'. (Foucault, 2006, p. 142)

Applying this new art of governance to mobilising narratives, I especially draw from Foucault's technologies of governance that work with a combination of regulations, governing of others, and self-governance but that also unveil struggles between governing as "the way in which the conduct of individuals or of groups might be directed" (Foucault, 1982, p. 790) and instances of "counter-conduct" that resist such governing (Burchell et al., 2007, p. 201f). With regard to mobilising narratives and in light of the importance of knowledge in governmentality, I further see Foucault's notion of subjectification as one locus of these struggles. Subjectification refers to Foucault's double meaning of the subject as emerging through subjection under (state) power and agency through self-identification as subject, thereby contributing to "struggles against the privileges of knowledge" that question "the way in which knowledge circulates and functions, its relations to power" (Foucault, 1982, p. 781). That this understanding of subjectivity opens possibilities for feminist emancipation through alternative self-consciousness (see e.g. D. Taylor, 2013, p. 403f), further relates questions of governmentality to the mobilisation of and through narratives as leading to "the construction of social and political consciousness in the context of relations of domination" (Adebanwi, 2016, p. 17). For also extending governmentality – which Foucault developed for Western states in the 18th century – to the context of Malian-diasporic online news and my decolonial feminist interest in this work, the following sections introduce the notion of media governmentality, the connections between gender and postcoloniality in governmentality, and the development of affective governmentality.

4.2.1 (Social) Media Governmentality and Neoliberalism

Whereas online news media are also subject to the art of governance by the respective hosting state, for instance through the provision of communication infrastructures or through digital policies, a focus on media governmentality allows for addressing the entanglement of the public and the private in online news and social media, thereby going beyond the state but still acknowledging forms of governance. Ann Begg (2012, p. 12) defines media governmentality as "a concept that works to link networks of social power, both technologies of domination and strategies of the self, with media power and with the interactive systems of communication that infiltrate and influence all aspects of neoliberal society". In this context, media power builds on the Foucauldian notion of neoliberalism as an ideology that views power over society and economy as more preferably in the hands of the market than of the state, a constellation that *inter alia* requires and enforces a "self-management" by citizens (Patton,

2013, p. 176). However, media governmentality not only relates to neoliberalism but also to questions of intersectional inclusion and exclusion in the realm of nation states (Begg, 2012, p. 15).

More specifically relating to the governmentality of social networking sites, Julio Cesar Castro describes their function as "typical dispositives of neoliberal governmentality" (Castro, 2016, p. 88).⁴⁸ In his work, Castro identifies social and economic dimensions of governmentality in the biopolitical art of governing performed by social networking sites as they reach into myriad parts of their users' lives in order to collect and monetise their data, govern through algorithms, monetise users' content, and thereby commercialise social relations (Castro, 2016, pp. 92–95). In addition, Castro's understanding of social media governmentality also hints towards the importance of subjectification. On the one hand, Castro argues with reference to Foucault that companies like Facebook translate their neoliberal imperatives to a subjectification of the Facebook user as "entrepreneurs of himself" who competes in a "market of attention" (Castro, 2016, p. 89). On the other hand, Castro also argues that users sometimes employed social networking sites in resistant ways that could lead to heterogeneous exchange, mobilisation, and political protest in ways that challenge the "current hegemony of neoliberalism" (Castro, 2016, p. 96f).

In the present thesis, I follow this work on (social) media governmentality to understand how institutions like nation states and especially online media platforms use their politico-economic and social positioning, the access to their services, and platform features as means to govern potential users and their mobilisation of knowledge in a neoliberal way – in addition to illustrating how users either comply with or resist this governance. Thereby, I acknowledge Desirée Lewis' warning that critically "analysing the way governmentality operates also involves recognising that knowledge now enters the open market of the knowledge industry as an object of consumption, rather than as a site of and conduit in activism" (Lewis, 2021, p. 116). As these commercialisations and activisms surrounding knowledge, however, do not only manifest in neoliberal terms, but also in, for instance, gendered and racialised terms, we will now turn to the integration of such intersectional inequalities in the theory of governmentality.

⁴⁸ Also Melitta Zajc (2015) argues for seeing social media as a dispositive that structures users' agency through subjectification in a presumptive environment.

4.2.2 Governmentality in Relation to Postcoloniality and Gender

In this section, I depart from Brigitte Bargetz and colleagues who remark that Foucault's theory of governmentality neglects more (historically) specific manifestations of power relations (Bargetz et al., 2015, p. 8). In order to widen the exclusive focus on the neoliberal aspects of media governmentality in the context of Malian-diasporic online news, I introduce two approaches, one gender-sensitive and one postcolonial, that will help us to additionally consider gender and postcoloniality as important structuring categorisations along the way.

First, I draw from Bargetz and colleagues who call for a gender-sensitive approach to governmentality (Bargetz et al., 2015, p. 9). They criticise how Foucault did not address the differential workings of power and, for instance, did not address the gendered conditions and effects of governmentality. But they also mention that Foucault's governmentality can inform feminist ideas (Bargetz et al., 2015, p. 15).

Therefore, Bargetz and colleagues introduce a feminist critique of gender as a constructed categorisation that, in turn, structures the political order of Western states on three levels: (1) gender constructs hierarchies in society at the intersection of nationalism and capitalism, e.g. through separations of public and private, or the construction of masculine *white* institutions; (2) gender is instrumental in constructing subjects – and citizens – in interaction with race, class, and other categorisations, also through institutions and hierarchical differentiations that, in turn, become starting points for governing subjects, for example, with population politics that centre on women; and (3) gendered social structurations and subjectifications unveil the conditions and hierarchies in the production of knowledge about, for instance, gender or the human body (Bargetz et al., 2015, pp. 15–18).

Based on this understanding of gendered structurations, Bargetz and colleagues argue that governmentality as described by Foucault results in a gendered structuring of society and the state, by using masculinist political economy as the primary source of knowledge, by separating the public and the private spheres, by creating affective relations with the state through constructions of masculinity and femininity, through paternalistic rule in pastoral power and security technologies, or through the gendered appellation of the subjects (Bargetz et al., 2015, p. 19f). Further feminist perspectives on Foucauldian governmentality emphasise, for instance, that activist or emancipatory engagement that is embedded in a context of governmentality can be co-opted by technologies of rule or self-governance (see e.g. Jong & Kimm, 2017; Lewis, 2021). Therefore, it is also important not to take the possibilities of online communication and the participation in the circulation of news as an automatic sign of

emancipation – in gendered as well as postcolonial terms – one needs to also consider the underlying power structures and social contexts.

Following this critique, I draw attention to gendered hierarchies that arise on the multiple levels where media governmentality unfolds as governing as well as self-governing, from the access to infrastructures and platforms, via the social interactions on them, to the identity constructions and mobilisation of emotions articulated through them. In addition, considering the possibilities for subversion and resistance mentioned by Bargetz and colleagues (2015, p. 14), and in line with Dianna Taylor's (2013, p. 404) feminist take on subjectivity as an emancipatory possibility, I also seek to unveil emancipatory moments that arise on these diverse levels.

In addition to this gender-sensitive critique of governmentality, this thesis also builds on its value in explaining postcolonial situations (for a debate on the use and critique of applying governmentality to postcolonial contexts, see Adebani, 2017, p. 68f). Although Foucault has developed governmentality for Western states, especially colonial and postcolonial entanglements have made governmentality an important concept for state-citizen relations and further relations of domination in Southern states and societies as well. In that regard, however, the means and effects of governing (and resisting) need to be seen as reaching beyond one single state and its population.

For analysing online discourses about Malian transnational relations and their postcolonial implications, I consider Wale Adebani's employment of governmentality to be especially helpful. He introduces Foucault's governmentality as an instructive way of explaining the bifurcation of (post)colonial publics and, thereby, of relations between citizens and their states, in African societies (Adebani, 2017, p. 65). In that regard, he builds on Peter Ekeh's concept of two publics that emerged in African postcolonial states due to the co-optation of national political elites for colonial rule. Ekeh differentiates between a moral *primordial public* in which citizens contribute to society based on moral principles and thereby strengthen their social identity and security system, and an amoral *civic public* in which citizens, in accordance with colonial exploitative ideologies, act solely for their own economic and material interests (Ekeh, 1975, p. 106ff).

Governmentality in this context allows for explaining this bifurcation as "cultural technologies of rule" that are in large part based on a (post)colonial constitution of (resistant) "mentalities of rule." In addition, the pervasive form of governmentality also explains the comprehensive effects this colonial bifurcation has for postcolonial mentalities and relations between

citizens, their states, and their governments (Adebanwi, 2017, p. 66). When I speak about such technologies and mentalities of rule in this thesis, this rule can relate to national government as well as to international, postcolonial government – or to the interrelation of these levels. As Ekeh (1975, p. 111) states: "It is that colonial past that has defined for us the spheres of morality that have come to dominate our politics." This persistence is also evoked by Françoise Vergès when she writes that "colonial forms of governmentality (...) ultimately would translate into fact via the policies concerning military intervention and political interference, and via the creation of vast networks of corruption" (Vergès, 2020, p. 32). This understanding of postcolonial governmentality thus adds to the forms of media governmentality explored in the previous chapter and demonstrates how such mentalities – in the sense of being compliant with (post)colonial governance but also potentially resisting it – become evident as subjectivities in constructions of identities and belongings.

Bringing these two approaches to governmentality together, I analyse in this work how intersectional structurations of gender – in addition to, for instance, class and ethnicity – and postcoloniality materialise as "cultural technologies of rule" (Adebanwi, 2017, p. 66) that mobilise online discourses about Malian transnational relations.

4.2.3 Affective Governmentality

As a last dimension of governmentality, I introduce affective governmentality as a way of focalising the entanglement of mobilising narratives with neoliberalism, postcolonialism, and the patriarchy.⁴⁹ Applying an affective dimension to media governmentality can explain how emotions become effective in the struggle over conduct and counter-conduct as, for instance, between providers and users of online communication infrastructures or platforms. Affective governmentality, in this sense, highlights the mobilisation of affects for governing others through regulations and especially through self-governance as affective subjectification (Sauer, 2016, p. 154). In line with Foucault's double meaning of subjectification, affective subjectification, then, combines the working of affects in the subjection of individuals under, in this case, neoliberal and exploitative power relations, and struggles of rule and agency in the self-identification as subject in the process of performing affective work within these power relations (Sauer & Penz, 2014, p. 87).

⁴⁹ In contrast to several academics who differentiate between affects and emotions, I follow Sara Ahmed (2014) and Bargetz and Sauer (2015), who use them synonymously.

In addition, Birgit Sauer introduces gender relations as one central dimension within affective governmentality (Sauer, 2016, p. 151). Whereas gender relations teach us a lot about the working of power relations in and through affects, in the postcolonial setting of the present thesis, I additionally consider other social relations based on, for instance, race, class, or religion, as Ursula Degener and Andrea Zimmermann remind of the entanglement of affects with racism, capitalism, and colonialism and, for instance, cite work that connects depression to colonialist and racist experiences (Degener & Zimmermann, 2014, p. 13f). They furthermore refer to Heather Love, who argued in the case of queer studies that political action in the present is always informed by the affective power of homophobic wounds in the past (Love, 2007 in Degener & Zimmermann, 2014, p. 9). This influence of the past is also an important aspect to consider when researching affects in a postcolonial context.

This ties in with Ann Stoler's highlighting of ambiguous moments during colonial rule in which rational knowledge "failed" or was "insufficient for governance" and thus required an affective management of security (Stoler, 2016, p. 220f). I argue that in a situation when the French presence in Mali and the legitimacy of (complicit) political elites are increasingly controversially debated (as outlined in Chapter 1), those French and Malian elites have engaged in the management of feelings as well. In the contemporary (online news) context, this management does not only address the management of the affects of colonial administrators anymore, but equally the affects of postcolonial Malian citizens. As in Stoler's example (2016, p. 230ff), security was an important instrument in these affective governing attempts, considering the focus on the threats of, for instance, jihadist violence and economic despair. However, Stoler as well acknowledges with reference to Foucault that narratives of imperial formations "can be mobilized for different projects" (Stoler, 2016, p. 20). In that sense, a focus on the role of emotions in postcolonial discursive governmentality and the embedded subjectifications can help

to understand the nature of imperial duress, the anxieties and fears it produces, the potentialities it short-circuits, the possibilities it enables, and the force it galvanizes to ensure that viable futures are not foreclosed. (Stoler, 2016, p. 35f)

I consider these forms of affective governmentality as especially fruitful for examining relations between citizens, states, and media corporations in the context of mobilising narratives. Departing from Birgit Sauer and Otto Penz, who recognise affective governmentality in the context of Vassili Tsianos' and Dimitris Papadopoulos' "embodied capitalism" that integrates affects to produce and commodify social relations in corporations and state administration (Sauer & Penz, 2017, p. 41f), I seek to illustrate that digital corporations and espe-

cially social networking sites use affects to further their capitalist growth through their governing of social relations as well as the information and exchange in the mediated digital public sphere. In this line of thought, the goal of welfare state bureaucracies to activate economically marginalised citizens, who are assumed to be naturally passive (Sauer & Penz, 2017, p. 43), finds a parallel in modernist ideas of activating passive, dependent Southern citizens through online media for promoting socioeconomic "development" (see e.g. Arora & Rangaswamy, 2013). Moreover, these developmentalist ideas feed into the more general goal of digital corporations to affectively mobilise passive media consumers to become prosumers and thereby produce the data and content that are at the core of the digital corporations' business model. Ann Begg supports this importance of affects when she states that "with the arrival of television, digital communication and the internet, the affect value inherent in media culture becomes a predominant source of value for capital accumulation" (Begg, 2012, p. 12).

In line with the Foucauldian idea of governmentality as a pervasive art of governance, this affective media governmentality works on diverse levels. Combining corporeal and affective politics in the realm of social media, Kaisu Hynnä and colleagues assert:

...means directing attention to the carnal ways in which bodies experience practices of governance, relate to, and give shape to one another. In the context of social media, these bodies extend from human ones to the nonhuman rhythms of newsfeeds, the aesthetics of interface design, the parameters of engagement set by end-user license agreements, and algorithmic predictions and decision [sic] based on metadata. (Hynnä et al., 2019, p. 1)

Integrating affects into the governmentality of and through Malian-diasporic public discourses on the levels of infrastructures, affordances, and subjectivities thus unveils (gendered and postcolonial) moments of governance of others and the self that additionally work through the mobilisation of emotions. In the following, I will outline my understanding of how this governmentality of mobilising narratives materialises in the construction of public spheres.

4.3 The Public Sphere as Conceptual Link between Governmentality and Critical Discourse Studies (CDS)

Considering that my research object of Malian-diasporic online news relates to online communication, I approach the governmentality of mobilising narratives through the lens of the public sphere. I understand the idea of a public sphere as a framework that allows for assessing the effects of discursive encounters and exchange with regard to power relations,

asking if and under which conditions online social networks can become sites for the negotiation of power inequalities. The conceptualisation of the public sphere thus is at the basis of my understanding of politically mobilising narratives since it addresses how the formation of public opinion can relate to political power, and how political communication can make mobile to consolidate or transform power relations. In the following, I will thus first outline the concept of the public sphere as introduced by Jürgen Habermas as well as how it has been adapted to mobile, online, and Non-Western/postcolonial contexts.

In Habermas' original idea of the – ideal bourgeois – public sphere, he outlines how a public sphere emerges from the rational exchange of citizens, how it forms public opinion, and that media are a critical part of sustaining it:

By 'public sphere' we mean first of all a domain of our social life in which such a thing as public opinion can be formed. Access to the public sphere is open in principle to all citizens. A portion of the public sphere is constituted in every conversation in which private persons come together to form a public. (...) Citizens act as a public when they deal with matters of general interest without being subject to coercion; thus with the guarantee that they may assemble and unite freely, and express and publicize their opinions freely. When the public is large, this kind of communication requires certain means of dissemination and influence; today, newspapers and periodicals, radio and television are the media of the public sphere. (Habermas, 1996, p. 92)

These considerations of a free public exchange of opinions through mediated means is the fundamental reason for exploring the working of online news portals as public spheres. In addition, Habermas speaks of a "political public sphere" when the construction of public opinion is related to the state as a form of critique and control, aiming at a transformation of its governing practices (Habermas, 1996, p. 92f). The following theoretical approaches dealing with the public sphere offer analytical dimensions for connecting the facets of mobilisation I outline in this thesis: They connect insights into the socio-geographical mobilising (who is discussing across space?), the cultural mobilising (how are they changing meaning while discussing?), and the political mobilising (which political effects do these discussion have in terms of transforming or consolidating structures of government?). In this line of thought, Reisigl and Wodak illustrate how the public sphere in a deliberative democracy can support citizens in exerting political power (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001, p. 34). They thus outline three criteria for a democratic public sphere:

- open, free and equal access
- discursivity (in the Habermasian sense of a rational debate about validity claims in which it is the 'compulsion of the better argument' that leads to political decisions)

- effectiveness: that is to say, of influence on the processes of political decision-making, both in the sense of an immediate perception and taking-into-consideration by the democratically elected decision-makers and an influence on the formation of political opinions and voting preferences of the citizens (see Gerhards 1998: 272). (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001, p. 233)

These principles of Reisigl and Wodak provide a framework for analysing the potentials for political mobilisation entailed in digital communication. The assumption this concept allows is that Malian-diasporic online news portals and related social media are sites for such a public sphere that enables a transformation of governing practices in the form of postcolonial and gendered regimes via the formation of political opinions.

The Habermasian model of the public sphere, however, has been treated with some reservations. Habermas himself outlined how a – in his view ideal – public sphere developed through the polarisation of private and public realms of the feudal society, had its climax in the bourgeois society and its specific press functions, and became transformed again to a less ideal form in welfare-state democracies (Habermas, 1996, pp. 93–97). In a less historically descriptive and more analytically critical stance, Wodak and Koller point to the exclusionary elements in his concept since his understanding of the public sphere was based on an ideal of Western European *white* bourgeois male rational exchange (Wodak & Koller, 2008, p. 2). Accordingly, feminist scholars have criticised the artificial separation of private and public spheres – along the lines of, for instance, female/male and emotional/rational – and its use for reproducing patriarchal and heteronormative social structures (see e.g. Bargetz & Sauer, 2015; Lang, 2004; Ludwig, 2016). The following section will engage more extensively with this critique and its implications for the construction of public spheres through mobilising narratives in a postcolonial Malian-diasporic setting.

4.3.1 Feminist Critique of the Public Sphere

Nancy Fraser is one of the most prominent proponents of this feminist-intersectional critique of the Habermasian public sphere. In principle, she values the public sphere as a site for the critical engagement with the state and the construction of social identities through the circulation of discourses and discursive interaction (Fraser, 1995, p. 287f). However, she remarks three critical points of the liberal conception of the public sphere, namely the working of informal exclusion mechanisms that reproduce structures of domination, the assumption of a unified public sphere that neglects the existence of subaltern counterpublics, and dominant

conceptions of the public-private divide (Fraser, 1995, pp. 288–295). Fraser thus argues for a postmodern, post-liberal conception of the public sphere based on three counter-assumptions:

- (1) a postmodern conception of the public sphere must acknowledge that participatory parity requires not merely the bracketing, but rather the elimination, of systemic social inequalities;
- (2) where such inequality persists, however, a postmodern multiplicity of mutually contestatory publics is preferable to a single modern public sphere oriented solely to deliberation; and
- (3) a postmodern conception of the public sphere must countenance not the exclusion, but the inclusion, of interests and issues that bourgeois masculinist ideology labels 'private' and treats as inadmissible. (Fraser, 1995, p. 295)

In addition to this raising awareness to inadequacies of "the" public sphere in terms of access, exchange, and common concerns, Fraser highlights the importance of recognising the intersection of race, class, and gender in the context of privacy and publicity (Fraser, 1995, pp. 300–305). She furthermore argues that publicity is not only a means to critique the state, but also social power relations beyond the state-citizen divide. And she points to the fact that simply making things public does not guarantee a contestation of power inequalities for marginalised agents but rather opens issues for public debate with open outcomes (Fraser, 1995, p. 306). Fraser's approach to (counter)publics, then, is useful for analysing Malian-diasporic online communication in its relation to governmentality since it accounts for questions of access, intersectionality, counter-hegemonic discourses, and the open outcome of interactions with regard to consolidating and transforming postcolonial power relations.

From a feminist Critical Discourse Studies perspective, Michelle Lazar makes some similar points. She argues that the public sphere can serve women to make their personal(ly felt) oppression public and thus political. However, Lazar emphasises that this also needs a change of dominant institutional gendered ideologies (Lazar, 2008, pp. 93–97). She recalls that the rules of participation in the public sphere are still made by men, which eventually undermines the right of women to participate in the public sphere – a pattern she also observes for the participation of men and women in the online space. In this regard, she further calls for more feminist self-reflexivity about who is being excluded intersectionally (Lazar, 2008, pp. 97–101). Therefore, Lazar argues for an entangled perception of the public and the private sphere that would undermine the traditional distinction between rational, male and emotional, female spaces (Lazar, 2008, pp. 101–106). Analysing online mobilisation from a feminist critical discourse studies perspective thus requires us to not only look at how women – or other marginalised groups – are represented in the discourse, or how they use their opportunities to

be part of the discourse, but it also requires us to look at the terms and conditions under which they participate and mobilise *their* narratives (in a context of gendered governmentality).

4.3.2 The Public Sphere and Transnational Online Communication

In addition to these feminist developments and critiques, Peter Lunt and Sonia Livingstone ask if Habermas' concept of the public sphere is helpful for understanding communication in online media, plural societies and diverse contexts (Lunt & Livingstone, 2013, p. 91). They outline some key changes in Habermas' understanding of the public sphere as forms of communication instead of a geographically bound space, as incorporating plurality through the recognition of differences and contestation in the negotiation of compromises, and as potentially benefitting from institutions that address individuals in participatory and diversity-oriented ways (Lunt & Livingstone, 2013, pp. 92–95). Beyond these adaptations of the Habermasian ideal, the following sections introduce further developments that capture the involvement of new media, different states or international relations as well as an adaptation to non-Western, transnational publics.

First, the national reference frame of the public sphere needs to be adapted to increasingly mobile and transnational life-worlds. Several transnationalism and mobility scholars emphasise the emergence of mobile, globalised, or transnational public spheres beyond the national framework, especially due to new forms of online communication (Castells, 2007, p. 258, 2008, p. 90; Downey, 2014, p. 368f; Urry, 2010, p. 363f). Whereas Wodak and Koller warn of too much generalisation because some presumably global phenomena still only reach a small part of global society (Wodak & Koller, 2008, p. 4f), Sheller equally warns of treating the potentials online media offer for public spheres as "a monopoly of the developed Western metropolises" and accounts for the possibilities they offer to actors in the Global South (Sheller, 2004, p. 42). On another level, Sheller calls for a fluid understanding of "mobile publics" that recognises how mobile communication blurs distinctions between private and public and allows actors to connect and disconnect for different interactions in specific contexts "which enables momentary stabilisations of collective identities as publics" (Sheller, 2004, p. 50). Thus, forms of mobile or online communication can construct context-dependent public spheres beyond the nation state.

Accordingly, we need to account for the increasing importance of online communication in contemporary societies, which has changed notions of public and private, and the parameters

of political engagement. While Habermas has been rather critical of the public emerging in online discourse (Habermas, 2008, p.162 in Dorostkar & Preisinger, 2017b, p. 776), some communication scholars emphasise the participatory nature of a liberal internet that fosters democratic engagement – while also considering the complex entanglement of online and face-to-face publics (Rasmussen, 2014, pp. 1316–1327; Rodney Jones in Wodak & Koller, 2008, p. 6). Dahlberg, moreover, suggests an agonistic approach to the public sphere that emphasises mechanisms of contestation, power, and exclusion with a focus on struggles between dominant and marginalised discourses (Dahlberg, 2007, p. 133f).⁵⁰ He outlines that the internet can support marginalised voices in three ways, namely in developing own deliberative spaces, in connecting marginal voices to form collective identities and stronger counter-discourses, and in contesting dominant discourses by fostering online and offline actions (including also the "'quiet' dissemination of counter-discourses") (Dahlberg, 2007, pp. 134–141). Another assumption that leads my research thus is that online communication can foster the participation and articulation of agents that are marginalised by dominant discourses.

4.3.3 Publics beyond the Western Context and Rational Imperative

As already pointed out with Ekeh's (1975) bifurcation of postcolonial publics above, this increasing importance of online transnational communication also necessitates extending the concept of the public sphere beyond Western contexts. Schulz, for instance, argues that the (mediated) public presents a good analytical lens for looking at transformations of the relations between state and society in a (post)colonial neoliberal context (Schulz, 2012b, p. 12f). For example, she mentions local Malian radio shows as an environment in which publics emerge through the consumption and production of content, creating a "community of sentiment" (Schulz, 2012b, p. 89). Moreover, scholars emphasise the need to account for diverse public spheres and counterpublics based on differentiated socio-political, economical, and technological contexts and conditions of public spheres in the Global South. In addition, they point to elements of public spheres in postcolonial societies and African specificities that are neglected by Habermas' concept, such as exclusionary identity politics, the importance of religion and popular culture for public debates and politics, or the different scales of publicness and public concerns (Lunat, 2008, p. 4f; Schulz, 2012b, p. 174; Srinivasan et al., 2019, p.

⁵⁰ Also Wodak emphasises that a crucial dimension of the public sphere are inclusion and exclusion based on social identities and subject positions (Ruth Wodak in Wodak & Koller, 2008, p. 7).

6; Zillinger, 2017, p. 53). Whereas these elements are not unique to publics in the Global South, they point to concepts and conditions that need to be considered when researching public spheres in a postcolonial setting.

Finally, in times of increasing attention to emotions and affects, we need to re-evaluate the focus on rationality in Habermas' notion of the public sphere. In a 2005 article, Habermas reinforces his notion of rational discourse as "inclusiveness, equal communicative rights, sincerity and freedom of repression and manipulation" (Habermas, 2005, p. 385).⁵¹ My point here thus is not to question the value of rational discourse, but to include the additional workings of emotions and affects. As Birgit Sauer and Brigitte Bargetz have shown with the Western "liberal dispositive of feelings" (Sauer, 1999 in Bargetz & Sauer, 2015, p. 95, translation from German, S.H.), this is especially important since the linkage of rational to public and emotional to private discourses is related to further social hierarchisations, most notably connotations of male and female (for more, see below). Therefore, it is important not to reproduce this dispositive by excluding the working of emotions.

In relation to the public sphere, Zizi Papacharissi's concept of "affective publics" as "networked publics that are mobilized and connected, identified, and potentially disconnected through expressions of sentiment" (Papacharissi, 2016, p. 311f) is an interesting starting point. For online news, for instance, Papacharissi describes together with Maria de Fatima Oliveira that affect works in relation to premediation (the anticipation of news or events) by constructing an ambiance through ongoing publishing of updates combining information, opinion, emotion, and calls of solidarity – as alternative to conventional (Western) journalism practices that try to eliminate emotion and draw on "objective" reporting (Papacharissi & de Fatima Oliveira, 2012, p. 276ff). Papacharissi makes some interesting points that allow connecting publics, identities, belongings, and emotions to my idea of making mobile. However, her understanding of affects as "the intensity with which we experience emotion" before reaching cognition (Papacharissi, 2016, p. 316), i.e. differentiating between emotions, affects, and cognition, diverges from my own understanding that rather follows an integrative take on emotions as being entangled with corporeal affects and cognition (for more on this, see Ahmed, 2014, pp. 5–8).

In this thesis, I thus follow feminist scholars working on emotions and affects, who have taken up Sara Ahmed's work. For instance, they follow her synonymous understanding of emotions and affects as entangled with the body and cognition and as embedded in (historical)

⁵¹ In addition, Lunt and Livingstone argue that Habermas saw rationalisation as a way for individuals to positively engage with power (Lunt & Livingstone, 2013, p. 94).

social and discursive power relations in opposition to, most prominently, Brian Massumi,⁵² who distinguishes between emotions and affects and sees affects as pre-cognitive (Degener & Zimmermann, 2014, p. 7; Sauer, 2016, p. 151f). Moreover, Bargetz and Sauer use the term "affect" to avoid the traditional distinction between emotion and rationality and to capture relations between body and mind, structure and action as starting points for common political feelings and actions (Bargetz & Sauer, 2015, p. 95).

As a way of approaching the entanglement of emotions and power relations, they see affects as a possibility to critically examine separations between public and private and evaluate the political potential of such a perspective. Bargetz and Sauer identify a "liberal dispositive of feelings" in modern Western societies, which creates hierarchical dichotomies between emotion and rationality, private and public, female and male – that further materialise in Western politics through classicist and racialised structures of domination. The construction of such hierarchical dichotomies justifies delegitimising the claims of those subaltern subjects that are associated with emotions and, ultimately, reinforces domination through their exclusion from the political sphere (Bargetz & Sauer, 2015, p. 95f). Both authors, however, also acknowledge the multiple relations of affects and power. Brigitte Bargetz raises awareness for the "political ambivalence of affect" as affects can work in stabilising as well as destabilising ways with regard to existing power relations (Bargetz, 2015, p. 581). And Birgit Sauer remarks that affects are used to govern people but can equally be starting points for resistance and solidarity.⁵³ More specifically, Sauer speaks about affects as potential starting points for political mobilisation through common experience and closeness, emerging from the interdependency of affective subjectivation and the political which are producing each other, as in the examples of the Occupy movement or refugee camps. In her idea of an "affective democracy," Sauer describes affects as influencing power relations at the intersection of the everyday lives and politics (Sauer, 2016, p. 157f). This ties in with my understanding of contingent social effects of mobilising narratives. In my work, I build on this notion and explore ways in which the affects that emerge during the consumption and discussion of online news can contribute to processes of political mobilisation through mediated common experiences.

⁵² The focus on affect emerged from an unease with post-structuralist approaches that mainly centred on discourses and representations. Especially Massumi (but also e.g. Marie-Louise Angerer 2006) emphasised the corporeality of affects as counter-weight to mere representational issues in social phenomena. Massumi (2002) and, for instance, Gould (2010) see emotions as a development of affects into a socio-culturally digested form (Degener & Zimmermann, 2014, p. 6f).

⁵³ In a similar way, Degener and Zimmermann refer to queer theory and highlight that Ahmed saw the effect of emotions being potentially reproducing or transforming power relations (Degener & Zimmermann, 2014, p. 11).

What does this mean for my understanding of Malian-diasporic online news portals as public spheres? What remains from Habermas' concept and what can other concepts bring to the table? Most approaches I introduced here start from Habermas' notion and also for myself, it was an important starting point to think about platforms for online communication as enabling public spheres – and about the participating users as forming publics.⁵⁴ As KhosraviNik suggests, Habermas' concept of an ideal public sphere can further benefit to and from Critical Discourse Studies (CDS) by allowing CDS to identify ways of promoting more inclusive conditions for participation in public discourses, and by allowing public sphere conceptualisations to draw from CDS insights on the socio-political effects of knowledge/power (KhosraviNik, 2015, p. 58). As suggested by the inventions into the Habermasian public sphere concept I outlined above, these questions of access to and effects of discourses additionally need to consider their feminist, postcolonial, digital, and affective implications.

4.4 Critical Discourse Studies and the Discourse-Historical Approach: Capturing Mobilising Narratives in the Digital Public Sphere

In order to operationalise how aspects of governmentality relate to mobilising narratives in the public realm of (Malian-diasporic) online news, I build on critical discourse studies and, more specifically, the Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) by Martin Reisigl and Ruth Wodak.

The origins of critical discourse studies⁵⁵ (CDS in the following) lie in such diverse fields as linguistics, anthropology, philosophy and cognitive research. In that sense, they are closely related to critical linguistics. The approach emerged in the early 1990s within a network of scholars around Teun van Dijk, Norman Fairclough, Ruth Wodak, Gunther Kress, and Theo van Leeuwen. Until today, CDS have been institutionalised through *inter alia* handbooks, university schedules, and conferences (Wodak & Meyer, 2009, pp. 1–4).

CDS are closely related to, but also distinguish themselves from, two fields, namely linguistic studies and discourse analysis. Common dimensions in CDS include a broadening of linguistic studies towards:

⁵⁴ Sharath Srinivasan and colleagues criticise this "common practice to begin any study [on publics, S.H.] with reference to Jürgen Habermas' seminal and critical study of the public sphere in 18th and 19th western Europe" (Srinivasan et al., 2019, p. 6). However, in the line of a CDS ethics of transparency (see Subchapter 4.4), I still consider it important to outline the roots and routes of my theoretical framework here.

⁵⁵ Diverse scholars – most prominently van Dijk – demand recognition that critical discourse analysis is not merely a method, but comprises a broader theoretical and methodological project. Therefore, they argue for the use of the term critical discourse studies instead of critical discourse analysis (T. van Dijk, 2008, p. 2f, 2013).

- "'naturally occurring' language use by real language users";
- phenomena like texts, discourses, or conversations instead of more isolated words and sentences;
- inter/actions instead of mere sentence grammar;
- material beyond verbal enunciations;
- dynamic (socio-)cognitive or interactional strategies;
- the diverse workings of the contexts of language use;
- and diverse phenomena of text grammar and language use (Wodak & Meyer, 2016, p. 2).

In that regard, CDS are suitable to explore the various discursive practices offered in everyday online communication and their relation to socio-political contexts.

Moreover, CDS distinguish themselves from discourse studies in their commitment to a critical, positioned, and multidisciplinary perspective on social phenomena (Wodak & Meyer, 2016, p. 2f). Building on the Critical Theory by the Frankfurt School, this implies creating knowledge that counters dominant ideologies and thereby working for social change through the emancipation of dominated groups (T. van Dijk, 2008, p. 6f; Wodak & Meyer, 2009, p. 6f). Van Dijk suggests the following criteria for doing critical research on discursive domination:

- 1) Focus on the interests and perspective of dominated groups and possibly cooperate with them;
- 2) Depart from experiences of dominated groups in order to assess dominant discourses;
- 3) Deconstruct the discursive domination as illegitimate; and
- 4) Work towards alternative discourses and social change for marginalised groups through them (T. van Dijk, 2008, p. 6f).

While these notions point to considerable commonalities among CDS, they nowadays encompass a heterogeneous field of approaches. Since its founding years, CDS saw the emergence of a British research group around e.g. Fairclough and van Leeuwen; a Dutch variety around van Dijk; a German variety around Jäger and Link; and an Austrian/Viennese variety around Wodak and Reisigl (Wodak et al., 2009, p. 7). Accordingly, van Dijk emphasises that CDS are not characterised by a specific method but rather by a critical perspective in research that

can make reference to a variety of methods (T. van Dijk, 2013). In addition, there is no single theory or method of CDS, which is why Wodak and Meyer suggest using the terms "school" or "program" to describe CDS (Wodak & Meyer, 2016, p. 5).⁵⁶

In addition, CDS researchers approach discourses from multiple disciplines and with multiple methods, in order to improve their understanding of, for instance, the workings of discursive discrimination in social structures. Moreover, this understanding of critical research also implies that researchers constantly reflect on their own role in social power relations, especially within the research process, and to position themselves openly as aiming for social change (T. van Dijk, 2008, p. 6f; Wodak & Meyer, 2009, p. 7). In that sense, CDS provide a framework for reflexive and proactive research in postcolonial contexts that goes beyond criticising the current status quo.⁵⁷

Insights from feminist critical discourse studies can further point to the importance of addressing intersectionality in a CDS setting, and vice versa, highlighting the importance a CDS perspective can have for intersectional research frameworks. Feminist critical discourse analysis, for instance, is one way of approaching the question of gender in the construction of power relations in and through discourses. Lazar has identified the following elements as crucial for feminist critical discourse analysis: committing oneself to an analytical activism that contests the status quo, identifying gender as an ideological structure, taking account of the complexity of gendered knowledge relations in their intersectional embeddedness and their multiple modalities, focusing on the discursive construction and/or deconstruction of gender, and applying critical feminist reflexivity on the institutional and analytical level (Lazar, 2008, pp. 90–93). In that vein, Lazar also emphasises the need to consider intersectional power relations when engaging critically with discursive exclusion, in this case, as based on gender relations. I assume that these ideas can and should also be extended to other social lines of exclusion – such as race, class, ethnicity, sexuality, and religion – as well as their intersections.

Following these considerations, Teun van Dijk describes CDS as a "scholarly movement specifically interested in theory formation and critical analysis of the discursive reproduction of power abuse and social inequality" (T. van Dijk, 2008, p. 1). Core principles of CDS thus describe them as problem-oriented, interdisciplinary, interested in deconstructing power

⁵⁶ Therefore, also understandings of core dimensions of CDS such as discourse, critique, and power vary according to different researchers. For an outline of how CDS scholars across diverse approaches relate to notions of discourse, critique, power, and ideology see Wodak and Meyer (2016, pp. 6–11).

⁵⁷ I will provide more information on my own compliance with this critical approach in the methodological chapter.

relations, and self-reflective (Wodak & Meyer, 2016, p. 4). An alternative definition of van Dijk, however, also hints at the possibilities to change situations of social inequality: "CDS scholars are typically interested in the way discourse (re)produces social *domination*, that is, the *power abuse* of one group over others, and how dominated groups may discursively *resist* such abuse" (T. van Dijk, 2009, p. 63 original emphasis). This notion, which can also be part of Reisigl and Wodak's prospective critique (see below), is especially interesting for studying mobilising narratives in postcolonial digital settings as they prompt one to ask: How is the discursive reproduction of social inequality working in an environment of online media that allows for the participation of users who are possibly subjected to such power abuse? Can they change these discourses? And in which ways can this transform social inequalities that characterise postcolonial and gendered relations? In order to answer these questions, I further draw from insights on the workings of discourses in online environments.

4.4.1 Critical Discourse Studies Going Online: New Participations, New Domination

In recent years, digitisation has emerged as an important medium for restructuring power relations in public communication and therefore presents crucial new challenges and developments for CDS (KhosraviNik & Zia, 2014, p. 757). In this context, the crucial difference is that of changing power relations through media texts. While CDS have traditionally engaged with "powerful" texts, social media – or the participatory web – provide a "new interactive context" and "sociality of communication" for those texts (KhosraviNik & Unger, 2016, p. 213). While acknowledging the utopian character of some egalitarian and empowering expectations related to social media, they argue that "the traditional dichotomy of powerful/powerless voices is eroding" and "such spaces for resistant discourses are not only afforded but taken up and used effectively" (KhosraviNik & Unger, 2016, p. 211). For instance, social media offer possibilities to construct identities that counter dominant representations (KhosraviNik & Unger, 2016, p. 211; KhosraviNik & Zia, 2014, p. 757). This is a feature that is especially relevant for media discourses in postcolonial settings that have a tendency to reproduce colonial representations of agents in the Global South. Especially in the context of the Global South, however, it is also important to think about the possibility that online communication reproduces existing power inequalities due to, for instance, unequal access to discourses or neoliberal exploitation (see the theoretical considerations on access and platforms in Section 4.4.3). In this line of thought, Majid KhosraviNik and Johann Unger high-

light not only possibilities for participation and interaction but also for capitalist exploitation (KhosraviNik & Unger, 2016, p. 206ff).

Beyond (and related to) the power issue, scholars mention further changes brought about by online communication. For instance, distinctions between private and public and the personal and the political become increasingly blurred through interactive design features and the following combination of formal and informal genres (Dorostkar & Preisinger, 2012, p. 3f; KhosraviNik & Unger, 2016, p. 209). In postcolonial settings, this blurring can facilitate access to political discourses for users who would otherwise be excluded through economic, political, or social factors.

Moreover, online media change the notion of context dimensions in the DHA. KhosraviNik and Unger identify media institutions, genres, and the wider social and political circumstances as context levels (KhosraviNik & Unger, 2016, p. 213f). They also cite Susan Herring, who distinguishes between medium and situation factors to contextualise social media data (Herring, 2007 in KhosraviNik & Unger, 2016, p. 214f). Niku Dorostkar and Alexander Preisinger, on the other hand, differentiate between general and design-specific parameters (Dorostkar & Preisinger, 2012, p. 11). Still, other authors have approached context in CDS 2.0 with questions about networks, transversals and control over communication (KhosraviNik & Unger, 2016, p. 209f). When researching online discourses, one thus has to account for these different factors that additionally come with online media (I will offer more detail on this in the methodology Sections 5.5.1 and 5.5.2).

Another change through online media popularity is the question about connections between online and offline contexts. Research on online discourses has stressed their connection to, for instance, racist social practices as a consequence of online racism (Dorostkar & Preisinger, 2012, p. 4) or their mobilising and radicalising effect on offline discourses about national identity in times of crisis (Angouri & Wodak, 2014, p. 547). Consequently, KhosraviNik and Unger emphasise that social media can facilitate new forms of social and political engagement – although always within their respective context (KhosraviNik & Unger, 2016, p. 212).

These changes challenge conventional practices of CDS research, but they also show that online media offer interesting possibilities for researching discourses and their connection to social power relations as outlined in the subchapter above on postcolonial and gendered forms of governmentality. As I will show in the next section, the DHA is a suitable approach for researching online discourses for several reasons. Before I do so, however, I will first outline

some core characteristics of this CDS approach that we call the Discourse-Historical Approach.

4.4.2 The Discourse-Historical Approach: Dissecting the Mobilisation of and through Narratives

In *Discourse and Discrimination*, one of their seminal books on the development of the Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA), Reisigl and Wodak introduce the approach as "a context-sensitive theory that follows a complex concept of social critique and focuses on the historical and political dimension of discursive actions" (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001, p. xii). This definition emphasises the engagement with discursive practices in relation to their respective context and their working within social power relations. In that regard, it allows for exploring the double notion of mobilising narratives, i.e. their being mobilised in a specific multi-scale context as well as their mobilising for consolidating or transforming the (historically sedimented postcolonial and gendered) status quo.

Among the multiple approaches assembled within the school of CDS, the DHA works inductively with detailed case studies, makes use of theories of social cognition for describing the interrelations of language and society (thereby situating itself between a focus on structure and agency), and bridges micro- and macro-structural analyses (Wodak & Meyer, 2016, p. 18ff). Together with its high context-sensitivity, the DHA is thus a suitable approach for studying the mobilisation of and through narratives in the context of a specific Malian-diasporic online news portal, the subjectifications these narratives create, as well as their structural embeddedness in situational and broader contexts.

Originally developed for the study of antisemitism in post-war Austria and its relation to commemorations of the Austrian National-Socialist past, the DHA has been further developed to research discursive discrimination in different contexts, for instance, of Romanian asylum seekers/immigrants, or in the construction of a national Austrian identity in relation to other groups. In the latter, DHA scholars also outline the differences in discriminatory discourses if voiced in more public or private contexts (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001, p. 41ff). Thereby, the DHA is open to a variety of voices on the public-private continuum, which also encourages research in environments in which these spheres become increasingly blurred, such as in online news portals. Moreover, since the DHA was developed in order to research racist discourses, it is an interesting approach to study where such discourses are consolidated or transformed in a postcolonial setting.

In the DHA understanding, discourses are in a dialectical relationship with the social fields in which they are embedded, both socio-politically conditioned and constitutive at the same time (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001, p. 36, 2016, p. 27). In that sense, discourse

...can be understood as a complex bundle of simultaneous and sequential interrelated linguistic acts that manifest themselves within and across the social fields of action as thematically inter-related semiotic, oral or written tokens, very often as 'texts', that belong to specific semiotic types, i.e. genres. (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001, p. 36)⁵⁸

To summarise, Reisigl and Wodak identify "(a) macro-topic relatedness, (b) pluri-perspectivity and (c) argumentativity as constitutive elements of a discourse". They also remark that the boundaries of discourses are always partly fluid (Reisigl & Wodak, 2016, p. 27). In this dissertation, I thus study a media discourse that (a) relates to Malian transnational relations, (b) is co-constructed by media agents and users, and (c) contains arguments about the past, present, and future nature of those relations. I understand this discourse as constituted through the narratives that circulate through Malian-diasporic online news.

Another important DHA concept that allows for unveiling the workings of governmentality in these narratives and the emerging discourse is ideology. Reisigl and Wodak (2016, p. 25) understand ideology as "a perspective (often one-sided) – i.e. a worldview and a system composed of related mental representations, convictions, opinions, attitudes, values and evaluations, which is shared by members of a specific social group". Especially for "grand narratives", they identify three interrelated models – a representational, a visionary, and a programmatic one – as ingredients. They argue that ideologies are important for creating social identities and for reproducing and transforming power relations. The aim of the DHA, then, is to unveil ideologies that contribute to power inequalities (Reisigl & Wodak, 2016, p. 25). In the context of online discourses on Malian transnational relations, this concept helps to identify how the discursive engagement of different agents forms groups based on certain identifications and their relations to certain positions in power hierarchies.

With regard to power, Reisigl and Wodak speak of "an asymmetric relationship among social actors who have different social positions or who belong to different social groups". They argue that power transcends society, can be productive or destructive, and is interdependently related to discourses. In that sense, the DHA focuses on linguistic forms – including oral, written or visual texts – and their contextual conditions as a means of reproducing power relations (Reisigl & Wodak, 2016, p. 26). Considering this understanding of power, CDS have

⁵⁸ In that understanding, texts are "materially durable products of linguistic actions" (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001, p. 36).

often focused on "powerful", mass-mediated texts. KhosraviNik and Zia describe their working of power as (a) power "behind" discourse that lies in the mass distribution and control over the production (and consumption) of texts and (b) "power in discourse" that lies in the constructive nature of the respective texts (KhosraviNik & Zia, 2014, p. 756). Especially the former is also emphasised by van Dijk when he draws attention to the dimension of control of the discourse through access that differentiates between (discursively) powerful groups and powerless groups (T. van Dijk, 2008, p. 31). This also ties in with the aim of the DHA to explore discourses and their different context levels. With regard to agents engaged in online discourses, this means to not only address power relations that are reconstructed in the discursive practices on Malian-diasporic online news websites and its social media accounts, but equally to account for the access different agents have to circulating narratives via these platforms in terms of their social location.

In order to theorise the diverse relationships and interdependencies between discourses and the social status quo, Reisigl and Wodak introduce four context dimensions, including:

1. the immediate, language or text-internal co-text and co-discourse;
2. the intertextual and interdiscursive relationships between utterances, texts, genres and discourses;
3. the social variables and institutional frames of a specific 'context of situation';
4. the broader sociopolitical and historical context, which discursive practices are embedded in and related to (Reisigl & Wodak, 2016, p. 30f)

In addition, the historical orientation of the DHA relates to the latter historical context level and to a diachronic perspective on discursive practices (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001, p. 35; Wodak et al., 2009, p. 7f). In this dissertation, this means being aware of the historical development of (the discourse on) Malian transnational relations (as outlined in Subchapters 2.1, 2.4, and 2.5) as well as analysing how the researched discourse fragment itself changes over time.

Scholars working with the DHA explore these linkages between discourse and context through theoretical, methodological, and disciplinary triangulation (Wodak et al., 2009, p. 9f). Triangulation also is one way in which DHA researchers secure the quality of their critical analysis as opposed to becoming too politically biased (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001, p. 35). Reisigl and Wodak explain how they used triangulation in their work in the following way:

In exploring the discursive construction of collective groups like 'races', nations and ethnicities, our interdisciplinary approach combines historical, sociopolitical and linguistic perspectives. Intradisciplinary, we apply various methods of one and the same discipline. In addition, the principle of triangulation implies using various methods of data collection and the analysis of different corpora and genres, depending on the topic in question. (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001, p. 40)

I follow this call for triangulation by combining different theoretical approaches from, most importantly, discourse studies, postcolonial studies, and mobility studies and by combining different online ethnographic methods for data collection (see the methodological chapter for more information).

In addition, the DHA is a suitable approach for researching online discourses for several reasons. First, DHA studies have early on challenged assumptions of mono-causal, top-down, manipulative opinion-making by powerful agents (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001, p. 31f). Also the notion of discourse promoted by the DHA is productive for exploring online discourses since it reflects their mostly problem-centred, argumentative, multi-perspective nature that supports intertextuality, interdiscursivity and recontextualisation through multiple technological features (Dorostkar & Preisinger, 2012, p. 5). In addition, the DHA provides an opportunity to follow the calls for more user and context sensitivity in research on online communication made by, for instance, Androutsopoulos and Herrings (KhosraviNik & Zia, 2014, p. 758). In that sense, CDS scholars also critique the "digital dualism" that assumes independently existing online and offline spaces (KhosraviNik & Unger, 2016, p. 213) and relativise online-offline divides by seeing online communication as one form among many in society (KhosraviNik, 2014, p. 298f). Moreover, the definition of discourses as socially constitutive and socially constructed allows for an analysis of connections between institutional and private, online and offline levels, linguistics and social issues, which contributes to capturing the social relevance of online discourses (Dorostkar & Preisinger, 2012, p. 4ff). In that regard, my work asks in which ways mobilising narratives in online environments connect mobilisation in the (offline) context and on the (online) discourse level.

As a further implication for researching online communication, KhosraviNik and Unger state that "anchoring the research in society rather than technology is the first step towards envisaging a CDS approach to social media" – also mirroring the importance of socio-political contextualisation in CDS (KhosraviNik & Unger, 2016, p. 208). In addition, and in line with more general DHA requirements, Dorostkar and Preisinger point to the necessity of modifying the DHA with regard to the respective research question (Dorostkar & Preisinger, 2012, p. 4f). And in terms of interdisciplinary engagement, Angouri and Wodak relate the DHA to a

range of other research relevant for their research question (Angouri & Wodak, 2014, p. 547f). I will do so as well in the following sections, connecting CDS to approaches from mobility studies, media and communication studies, and social sciences as a way of integrating movement, online media, and power into the study of online discourses in a postcolonial setting.

This approach enables me, on the one hand, to connect discursive user engagements online with their multiple contexts and, on the other hand, to relate these to issues of power inequalities. First, I explain how narratives are mobilised socio-geographically between media agents and users through physical and mediated movements across space on diverse levels. Secondly, I illustrate how the narratives circulated mobilise through discursive constructions of (political) identities and emotions that either consolidate or transform intersectional power relations, especially gendered and postcolonial politics of exclusion.

In order to explicate these two facets, I also refer to a range of other approaches beyond the DHA that will be outlined in more detail below. I first introduce approaches that provide analytical perspectives for exploring the movements that enable users to connect and exchange across space but also account for their embeddedness in the structures that limit or enable their movements and connectivity. This illustrates how narratives that constitute discourses become mobile – or not – in online media environments and between agents. Secondly, I employ approaches to identities and belongings in order to account for how narratives become mobile symbolically. They take up discursive practices of representing the "self" and "other" and explain how these create ingroups and outgroups in an era of increasing – but unequally distributed – physical mobility and online connectivity, and show how the meanings of these identifications can change with the circulation of texts. In that regard, I also refer to approaches that explain how such narratives can mobilise (users) and thus make narratives and social relations mobile as they consolidate or transform power relations. When introducing these approaches, however, I will not be able to speak to the (historical) debates going on in the respective disciplines. Rather, I will focus on how I combine these different approaches to supplement my theoretical considerations outlined so far.

4.4.3 Mobilising Narratives in Context: Online (News) Infrastructures, Platforms, and Social Interactions

This chapter addresses the socio-geographic mobilisation of narratives in my framework of mobilisation and explains in which ways narratives become mobile through online communi-

cation as they circulate between agents in different social and geographical positions that are located within multiple im/mobility regimes. I explain how I approach the social, technological, and political conditions under which narratives can circulate and which forms of agency I assume users have in this context. Asking these questions is especially important in postcolonial settings since they address the fact that not all agents have equal access to online communication and how their narratives have thus become mobile in a less fluid way.

This chapter mainly studies this socio-geographic mobilisation as part of the socio-historical and political as well as the institutional situational context levels of the DHA. In terms of discourses, Teun van Dijk prominently emphasises the importance of access on diverse levels. In his book *Discourse and Power*, for instance, van Dijk dedicates a whole chapter to the question of access to discourses. This is very instructive as it explains how the situations (see situational context level) of discursive production are already imbued with social power relations (T. van Dijk, 2008, p. 65f). His understanding of access, however, mostly addresses questions around who plans events, who invites whom, or who is allowed to speak. Moreover, when dealing with the access of racialised minorities to media discourses, he mostly deals with their access in terms of the journalist profession and content (T. van Dijk, 2008, p. 74f). Reisigl and Wodak refer to the positionalities of interacting agents as part of the situational context which could be an implicit hint to their differential access to communication infrastructures (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001, p. 41). So, whereas CDS and DHA scholars stress the importance of context, they mainly stay on the situational level and do not explicitly integrate the material conditions of accessing discourses.

This lack of dealing with spatial and material aspects of communication could result from the fact that these works do not (yet) consider the interactive potentials opened by the internet for media discourses. Even when looking at the work of scholars who engage with CDS 2.0, infrastructure is not mentioned explicitly. Dorostkar and Preisinger mainly refer to the importance of website design but do not address the access of users to those websites (Dorostkar & Preisinger, 2012, p. 3f). And KhosraviNik and Unger mention as context levels media institutions, genres, and the wider social and political circumstances (KhosraviNik & Unger, 2016, p. 213f). The latter could also include a reference to infrastructure, but this is again only implicit.

Mobility studies can inform the DHA here, as they explicate the different forms of movement that contribute to narratives becoming mobile socio-geographically and emphasise the importance of studying the material conditions of such movements. In this context, the notion

of critical mobility studies promoted by Glick-Schiller and Salazar (2013, p. 185f) and Kesselring and Vogl (2013, p. 31) brings attention to the relationships between mobilities and immobilities, and the agents and socioeconomic conditions behind them that can unveil forms of governmentality in the socio-geographic mobilising of narratives. For researching the online communication of marginalised agents, this means to address their access through their embeddedness in politico-economic contexts as well as the differential valuation of different agents' mobilities as contributing to their positionalities, as well as investigating the relations between their different im/mobilities to explore what kind of resource online communication is for them.

For analysing the material and institutional conditions of mobilised narratives, the perspective of mobility regimes is instructive as it points to the different scales I address in the following. According to Kesselring and Vogl, mobility regimes manifest on different but interrelated levels, i.e. the macro level of global mobility regimes (global transport and communication regimes, national border regimes, migration regimes, or drug trafficking regimes), the meso level of intra-organisational regimes (companies, professional networks, or NGOs), and the micro level of subject-oriented mobility regimes (social networks, families, or Facebook communities). Therefore, mobility regimes are shaped by, for instance, supranational as well as national policies (Kesselring & Vogl, 2013, p. 36f) . This supports connecting mobility studies to the DHA by offering a bridge to its socio-political and historical, institutional situational, and social situational context levels. In order to still explicate these connecting points of the DHA and mobility studies, it will be productive to look more into the governmentality of mobilising narratives through the following contextual dimensions (see also Figure 2): political projects of moorings (infrastructures), platform governance (affordances), and social interactions (affective labour).

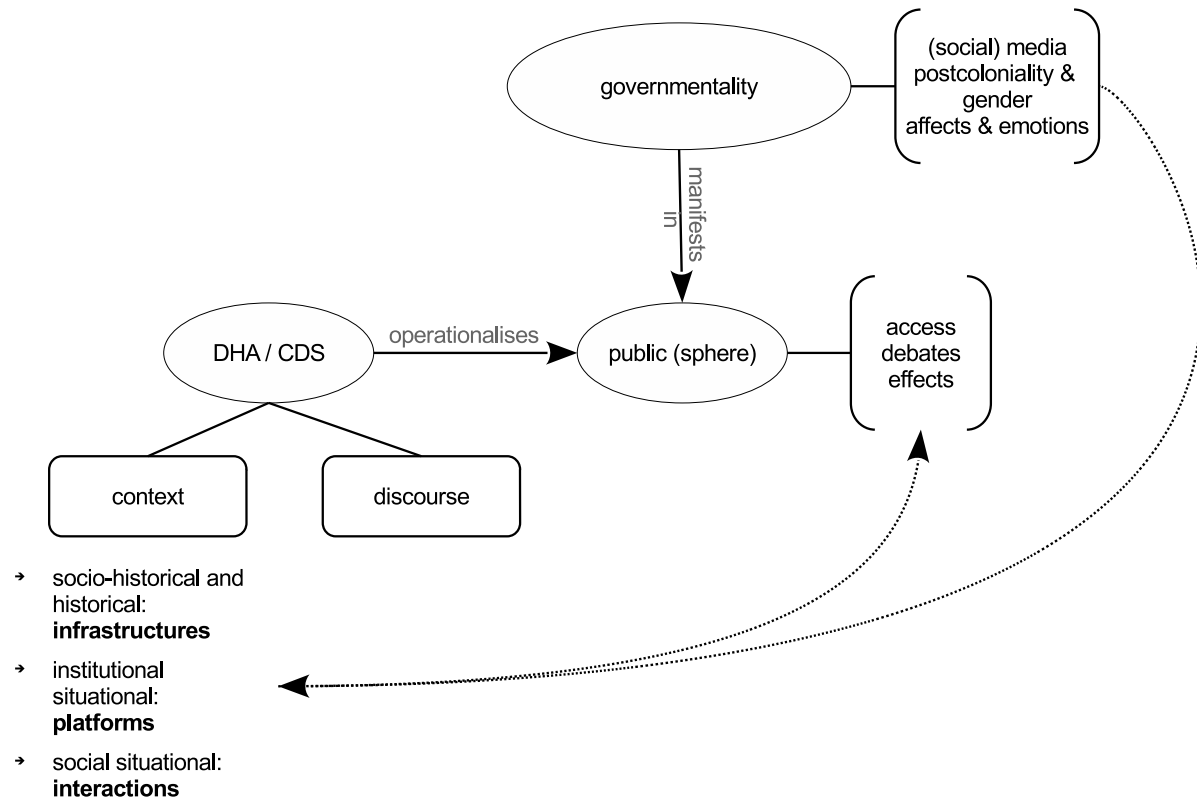


Figure 2: Integration of context levels into the overall theoretical framework of mobilising narratives (own visualisation)

In the following, we will explore these contextual dimensions in more detail.

Infrastructures of Online Communication between Physical Availability, Digital Divide, and Information Politics

This subsection explains in which ways which material structures influence the becoming mobile of narratives between media agents and users in different social and geographical positions. Thereby, it especially focuses on how infrastructures influence the access of agents to online communication. In addition, it highlights the symbolic meaning of infrastructures as political projects in postcolonial settings. That way, infrastructures can explicate the DHA level of the socio-political and historical context of online communication in Malian-diasporic online news portals and indicate what exactly to look at in order to assess the (access to) infrastructure as a vehicle for governmentality in mobilising narratives.

The importance of considering infrastructures has also been stressed by mobility studies. From the beginning, they have dealt with the so-called moorings, i.e. physical structures ("immobile" material worlds") that are necessary to enable movement. As Hannam and

colleagues write, "[m]obilities cannot be described without attention to the necessary spatial, infrastructural and institutional moorings that configure and enable mobilities" (Hannam et al., 2006, p. 3). Whereas the focus of early mobility scholars mostly relates to infrastructures for physical movement of people or goods such as airports or docks, they also mention infrastructures for information and communication technologies as a component of researching imaginative and communicative mobilities (Hannam et al., 2006, p. 11f; Sheller & Urry, 2006, p. 212). Whereas their considerations are helpful for emphasising interdependencies between mobilities and moorings as static physical structures, they rather claim the importance of this perspective and do not go into greater length at explaining the workings of "immobile" infrastructures. In the remainder of this subsection, I will thus explain in more detail my understanding of infrastructures and their working in postcolonial settings.

As a first step towards my understanding of infrastructures, insights from communication studies proved valuable. David Morley argues for a non-media centric approach to communication that analyses it in its broader socio-political, and cultural context, especially in relation to transport (Morley, 2017, p. 26). Moreover, he suggests combining the study of transport and communications, since he understands communications in a broad way as including all the means of connecting people, including telephone lines, internet infrastructures, and the railway (Morley, 2017, p. 29). Looking at infrastructures of communication in this way allows me to especially look at those relevant for online communication without neglecting that they are connected to other infrastructural routes for different kinds of mobilities and mobilisations. In this line of thought, I see (Malian-diasporic) online communication as an extension of existing, historically formed communication flows and related infrastructures, and not as a completely new phenomenon.

More specifically, I follow scholars from communication studies, who understand the infrastructures sustaining online communication as complex systems with connections to other realms of society. Gillespie and colleagues (2018, p. 5) refer to Star and Ruhleder (1996) to define infrastructures as relational and performed "constellation of structures (...) with particular characteristics. These include the following: embeddedness, transparency, reach and scope, conventions of practice, embodiment of standards, construction on an installed base, and visibility upon breakdown". They further highlight that digital infrastructures are connected to "other structures (financial, legal, military), systems (policing and border controls), and sociotechnical arrangements (Google, Facebook)". Especially this context-sensitivity of infrastructures emphasises the necessity to look at their relation to power inequalities in postcolonial contexts.

When assessing the infrastructures available to actors communicating in postcolonial situations, which often involves actors in the Global South, the so-called "digital divide" is an important aspect to consider. This, however, does not only mean to ask if agents have physical access to internet infrastructure, but equally if they have the economic means to use it or the necessary education to articulate their positions online. In this line of thought, Massimo Ragnedda (2019, pp. 29–37) describes a digital divide model with three levels, with the first level addressing the access to online communication infrastructure, the second level also including skills and motivation of potential users, and the third level asking about the possibilities to convert capital from digital media use into better life chances. Adding an intersectional lens to this concept shows that the access to and the use of means of online communication are divided through, most importantly, gender, class, and location.

In this context, Jan van Dijk criticises descriptive approaches to digital inequalities for methodological individualism that does not provide any explanations and blames the individual (J. van Dijk, 2013, p. 29). He rather suggests a relational approach to the digital divide that positions users of digital communication in relation to each other based on social categories. He argues that this approach has several advantages: It can explain the differential appropriation of digital technologies, distinguish between types of inequalities, determine the importance of categories from empirical observation, and position relative inequalities of user positions and resources on a continuum (J. van Dijk, 2013, p. 30f). For online communication in the context of this thesis, this means approaching the digital divide from an individual *and* a structural angle, i.e. by assessing the positionalities of Malian-diasporic agents in global, regional, and national networks.

Van Dijk summarises the assumptions of this resources and appropriation theory the following way:

1. Categorical inequalities in society produce an unequal distribution of resources.
2. An unequal distribution of resources causes unequal access to digital technologies.
3. Unequal access to digital technologies also depends on the characteristics of these technologies.
4. Unequal access to digital technologies brings about unequal participation in society.
5. Unequal participation in society reinforces categorical inequalities and unequal distributions of resources. (J. van Dijk, 2013, p. 33).

In this context, he introduces as "personal categorical inequalities" age, gender, race/ethnicity, intelligence, personality, and health, and as "positional categorical inequalities" different labour positions, education, household constitution, and users' nations. For resources, he introduces temporal, material, mental, social and cultural resources. The kinds of access develop through appropriation based on motivation, physical access, material resources, and skills which manifests in the frequency and diversity of usage. These are influenced by characteristics of ICTs that can facilitate usage or make it more difficult. And the appropriation of those ICTs finally influences the economic, social, political, spatial and institutional participation of users (J. van Dijk, 2013, p. 33ff). For skills, van Dijk distinguishes among six types of medium- and content-related skills, including operational skills, formal skills, information skills, communication skills, strategic skills, and content-creation skills (J. van Dijk, 2013, p. 40f). Van Dijk thus argues that in a network society, not only physical access to online communication, but also skills, motivation and usage will determine the future digital divide (J. van Dijk, 2013, p. 47f). For assessing the access of actors to Malian-diasporic online news portals, I thus have to go beyond the distribution of internet networks and include an intersectional analysis of the digital divide.

In a similar line of thought, Gillespie and colleagues point to infrastructural vulnerabilities – or even "infrastructural violence" (Rodgers and O'Neill, 2012 in M. Gillespie et al., 2018, p. 6) – as constraining factors in the context of smartphone use during refugee journeys: While smartphones can become an essential part of refugees' lives, the devices also put refugees at risk when they need their batteries charged, are exploited or subject to fraud in registering for a mobile network, when they lose their phone, or when they lose connection with their families due to coverage or surveillance issues on the route or back at their families' places (M. Gillespie et al., 2018, p. 5ff). This points to a conflation of making and becoming mobile, mobilising dominant structures and processes that consolidate the status quo of social inequalities. The social effects of online communication infrastructures thus always have to be seen in relation to individual and social vulnerabilities, as we will explore for the situation of online news in the Malian news sector.

In addition, infrastructures also have a political dimension that ultimately influences the mobilising of narratives. Antina von Schnitzler's work on techno-politics provides an interesting example here. Von Schnitzler argues for a perspective on infrastructure that widens views on the political "by focusing on the infrastructural and the technical as modalities of political action (...) by exploring affective, embodied form of political subjectivity and focusing on new locations of ethical and political formations" (von Schnitzler, 2016, p. 9). Referring to

Chatterjee's "political society" (2004), von Schnitzler argues that especially in postcolonial contexts, political negotiations between the state and its citizens appear not in the "traditional public sphere" of (colonially built) politics, but in administrative procedures (von Schnitzler, 2016, p. 9). As an example, she illustrates the socio-political dimensions of water meters that were first installed in 19th century Britain to morally reform and control the working class and in the 1980s came to South Africa to undermine antiapartheid "rent boycotts" (von Schnitzler, 2016, p. 7). More recently, they have become embedded in debates about neoliberalism and environmental sustainability (von Schnitzler, 2016, p. 10).

Von Schnitzler further refers to Gabrielle Hecht (2009, 2012) and Timothy Mitchell (2002, 2011) when she introduces her understanding of techno-politics as

...the ways in which political actions are embedded within technical forms and, conversely, the ways in which the technical shapes political questions. Thus, techno-politics may denote the ways in which large-scale engineering or infrastructure projects function as vehicles or expressions of larger political goals and forms of power, but it also and more broadly foregrounds the materiality of politics and political expression". (von Schnitzler, 2016, p. 10)

In her case, she takes a micro perspective on individual households and subjectivities and their engagement with the device of the prepaid water meter (von Schnitzler, 2016, p. 10). Whereas von Schnitzler focuses on the "work of making liberal democracy" and sees techno-politics as a development outside of the realm of publics, arguing that "this infrastructural perspective opens up conceptual space for a more expansive theory and vision of what it means to act politically in the postcolony and beyond (Mbembe 2001)" (von Schnitzler, 2016, p. 8), I mostly focus on the socio-political meaning of communication infrastructure as articulated in the engagement of international and national political-economic actors.

This subsection highlighted the importance of researching infrastructures when asking questions about diverse forms of mobilities. It introduced approaches that explain how infrastructures work in communicative situations and postcolonial settings. Especially the work on digital divide explained in which ways infrastructures influence the movement of narratives between agents, i.e. between which agents narratives can move in which ways and which vulnerabilities they produce. Von Schnitzler's ideas about postcolonial politics of infrastructure went one step further to explain how political projects may interrelate with this access. From this structural perspective, the next subsection will turn to the potential for agency online communication offers to individual users.

Platforms: Users (Not) Being Governed through Affordances

As another contextual level of mobilising narratives, this subsection introduces my perspective on digital platforms through technological features. With the notion of affordances, I point to possibilities for agency users have within regulative parameters of (social) media governance when interacting with online media. Whereas CDS and the DHA emphasise new possibilities for discursive participation offered by online media, they do not systematically explore which features of these media facilitate or constrain those new possibilities. In addition, as outlined above, mobility scholars have always emphasised the importance of material worlds for practices of movement. Elliott and Urry, for instance, mention affordances as basic conditions that negotiate the agency of im/mobile humans in their interaction with material worlds and that are granted by objects that are im/mobile in various forms (Elliott & Urry, 2010, p. 13ff). Their take on affordances, however, is rather descriptive, as when they elaborate on the miniaturisation of technological devices that facilitates their mobility, for instance, using the example of the Walkman for an early form of being in two places at once, or the impact of new mobile media on interpersonal communication (Elliott & Urry, 2010, p. 28ff). In the following subchapter, I thus introduce the theory of imagined affordances to explain more explicitly how features of online media can govern the mobilising of narratives between actors in different social and geographical positions but also provoke resistance to this governance.

In its original sense, as developed by James Gibson in the 1980s, the affordance theory describes the interactions between organisms and their environment. It promotes the idea of a niche, which accounts for the fact that different organisms can make use of different affordances, the classic example being a human vs. a lizard making use of a stone in different ways. In this understanding, affordances are selectively actualised, contain different potential activities depending on the cognitive facilities of the respective organisms, and therefore equally depend on the environment and the observer, pointing to the influence of materiality and discourse (Nagy & Neff, 2015, p. 3).

Sandra Evans and colleagues outline the change in studies on affordances from a rather deterministic understanding of the action-shaping environment or design to a relational understanding of affordances as emerging within the materiality of an object, its use, and the context of its use (Evans et al., 2017, p. 36f). When researching the material determinants of online communication, the concept of affordances can be very helpful because an "affordance perspective represents a relational approach to understanding how people interact with

technology" (Leonardi 2013 in Evans et al., 2017, p. 35). Jennie Molz and Cody Paris, for instance, outline how Gibson's understanding of affordances has been used in tourism studies to describe how social affordances of digital media enable or constrain different ways of sociabilities through mooring, following, collaborating, and disconnecting (Molz & Paris, 2015, pp. 180–188). For my purposes, it is especially interesting to apply affordances to communicative situations as they can provide a way to look at how users interact with the online news platforms and how these platforms promote or constrain certain interactions.

When applying affordances theory to the study of (online) communication, Peter Nagy and Gina Neff highlight that the term "affordances" has been used by communication scholars in a rather limited way as they often focus on the observer to the detriment of the environment, i.e. emphasise the agency of users to the detriment of material aspects (Nagy & Neff, 2015, p. 2f). Moreover, they argue that communication scholars have neglected that imagination works in two ways when it comes to affordances: Users imagine the potential use of technologies, and designers imagine their use(r)s. Therefore, Nagy and Neff suggest imagination as an additional clarifying term for dealing with affordances. Imagination goes beyond rational thinking about technology and affects its perception, but also stays connected to the material conditions of technological features (Nagy & Neff, 2015, p. 4f). They thus advocate "imagined affordances as a theory that better incorporates the material, the mediated, and the emotional aspects of human-technology interaction" (Nagy & Neff, 2015, p. 2). As an example, they argue that users might perceive information on their Facebook news feed as an objective reporting on their friends' activities instead of as structured by algorithms. This, in turn, would affect their use of the news feed.

From these considerations, Nagy and Neff postulate that imagined affordances can be a way of thinking about the social and psychological moments in human-technology interactions and to integrate their mediated, material and emotional aspects. Thereby, imagined affordances help researchers to go beyond the dichotomy between materialism and social constructivism by highlighting the relations between users' perceptions and their actual use of technologies (Nagy & Neff, 2015, p. 7). Gillespie and colleagues second these considerations of Nagy and Neff. In addition, they emphasise that the fluid nature of affordances should be addressed by researching how agents use mobile media across space and time. In their research project, for instance, they show how the locatability and visibility that smartphones afford can be saving and threatening refugees' journeys and lives at the same time (M. Gillespie et al., 2018, p. 7f). Accordingly, I assume that online news portals can have different meanings for different users not only depending on their position in different times and in different locations, but also in

different social locations and, in turn, depending on their embeddedness in forms of neoliberal governmentality (see Section 4.2.1).

For communication studies, Evans and colleagues suggest three criteria for identifying affordances: That they (1) describe neither an object nor a feature of an object but the relation between objects and users; (2) do not present an outcome but links between objects, users, and potential (different) outcomes; and (3) are variable since they depend on the environment and the user (Evans et al., 2017, p. 39ff). However, Evans and colleagues also state that for a more refined version of these criteria, more applications of affordances as a concept are still necessary (Evans et al., 2017, p. 46). In this dissertation, I will thus use their criteria as a starting point for identifying affordances of online news portals and their social media accounts.

In this context, the question of agency within online communication is also an interesting issue. Continuing the thought on the empowering function of online media, José van Dijck and Thomas Poell suggest a social media logic that illustrates which affordances allow for constructing and circulating content between media agents and users, and thus contribute to the becoming mobile of narratives through the combination of platform mechanisms and user activities. They argue that social media challenge power hierarchies of conventional mass media institutions but at the same time also still adhere to media-related structures. They approach these relations with the conceptualisation of a "social media logic" (van Dijck & Poell, 2013, p. 3). They use the concept of affordances as one way to approach this relation between technological interfaces and user engagements and identify four elements that emphasise the interrelatedness of online platforms and user activities: the programmability of the flow of content, the popularity of certain users, the creation of connectivity between content, users, and advertisers, and the datafication of user engagements (van Dijck & Poell, 2013, pp. 5–10). What is important for mobilising narratives here is that online platforms and social media structure a co-constitution of user interactions, important issues, and user networks that are on varying scales influenced by media agents – ranging from the Facebook corporation to newspaper editors – and users themselves.

Other authors connect affordances even more explicitly to questions of social power inequalities. Adrienne Shaw (2017), for instance, relates Nagy and Neff's ideas on imagined affordances to Stuart Hall's concept of encoding/decoding. This concept points out that any message that is transmitted through cultural forms can be "read" in more or less compliant and resistant ways that, however, are also dependent on the positioning of those who are

addressed by these messages. Whereas affordances can be seen as techniques of "privatised forms of governance" (Kwet, 2019, p. 7) that platform operators exert through design and regulations as well as through the self-governance of users, they thus also enable subversive moments in the engagement of users with platform features. Adrienne Shaw argues that this allows for a process of encoding and decoding affordances through "dominant/ hegemonic use", "negotiated use", and "oppositional use" (Shaw, 2017, p. 598). She argues that this combination allows for a reading of compliant or resistant use regarding hegemonic practices in the use of online media (Shaw, 2017). In this line of thought, I analyse affordances in order to unveil platform technologies of governing users and of governing the user self as well as resistances to this being governed by users on the level of the institutional situational context of mobilising narratives.

Social Interactions: Digital Affective Labour and Intersectional Power Relations⁵⁹

Considering social relations as crucial element of the social situative context of discourses and thus as another level for the workings of governmentality in mobilising narratives, I furthermore conceptualise the interactions between users and journalists in the context of Malian-diasporic online news.

In order to also assess the intersectional implications – especially along the lines of gender, class, and postcoloniality – of interactions between and among users and journalists that are further embedded in a context of (affective) media governmentality, I view them through the lens of digital affective labour in the sense of "the active creation of human relations and social networks" to increase productivity and competitiveness of corporations (Sauer & Penz, 2017, p. 41). This notion of affective labour goes back to Michael Hardt, who saw it as a central element emerging through the process of informatisation that brought communication, information, and affect to the centre of capitalist economies (Hardt, 1999, p. 91). Hardt emphasised that affective labour "is immaterial, even if it is corporeal and affective, in the sense that its products are intangible: a feeling of ease, well-being, satisfaction, excitement, passion—even a sense of connectedness or community" (Hardt, 1999, p. 96). With connectedness and community, he thus mentions two core values (and related accumulative strategies) of social networking sites, which is why I argue that interacting article authors and users

⁵⁹ Whereas I treat social interactions as contextual dimension of mobilising narratives in this theoretical part, they appear in the discursive dimension in the result-based Chapter 7. On the one hand, this is because social interactions are interrelated with the discursive construction of identities (see Section 4.4.4). On the other hand, my analysis of social interactions is based on another corpus than my analyses of infrastructures and platforms (see Section 5.5) and thus fits better with Chapter 7 that departs from this corpus.

perform affective labour in the context of debating online news on these platforms. Ann Begg suggests a similar interpretation when she writes: "It is affective labour and the immaterial production of ideas, knowledge, and co-operative forms of communication that produce social life, that underpin informational capitalism and that now situate media governmentality as capital's prime mode of production" (Begg, 2012, p. 85). In contrast to Koen Leurs (2019), who has explored online interactions of refugees as affective digital care labour in a private, family-related context, I adapt this idea to the public exchange on online news media.

In interpreting forms of affective labour as performed through journalist and user interactions, however, we also have to consider the consolidating and transforming power relations created through them. Hardt himself conceptualised these underlying power relations as biopower that has, on the one hand, gendered, classed, and racialised effects. On the other hand, he also emphasised opportunities for emancipative moments through affective labour and related subjectivities (Hardt, 1999, pp. 97–100). For assessing such consolidating and transforming effects of digital affective labour, I also draw from the work of Sauer and Penz on service workers in the Austrian postal services and Austrian, German, and Swiss employment agencies. They found that the requirements of affective labour that were possibly threatening hierarchical gendered labour divisions led, on the one hand, to male service workers re-interpreting those requirements as crucial competences for increased efficiency – in contrast to seeing them as natural trait of female service workers – or to them performing "forms of 'paternalistic coping'", but, on the other hand, also to establishing a "new subordinate masculinity" or a "marginalised masculinity," as male service workers needed to assimilate to female tasks (Sauer & Penz, 2017, p. 53). These adaptive strategies tie in with research on gender relations, masculinities, and femininities in postcolonial situations that have been described as challenged by colonialist, developmentalist, and neoliberal destabilisations of labour divisions and authority but at the same time also as resisting such challenges, enabling the simultaneous emergence of hegemonic and subordinate masculinities in specific situations (R. Connell, 2014, pp. 225, 227f, 2016, p. 305f; Enloe, 2013, pp. 10f, 17f).

Extending these insights to the context of Malian-diasporic online news, digital affective labour emerges in a broader context of neoliberal and social transformations that already produced negotiations of femininity and masculinity and "gender debates in the neoliberal era as one privileged arena for the articulation of conflicting ideas of the social order" (De Jorio, 2009, p. 95), also in complex interactions with religion and postcoloniality (for more see also De Jorio, 2016; Hertrich & Lesclingand, 2013; Schulz, 2012b; Schulz & Diallo, 2016). In this context, I will show how Malian-diasporic (and West African-diasporic) journalists and users

articulate their interactions as well as their experiences with others' interactions either in ways that reproduce intersectional hierarchies or in ways that renegotiate them along the lines of gender, class, and postcoloniality. In that vein, this perspective on affective labour further explicates some of the interactions between users and journalists that constitute a context for dialogical constructions of identities and belongings through cooperation and contestations. This is the focus of the second, more discourse-oriented dimension of mobilising narratives.

4.4.4 Narratives Mobilising through Discourse: Identities and Performativities, Politicisation and Emotions

The second aspect of mobilising narratives relates to the mobilising potential of narratives themselves since I assume that the movement of narratives between actors in different geographical and social positions leads to a transformation – or consolidation – of those narratives, in the sense of mobilisation on the content level. Concentrating especially on processes of subjectification as constructing "identity by a conscience or self-knowledge" (Foucault, 1982, p. 781), but also in the sense of constructing these subjectifications of others, I focus on the construction of identities and belongings within the media discourse on Malian transnational relations and ask which identities and belongings does this discourse construct for different actors in a postcolonial setting? Based on the assumption that dominant media discourses often construct Southern identities in an exclusionary manner, the idea of cultural mobility specifies the conditions under which a transformation of such narratives through circulation can happen.

Stephen Greenblatt refers to cultural mobility as a contingency in the diffusion and history of cultural elements such as identities. Greenblatt emphasises that this contingency is promoted by contact with moving people, ideas, and objects but at the same time is limited by the persistent tendency of experiencing cultures as fixed (Greenblatt, 2010, p. 1,16). On a micro level of such processes, the objective to research the circulation and transformation of narratives through Malian-diasporic online news responds to his claim to "identify and analyze the 'contact zones' where cultural goods are exchanged" (Greenblatt, 2010, p. 251). This is done with a special focus on "mobilizers" – in the sense of intermediaries and, here, the articles and comments that form narratives – and their institutional realm as elements that promote intercultural contact (Greenblatt, 2010, p. 251). This understanding also is reminiscent of Urry's observation that the mobile lifestyle of societies contributes to a constant reformulation of cultures (Urry, 2003).

In addition, critical mobility studies point to power relations being negotiated through constructions of belonging within regimes of mobility. Glick-Schiller and Salazar (2013, p. 189) emphasise that those regimes have implications for "similarity, difference, belonging and strangeness." They "postulate that there are several different intersecting regimes of mobility that normalise the movements of some while criminalising and entrapping the ventures of others" (Glick Schiller & Salazar, 2013, p. 189). Whereas they, however, relate their work mostly to physical mobilities, I also draw from Birgit Englert (2021, p. 128f) who – using the example of popular culture produced by Franco-Comorian artists in Marseille – extends this notion to the cultural level, considering narratives and resulting identifications and belongings themselves as regimes of mobility that keep postcolonial actors in their (social) place. When narratives about the movement of people, objects, and ideas become mobile culturally, they can thus also destabilise notions of identities and belongings fixed within postcolonial regimes of mobility.

What are the conditions in theorisations of identities, then, that enable their cultural mobilisation? To explicate this, I introduce conceptualisations of identities in CDS and the DHA before I outline how I seek to adapt them to the context of Malian-diasporic online discourses. Identity politics and their discursive construction have been an important focus of CDS (KhosraviNik & Zia, 2014, p. 755). KhosraviNik and Zia mention a range of CDS literature that deals with diverse collective identities such as national, ethnic, racial, religious, or international identities (KhosraviNik & Zia, 2014, p. 760). Scholars working within Critical Discourse Studies and, more specifically, the Discourse-Historical Approach, name common characteristics of (discursively) constructed identities. One important point is that they see identities as relational, meaning they are constructed around an internal sameness and external difference, i.e. the relation to other(s). Moreover, identity constructions are dynamic. They are open to change depending on their respective context and their relationality is constantly changing and being reproduced. However, CDS scholars have equally observed that in times of conflict, for instance, people often assume static collective units as basis for identities (KhosraviNik & Zia, 2014, p. 759; Wodak et al., 2009, p. 11; Wodak & Boukala, 2015, p. 88). This could be relevant in the Malian case due to the current struggles for national unity in the face of international interventions (see Subchapter 2.5). Figure 3 illustrates how these considerations manifest within my overall theoretical framework.

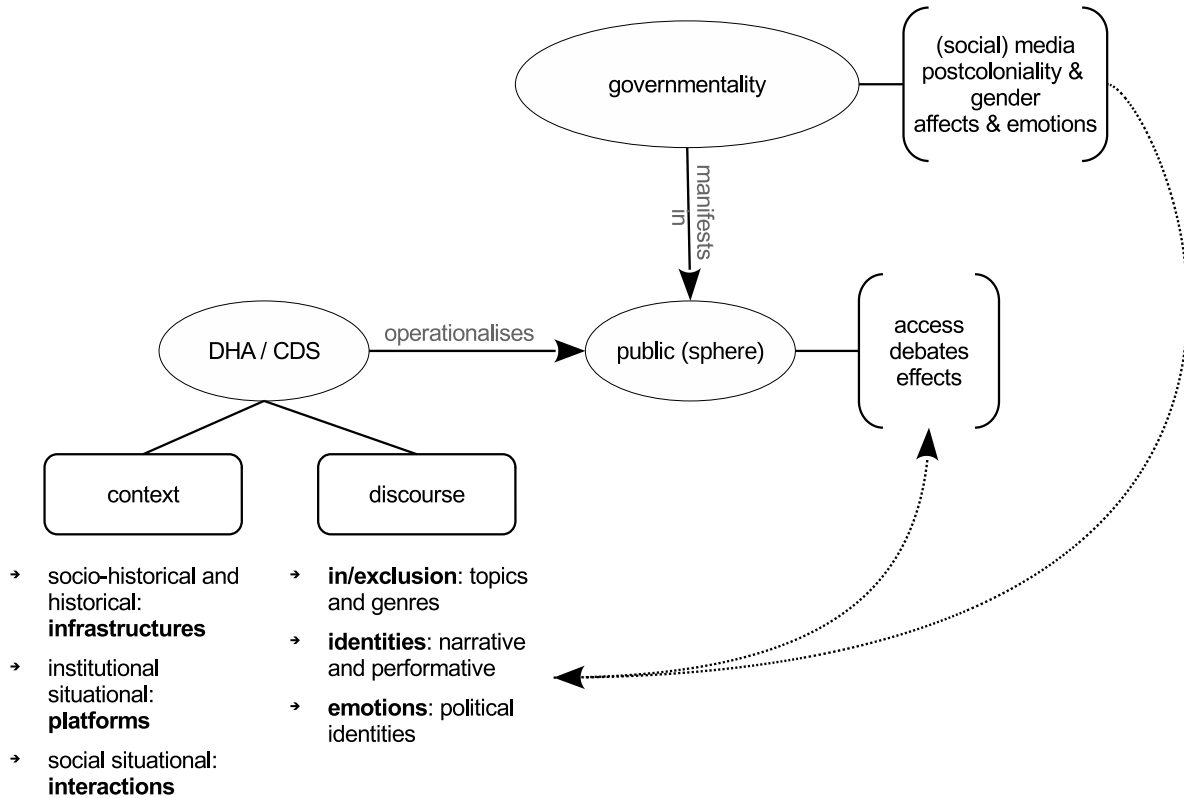


Figure 3: Integration of discourses into the overall theoretical framework of mobilising narratives (own visualisation)

In the following, I thus explain how identity constructions relate to governmentality in a translocal, postcolonial online context. In addition, to account for agonist developments and identity politics in online debates, I refer to the concept of political identities. And for the emotional mobilisation through public online discourses, I introduce theoretical considerations of emotions and their entanglement with power relations.

The Discursive Construction of Identities

In their book on *The Discursive Construction of National Identity*, Wodak and colleagues, for instance, refer to Paul Ricoeur's philosophical theory of identity and the following "cornerstones": sameness and selfhood, narrative identities, individual and system-related identities, and multiple identities (Wodak et al., 2009, pp. 11–18). In order to explicate possibilities for cultural mobility, especially the notions of narrative and multiple identities are illustrative. With regard to the former, Ricoeur introduces the notion of "narrative identity" as a strategy to integrate the heterogeneous elements of sameness and selfhood into a consistent story(line). As they integrate contradictory circumstances and experiences, narrative constructions of

identity open possibilities for dynamic and transformation, for variations in the past and an open future. In that regard, Ricoeur identifies an "other" in the narrated self based on temporal changes and internalised features of role models (Wodak et al., 2009, p. 14f). This understanding of identity construction highlights that narratives themselves are open to contingency in their construction as a form of cultural mobility.

Moreover, since individuals never only belong to one group or system, Wodak and her colleagues also take up Ricoeur's notion of multiple identities:

A member of a wide variety of social groups and networks has at her or his disposal a wide spectrum of sources of identification, from which he or she selects more or less voluntarily, depending on the context and situation, and thus 'composes' her or his multiple identity. (Wodak et al., 2009, p. 16f)

In that vein, identity construction happens from a context-sensitive and thus intersectional position as well. Wodak and colleagues point to emancipatory elements with regard to the boundary-making of identification as "hybrid, multiple identities represent a potential corrective element which can counteract the practices of exclusion and differentiation" (Wodak et al., 2009, p. 17). Moreover, the overlapping of different social, e.g. linguistic and religious identities can mitigate conflicts between individual categories that may otherwise be one-dimensionally mobilised. In this line, they recount that Stuart Hall has argued that globalisation creates favourable conditions for such cultural hybridisation (Wodak et al., 2009: 17). This intersectional perspective on multiple identities as well highlights the potential for contingent moments in the construction of identities in a postcolonial Malian-diasporic setting.

As a way of classifying identity constructions, scholars often distinguish between individual and collective identities. They see collective identities being constructed as shared communities in distinction to others (Wodak & Boukala, 2015, p. 88). Such identifications can produce imagined communities – as prominently introduced by Benedict Anderson – with one of the most important being the nation (KhosraviNik & Zia, 2014, p. 759f). In this context, Wodak and colleagues claim that the culturally and historically specific features of, for instance, the studied nation play an important role in analysing national identity constructions (Wodak et al., 2009, p. 5). On another level, European identities, for instance, are constructed on national, post-national and supranational levels. Wodak and Boukala further link these identifications to positionalities, senses of belonging, and politics of belonging, including exclusionary definitions of "us" and "them" that become especially salient in times of crisis (Wodak &

Boukala, 2015, pp. 89–93). This potential construction of collective identities and their relation to different contexts and scales is an important consideration when dealing with the construction of Malian-diasporic identities online at a time of multiple – social, political, and postcolonial – crises affecting the Malian-diasporic society.

Theorisations of identities within CDS thus already indicate some possibilities for cultural mobility in the (linguistic) construction of identities. At the same time, they also illustrate the potential for fixed and exclusionary notions of identity (which Greenblatt equally recommends to consider). Especially with regard to social media, CDS scholars acknowledge the possibility for alternative, i.e. contingent identity constructions and debate the interrelations of online technologies and social engagements (Dorostkar & Preisinger, 2012, p. 3f; KhosraviNik & Unger, 2016, p. 211; KhosraviNik & Zia, 2014, p. 758f). These considerations suggest that identity constructions are a fruitful concept for exploring in which way dominant and marginalised groups construct narratives about (their places in) Malian transnational relations when interacting with online news.

What CDS scholars could still benefit from, however, is to analyse in more detail, how the exchange between agents in a context of physical and virtual mobilities establishes contact zones that in turn enable or discourage contingency in identity constructions and how these relate to broader processes of subjectification that either consolidate or transform the gendered and postcolonial governmentality in (discourses on) Malian transnational relations. This is an endeavour we will undertake in the following subsections.

Identity Constructions within (Politics of) Belonging

This subsection outlines Nira Yuval-Davis' conceptualisation of identities and belongings as a way of connecting the CDS characterisation of identities outlined above to processes of identity construction that are mobilised in translocal contexts and produce socio-political effects. The notion of belongings, moreover, captures a construction of ingroups and outgroups that connects identifications to actors' context and argumentations, thus linking several dimensions of the DHA as well as the call for context-sensitive approaches to identity construction mentioned above.

In that vein, Yuval-Davis' concept of belongings is the basis for deeper explorations of intersectional power relations, discursive identifications and emotional attachments, and ethical and political value systems. In order to clarify the meanings of terms used here, I first introduce some of Yuval-Davis' definitions. Yuval-Davis distinguishes belongings as being

about "an emotional (or even ontological) attachment, about 'feeling at home'", whereas politics of belonging "comprise specific political projects aimed at constructing belonging to particular collectivity/ies" (Yuval-Davis, 2011b, p. 10). Whereas belonging is normally a naturalised part of everyday life, it "becomes articulated, formally structured and politicized only when it is threatened in some way" (Yuval-Davis, 2011b, p. 10). This makes it especially interesting to look at online media discourses in postcolonial contexts that pose many opportunities for these threats. In Mali, such threats appear, for instance, in the French and international military interventions, or in the separatist movements in the North of Mali. Thus, I embed my analysis of identities in this context into actors' constructions of belongings, which I also distinguish from politics of belonging that help to capture strategic elements and embed identity constructions in projects of intersectional governmentality.

In this context, Yuval-Davis suggests studying belongings through three analytical facets: (1) intersectional perspectives on the social location of agents; (2) identifications and emotional attachments of individuals to collectives and groups; and (3) ethical and political value systems to judge belongings and social locations (Yuval-Davis, 2006a, pp. 199–204, 2011b, p. 11). These facets are interrelated and constantly re-constructed but – according to Yuval-Davis – also necessarily separated in analysis. I argue that together, they allow for a non-essential, contextualised exploration of identifications and their potential for becoming mobile culturally. In the following, I focus on identifications and emotional attachments as potential moments of cultural mobility emerging from the contact zone of a Malian-diasporic online news portal and its social media accounts.

In her article on *Theorizing identity*, Yuval-Davis outlines the many scholarly contestations about the usefulness of identity in the face of its omnipresence. She positions herself in this debate by arguing that identity is indeed a useful concept if it is defined and separated from social locations and value systems (Yuval-Davis, 2010, p. 261f). She argues that this separation is crucial for avoiding two core analytical problems with theorising identities, i.e. either reducing social locations and identities to one another in an essentialising way, or neglecting the relevance of social categories for the construction of identities (Yuval-Davis, 2010, p. 268).

Within her conceptualisation of belongings, Yuval-Davis understands identities as "a specific kind of narrative in which people tell themselves and others who they are, who they are not and who/how they would like to/should be" (Yuval-Davis, 2010, p. 279). Referring, *inter alia*, to Ricoeur (as did several DHA scholars, see above), she argues that such narrative identities

follow some characteristics: they relate the self to collectives – and even if they use individual localisations of the Self, these often refer back to collective entities; they can refer to the past, explain the present or project to the future; as narrations, they do not aspire fixed definitions and leave room for processuality and thus subjectivity and agency in changes to and contestations of narratives about coherent boundaries; narrative identities are constructed by verbal enunciations as well as practices or, as Yuval-Davis calls them, "embodied narrations"; and in their respective contexts, narrative identities can be more or less stable or contested (Yuval-Davis, 2006a, p. 202, 2010, p. 267). As I have argued above, considering identities as narratives opens questions about their contingent production within practices of cultural mobility. In addition, their connection to the past, present, and future is an important dimension when researching discourses about postcolonial relations that specifically address responsibilities for current postcolonial situations as well as potential decolonial futures.

In addition to a narrative conceptualisation of identities, Yuval-Davis argues that this approach encompasses other theorisations such as performative and dialogical identities (Yuval-Davis, 2010, p. 269). Based on work that understands identities as performances (for more on performance, see the next subsection), Yuval-Davis summarises that in "the performative approach to identity theorization, then, identity narratives can be constructed within, counter to or outside predetermined social discourses" (Yuval-Davis, 2010, p. 270). These considerations relate to Greenblatt's argument that the possibilities for contingency through cultural mobility co-exist with fixed notions of culture. Researching identities as performative identities, then, can highlight in which instances circulating narratives consolidate dominant identities and in which instances they rather transform these social constructs and work within, counter to, or outside gendered and postcolonial governmentality.

In her theorisation of dialogical identities, Yuval-Davis builds on Bakhtin's argument that the self is constituted through reflection and perception in relation to an other. Such a perspective on identities highlights their ephemeral and processual character and points to the processes of constructing, legitimating, justifying, and contesting that take place along the way. Such an analysis of identity construction, then, also needs to turn to the intersectional power relations within the respective groups in order to avoid homogenising identity politics, i.e. assuming the same identifications for people who are attributed to the same group (Yuval-Davis, 2010, p. 271). Moreover, this approach does not presume already existing identity narratives, but still acknowledges the possibility of common cultural resources and meanings. In doing so, the perspective on dialogical identities emphasises the potential for experimenting and contesting within the dialogical situation. Yuval-Davis summarises that "the dialogical

approach can be seen as assuming the construction of identities as specific narratives that collude or diverge from each other in the on-going process of 'becoming' involved in the dialogical process" (Yuval-Davis, 2010, p. 272). Thereby, the dialogical approach to identities especially points to the negotiations taking place in contact zones in which the cultural goods of identities are exchanged between media agents and users of online news portals.

I assume that the connectivity provided by online news media opens opportunities for simultaneously constructing identities in narrative, performative and dialogical ways and thereby combining their potentials for contingency. In accordance with Yuval-Davis' suggestion that theorising identities as narratives and with a performative and dialogical approach "can be used to highlight different modes of identity construction and practice" (Yuval-Davis, 2010, p. 272), I address processes of identification in the context of interactive online news portals as a combination of a range of practices that promote or restrict cultural mobility. I am especially interested in how Malian-diasporic users construct such identities through mobile media affordances: By liking, sharing, and commenting articles and by managing their profile information, users can construct certain narratives about themselves or social agents they talk about. As a performative dimension of these narratives, they reproduce or contest dominant discourses. Moreover, the interactive nature of online discourses allows them to constantly negotiate these narratives by interacting with the article, each other, the journalist, and an imagined audience. In that regard, those dimensions also relate to levels of the DHA.

The other dimension of the identity-related facet in Yuval-Davis' concept of belonging deals with emotional attachments. She argues that belongings go beyond narrative identities and also require emotional investment and a desire for attachments. Yuval-Davis states that such emotional investments change according to the respective contexts, but are especially strong in situations of threat. Here as well, Yuval-Davis sees a relation to performativity, i.e. the role of repetitive practices that shape attachments (Yuval-Davis, 2006a, p. 202f). In this context, she refers to Sara Ahmed's understanding of emotions as contributing to politics of belonging that construct boundaries around we- and they-groups, boundaries that decide who belongs and who does not (Yuval-Davis, 2011b, p. 177). Therefore, I will introduce some of Ahmed's ideas on the working of emotions in more detail below and make explicit how they inform (political) identifications as well as their mobilising moments (see the subsections on political identities and mobilising emotions below).

As one way of connecting these constructions of narrative identities to social collectivities and their related – here gendered and postcolonial – power relations, I also consider the role

of politics of belonging. Yuval-Davis distinguishes between belonging – as outlined above – and politics of belonging, which she defines as "the maintenance and reproduction of the boundaries of the community of belonging by the hegemonic political powers but also their contestation and challenge by other political agents" (Yuval-Davis, 2006a, p. 205). Especially with her reference to potential contestations, Yuval-Davis highlights the potential for cultural mobility affecting politics of belonging. Therefore, her concept also draws attention to the subversive potential of belongings that is, in turn, supported by the interactive potential of social media communication and their aforementioned fostering of narrative, performative, and dialogical identity constructions.

In addition, Yuval-Davis raises awareness of the workings of politics of belonging in gendered, postcolonial, and diasporic social relations. First, she illustrates the importance of distinguishing between belongings and politics of belonging in terms of gender relations and the construction of femininity and masculinity: On the one hand, this focus on politics of belonging with regard to gender is important because such projects equally naturalise hierarchies between gendered positions as well as the distinction between male and female identities themselves. On the other hand, assumed attitudes about gender relations and womanhood are often used to establish cultural hierarchies between groups of social agents. At the same time, however, Yuval-Davis warns about a romanticising perspective on hierarchic gender relations as cultural traditions in opposition to Western influences (Yuval-Davis, 2009, p. 8f). This example highlights the complexities involved in the exchange of cultural goods and their implications for changing or fixing cultural meanings.

In addition, it is also important to consider the specificities of national projects of belonging in postcolonial settings, also with their intersectional implications for gendered and ethnic relations. With reference to Chatterjee, Yuval-Davis argues that postcolonial nationalist projects are different from Northern nationalisms. Postcolonial national projects, for instance, create an anti-colonial narrative of the nation before they create a narrative of their independent state. Yuval-Davis also highlights that the position of women is an important part of colonial and postcolonial nationalist projects. Additionally, she argues that many nationalist projects aim for ethnic homogenisation. In societies with multiple ethnic groups, one often seeks to establish a dominant position, especially in empires, so after the fall of empires, ethnic conflicts emerge.⁶⁰ In post-colonial contexts, this is even more important since the respective nations were often constructed by the colonial powers. Yuval-Davis postulates that

⁶⁰ In relation to autochthony, indigeneity is a frequent claim in post-colonial societies, often with a Eurocentric definition of the authentic moment as the one before colonisation (Yuval-Davis, 2011b, p. 102ff).

in current states of insecurity, identity politics thus become more salient again (Yuval-Davis, 2011b, p. 87ff).

In terms of diasporic relations, Yuval-Davis, on the one hand, outlines the hopes associated with diasporic belongings as alternatives to nationalist projects. On the other hand, she highlights the ways in which many diasporic contexts rather foster nationalist belongings, also depending on the developments of transport and communication technologies that can lead to more national or transnational diasporic practices. And she emphasises that diasporic agents are always embedded in multi-layered contexts of belonging (Yuval-Davis, 2011b, p. 106ff). In this context, I also consider Avtar Brah's work on postcolonial diasporas as fundamental. In her view, multi-locational diaspora networks together with inherent mechanisms of bordering foster plural and processual identifications that destabilise fixed notions of origin, centre and periphery. However, Brah also points to the ongoing importance of material structures which, in turn, impact the positionality of diasporic agents and experiences (Brah, 1996, pp. 196–208). Moreover, she describes diasporas as "contested cultural and political terrains where individual and collective memories collide, reassemble and reconfigure" (Brah, 1996, p. 193). Thereby, she highlights the intersectional composition of diasporic groups, the different perspectives and internal power relations that emerge within those groups (Brah, 1996, p. 184ff). In that vein, politics of belonging point to the possibilities for contingent, transforming, narratives in Malian-diasporic online news discourses while at the same time being aware of the possibility for fixing, consolidating narratives to emerge as well and maybe even dominate the debate.

These conceptualisations of identities, belongings, and politics of belonging are, on the one hand, important for dissolving the essentialising social location-identity nexus. On the other hand, these different levels, and especially the narrative, performative, and dialogical identity dimensions highlight moments of contingency within discourses. However, the considerations on politics of belongings, and especially on postcolonial, gendered, and diasporic projects of belonging, emphasise that those possibilities for cultural mobility always have to be studied within their respective socio-political and historical context. Since studying identities online poses new questions to the interdependencies of identifications and social locations, exacerbated by the interrelations of online and offline discourses and realities, the conceptualisations of identities, belongings, and politics of belonging outlined here propose a way of capturing these relations in a non-essentialist way. Whereas these conceptualisations already point towards possibilities for consolidating and transforming social relations within the intersec-

tional governmentality of mobilising narratives, we now look at the negotiation of these dimensions more closely through the concept of performativity.

Performativity as Possibility for Not Being Governed that Way

Zooming in briefly on one of the dimensions of identities that Yuval-Davis mentions, the concept of performativity allows me to explicate the workings of contingency in identifications and constructions of belongings, asking how the circulation of narratives, especially between article authors and commenting users, contributes to the consolidation or subversive transformation of these narratives. In that vein, I refer to Judith Butler's understanding of performativity "not as a singular or deliberate 'act,' but, rather, as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names" (Butler, 2011, p. xii). In that regard, performativity is key to understanding how power relations become effective in and through discourses.

Butler's understanding of performativity is among the most influential when it comes to constructions of identities. In her seminal book *Gender Trouble*, she outlines how discourses work within a "heterosexual matrix" that reproduces dominant structures of sex, gender, and desire (Butler, 2007, p. 47ff). In that vein, she emphasises the inability of language to work outside of this matrix and the related power of discourses in constituting identities (Butler, 2007, p. 7). What has often been critiqued as an anti-humanist view that denies any form of agency to actors when it comes to their identities (e.g. Williams, 2000 in Yuval-Davis, 2010, p. 270), is her view that (gender) identities are not independent from, but performative constructions through discourses (Butler, 2007, p. 34). This understanding of identities at first sight weakens possibilities for resistant subjectifications within arrangements of gendered and postcolonial (media) governmentality.

However, already in *Gender Trouble*, Butler points to possibilities for agency in this performative power of discourses that derives from the necessity to repeat discursive practices for them to become signifying and powerful:

As a process, signification harbors within itself what the epistemological discourse refers to as 'agency.' The subject is not *determined* by the rules through which it is generated because signification is *not a founding act, but rather a regulated process of repetition* that both conceals itself and enforces its rules precisely through the production of substantializing effects. In a sense, all signification takes place within the orbit of the compulsion to repeat; 'agency,' then, is to be located within the possibility of a variation on that repetition. If the rules governing signification not only restrict, but enable the assertion of alternative domains of cultural intelligibility,

i.e., new possibilities for gender that contest the rigid codes of hierarchical binarisms, then it is only *within* the practices of repetitive signifying that a subversion of identity becomes possible. (Butler, 2007, p. 198f, italics in the original)

In the present thesis, I assume that we can observe such repetitions in news discourses, especially through the reporting on events and debates in news articles, and through comments that engage with these news articles. Continuing this line of thought, I further assume that these repetitions can contribute to a performativity that is either consolidating or transforming gendered and postcolonial subjectifications.

Especially in another of her influential books, *Bodies That Matter*, Butler gives more emphasis to the potential of subversive identity constructions. Already in the introduction, when she outlines her understanding of the materialisation of sex as a category, she argues that

...bodies never quite comply with the norms by which their materialization is impelled. Indeed, it is the instabilities, the possibilities for rematerialization, opened up by this process that mark one domain in which the force of the regulatory law can be turned against itself to spawn rearticulations that call into question the hegemonic force of that very regulatory law. (Butler, 2011, p. xii)

In that regard, Butler emphasises that the materialisation through embodied practices can contest discursive regulations.

This is the core of my understanding of narratives that become mobile culturally as a consequence of their becoming mobile socio-geographically: Through their circulation between different actors, and the interaction of those actors with narratives, they become told and re-told. It is in this interaction and re-telling that I expect variations of discourses, also in a gendered postcolonial setting that is characterised by dominant Western discourses and imaginations. In addition, I see online communication as a site that offers many possibilities for the performing of consolidating and transforming identities because of their participatory features and the potential to connect actors with different socio-political positions and opinions. These possibilities relate to Greenblatt's argument that the possibilities for cultural mobility co-exist with fixed notions of culture. Researching identities as performative identities, then, can highlight in which instances circulating narratives reproduce gendered and (post)colonial subjectifications and in which instances they rather transform those social constructs.

In that vein, Butler's understanding of performativity is also related to the idea that narratives mobilise power relations through their performativity:

Lastly, the mobilization of the categories of sex within political discourse will be haunted in some ways by the very instabilities that the categories effectively produce and foreclose. Although the political discourses that mobilize identity categories tend to cultivate identifications in the service of a political goal, it may be that the persistence of *disidentification* is equally crucial to the rearticulation of democratic contestation. Indeed, it may be precisely through practices which underscore disidentification with those regulatory norms by which sexual difference is materialized that both feminist and queer politics are mobilized. (Butler, 2011, p. xiiif)

In the context of the discourse on Malian transnational relations, the concept of performativity can thus help to emphasise the moments of transforming identity constructions that do not as easily comply with postcolonial and patriarchal forms of governance and might mobilise for feminist-decolonial politics.

Online Identity Constructions and Their Possibilities for Featuring Resistant Subjectivities

This subsection summarises some of the specific opportunities and constraints online communication offers for changing or consolidating (dominant) identities and belongings.

One feature of online communication mentioned by CDS scholars is that online spaces such as websites foster the entanglement of private, interpersonal, and social discourses – within the context of the respective technological structures (Dorostkar & Preisinger, 2012, p. 3f). KhosraviNik and Zia additionally mention Boyd's argument that the technical features of (social) media are always interrelated with and influenced by social structures and values. They see the context-sensitivity of CDS as a suitable approach to capture those social circumstances of new media affordances (KhosraviNik & Zia, 2014, p. 758f). Constructions of identities and belongings online are thus always a product of the interaction with other users – as emphasised by Yuval-Davis' dialogical dimension of identities – as well as with the respective technological interface and broader socio-political structures. In the present research framework, I capture these relations with the social situational context level (user interactions), the institutional situational context level (platform interfaces), and the socio-political and historical context (background and access). These interactions and interrelations, then, are all potential moments for contingency on a contextual level.

As mentioned above, CDS scholars also perceive online communication as an environment for challenging dominant discourses. Some specifically relate these possibilities to the construction of identities. KhosraviNik outlines how online media challenge traditional power of mass media, including their one-way street of discourse control. Online media and their

networked participatory features, on the other hand, offer possibilities for researching non-elite discourses that can contribute to the construction of alternative identities (KhosraviNik, 2014, p. 287f; KhosraviNik & Unger, 2016, p. 211). In addition to a Foucauldian notion of "power of discourse", KhosraviNik outlines "power in discourse" as a topic-related notion of discourse which he identifies as "the space where various identities may be constructed, challenged, and perpetuated" (KhosraviNik, 2014, p. 289). However, KhosraviNik also mentions limits of participatory notions of discourse including the power of technologies, digital divides, or social hierarchies between users (KhosraviNik, 2014, p. 296), which refer to the contextual dimensions mentioned above. Online news portals thus offer the possibility to observe the struggle between mass media discourses and these participatory bottom-up discourses and the identifications they support. In addition, a close observation and exploration can also unveil their (limiting) contexts as mentioned by KhosraviNik, thus indicating possibilities for transformation as well as consolidation.

A related assumption about identifications and belongings online is that different contexts such as, for instance, different social media platforms, offer users the possibility to enact different identities. This assumption is also based on the CDS conceptualisation of multiple identities that are constructed according to their respective context. Whereas recent research relativizes initial ideas about identity construction online that is completely independent of users' social and corporeal contexts as manifested in intersectional power relations (see Hughey, 2008, p. 529f), online environments still provide some freedoms in that regard. Irma van der Ploeg and Jason Pridmore, for instance, understand user actions on social media "as construction of digital identities, in the sense that it often involves a careful and conscious effort to experiment with and shape one's image to oneself and others" (van der Ploeg & Pridmore, 2016, p. 3). Hughey even sees online interactions as a Third Space that – following Bhabha – offers potentials for hybrid identity constructions (Hughey, 2008, p. 531f). Identities constructed through interactions with online news portals and social media accounts thus always need to be seen as products of their respective context levels but also of potentially varying expressions.

This contextualised contingency of identities becomes especially apparent in conceptualisations of digital diasporas. The term "digital diaspora" points to the growing importance of online communication for the connection of diasporic actors and the construction of diasporic communities (Scopsi, 2009, p. 86f). In this context, Myria Georgiou outlines how diasporic situations and the use of new media can challenge national constructions of identities. She shows how the diverse spatial experiences and cultural repertoires of diasporas can undermine

nationalist or territory-bound identifications or notions of citizenship and open opportunities for alternative identifications (Georgiou, 2010, p. 27). Georgiou highlights the potentials for contingent identifications in diasporic situations as "[c]hanges in distance and proximity can destabilize or reinvent identities and their limits", as proximity through increasing mediatisation enhances a common sense of belonging among diasporas, and even enables a more critical position towards the "homeland" and essentialist diasporic identities (Georgiou, 2010, p. 28f).⁶¹ Especially in the diversified landscape of (urban) media available to diasporic agents, Georgiou sees a potential for performative identifications that can not only reproduce but also challenge identities constructed by mainstream media and state actors (Georgiou, 2010, p. 30f). These ideas contribute to my understanding of how connecting at distance via online media opens opportunities for contingent narratives, as agents with different contexts, motivations, and ambitions exchange their views. This provides valuable insights when working on a Malian-diasporic online news portal and its social media accounts. But it can also be useful for understanding the experiences and identifications of Malian users that often have a migration history in national terms.

The connection of these points – power in and over discourse, alternative identifications, and experimenting with different identities (across space) – shows how online environments can provide a setting for constructing resistant subjectivities. However, as outlined, for instance, in Section 4.4.3 on infrastructural vulnerabilities, these elements can also contribute to more control through dominant contextual and discursive structures. The specificities of online communication thus point to contingent moments in social and technological contexts during the circulation of narratives. This circulation, then, can either contribute to a consolidation of and through dominant mobilising narratives, or to their transformation.

Political Identities: Explicating "the Political" in Discursive Constructions of Identities

As a way of explicating the contingent effects of mobilising narratives, this subsection outlines how the construction of political identities may lead to processes of political mobilisation through the mobilisation of narratives. Therefore, I follow Chantal Mouffe's "assertion that what is at stake in politics is the construction of political identities on the mode of a we/they discrimination and that this always entails a libidinal investment" (Mouffe, 2014, p. 155). In this context, I explore online constructions of identities and belongings as moments of political mobilisation. Political identities as conflating identifications, emotions and value

⁶¹ I put the term "homeland" in quotation marks to point to its potential constructed nature and to avoid essentialising notions of home and origin. For a discussion of critiques on these concepts see e.g. Cohen (2008).

systems in order to actively create collectives thus relate to the political effects of mobilising narratives as they construct social in-groups and exclude others.

For a more in-depth analysis of political identities, I outline Mouffe's understanding of identities, the political, and their relations to emotions, citizenship and the public sphere. In a 1992 conference contribution, she argues for the "creation of new political identities in terms of radical democratic 'citizens'" (Mouffe, 1992, p. 28). In order to avoid essentialising notions, Mouffe highlights that she sees social agents as "constituted by an ensemble of subject positions" and by a "diversity of discourses" that are constantly shifting and being negotiated in their relationality and importance. Identities, in her view, are only temporarily fixed constructions "at the intersection of such subject positions and dependent on specific forms of identification" (Mouffe, 1992, p. 28). This is an understanding of identities that resonates with my own as outlined above.

Considering how these identities become political, Mouffe mentions two ways to think about the political, as "a space of liberty and common action" or "a site of conflict and antagonism". She associates her own understanding in the second manner and further distinguishes the political as related to this antagonism⁶² from politics as attempts to provide a social structure (Mouffe, 2014, p. 150). Pluralist democracies, in her understanding, recognise divisions and manage to turn an antagonistic friend/enemy constellation into an agonistic relation between adversaries that express their conflictual opinions but also mutually acknowledge their right to different views (Mouffe, 2014, p. 150f). So my own take on political mobilisation in or through political identities refers to the dimension of the political since it lies at the level of debates, discussion, and negotiations. In this way, Mouffe understands agonism as an analytical approach that seeks to explain how the struggle of hegemonic projects can fit into a democratic society, but not determine the outcome of these confrontations (Mouffe, 2014, p. 154f). This ties in with my understanding of mobilising narratives as consolidating or transforming power inequalities within gendered and postcolonial governmentality.

⁶² Mouffe distinguishes her own perspective of agonism from those of others. Hannah Arendt, for instance, refers to agonism rather as a way to reach intersubjective consensus or understanding. Bonnie Honig sees agonistic struggles as a way to contest dominant identities and power relations by keeping the questioning process open and introducing multiple perspectives. Mouffe, however argues that this view neglects the possibility that agonistic struggles might also reproduce hegemonic relations. William Conolly argues for the construction of a pluralist public sphere with the help of "agonistic respect". Mouffe, however, doubts that this endeavour is possible, i.e. to integrate all antagonism in an agonistic public sphere since acting politically always requires decisions that produce exclusions. Mouffe concludes that these other approaches to agonism lack her elements of antagonism and hegemony "which I see as indispensable to think politically" as they need to be included in thoughts about the change of existing power relations (Mouffe, 2014, p. 152f).

Another important characteristic of political identities according to Mouffe is their formation around a common concern based on certain values. In that vein, Mouffe also emphasises her understanding of citizenship – beyond communitarian vs. liberal concepts – as a form of political identity, created through the identification with political principles, rules, ethico-political values or concerns such as diversity and individual liberties (Mouffe, 1992, p. 29ff, 2005, p. 69). With regard to ethico-political values, i.e. "the normative dimension inscribed in political institutions," Mouffe argues that they are not to be seen as universal but depending on the respective context within which they are exercised. However, she equally argues that democratic societies need common sets of ethico-political values to which citizens adhere (Mouffe, 2005, p. 121f). In the context of the present thesis, such a common concern could be the position of Mali in a postcolonial setting that is then interpreted and debated with the use of different value systems.

In addition, Mouffe connects this mobilising potential to the realm of the public sphere and especially its political dimension of critiquing power, in this case, hegemonic social orders. Early on, she argues that there is a distinction between public and private but they are as interconnected as the individual and the citizen (Mouffe, 1992, p. 32). Moreover, Mouffe argues that the situation of continuous antagonisms in the political requires some way of dealing with the contingency entailed. An agonistic perspective acknowledges that confronting views are always taking place in a hegemonic order and represent the conflict between different hegemonic positions (Mouffe, 2014, p. 151). Being a pre-condition for political action, such political identifications can enhance the empowerment of social agents, voicing their positions towards – in the present case – postcolonial regimes. Or they can reproduce dominant structures of we/they distinctions that rather consolidate hegemonic orders.

Moreover, Mouffe sees a democratic momentum in the construction of political identities when they mobilise passions⁶³ for agonistic negotiations of the social order. In opposition to the assumption in political theory that reason has outcasted passion from politics, Mouffe early on observes:

From the explosion of various forms of old and new nationalism, to the increasing manifestations of racism, xenophobia and religious intolerance, we are witnessing the powerful role of

⁶³ In the 2014 text *By Way of a Postscript*, Mouffe explains her distinction between emotions and passions, as she sees the former attached to individuals and the latter as element of collective identity constructs and their conflicting moments (Mouffe, 2014, p. 149). She explains that "by 'passions' I designate a certain type of common affects, those that are mobilized in the political domain in the formation of the we/they forms of identification" (Mouffe, 2014, p. 155).

passions in the crystallization of a variety of collective political identities which could put our democratic institutions at risk. (Mouffe, 2002, p. 615)

Seeing the analysis of passions as an important task of political theory, she postulates that "the main challenge confronting democratic politics is not how to eliminate passions in order to create a rational consensus, but how to mobilize them toward democratic designs" (Mouffe, 2002, p. 616). In that vein, Mouffe finally asks: "How can affects be mobilized in a counter-hegemonic direction?" She refers to Freud who has emphasised the importance of libidinal bonds for collective identity construction. She postulates that agonistic politics should support affective attachments to foster counter-hegemonic movements. For explaining the production of common affects, she builds on Spinoza's differentiation between affection as state of the body and affect as a form of desire, which is articulated in the construction of political identities and moves to action. (Mouffe, 2014, p. 156). With regard to counter-hegemonic projects in the face of neoliberal institutions, Mouffe concludes: "A counter-hegemonic politics necessitates the creation of a different regime of desires and affects so as to bring about a collective will sustained by common affects able to challenge the existing order" (Mouffe, 2014, p. 157). In this way, a creation of common affects in postcolonial settings would mean to mobilise passions for a different position of Mali in the international (gendered postcolonial) social order.

Some scholars, however, critique (from a feminist perspective) that Mouffe neglects the importance of the inherent power inequalities in emotional regimes. Although acknowledging her take on passions as instrument of mobilisation for democratic goals, they advocate for seeing the modalities of domination in affects when exploring their potential for de/mobilising the political (Bargetz & Sauer, 2015, pp. 96f, 99ff). To deepen this understanding of emotions and power inequalities, I introduce Ahmed's theory of emotions in the next subsection.

Mobilising Emotions between Consolidating and Transforming Power Relations

Continuing Mouffe's thoughts on the mobilising potential of passions and (as different from) emotions and acknowledging the critique of her approach to passions, this subsection outlines in more detail how I understand emotions, how they can consolidate or transform power relations, and how they can make mobile through the circulation of online news and related encounters. In doing so, these theoretical considerations on emotions and affect make the workings of feelings within processes of mobilisation more explicit, also to supplement other approaches in my theoretical framework such as, for instance, belongings or political identi-

ties. This subsection thus outlines how formations of affective gendered and postcolonial governmentality materialise in specific articulations of emotions.

The most important starting point for my understanding of emotions in this context is Sara Ahmed's work. In her seminal book *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Ahmed aims at rethinking the relation between body, emotion and cognition in reaction to debates on emotions that relate them either to the body or to cognition (Ahmed, 2014, p. 5). Ahmed thus critiques the notion of a so-called affective turn for neglecting the work done by feminist thinkers who have challenged body-mind and passion-reason dichotomies long before (Ahmed, 2014, p. 205f). In that regard, she also refers to the power relations within debates on emotions, as, for instance, the construction of hierarchies between rational male and emotional female subjects (Ahmed, 2014, p. 170).

Ahmed explains that emotions "involve bodily processes of affecting and being affected, or to use my own terms, emotions are a matter of how we come into contact with objects and others" (Ahmed, 2014, p. 208). In her conceptualisation, emotions depend on the harmfulness or helpfulness of their objects, they emerge in the contact with their objects, and for them to become effective, a reading of the objects and the contact with them is necessary (Ahmed, 2014, p. 5f). Ahmed opposes the idea of "having" emotions and introduces a model on the "sociality of emotions." She argues that emotions and the reaction to contact with others rather construct boundaries between inside and outside of individual and collective bodies through the circulation of the objects of emotions (Ahmed, 2014, p. 10). Ahmed describes the "doing" of emotions as they initiate movement towards or away from others and thereby "they shape the contours of social as well as bodily space" (Ahmed, 2014, p. 209). This highlights how emotion-related encounters – in the present thesis between users and articles about Malian transnational relations as well as between users – contribute to a mobilising of boundaries of social groups, further influencing constructions of belongings, political identities, and related subjectifications.

With regard to attachments, Ahmed also illustrates their ambivalent relationship with movement: "What moves us, what makes us feel, is also which holds us in place, or gives us a dwelling place (...) attachment takes place through movement, through being moved by the proximity of others" (Ahmed, 2014, p. 11). It is such considerations that illustrate the entanglement of physical and cultural mobilities, of movement and temporal stasis, as movements by and through emotions create contingent relations between agents and objects of emotions. In her considerations on the processes of identifying "strangers," for instance, Ahmed argues

that encounters are historically mediated and, thus, the historical developments ("careers") of feelings and their objects are interrelated (Ahmed, 2014, p. 211f). As an example, Ahmed reads a passage from Frantz Fanon's book *Black Skin White Masks* that describes the meeting of a Black man, who is shivering with cold, and a *white* boy, who is in response trembling with fear because he assumes that the Black man is angry. She highlights that the same bodily reaction is related to different affects that are, in turn, depending on a historically based (cannibalistic) misreading of the Black body. As a consequence, the proximity of the bodily encounter leads to re-establishing a distance between them (Ahmed, 2014, p. 62f). This connection between proximity and distance based on the objects of emotions can take place parallel and additionally to the discursive construction of internal sameness and external difference in the process of identification. In that vein, it describes another dimension of social relations that becomes effective in postcolonial settings, as emotions emerging in debates about Malian transnational relations have to be seen within their history of postcolonial relations and as mobilising subjectifications within these relations.

Based on these considerations, I explore the workings of emotions and affects as mobilising in online debates about Malian transnational relations. In this context, I also refer to Simon Koschut, who outlined that such circulating emotions can either "work to position groups in world politics within structures of dominances and resistance" (Koschut, 2018, p. 506), or contribute to the re-negotiation of international power relations and related norms (Koschut, 2018, p. 517). Therefore, he introduces Norbert Elias' matrix of (a) status-confirming emotions (pride and shame) that reproduce inequalities between states and (b) status-disconfirming emotions (fear and resentment) that challenge the status quo. However, Koschut – together with Elias – also acknowledges that emotions additionally produce differentiations on the intra-group level (Koschut, 2018, p. 506ff).

Therefore, I study affective dimensions in articles and comments to see how the encounters between different agents and objects work in a mobilising way, consolidating or transforming power relations. At the same time, however, I will consider (historical) postcolonial and gendered structures of domination that appear within these articulations of emotions.

4.5 Mobilising Narratives from a Decolonial Feminist Margin

Several postcolonial scholars have influenced my decision to study political mobilisation through Malian-diasporic online discourses in this thesis, as they emphasise the need to

counter Eurocentric knowledge production about former colonies as well as about current international relations. The following theories and conceptualisations show how discourses in this context can become effective with regard to gendered and postcolonial governmentality.

First, I draw on Edward Said's work to outline how such postcolonial knowledge production can work in the realm of cultural production and consumption. In his book *Culture and Imperialism*, Said emphasises the exceptional domination of distant territories practiced by Western empires,⁶⁴ a domination he sees as persisting despite formal independence of former colonies. He especially highlights the importance of imaginations and ideas in the consolidation of Western dominance. Thus, he argues for comprehensively analysing global power relations, e.g. in their political and cultural domains (Said, 1993, pp. 6–13). In this context, Said's work encourages exploring persisting imperial influences in current international relations, influences that also include mediated discourses such as online news. They reflect persistent power inequalities but also enable reproducing or contesting the central role of former colonial powers. Said's work has therefore motivated me to research how online media reproduce or contest postcolonial discourses as one manifestation of persistent power inequalities.

In a similar way, Avtar Brah shows how the centrality of the "West" culminates in Eurocentric knowledge production, which she details for modernist ideas about political systems or "development" that have been interconnected with colonialist discourses (Brah, 1996, pp. 220–223). She also claims more awareness for e.g. postmodern thinking in the Global South, which could lead to a destabilisation of knowledge structures until "[t]he 'centre' is no more a centre than is the 'margin'" (Brah, 1996, p. 226). By doing so, she points to the potential that knowledge production from the Global South has when it comes to challenging inequalities and fixed hierarchies in (knowledge about) current international relations.

Frantz Fanon also emphasises this importance of knowledge production when he argues that anti-colonial resistance needs to go beyond socioeconomic oppression and also include internalised hierarchies in identity constructions (Fanon, 1967 in Yuval-Davis, 2011b, p. 18). My goal in this thesis, then, is to assess the constructions of a Malian-diasporic self and identities within Malian transnational relations for their moments of resistance.

In this vein, I also draw on the idea of "talking back" formulated by bell hooks. While she came to know this term as "speaking as an equal to an authority figure" (hooks, 1989, p. 5)

⁶⁴ Said defines imperialism as "the practice, the theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan center ruling a distant territory" (Said, 1993, p. 9).

during her childhood, hooks moreover understands the act of talking back as a way of healing for oppressed people. As actors who talk back resist being silenced by dominating groups – and submit to their knowledge production – they speak about their experiences and transform themselves from being an object into being a subject of knowledge production. As they question and thus mobilise the existing order of dominated and dominating groups, their talking back becomes political (hooks, 1989, p. 7ff).

For us, true speaking is not solely an expression of creative power; it is an act of resistance, a political gesture that challenges politics of domination that would render us nameless and voiceless. As such, it is a courageous act – as such, it represents a threat. To those who wield oppressive power, that which is threatening must necessarily be wiped out, annihilated, silenced. (hooks, 1989, p. 8)

I therefore explore in which ways the circulation and transformation of online discourses can open – or close – possibilities for Malian-diasporic article authors and users to "talk back" in the context of transnational relations and related postcolonial and gendered governmentality.

As a means of assessing those discursive constructions in a postcolonial setting, I turn to the idea of decolonial knowledge production. According to Walter Mignolo, decolonial knowledge production unveils the situatedness of Western knowledge production and questions (implicit) pre-assumptions that grant Western concepts such as modernisation, progress, and economic growth more priority than human life itself (Mignolo, 2009, pp. 3–7). He criticises in particular how Southern knowledge production mostly depends on Northern institutional conventions, an important one being Northern languages. In addition, he claims that postcolonial subjects are, in most cases, those whom others speak about and not those who speak for themselves or whose bodily experiences are acknowledged (Mignolo, 2009, pp. 7–19). In summation, Mignolo argues for extending the focus of analysis from what is said to the broader conditions of speech acts (Mignolo, 2009, p. 4).

Building on these ideas, I investigate decolonial knowledge production in online communication following four assumptions:

1. Subject/Object: Online news portals enable Southern agents to become subjects of knowledge production about them instead of being its objects.
2. Institutions: Online news portals offer a (public) space that is in theory accessible to all.
3. Situatedness: Online news portals allow operators, journalists, and users to unveil the positions of (Western) knowledge producers.

4. Pre-assumptions: Agents can make implicit pre-assumptions in postcolonial discourses explicit and negotiate them.

These assumptions point out that diverse levels are at work in (de)colonial knowledge production. In the present thesis, we address this implication through the diverse levels of context and discourse that we explore for governing and resisting elements in their relation to gendered and postcolonial governmentality.

As already mentioned in the considerations about access to online communication above, several scholars – the most prominent among them likely being Spivak (2010) – rightly warn of overly optimistic perspectives in postcolonial relations since subaltern groups at the periphery of global society have no means for articulating themselves (see e.g. Kerner, 2012, p. 133f). I acknowledge this warning, but still understand the actors engaged in Malian-diasporic online news portals as one potential group that is privileged enough to articulate their concerns, but that, on an international scale, still speaks from a marginal position. In that sense, I also refer to bell hooks' idea of the margin as a potential site for political and emancipatory enunciations. In her understanding, being part of a society, but at its periphery, opens possibilities for resistant consciousness and solidarity (hooks, 1996, p. 150ff). As she further differentiates between a marginal position that is imposed by dominant groups, and a marginal position that is freely chosen as a site for resistance (hooks, 2006, p. 156), I also need to assess in which ways the agents involved in the mobilising or narratives through Malian-diasporic online news construct their marginal position.

Based on these considerations, I analyse to which extent narratives that have been mobilised – or not – in socio-geographical and cultural terms also mobilise for or against gendered and postcolonial power relations from marginalised positions. In this theoretical chapter, I have shown that we can assess such im/mobilisations in digital environments through the Discourse-Historical Approach that emphasises the importance of combining analyses of context (including infrastructures, platforms, interfaces, and social interactions) with analyses of discourses (in terms of narrative and performative identity constructions, political identities, and emotions). I have argued that we can use these explorations to unveil power relations in the access to and deliberation within Southern, affective, and digital public spheres. Furthermore, I have suggested to interpret the power relations that unfold in these public spheres through the lens of gendered and postcolonial governmentality as strategic relations that consolidate or transform current postcolonial inequalities through mobilising narratives.

5 Methodology: Performing the DHA on Online Discourses

What I am proposing in working toward a decolonial feminism is to learn about each other as resisters to the coloniality of gender at the colonial difference, without necessarily being an insider to the worlds of meaning from which resistance to the coloniality arises.
(Lugones, 2010, p. 753)

After outlining the theoretical framework of this thesis, I explain how I approached mobilising narratives and their relation to postcolonial and gendered governmentality in an online news environment from a methodological point of view. As an example, I explored opportunities for political mobilisation that emerged from the circulation of Malian-diasporic online news between actors in different social and geographic positions. Following the Discourse-Historical-Approach (DHA) by Reisigl and Wodak that combines discourses with multiple contextualisations, I set out to develop a methodological framework that allows me to, on the one hand, explore how narratives are mobilised through infrastructures, digital platforms, and social interactions, and, on the other hand, explore how they can mobilise through genres, discursive content and emotions. For combining these two perspectives, I drew inspiration from online ethnographic approaches. In the following, I will first situate myself within the vast landscape of online ethnography. After introducing my translocal digital research field, I outline which ethical issues I identified as most pressing and how I addressed them. Afterwards, I illustrate how I used observation, archiving, and interaction as methods for collecting data and how I used the levels of the DHA for analysing this material.

5.1 Researching Mobilising Narratives: From Varieties of Digital Ethnography to a Contextualised Online-Only Ethnography

This subchapter explains my online ethnographic approach to researching mobilising narratives in an online public that is constituted by the interaction with online news. I chose an online ethnographic approach because – as Subchapter 5.4 will show in more detail – it has allowed me to combine a diverse range of material in order to explore the diverse levels of

mobilising narratives that we just developed in the theoretical part. Within online ethnographic approaches, however, which approach to choose and which material to collect in which way is a complicated task. In the following, I outline how I moved from my research interest in mobilising narratives on Malian transnational relations to a contextualised online ethnographic approach to Malian-diasporic online news.

In general, Derya Kulavuz-Onal and Camilla Vásquez (2013, pp. 227–236) have outlined five vital challenges for conducting ethnography that is not situated in a classical "field" but in digital social contexts: (1) Especially in multi-sited communities, the "field" is not geographically bound, but can be delineated by the actions of the community members. (2) An online ethnographer's participation is different in terms of membership, (visible) presence, and active participation in different sites. (3) The distinction of observational and archival data can become blurred, e.g. in email conversations or real-time multimodal interaction, which influences the ways of fieldnote taking. (4) Online interactions are different from face-to-face encounters on a range of occasions, for instance, lacking (non)verbal cues for active listening, virtual eye contact, or the parameters of informal conversations. (5) The most important survival skill for a netnographer is the expertise in different technologies. These implications emphasise the need to develop a customised approach for doing online ethnography.

Still, Christine Hine reminds us that whereas ethnography online comes with different techniques and ethical issues, there are also many similarities with "traditional" ethnographic research (Hine, 2016, p. 405). This is especially resurfacing in recent work on online ethnographies that develops towards a focus on digital ethnography. Thinking about the specificities of digital ethnography, Pink and colleagues write:

In digital ethnography, we are often in mediated contact with participants rather than in direct presence. (...) [W]e might be in conversation with people throughout their everyday lives. We might be watching what people do by digitally tracking them, or asking them to invite us into their social media practices. Listening may involve reading, or it might involve sensing and communicating in other ways. (Pink et al., 2016, p. 3)

While digital ethnography, for instance, may have a rather broad focus including offline ethnographic research on internet use, my own online ethnographic approach rather developed in the sense of netnography. According to Robert Kozinets, netnography delineates "a specific set of related data collection, analysis, ethical and representational research practices, where a significant amount of the data collected and participant-observational research conducted originates in and manifests through the data shared freely on the Internet" (Kozinets, 2015, p. 79). This definition illustrates three important aspects:

1. A clear focus on data shared online;
2. A combination of participant observation and additional data collection;
3. An approach that does not just influence the ways of gathering data, but equally the ways of outlining the research field, securing ethical standards, analysing data and presenting results.

Even though Hine mainly advocates for a combination of netnography and "classical" ethnography, she states: "Online-only ethnography does have a significant contribution to make, particularly in working out the dynamics of interpersonal relations and exploring contemporary practices of meaning-making and identity formation" – if these studies are grounded in their theoretical foundations (Hine, 2016, p. 411f). Therefore, despite drawing inspiration from a range of approaches to ethnography in digital social contexts, I position my research as an online-only ethnography that builds on these possibilities for exploring identity formation and interpersonal relations but also relates these discursive online practices to their wider socio-political and economic context and their embeddedness in intersectional governmentality.

5.2 Online Ethnographic Case Study Context: Exploring a Mediated Malian-Diasporic Research Field

In the following, I will explain which considerations informed my focus on journalist and user interactions with online news articles that circulate through the online news portal Maliweb and its social media accounts. I evaluated Maliweb as a suitable site for researching online news discourses, considering that in 2015, a report on media use in Mali by the *Media in Transition and Cooperation* (MiCt) and *Friedrich Ebert Foundation* (FES) found Maliweb to be the most popular website among their respondents, and one of the most frequently used websites (MiCT & FES, 2015, p. 53). Founded in 2002 as one of the first online news portals with a focus on Mali, Maliweb now operates a website, a Facebook page, and a Twitter page. This is an online environment in which users from diverse geographical and social locations come together and debate current (news) events, thereby constituting a contact zone for media agents and users in Mali, the Malian diaspora, and non-Malians worldwide (for more information on Maliweb, Facebook, and Twitter, see Section 6.2.1).

The first challenge in netnography, then, is delineating "the field". This is not an easy task, as Annette Markham (2018, p. 651) observes that "[d]espite 20+ years and thousands of studies

on such communities, the ethnographer's basic task of defining the field remains a challenge with no easy answers". Hine argues as well that due to the multiple embeddedness of the internet in everyday lives, it is increasingly difficult to delineate a pre-existing bounded field site. Moreover, she emphasises it is difficult to answer research questions with online-only observations which is why it is important to explore the online and the offline as well as their interconnectedness. Some researchers therefore blend ethnography and netnography. The connective approach suggested by Hine acknowledges the multiple embeddedness of online activities and sees the exploration of different connections as strategic choices (Hine, 2016, p. 406f).

In general, Hine argues that any (online) activity can qualify for an ethnographic approach since everything people do has some meaning. Reflecting on her own research biography, however, she also argues that since all online activities are only a part of people's lives, ethnographic research has to be multimodal and multi-sited (Hine, 2017, p. 22). Hine thus draws a line from online research in earlier days that focused on defined online groups to a recognition of the embeddedness of the internet in everyday lives which led to tracing networks of connection through the online and offline space. She equally acknowledges that a diversity of organising concepts exist for defining the field site. In the end, however, she emphasises that each researcher brings the field into being with each decision they make (Hine, 2017, p. 24f). Finally, deciding how to approach the field is dependent on the researcher's interest as well as on the group they are studying. Therefore, reflexivity with regard to these decisions is crucial (Hine, 2016, p. 407f).

Markham (2018), for instance, differentiates between three research perspectives that are not to be seen as comprehensive but which rather illustrate ways of approaching the internet as

- a) a way to connect and experience networked sociality
- b) a virtual world to immerse in, or
- c) a way of being in an increasingly digital era.

Due to my interest in the news portal Maliweb and its social media accounts as spaces for users to connect and interact, I mostly focus on the first perspective. However, the other perspectives concern me as well as I also am interested in what it means for users to "be there" and how their online media use relates to the context of their everyday lives in terms of, for instance, the conditions and meanings of their online interactions.

But how do others delineate this field of networked socialities? Challenging the necessity to study bounded fields in holistic ways, Markham and Lindgren (2014) propose a perspective informed by network sensibility to research mediated interaction in a way that considers complexity and flow. Some authors apply this in a rather broad way. Lane (2016), for instance, studies social life on the streets in Harlem as networked publics that unfold in person and through social media. Others focus on online communities, e.g. of English language teachers (Kulavuz-Onal & Vasquez, 2013) or users of a Massive Open Online Course (Saadatdoost et al., 2014).

However, as I do not want to presume a given "community" of Malian-diasporic or Maliweb users, I will focus on the online interactions performed by users consuming online news that circulate through the Maliweb portal, Facebook, and Twitter.⁶⁵ Kozinets (2015) offers the notion of networked (con)socialities that emerge from such interactions as an alternative to static understandings of community. This also ties in with others' focus on social worlds and socialities as alternatives to the concepts of communities or networks (Pink et al., 2016, pp. 102–107). Authors focusing on online social interactions have dealt, for instance, with tourist reviews in response to marketing messages (Mkono, 2013) or user discussions accompanying a consumer boycott (Cruz & Ross, 2012). These perspectives inform my approach to mobilising narratives in as much as I follow certain users in their interactions with articles and other users. Starting from Urry's dimensions of physical, imaginative, virtual, and communicative mobilities outlined in the theoretical part (Section 4.1.2), the circulation of online news through this portal and its social media accounts integrates the (1) physical mobilities of Maliweb users, (2) the imaginative mobilities of visual and textual discourse fragments through articles that travel to Maliweb from diverse sources, (3) the virtual mobilities of users between different social media platforms of the Maliweb portal, and (4) the communicative mobilities of user interactions through liking, sharing, and commenting. I will follow these mobilities through archived, elicited, and reflexive data within the framework of an online ethnography. In addition, considering that I also seek to situate these (discursive) interactions in their respective socio-political and institutional contexts, my research will address the following aspects of online social interactions:

On a first level, I explore the context in which user interactions on Maliweb happen. From her observations in Science and Technology Studies, Hine derives four organising principles for

⁶⁵ I assume that interactions do not just occur among users, but also between users and the article, the author, the technical interface, etc. and that all those interactions influence the online identity construction by users.

digital ethnographies, of which especially points 2 and 3 relate to the context of online activities and their relation to media governmentality:

1. Take all experiences seriously on their own terms and do not aim to judge whether what people say and do is correct by any external criteria.
2. Explore technologies as cultural artifacts, expecting them to acquire meanings in use, specific to particular contexts.
3. Aim to examine taken-for-granted assumptions and to highlight invisible work that might be unremarked by participants but is essential to keep technologies running smoothly.
4. Critically examine claims-making as an intrinsic part of technological development and uptake. (Hine, 2017, p. 24)

In a similar way, Markham proposes to "get beyond human-centric research design to consider both the social and technical as elements in a complex ecology" (Markham, 2018, p. 7 draft). She points to the importance of the technological interface – e.g. the defaults, protocols and algorithms – that influence user behaviour and thus are important to consider for interpreting social interactions. Related to this is the need to consider non-discursive, embodied practices related to (mobile) media use (see e.g. Moores, 2012). In addition, media and communication studies have seen calls for combining symbolic and material dimensions of communication (see e.g. Morley, 2017). Making such practices and contextual realities explicit can also bridge an important gap in identity construction between online social interactions and everyday material realities. Therefore, the combination of social interactions, technical interfaces, and material (offline) realities provide the context in which narratives are mobilised.

On a second level, I explore the discourses that emerge from user interactions with articles, each other, and wider audiences. This entails an analysis of diverse discursive practices. Based on a Discourse-Centred Online Ethnography, Androutsopoulos (2008), for instance, focused on the socio-linguistic analysis of online social interactions by studying *inter alia* hip-hop youth culture or websites of ethnic minority groups in Germany. This corresponds to my interest in the ways Malian-diasporic users negotiate their identifications in this section of the internet by creating narratives through commenting.

In addition, several researchers focus on the impact of online social interactions. Clark and colleagues (2015), for instance, try to assess the agency potential of digitally enabled narrative exchange in a UK college, whereas Madianou (2016) illustrates the ways in which online

media support an ambient co-presence among transnational families. I will mainly focus on the ways in which Maliweb users create a "relational public sphere" (Wodak & Koller, 2008, p. 4) through their online social interactions, i.e. how they articulate narratives and form political opinions through cooperation and contestation, thereby mobilising identities and emotions that contribute to processes of political mobilisation.

Before I explain in more detail how I approached these levels, however, I will explain my ethical consideration for this project. In that regard, I follow Kozinets (2015, p. 128), who states that "[b]ecause research ethics are such an important matter, they cannot be left as an afterthought or treated in an ad hoc manner during or after the ethnographic entrée and collection of data. Instead, ensuring an ethical research stance must be an important and integrated part of planning the netnographic research project". Therefore, and to make my methodological choices more understandable, I continue this chapter by explaining my ethical considerations before I get to the other phases of my netnographic approach to mobilising narratives through Maliweb and its social media accounts.

5.3 Ethical Considerations in a Postcolonial Research Environment

Researchers who work on online interactions address big range of ethical issues such as how to identify "human subjects" (Markham & Buchanan, 2015), how to deal with corporations like Facebook (Kozinets, 2015), how to adhere to legal regulations (Androutsopoulos, 2008), how to respect copyright directives (Highfield & Leaver, 2016), or how to manage the openness of the researcher's role as well as the privacy and autonomy of the participants (Hine, 2016, p. 404). In this context, Markham and Buchanan urge their readers to consider two basic principles: that ethical dilemmas are less visible from a distance; and that harm or vulnerability can never be understood in advance. In general, they call for a case-based approach to ethical conduct in internet research that protects participants (Markham & Buchanan, 2015). In my research, I have identified the following as the most important ethical questions: positionality, transparency, privacy and anonymity, informed consent, and vulnerability.

In the following, I outline how I perceived these ethical concerns, how I tried to address them, but also which questions remained open (for more accounts of how others approach online research interactions, see e.g. James & Busher, 2016; Kozinets, 2015; H. O'Connor & Madge,

2016). As a primary concern of the translocal and postcolonial field I am researching, I begin by laying out my considerations of transparency and my own positionality.

5.3.1 Researcher Positionality

The researcher's positionality is an ethical concern not exclusive to ethnographies in digital social contexts, but for all research with human research participants, especially if it involves power inequalities between (Northern) researchers and (Southern) research subjects, as articulated in Chandra Talpade Mohanty's seminal text *Under Western Eyes* (Mohanty, 1988). In addition, it is also an important step in Critical Discourse Studies to reflect on one's own position within the research field (T. van Dijk, 2008). In my project, I am embedded in existing power inequalities as a *white* Western, female, heterosexual, middle-class researcher with a Western institutional affiliation.

I am positioned in the Malian-diasporic online research context as a Western researcher, currently living and working in Austria and Germany, and staying connected to happenings in Mali through online media. During research projects in Mali and with Malian-diasporic agents in 2010 and 2012, I not only observed how many levels Malian-diasporic society and the former colonial French society were (still) connected on, but also how much this ongoing connection was criticised by many people and how controversially debated connections to other countries like China manifested as well. Following the DHA understanding of critique as reflecting on the political and normative position of the researcher (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001, p. 33f), this personal experience of postcolonial critique also informed the present research.

However, as a *white* person in a postcolonial research context, I also need to consider that I am involved in intersectional power relations, especially through my being privileged in terms of nationality, education, and profession in relation to my research participants. On the one hand, this positionality meant that I could more easily afford to communicate online, (often) had a better internet connection, and often was more fluent in English – and especially since I earned money for researching the everyday media use of research participants, therefore raising questions about my own reproduction of and engagement in forms of digital colonialism (see Subchapter 3.1). On the other hand, these hierarchies sometimes faded a little into the background, be it because of identifications I shared with research participants, for instance as parents or researchers, became more prominent during the exchange, or be it

because research partners performed parts of their identities that challenged my privileges, for instance, their being elder, male, or having more direct access to information on what was going on in Mali. In that sense, however, I still consider my *white*, educated, heterosexual location in a gendered and classed postcolonial system relevant in each of these interactions. In the following, I want to explain how I tried to at least mitigate these entailed hierarchies between my research partners and myself, starting with the transparency of my research project.

5.3.2 Transparency of and in the Project

Doing ethnography in digital social contexts offers researchers the tempting possibility to get an inside view on so-called "online communities" without them ever knowing about the research project. Many authors, however, decide to unveil their academic engagement on the respective sites (see e.g. Androutsopoulos, 2008; Saadatdoost et al., 2014). Kozinets (2015) firmly advises to inform research participants about the identity and function of the researcher as well as the project – without, however, disrupting regular activities in the studied internet environments. He proposes the creation of a netnographic interactional research website that can be used as a tool to inform participants about the research and its progress, to provide interesting content as an exchange for their participation, and to generate more data. Kulavuz-Onal and Vásquez (2013), for instance, produced such a research website on which they provided detailed information about themselves and their project, but without integrating interactive elements.

For my project, I have opted for some form of covert observation of the Maliweb website and its social media accounts in the beginning as a way of getting familiar with the digital platforms and social conventions in using them. During that time, I only collected rather general observations (that I would not link to any specific actors later) and documented public material like the home page of Maliweb or articles that were published on Maliweb, Twitter, or Facebook. This approach changed, however, as I started to collect and analyse more personal material like user comments and profile information.

From this time on, I made my research and its intentions public to the users that were concerned by this more focused analysis (for more information on how I informed them on the fact I was doing a research project, see the informed consent section below). In order to combine this academic transparency with transparency of my person and thereby contribute to

a relationship of trust with potential research participants, I further used my personal Facebook and Twitter accounts for contacting and interacting with research participants. However, I also inserted a "researcher" disclaimer into my Facebook and Twitter usernames in order to (continually) alert users to my researcher position in our interactions. In addition, I created the interactive research website *MaliConnexion* on which I provided background information on the PhD project, its affiliation, its rationale, and my own person (see Figure 4). This website was intended to enable me to get in contact with research participants (and vice versa), keep them informed about the project, and to create some relationship of trust between my research partners and myself without the otherwise crucial face-to-face encounters. On this research website, I provided five segments with the following content:

- Welcome: my general research project and interest
- About the project: my personal reasons for doing this project, questions I would have for potential interview partners, the (other) material I was working with, and some preliminary results
- About participating: my motivation for inviting journalists and users to contact me, and diverse ways of contacting me (email, mobile phone, Facebook and Twitter accounts)
- About me: my motivation for doing research on Malian-diasporic online news, my educational background, my affiliations, and my social media accounts
- For saying thanks: explaining why I could not offer any monetary remuneration for participating in the research,⁶⁶ offering links that could be interesting for users commenting on Malian transnational relations, sharing my knowledge of free applications for online communication and collaboration, suggesting further shared engagement like organising a talk with an expert on a subject chosen by the interview partners or an online exhibition on their perspectives about Malian transnational relations

⁶⁶ Whereas Kozinets (2015, p. 178) suggests to offer, for instance, vouchers for users' participation, I considered this a rather difficult endeavour to realise. On the one hand, I considered it difficult to provide "just" remuneration to people living in diverse geographic and social contexts. On the other hand – and this was even more pressing for me – I did not want to limit the number of possible participants because of limited personal funding.



Figure 4: Screenshot of the interactive research website MaliConnexion (design by Syntia Hasenöhl, captured from <https://maliconnexion.jimdofree.com/>, 14.03.2021)

Whereas this research website did not create any additional interactions in the form of further online debates or the aforementioned exhibition, I learned from at least two interview partners that they only decided to participate in my research after having visited the site and being convinced by my intentions. In that regard, I consider this research website as an important tool in being transparent about my own role, especially in a field in which I am read as a citizen of (neo-)colonially intervening states and since my way of doing the project has influences on the research participants, starting with concerns for their privacy and anonymity.

5.3.3 Privacy, Anonymity, and Authorship

Whether data shared online are public or private is often hard to determine. Several authors working in digital social contexts emphasise the difficulties implied in protecting the privacy of their research participants (see e.g. Androutsopoulos, 2008; Beneito-Montagut, 2011; Georgalou, 2016). This applies especially to research with (user-generated) visual content (Buckingham, 2009; Highfield & Leaver, 2016). Kozinets (2015) differentiates between private data from personal communication and publicly posted data. He stresses the need to negotiate between gaining a deep understanding for the research, protecting research participants from doing harm by publishing data, and not excluding voices by honouring their

authorship.⁶⁷ Markham and Buchanan (2015) state that privacy is a contested and shifting concept that results in very subjective attitudes towards the protection of personally identifiable information and therefore advocate for a case-based approach. In addition, feminist researchers like Jasmine Linabary and Danielle Corple (2018) have emphasised the need and responsibility for protecting the privacy of intersectionally vulnerable persons in online research. Hine still points to another development in this realm, i.e. the increasing emergence of (commercialised and/or personalised) closed online spaces and ephemeral applications (Hine, 2017, p. 27) that require that researchers also consider corporate interpretations of privacy, anonymity, and authorship.

In my research context, I generally considered user interactions on Maliweb as public data, as users employed these media to discuss their opinions on public issues. This is already different for Facebook and Twitter, which are only partly public. However, I wanted to acknowledge that different people value privacy very differently – and, for instance, either may not want their commenting patterns to be analysed publicly in a comprehensive way (by a *white* Western researcher) for an academic audience, or may want their comments to appear non-pseudonymised because they considered themselves as authors of this work. During the consent process with users who had reacted to a Maliweb post on Facebook for an earlier article (see Hasenöhl, 2019), I had learned how important privacy was for some users, considering that I could take their comments out of their original context. Therefore, I treated public and aggregated information on user interactions gained by e.g. counting views and likes or outlining general discussion flows as public data. In order to collect more information on distinct users or to use their direct (non-)pseudonymised citations,⁶⁸ I obtained their informed consent or at least gave them the option to object to their comments and public profile information being part of the research project.

⁶⁷ Highfield and Leaver (2016) equally emphasise the importance of authorship when it comes to visual user-generated content. And Dan O'Connor (2013) argues that an emancipative notion of non-privacy is possible for apomediated medical research – i.e. research that is designed and conducted by research subjects themselves – and the related sharing of health information.

⁶⁸ At the end of the interviews, I asked if the interview partners would like to choose a pseudonym themselves or if they would like me to choose one for them, or if they would like to use their real names (considering the involved risks). When I chose pseudonyms for the users, I still tried to reflect ethnic affiliations they expressed in their family names. If they, however, did not use a family name in their username, I also did not add one to their pseudonym.

5.3.4 Informed Consent

Especially in digital social contexts, obtaining informed consent and deciding from whom to obtain it is a difficult task. Its feasibility needs to be considered in relation to the importance of informing and protecting research participants as well as the potential harm it could do to the research project itself by influencing user interactions (Buckingham, 2009; Markham & Buchanan, 2015). Some authors solve this dilemma by limiting their research to personally familiar participants from whom it is easy to gain informed consent (Beneito-Montagut, 2011), while others only work with a very small number of participants (Georgalou, 2016). Kozinets (2015) names possibilities for implied consent, e.g. accepting conditions for the research, giving one's name and email address, or making the role of the researcher explicit. Moreover, he advises to assess the need for informed consent according to four factors: (1) the nature of the research involvement, (2) the likelihood that research participants believe that their data are private, (3) the types of data used (e.g. videos, photos, direct quotes), and (4) the probability of harm to research participants. Especially the latter may be a very subjective and conflicting decision. Like Markham and Buchanan, Kozinets also suggests an inductive process, as, for instance, informed consent is sometimes more ethically obtained at the end of a research project than at its beginning.

In my project, I used material that more or less belonged to three groups of actors: the digital platforms (Maliweb, Facebook, Twitter), the publications and authors publishing the articles, and the users commenting on said articles. For each group, I approached the acquisition of consent differently. Whereas some of this consent procedure was regulated through the GDPR that became effective in May 2018, some months before I started contacting journalists and users for their consent, I was also considering their – and my – positioning in a postcolonial media system.

For the operators, Kozinets (2015) suggests to at least notify corporations about the respective research one is doing and to ask gatekeepers of online forums for their permission. In my case, as a Western researcher, I also saw it fit to inform Maliweb about my research in order to give them the opportunity to reject. However, although I tried to inform the operators of Maliweb about my research project through diverse channels (website, Facebook, mobile phone), they did not respond to any of these attempts. While this precluded me from doing interviews with Maliweb operators – as I had initially planned – they also did not reject my engagement with their news portal. Therefore, I continued to engage with their publicly available material. For Facebook and Twitter, on the other hand, they had outlined their

approach to research in their terms of service, which is why it sufficed to follow these terms (e.g. not to engage in any data scraping without their permission).

For the journalists, I did not try to get consent *per se* for using their articles, which they obviously considered public material – although I acknowledge that they were aware their articles were published on a Malian-diasporic news portal and not necessarily that they would be analysed by a Western researcher. However, as I also contacted most of the journalists in order to ask for interviews with them – i.e. all for whom I could identify some of their or their journal's contact information – they were at least informed about the research and the article(s) I was using. The article authors could thus have objected to the inclusion of their articles in my research, although I acknowledge that their respective positioning and my privileged affiliation also influence the likelihood of them using this option.

When it comes to the public comments of users on the Maliweb website, I had planned to inform them about my research and give them an opt-out option, i.e. that they could contact me if they did not want me to use their (anonymised) comments in the project. However, since Maliweb had started to close comment threads after one year, I could not contribute to the original threads anymore. I proceeded to write my consent message in the comment thread of articles on Malian transnational relations that also users from my sample were commenting on. While I did not receive any participatory feedback from the website and only one person reacted – warily – this person still suggested that I should read what people had written on the website as a way of informing myself. Considering these disrupted forms of interactions, however I decided to only consider user interactions on the Maliweb website in more general terms and did not analyse specific comments.

I proceeded to obtain informed consent from Facebook and Twitter users in different stages and for different purposes. First, I asked all the users who had commented on articles I had selected for the analysis (see Section 5.4.3) if I could use their comments and public profile information for my research. Secondly, at the beginning of interviews, I sent a data protection declaration to the interview partners and asked for their consent. Once they had agreed to this declaration, I informed interview partners about the interview procedure and the fact that they could still revoke their consent at the end. This was especially important since some interviews extended over several weeks or even months. Third, at the end of each interview, I still asked users again if I could use the interview and the information they provided. Most of the users agreed to this, apart from one interview partner. This person had already been rather critical of my positionality as a Western researcher at the beginning of our conversations.

Later, however, he began to have more trust in my intentions and we were exchanging interview questions but also information about our everyday lives over several months, which made this a rich conversation.⁶⁹ However, when I asked at the end of the interview process if I could use the interview for my research, this specific interview partner answered that he did not want any Western people to profit from his words. As I assumed that this had at least partly to do with a French affront to Mali at the time, which might have reinforced his anti-colonial feelings, this experience showed me how important it is to perform informed consent as a process and not a one-time event.

5.3.5 Do No Harm and Vulnerability of Research Participants

When it comes to the principle to "do no harm" as well, Markham and Buchanan (2015, p. 611f) warn that harm and vulnerability cannot be completely understood in advance. For instance, as it is difficult to identify research participants in digital social contexts, it is equally difficult for the researcher to assess belonging to vulnerable groups (Kozinets, 2015, p. 143ff). In my research setting, for instance, the illegalised status or critical stance of (diasporic) research participants might be a reason for anonymising them – or not, depending on what could help or sabotage their future endeavours. In addition, politically active or activist users could also become endangered through unveiling more about them. Considering the heated political climate in Mali as well as the partly precarious situations of diasporic users, I was rather conservative in identifying vulnerable group affiliation or potentially harmful content.

Moreover, content that is not perceived as problematic by the users themselves could still provoke negative reactions from a decontextualised audience (Highfield & Leaver, 2016). This is especially the case, as my project is situated in a postcolonial context in which certain representations of Maliweb users might reproduce colonial thought structures. To assess these cases, I also grounded my material selections and interpretations in postcolonial and intersectional literature.

The implication to do no harm intersects as well with Critical Discourse Studies, which require research to work towards the ultimate goal of improving conditions for marginalised groups while constantly reflecting on the researcher's privileged position (Reisigl & Wodak, 2016; T. van Dijk, 2008). Related to this is Buckingham's claim to reflect on the power

⁶⁹ From my first attempt at making contact to the closing questions of this interview, we stayed in contact – with some breaks – for over two years.

relations between research participants and the researcher (Buckingham, 2009). Considering my positionality outlined above, this meant that I always tried to value the security of my research participants higher than the interest in certain information for this thesis. Most importantly, I refrained from creating links between publicly traceable comments and specific interview partners, considering that this might increase their vulnerability either by unveiling controversial private opinions and practices, or by unveiling additional information that might identify them to an unintended extent.

A last point I want to make here goes to the harm and the vulnerability of those not heard in my approach to mobilising narratives. As we will see in the following data collection sections, my approach only included users that had reacted in some way to online news articles. This excludes those who only read these articles and did not or could not react to them (Eynon et al., 2016) as well as those who were excluded from consuming online news altogether – a phenomenon Eszter Hargittai (2018), for instance, perceives as underrated in online research. Whereas I cannot change these exclusionary patterns in my research, I still have to be aware in the interpretation of my findings that "it is important that decisions that concern the whole population are not based on the results of analyses that favor the opinions of those who are already better off" (Hargittai, 2018, p. 10). Here, non-participant users could experience harm through conclusions that do not value their own positionalities.

5.4 Collecting Data through Online Ethnographic Methods

In the following, I illustrate how I collected the material for exploring mobilising narratives in a Malian-diasporic online news environment. Therefore, I first outline my general online ethnographic approach before I engage in the specifics of collecting material through observing, archiving, and interacting.

Markham (2018) suggests that, considering the increasing impact the internet has on our everyday lives, we should keep an ethnographic attitude that seeks to understand the complexity of the human experience but be open to change specific methods. Accordingly, research that is related to ethnography in digital social contexts uses a broad range of methods for data collection.

One strand of research relies purely on data mining without interacting with human subjects. Some analyse the deeper meaning of hyperlinks. Beaulieu and Simakova (2006), for instance, identified relevant databases, collected diverse hyperlinks, followed the related websites, and

retrieved their context information. Diminescu and Loveluck (2014) moreover, used Navicrawler (see www.webatlas.fr) to collect hyperlinks and Gephi (www.gephi.org) to map diasporic networks for an analysis of diasporic identifications. Others download textual and visual information. Mkono (2013) explored webpage marketing messages and responding tourist reviews for two restaurants at Victoria Falls. Highfield and Leaver (2016) collected images, diverse forms of visual communication (e.g. artwork, memes, videos, collages, infographics, inspirational quotes and poetry presented through images), profile and image information by following certain hashtags. Thereby, they emphasised the need to observe the respective platform interface as well as the extended social media context, i.e. connected platforms.

Despite such increasing possibilities and the importance of big data and quantitative computational methods, there is still a need for doing qualitative research that addresses the meaning of online activities for participants. Hine argues that

...ethnographic methods that look outwards to the embedding of Internet activities in diverse contexts and also inwards to autoethnographic accounts of how such forms of connection feel, may be very significant in allowing us to grasp the forms of sociality enabled by the Internet and may form a suitable complement, or even counter, to big data approaches. (Hine, 2016, p. 403)

Accordingly, she emphasises the importance of studies that oscillate between online and offline considering the embodied, embedded and everyday nature of the internet today (Hine, 2017, p. 27).

Another set of studies, then, features (offline) interactions with research participants more or less prominently, from starting online and then going offline to mainly studying online activities offline (Hine, 2016, p. 407). Some have researched offline networks and follow the online activities of the persons involved, as done very prominently by the research group around Daniel Miller (for a good overview, see e.g. Miller et al., 2016). This is also the approach that is promoted by advocates of non-media-centric digital ethnographies (Pink et al., 2016, p. 7). Jeffrey Lane (2016), for instance, contacted teens in a neighbourhood of Harlem on a personal basis and extended these interactions to the social media sphere by eliciting discussions through screenshots of the teens' social media accounts. Wilma Clark and colleagues (2015) combined Grounded Theory and action research to collect data from researcher-led interviews, student focus groups, social media training workshops, and participant (online) observation (e.g. a Twitter event using the software tool Archivist). And Mirca

Madianou (2016) did a long-term ethnography based on personal relations with her research partners with additional online participant observation and interviews.

On the other hand, some researchers start with online participant observation and then contact users for face-to-face interactions in order to develop a personal relationship with their research participants. Yifan Chang (2014), for instance, did online participant observations through his Weibo account in a Weibo G-Dragon fandom group followed by face-to-face interviews with five G-Dragon fans. Roser Beneito-Montagut (2011) used theoretical sampling to identify six Spanish frequent internet users as research participants based on observations during her own internet use. This sampling was followed by three phases of data collection: (1) an initial general observation of online activities, (2) a participant observation with semi-structured face-to-face (before) and online (after) interviews, and (3) routine diaries to explore non-public emotions and embed online interactions in their context. She advocates for an "expanded ethnography" that follows the users in their use of different sites, combines online and offline techniques for more comprehensive sense-making, and customises the use of multimedia research techniques to the respective research participants.

Still others combine archival data, interactions with research participants, and reflective note-taking but limit it to the online level: Robab Saadatdoost and colleagues (2014) did an ethnography during a specific Massive Open Online Course on *Coursera* and collected archival data (posts), elicited data (online interviews) and reflexive data, i.e. field notes including observations of the community, members, interactions, meanings, researchers' participation and sense of membership. Kulavuz-Onal and Vásquez (2013) did a 12-month fieldwork at the English language teacher community "Webheads in Action" by participating in the main events, archiving email communication, conducting interviews with different actors, creating reflective observational fieldnotes, and taking screenshots of observations. In a similar way, Jeewa Zakia and Jean-Philippe Wade (2015) did a participant observation of Harry Potter and Vampire Diaries virtual fandom communities for over two years. They systematically collected user profiles, fan conversations, user accounts of media professionals, role-playing texts, fan fiction, fan art, fan videos, blogs, uploaded documents, links, etc. and conducted six semi-structured interviews with members of those communities.

With my research project focusing on mobilising narratives in a Malian-diasporic media environment, I will follow the version of netnography that stays at the online level. As such an approach fosters the accessibility of groups on different scales from the local to the global (Cruz & Ross, 2012) and provides access to difficult-to-reach groups in many parts of the

world (Mkono, 2013), this allows me to include the interactions of persons in Mali as well as in the Malian diasporas that are located in a myriad of places. Moreover, following the context sensitivity of the DHA (see e.g. Reisigl & Wodak, 2001; Wodak et al., 2009) I also collect data beyond the user interactions already given.

This also gives credit to Hine, who argues that important elements of digital ethnography are immersion⁷⁰ and reflexivity in doing research and writing. The latter "involves examining choices and assumptions and reflecting on modes of experience and movements within the field" (Hine, 2017, p. 26). In my attempt to immerse myself into the Malian-diasporic online news portal Maliweb and its social media accounts, I am also influenced by John Postill's work on remote ethnography. He elaborates on how ethnography from afar can work in increasingly digitally connected worlds. Moreover, he introduces the work of Jonathan Skinner (2007) who followed the online contact of a population scattered after a natural disaster. Postill argues that this was a common situation for diasporic groups trying to recreate the "being there" through media (Postill, 2017, p. 64). Researching diasporic "being there" may thus also involve not being there. Accordingly, Postill concludes that remote ethnography is no "second choice" since it offers new insights from different perspectives and accounts for the fact that "'being there' from afar is becoming an ever more integral part of daily life" (Postill, 2017, p. 67) – and in my case, this *is* also the condition of users I am interested in in the first place.

My own approach for collecting data thus involved three circular steps: archiving data, interacting with Maliweb users, and reflecting on my own experiences. In line with Unger and colleagues who suggest building "observational research approaches" into the exploratory step of CDS online (Unger et al., 2016, p. 282), I first documented my own observations on the news portal between July 2016 and May 2019 with a focus on material collected during 2017, and captured the daily website layout between end of May 2017 and the end of December 2017. Secondly, I archived metadata of articles published on the news portal between March and May 2017, an article collection that, together with the observations above, helped me to identify general patterns on Maliweb as well as identify articles for closer analysis (see introduction to Subsection 5.5). And, thirdly, I conducted interviews with authors and users who had written or commented on these articles.

These three steps of collecting material were embedded in Kozinets' (2015) 12 circular, interacting phases for doing a netnography:

⁷⁰ See Pink and colleagues for further literature that deals with the immersion in digital contexts (Pink et al., 2016, p. 23).

1. an introspection on the meaning of the project for the researcher (→ reflecting on my personal and academic motivation for researching user interactions on Maliweb),
2. an investigation of people, topics or sites leading to the netnographic research question (→ first explorations of diasporic websites in general and of Maliweb in particular),
3. information on research ethics (→ literature review and reflection),
4. initial explorative "interviews" of sites or people (→ first insights into the technical interface and user interactions on Maliweb),
5. inspection to choose a particular focus (→ user interactions on the Maliweb website, Facebook and Twitter pages),
6. formulating an interaction entry strategy (→ creation of interactive research website and researcher profile),
7. immersion in the data, topic or site on a frequent basis (→ daily visits of the Maliweb platforms, development from observing to active participation),
8. an indexing data collection strategy (→ choosing topics, articles, and users for closer observation),
9. immediate and continuous interpretation (→ guided by the different DHA levels),
10. iterations of certain phases,
11. instantiation through representation (→ working on representations for different academic audiences), and
12. an integration of findings and further recommended action (→ publication, transformation of the interactive research website).

Departing from this overall view on the research project, I will outline in more detail how I approached the observing, archiving, and interacting phases in more detail.

5.4.1 Observing and Reflecting Own Experiences

Throughout the research process, I kept on more or less regularly observing the Maliweb website and its social media accounts on Facebook and Twitter, mainly between July 2016 and December 2018, and again between May 2019 and January 2020, with the almost daily and most intensive observations having taken place between May and December 2017. During this time, I was creating fieldnotes on my own Maliweb use and the observations I

made. These observations included platform features, the emergence and vanishing of topics, ways in which they were commented upon, as well as more general background and (inter)actions of users. I could thereby experience the change and impact of platform interfaces and generated starting points for interpreting and collecting further data. In an autoethnographic way, my own engagement on Maliweb also allowed me to reflect on the potentials and limits of such an online news portal in providing an (emotional) connection to Malian-diasporic agents, places, and events and in contributing to political mobilisation. In addition, following the DHA triangulation approach (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001, p. 40), especially when analysing the selection of articles and comments, these observations helped me to contextualise this material and ground my interpretations in a broader environment.

Regarding the extent of my ethnographic engagement in terms of participant observation, I decided not to actively participate in discussions on the Maliweb portal (for a discussion, see Androutsopoulos, 2008, p. 17). Since I did not want to participate without declaring my role as a researcher, I feared that in this highly public environment, a premature entry could compromise the whole project (for an example, see Kozinets, 2015, p. 102f). In addition, especially since I was in contact with other users who sometimes had very differing opinions, I did not want to alienate, offend, worry, or even exclude them by publicly voicing one-sided opinions on topics that were often hotly debated.

Finally, these observations are not to be seen as representative since they merely portray my own experience of the portal. However, I also combined my personal observations with more systematic approaches to the data through regular observations of specific article types, e.g. the leading articles on the website or the pinned articles on the Facebook account as well as the archived metadata and the website captures (see below). In that regard, these observations and their documentation gave me an idea of the ongoing media debates as well as the overall context of the portal and its social media accounts, including the platform interfaces and user interactions, thereby offering insights into the different dimensions of governmentality explored in this thesis.

5.4.2 Archiving Material

Especially for exploring the contextual dimensions of mobilising narratives on Malian transnational relations, I archived a rather diverse set of material. On a very general level that

is not related to the online ethnography but to its contextualisation, I drew from official documents and reports. These informed on different contextual issues:

- National statistical reports on the general background of Malian society, including reports from the INSTAT, RGPH, CNDIFE;
- International, regional, and national official reports about the development of online communication in Mali, including reports from the AMRTP; Afrobarometer; the ITU, GSMA;
- The Mali digital 2020 strategy of the Malian government/ MENIC;
- News and NGO reports about (online) media in Mali like the FES and MfWA reports, also including information from social media accounts of the respective media;
- Official company information and terms of use from Maliweb, Facebook, and Twitter.

In addition to these general background reports, I archived data posted on Maliweb and its related platforms, including Facebook and Twitter. In a first step, I archived articles and their metadata (i.e. their title, date, source, categorisation, website positioning, picture, and number of comments) over a period of three months (from March 2017 until May 2017). These metadata helped me to identify important topics – with topics considered "important" if many articles were published about them and if they provoked many user interactions.⁷¹ In addition to these metadata and the observations mentioned above, I captured the Maliweb home page on an almost daily basis from the end of May 2017 until the end of December 2017. This allowed me to confirm and contrast my interpretations from the other two sources – that were limited in their time frame and their comprehensive focus, respectively – with a more encompassing and longer-term observation.

These data provide insights on the discursive structures emerging through Maliweb and the ways users (inter)acted within these structures by e.g. emphasising certain issues (see e.g. van Dijck & Poell, 2013 for the intersection of platform and user agencies) as contextual information for the discourse on Malian transnational relations. Based on these insights, I selected important articles, Tweets, and Facebook posts with their images, user comments, and other user interactions (liking, sharing, etc.) (for more on this selection for detailed analysis, see the next section on selecting articles for deeper analysis).

⁷¹ In doing so, I acknowledge that researching online activities cannot account for or even marginalises the activities of users who do not leave any traces but might still be important for their lives (Hine, 2016, p. 411).

On the user level, I collected the publicly available information on the users who interacted with the chosen articles, i.e. their usernames, descriptions of their profile pictures, and further profile information. This provided me with some insights into how users constructed their individual identities online, how these related to their collective identifications on Maliweb and to their offline contexts. This step, however, only followed after I had informed users of my research and after getting at least their implicit consent (see the informed consent section and the explanations on contacting users for interviews). Therefore, I wrote informed consent messages to the Facebook users I had not interviewed – either by posting a comment under the respective thread or by writing them a direct message – in order to ask for their permission for using their comment and public profile information. For those who had been contacted indirectly as I had posted a comment under a comment thread they were a part of, I could not see if they had read the comment but I assumed that they had been notified by Facebook about the comment. Based on this consent procedure, I collected public profile information from Facebook users who had either seen or responded positively to my private message or who – after my collective post in their comment thread – had still posted something on their Facebook profile and could still be considered active – and thus notified – users at the time of being informed. For the Twitter users, who were all informed about my research, I collected information from all public and active accounts, especially considering the more public nature of Twitter (but also consider that the legal publicness might contrast with users' perceptions, see e.g. Williams et al., 2017).

If provided, I collected the following information from Facebook and Twitter users:

- profile picture⁷²
- background picture
- education
- profession
- current location
- hometown
- migration history⁷³

⁷² Due to special requirements and challenges for data protection, informed consent, and the potential vulnerability of research partners, I only archived general descriptions of profile and background pictures.

⁷³ In this categorisation, I coded users as "yes" if their profile showed different places of origin and places of reference, and/or different places they had lived in. I coded them as "not articulated" if only one location appeared in their profile information.

- number of languages spoken
- religion
- gender
- number of followers (Twitter only)
- verified account (Twitter only)
- on platform since (Twitter only)

With this profile information, I sought to assess the represented social locations of users and contextualise their contributions to the discourse.

5.4.3 Regrouping: Selecting Articles for Deeper Analysis

In order to enable further explorations of context and discourse, I selected articles for (a) detailed analysis and (b) extending my research to users and journalists. Based on theoretical insights that stress the importance of events for collective identities, and the articulation of identities and belongings in times of threat (see e.g. Angouri & Wodak, 2014; Chilwa, 2018; Krzyzanowski et al., 2018), I identified a range of events between March 2017 and January 2018 that I considered important for the construction of Malian-diasporic identities and belongings. Equally informed by mobility studies, the following selection process approaches (mediated) Malian transnational relations from a movement perspective with a postcolonial lens on the movement of people, objects, and ideas. I arrived at selecting these events by combining three sources of data that I integrated through the data analysis software NVivo:

1. From the archived article metadata (March–May 2017), I identified through, for instance, word frequency analyses, which topics were especially important. In doing so, however, I did not only consider the articles published on Maliweb in general but also those that were commented on or commented on a lot (for this period, I identified this as generating more than ten comments).
2. With the daily captures of the Maliweb home page, I could – also via word frequency analyses – show which topics were prominent across time and which ones emerged over time and disappeared again.
3. For my own observations, I coded their documentation in daily research diary entries. Afterwards, I used matrix analyses to identify important combinations of broader

codes (like, for instance, transnational relations + domestic politics) and, through these, identified a range of events that related to the mobilities of persons, objects, and ideas on the Maliweb website and its social media accounts.

In order to select events for more detailed analyses, I created a table in a word document that compared important mobilities of people, objects and ideas in the metadata, screen captures and diary entries. At this stage, it became apparent that within this news discourse, Malian transnational relation were embedded in and entangled with African transnational relations, which is why I extended the focus of the discourse to Malian and African transnational relations. This table showed in a way of triangulation how different perspectives made different topics more or less visible. The metadata comment analysis as well as my own observations highlighted how issues became salient for users that were not as prominent on the portal itself – or the other way around, that the portal interface made articles salient through its positioning. On the one hand, this overview gave me a comprehensive overview of the different topics addressed. On the other hand, it showed me which topics the single perspectives might have missed. Together, this selection process produced 25 events and debates that addressed Malian or African transnational relations through mobilities of persons, objects, and ideas.

Moreover, based on their topics, social (users) and institutional (platforms) situational context, I selected 48 articles from the corpus of articles that had been published via Maliweb on the aforementioned events and debates (see the Appendix for a list of the selected articles). For this selection, I employed the following criteria:

- the articles' centrality for postcolonial mobilities;
- the intensity of interactions with them;
- their appearance within the intensively observed timeframe (March 2017 to January 2018);
- their prominence in terms of platform positioning, for instance, as leading article or general article, but considering this sometimes also as especially interesting if an article was not positioned prominently but still got many reactions. [only in the selection of articles?!]

The selected articles were mostly news articles, but also included other genres such as government communications or project reports.⁷⁴

Building on this selection process and my topic-related mobility focus, I outline how the movements of people, objects, and ideas appear in the events I selected and how mobility studies helped me in that selection. As mentioned above, I chose those events based on their centrality for postcolonial relations, the intensity of interactions, and the prominence of their positioning through the portal on the Maliweb website, or on Facebook, or Twitter. This ties in with Söderström and colleagues' (2013, p. 2) description of "critical mobilities" as movements that are controversial (much debated), socially constitutive (related to other issues within Malian society), and challenging an overly optimistic idea of ever-increasing movement (focusing on the postcolonial power relations). Figure 5 shows the mobile people, objects, and ideas that are embedded in Malian and African transnational relations.

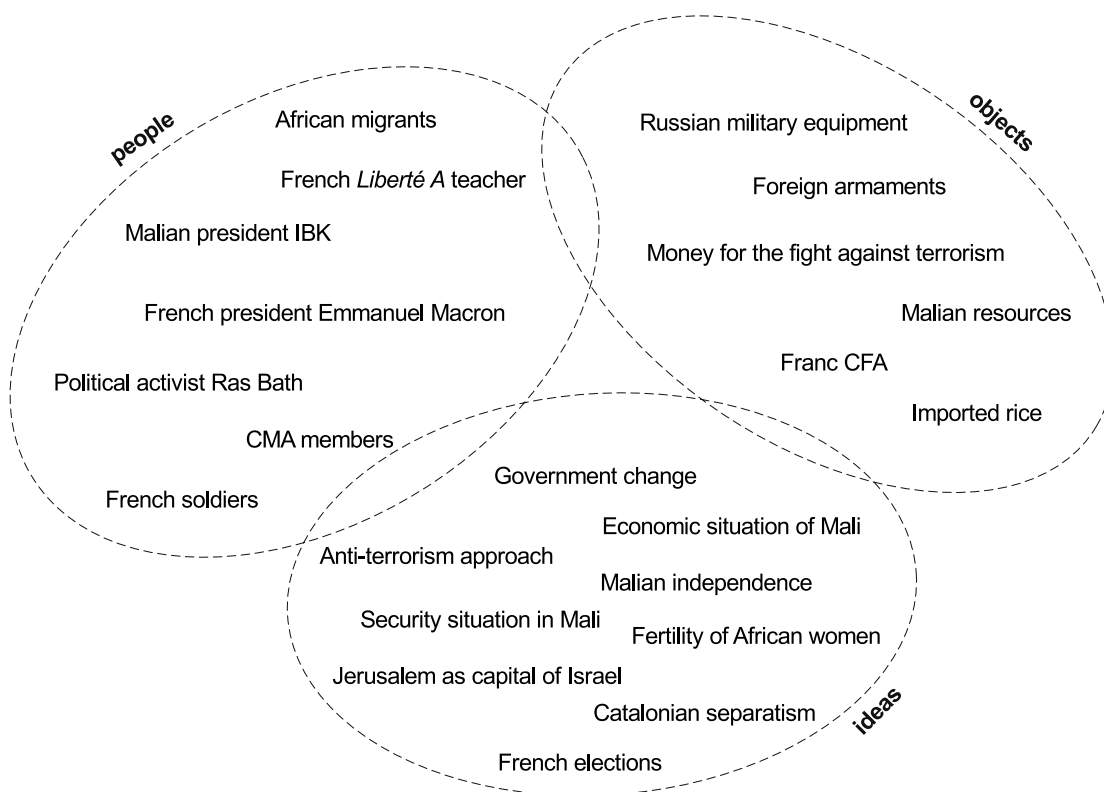


Figure 5: Selected events and debates relating to moving people, objects, and ideas on Maliweb 04/2017 – 01/2018 (own visualisation)

⁷⁴ For ease of reading, I will use the term "articles" when talking about all sources, and "newspaper articles", "government communication" etc. when emphasising the specific genres involved.

Although the movements of people were connected to a variety of issues, we can discern some groups within that category. Some reports on mobile persons were related to the Malian conflict in the North and Centre and the related international interventions, most prominently here the movements of French soldiers and of former rebels, now members of the CMA.⁷⁵ Added to this is the movement of a (male) French teacher who was expelled from Mali for weighing in on the conflict by giving a homework assignment that involved the contested term "Azawad". Additionally, the visit of the French president Macron in Mali was interpreted in light of the conflict and the French intervention. Other reported movements were more related to the general Malian and African socio-political context, including the movement of African migrants, the travels of the Malian president IBK, or the return of the oppositional political activist Ras Bath after a journey in which he visited groups of the Malian diaspora for political sensitisation.

The mobile objects that the articles dealt with were also mostly related to the conflict and the international interventions as well as to the debates on Russian military goods and other foreign armaments. Additionally, the articles on money transfers for and against terrorism were related to the Malian conflict. And the exploitation of Malian resources as suspected (hidden) motivation for the French military intervention related to the same issue. The discussion around the West African currency Franc CFA, then, dealt more generally with Malian and African relation to France. And the debate on imported rice revolved around issues of international trade and national consumption.

The selected mobile ideas and information concerned Malian transnational relations on diverse levels. Some additionally related to the conflict, including a UN report on Mali's security and peace situation, the French influence on IBK's idea of combatting terrorism, and ideas of Catalanian separatism. Others provided more general perspectives on Malian political and economic issues, such as with an IMF report on Mali's economic situation and articles on generational changes in the Malian government. Still others related to transnational African or Muslim concerns, including talk of the fertility of African women by the French president Macron and the US president Trump's decision about Jerusalem as site of the US embassy. And the information on the French presidential election related to an event that was taking place outside of Mali – except for the voting French nationals in Mali – but was still seen as having consequences for (the sovereignty of) Malian and African societies.

⁷⁵ Coordination des Mouvements de l'Azawad / Coordination of Movements of Azawad

These selected events, debates and, consequently, articles were the basis for seeking interactions with article authors and users who commented on the selected articles.

5.4.4 Interacting with Journalists and Users

The last phase of my research involved gaining insights into the contexts and meanings of journalist and user interactions with online news published through Maliweb and thus contributed to the overarching research interest in further subjectifications and their contexts.

Accessing Journalists and Users

The basis for interacting with users and article authors was the creation of the interactive research website mentioned above. I approached users who had interacted with the articles chosen for detailed analysis via the respective platforms and invited them to consult the research website.

Therefore, I first selected which users and article authors I would contact. In total, the articles I had selected for a detailed analysis had been published by 39 journals or institutions, and they had been commented on by 785 users. Based on these numbers, I tried to contact all article authors or their institutions – for 36 of which I could identify some contact information and five of which actually got back to me and ultimately were willing to do an interview. In addition, I selected 90 users who had commented on at least two of the articles in my corpus for a first contact round for the discourse analysis (47 on the website, 35 on Facebook, eight on Twitter). I made this choice based on the assumption that commenting on two sources would increase the chances that they regularly consumed news published by Maliweb and were interested in the topic of Malian and African transnational relations. In a second contact round, I contacted all Facebook (36) and Twitter (29) users who had reacted twice to an article.⁷⁶ And in a third contact round, I tweeted to the rest of the Twitter users since only very few had reacted to my previous attempts.

For contacting Facebook users, I identified them through the Facebook threads and then sent them a private message with my invitation to participate in the research. In cases where users had disabled the private messenger service for non-friends, I sent them a friendship request

⁷⁶ Since I did not succeed in contacting any website users, neither by commenting on their comments to recent articles nor by publishing a more open call for participation in recent articles on Malian transnational relations (see my explanations in the informed consent section above), after some time I ultimately decided to focus rather on the Facebook and Twitter users.

and sent them the research message if they accepted said request. In rare cases when neither of those options were possible, I posted a shortened version of my contact message under comments said users had recently written.

For the Twitter users, I equally identified users through their Twitter reactions to the selected articles. I then followed the approach outlined by Ben Corbett and Allan Edwards (2018) and first tried to send these users a private message in which I could explain my research and the invitation in more detail. When they had disabled the option to receive private messages from non-followed users, I posted a public Tweet in which I mentioned their username, very briefly introduced my project and asked if they would like to exchange about it.

Sample

After approximately one year of contacting and exchanging with users and article authors, I was able to complete five interviews with article authors and thirteen interviews with users (for more detailed and contextualised information on the social locations of journalists and users, see Section 7.1.1). While I could complete all interviews with article authors and Twitter users, I did not use three interviews with Facebook users, because two stopped responding to my messages, and (as mentioned in Section 5.3.4) one user withdrew consent.

For the article authors, they included journalists from five Malian journals. Four of them were professional journalists and one was an architect and university teacher who had made writing his passion. And one of them was also an oppositional politician in addition to his journalistic occupation. Moreover, four of them were male and only one of them female.

For the users, they represented a rather diverse composition. Five of them had reacted to Tweets and eight to Facebook posts published by Maliweb. Three out of thirteen were female users. In terms of their professions, some were employed by the state (as public servants or teachers), some by NGOs, some were independent workers, and some were students. In terms of education, those with a university education were quite overrepresented (10) in comparison to those with vocational training (3). Most of them were from Southern or Western Mali, with two female users from Central Mali and one male user coming from Ivory Coast, another from Senegal, and one female user from Paris/Gabon.⁷⁷ At the time of the interview, most of them lived in Bamako, with the exceptions of Sikasso and some smaller towns in the vicinity

⁷⁷ This said user lived in Malta at the time of writing and had never been in Mali. For her, however, her identification as African weighs stronger than her national one. In that regard, this user exemplifies how a Malian-diasporic public can also go beyond the classical idea of the nationally defined Malian diaspora.

of Bamako and international locations like Dakar (Senegal), Marseille (France), and Malta. In addition, I had started one email interview with a user currently living in the North of Mali who, however, could not finish the interview. The youngest of these users were in their early twenties, the oldest in their sixties. And whereas some were single, others were married (or divorced), some with children and grandchildren. Although these users represented a privileged part of Malian society, especially in terms of their education and profession, they thus still contributed to the research from a diversity of standpoints.

Although the number of interview partners was rather limited, this limited number allowed me to engage in intensive interactions with them, interactions that sometimes lasted over several months, and in some instances, persist until today.

Same Questions, Diverse Formats

In addition to these diverse positionings, I also conducted interviews with article authors and users through diverse mediated formats. These formats became so diverse as I let the interview partners choose the format for the interview. On the one hand, this allowed them to choose the format that was most practical for them, for instance, in terms of their network connection and their finances. On the other hand, this also allowed them to pick the way of communication they felt most comfortable with. With two of the journalists, then, I conducted phone interviews, the other three preferred that I send them a questionnaire they could complete and send back to me. For the Facebook and Twitter users, we conducted the interviews through email (2 interviews), Facebook messages (1), Twitter messages (1), WhatsApp written messages (4), WhatsApp vocal messages (2), and (WhatsApp) phone calls (3).

I acknowledge that this diversity also led to diversity in the quality of the interviews, as, for instance, the phone calls allowed for more spontaneous and deeper interactions than the written (email, Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp) exchanges. On the other hand, I argue that a certain level of depth and richness still emerged across these formats, considering that the lack of narrative compulsion could be compensated for by the possibility for reflexivity (as also argued by, for instance, James & Busher, 2016, p. 248; H. O'Connor & Madge, 2016, p. 580ff). This preference for sending questions to be able to reflect about them and edit responses could be especially important in postcolonial research settings wherein interview partners feel the need for reflective self-presentation. In addition, the quality of interactions also depended on the relationship between the interview partners and myself, a relationship that often developed over several weeks or months – and, of course, on their personal circum-

stances at the time. For one interview partner, for instance, we had to cut the interview short because his work became too demanding at the time. For another, we had to take a break because he was travelling to the countryside. And for two others, their time freed up at the beginning of the Coronavirus pandemic in March 2020, so deeper interviews were possible in the first place.

On the content level, I aimed for gaining deeper insights into the persons behind those articles and comments, but also on their conditions for and experiences with producing and consuming online news. For the journalists, I asked about their professional development, their current journalistic work, their publication, their relationship with Maliweb, and their experiences with their articles being commented on. For the users, I asked about their personal background, their histories with the respective platform, including their experiences with other users, their further (social) media use, but also about their current opinions on Malian transnational relations, and their further socio-political engagements beyond online media. For answering these questions, I worked with interview guidelines in which – following Rosenthal's (2011, p. 150f) suggestion for expert interviews – I integrated as many narrative questions as possible, such as about their history with Facebook and Twitter, in order to allow users to elaborate on the topics of the questions in a contextualising way (see the Appendix for the complete list of questions).

In addition to capturing or recording the interviews, I also wrote parallel protocols on my interactions with the respective interview partners. These protocols were especially helpful in case when interactions with interview partners were interrupted or developed on a less frequent basis.

5.4.5 A Corpus for Mobilising Narratives

Together, these observational, archival, and interactive methods produced a broad range of different material that informed the diverse levels of mobilising narratives, and also the different modalities of (media) governmentality therein. As I already outlined with the process for selecting material, I want to acknowledge that these data (for instance, user comments and interviews on their background) were collected at different times and thereby do not represent a co-occurring relation between content and context. In the context of this specific research project, however, I chose to prioritise the reflective data selection over the simultaneous occurrence of material. As the following subchapter will show, these different

forms of online ethnographic material allow for an analysis according to context and discourse dimensions of the DHA.

5.5 Analysing Online Ethnographic Data through the DHA Framework

Many authors researching digital social contexts analyse their data through coding and categorising. Some take a more problem-oriented approach, such as Mkono (2013), who identifies patterns in tourist reviews that point towards performative authenticity, or Beaulieu and Simakova (2006) who categorise different linking practices according to their relation to time. Others develop these categories based on theoretical work on, for instance, cross-cultural identity constructions (Chang, 2014) or communities of practice (Saadatdoost et al., 2014). For my research project, I used the analysis software NVivo in order to analyse my material along the levels of the DHA that allowed for addressing the discursive formations that emerged through articles and comments as well as their context on diverse levels.⁷⁸

For keeping the material gathered for this analysis manageable, however, I had to select which data I would analyse at what depth. As Figure 6 shows, I analysed all observations and screenshots for the institutional context of engaging with Malian-diasporic online news through Maliweb, Facebook, and Twitter. As explained in Section 5.4.3, I also used this broad level to select 48 articles for detailed analysis. I analysed these articles and the profile information of the commenting – and informed, see Section 5.3.4 – users for the social situational context and the overall topics of the discourse fragment I was looking at. And finally, I used the interviews and the articles and comment threads in which my interview partners had participated for a deeper engagement in their context as well as in discursive strategies that supported the discourse on Malian transnational relations. In addition to this staged analytical process, I also considered information from interviews and observations if they were relevant for contextualising other (more or less detailed) analytical levels.

⁷⁸ Saadatdoost and colleagues (2014) as well used the NVivo software for their coding analysis. For a more detailed account on NVivo-based coding within the DHA, see Dorostkar (2014, pp. 94–102)

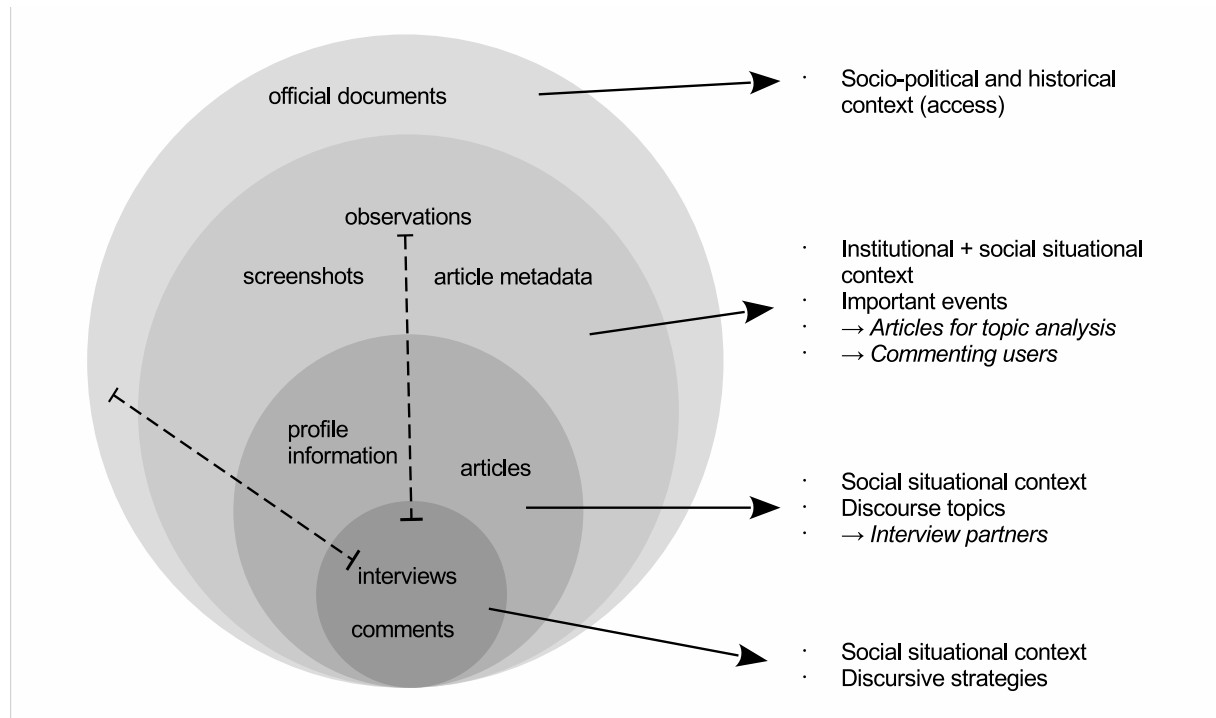


Figure 6: Attribution of collected material to different analytical levels (own visualisation)

Based on this selection, I analysed the material according to the different analytical levels of the DHA, i.e. its context levels, genres, topics, and discursive strategies. In addition, I combined diverse approaches for an analysis of emotional articulations.

5.5.1 Context Levels

As a way of approaching workings of governmentality on different levels of mobilising narratives online, my analysis first engaged with the contexts of the discourse on Malian transnational relations. Michal Krzyzanowski uses context in relation to the DHA in two ways: First as according to van Dijk, who sees context as socially constituted, as also constructed by social actors, providing a link between structure and agency (Krzyzanowski, 2010, p. 78f).⁷⁹ Here, imagined affordances and the politics of infrastructure as well as social positionings through profile information could be concepts to grasp this context for online communication. In terms of data collection, this points to the importance of experiencing the communicative setting, i.e. how actors perceive the setting and thus the context of discursive interaction. Secondly, Krzyzanowski introduces context according to the DHA, which seeks to analyse not only how discourses are produced, but also how they are consumed

⁷⁹ See also van Dijk about his ideas of social cognition related to individual and broader social representations as a dimension relating text and context (T. van Dijk, 1991, p. 69ff).

(Krzyzanowski, 2010, p. 79). In addition, he illustrates the four context levels of the DHA and how they can serve as a guideline for an abductive research strategy that goes from a meta-level to the text level but also includes ongoing exchange between the levels (Krzyzanowski, 2010, p. 79f).

As mentioned in the theoretical part, Reisigl and Wodak introduce the four DHA context levels – text-internal co-text, interdiscursive and intertextual relationships, the context of situation, and the broader socio-political and historical context – as part of their triangulation approach (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001, p. 41). In my project, I applied these in the following ways:

1. Text-internal co-text: I identified consistencies and discontinuities between articles and user comments, and also within comment threads.
2. Interdiscursive and intertextual relationships: I showed how certain topics and argumentations travelled between articles and other topics, also through comments.
3. Context of the situation:
 - a. Institutional situational context: I explored how the digital media platforms Maliweb, Facebook, and Twitter generated different environments for interacting.
 - b. Social situational context: I analysed the different social locations of publications, journalists, and users as well as hierarchies that emerged in interactions between them.
4. Broader socio-political and historical context:
 - a. Discourse content: In Chapter 2 on the research field, I outlined the historical development of (debates on) Malian transnational relations as background of the discourse analysed in articles and comments.
 - b. Discourse context: As another interpretation of the socio-political and historical context, I analysed the more general conditions for using online communication and online news, especially in the Malian context.

In addition, Krzyzanowski recounts that the historical dimension of the DHA is derived from its attempts to trace information on the historical background and historical resources of specific texts as well as their diachronic change (Krzyzanowski, 2010, p. 71). In my case, this would mean the historical background of Mali's postcolonial relations as well as of (online)

news in Mali and its diaspora (as outlined in Chapter 2 and Subchapter 6.1). The diachronic change dimension emerged from my observation of changes that appeared during the time of my research, for instance, in the identity constructions of Emmanuel Macron, who developed from a political outsider to the acting French president (see Section 7.4.2).

5.5.2 Genres: Technological Parameters and Meditated Content

As another analytical dimension, Reisigl and Wodak differentiate between text and genre, field of actions (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001, p. 36ff). They frame this as a macro-analysis, containing the topics, fields of action, and macro-structure of the article including the text environment. In this context, I differentiate between genres on a technological level, and genres on a content-related level, both with their implications for mobilising narratives.

Technological Genres for Describing Factors of Online Communication

On the technological level, Dorostkar and Preisinger studied racist discourses on the Austrian online forum *derStandard.at* by seeing forums as institutionally regulated "producing" contexts, considering technological-interactive possibilities of online fora in their analysis, and connecting those two approaches to formulate a critique of and recommendations for addressing racist language use (Dorostkar & Preisinger, 2017a, p. 760). They argue that the DHA needs some "fine-tuning" (Dorostkar & Preisinger, 2017b, p. 761) to be applicable to online forums. Therefore, they introduce their approaches from media linguistics for characterising the communication modes and design parameters of online forums (Dorostkar & Preisinger, 2017a, pp. 761–765). In my decision on technological genre parameters, I drew from a range of work that applied CDS to online environments:

Dorostkar and Preisinger distinguish between genres and communicative forms. In their understanding, the latter do not depend on a certain objective of the communication but on technological parameters (Dorostkar & Preisinger, 2012, p. 10). In order to characterise computer-mediated communication, they distinguish between general and design-specific parameters (Dorostkar & Preisinger, 2012, p. 11). Whereas general parameters determine the abstract form of communication, the design-specific parameters determine their specific realisation (Dorostkar & Preisinger, 2012, p. 13f). Helmut Gruber as well distinguishes between media, communicative forms facilitated by them, and genres that realise communicative forms, "depending on the communicative purpose they fulfil in a certain situation type"

(Gruber, 2008, p. 363f). He then adapts Holly's dimensions of media to analyse communicative forms of new media – arriving at Dorostkar and Preisinger's general communication parameters – and applies them to hypertexts, email, chat, and text messages (Gruber, 2008, p. 364ff). Unger and colleagues suggest medium-related and situational factors that describe the possible media practices and technology affordances. They include as medium-related factors: message transmission, persistence of the transcript, size of the message, channels of communication, privacy settings, anonymity, message format; and as situational factors: participation structure, participant characteristics, purpose, topic, tone, norms, code (Unger et al., 2016, p. 280f).

On the technological level, I combined these research practices and analysed the forms of communication that emerged through Maliweb, Facebook, and Twitter using the following parameters:

- conceptual communication mode (written, oral),
- semiotic communication mode/channels of communication (multimodal, textual / words, images, sound, video...),
- communication direction (monologue, dialogue),
- number of participants/message transmission (1:n, 1:1, n:n), they name the number of participants and direction of the communication as criteria for interactivity – in contrast to information science that sees each online news as interactive because of the interaction between users and computer;
- durability (high, middle, low/ephemeral – archived),
- synchronicity (synchronous, asynchronous);

In addition, I addressed design-specific parameters for describing Maliweb articles, Facebook posts, Tweets, and interaction possibilities (Dorostkar & Preisinger, 2012, p. 14f):

- layout,
- representation/message format (architectures for displaying interactions),
- moderation (pre-moderating, post-moderating, no moderating, deleting, archiving, etc.),
- registration → privacy settings (public, semi-public, semi-private, private),
- anonymity (representation of identities),

- text length/size of the message,
- communication modes,
- possibilities for influencing the design,
- code of conduct,
- additional functions (evaluation button, permalink, seeing all posts of a user...).

In assessing these parameters for the Maliweb website, Facebook, and Twitter, I analysed the differences between these platforms that emerged on the technological and regulative level.

Content-Related Genres Describing Discursive Manifestations

In addition, I explored the articles for more content-related genres as a further level for governing the circulation of narratives. Theo van Leeuwen uses genres in the linguistic and discourse analysis tradition as

...characterizing texts and communicative events in terms of the way they embody particular types of interaction that come with particular relationships between the interactants (e.g. participants in a dialogue, or writers and readers) and with particular communicative functions (e.g. persuading, teaching, entertaining). (Leeuwen, 2008, p. 345)

Thus, he argues that analysing genres means exploring how people interact through texts and how these interactions influence "specific relationships" (Leeuwen, 2008, p. 346). He introduces Longacre's ideal types of genres (narrative, procedural, expository, hortatory) and the beginning-middle-end structure of genres with different typical (obligatory and optional) stages that work towards communicative goals and can also combine different ideal types into one genre (Leeuwen, 2008, pp. 346–349). In that regard, Reisigl and Wodak suggest that "particularly the macro-structures of syntactic cohesion and semantic coherence, the global mood structure (the exchange of speech acts or speech functions) and genre-specific stylistic features, can be the focus of analysis" (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001, p. 36).

Furthermore, van Leeuwen also emphasises that news stories are different from other stories in that: they often have a beginning but no end, with the beginning integrating an abstract that includes the whole story and the basic orientation; they often have no chronological order but a reverse pyramid structure; and the central event can be related to a variety of background, follow-up, commentary or detailing events (Leeuwen, 2008, pp. 351–354). He outlines the following as types of genres: magazine feature genres, news action stories, human interest

stories, and lifestyle stories that combine news and advice (Leeuwen, 2008, p. 357ff). However, he relativizes:

Texts are rarely 'pure' in terms of genre, and perhaps it is better to think of genres as resources we use to create strategies for achieving social goals of various kind, or, from the point of view of analysis, as *reference points* for analysis, rather than as schemas in which texts can be expected to fit neatly. (Leeuwen, 2008, p. 359)

He thus calls for a critical approach to genres, that studies them in relation to discourses and style "with an eye for its social impact and its uses in social control, rather than only procedurally and 'technically'" (Leeuwen, 2008, p. 360).

On the content-related genre level, I thus analysed the articles for their different ways of mediating content and addressing readers, with a focus on their social control in terms of facilitating access to discursive deliberation. The criteria by which I assessed the different articles were the following:

- visual text
- lexis
- syntax
- speech acts
- key
- setting
- instrumentalities
- participants
- relation between participants
- norms of interpretation
- purpose/objective
- social impact

Together, this genre analysis allowed me to unveil inclusionary and exclusionary tendencies in mobilising narratives as another level of governing mobilising narratives.

5.5.3 Topics: Delineating the Discourse

Krzyzanowski describes the analysis of topics as an entry-level analysis within the DHA that precedes an in-depth analysis about the pragmatic working of the discourse (Krzyzanowski, 2010, p. 81). Most prominently for analysing topics in the DHA, Teun van Dijk argues as well for a study of a discourse's global coherence through topics:

Topics conceptually summarize the text, and specify its most important information. In theoretical terms such topics can be described as semantic macro-propositions, that is, as propositions that are derived from sequences of propositions in the text: for instance, by macro-rules such as selection, abstraction, and other operations which reduces complex information. The hierarchical set of topics of macro-propositions forms the thematic or topical structure of the text. Language users employ such *macro-structures* in order to understand globally and to summarize a text. In news discourse, the top of this macro-structure is conventionally expressed in the headline and the lead paragraph. (T. van Dijk, 1991, p. 67, italics in the original)

Moreover, van Dijk's argues that the superstructure that organises topics also unveils something about the ideological function of the respective text. He outlines that news reports conventionally entail "categories as Headline, Lead (together forming the Summary), Main Events, Context, History (together forming the Background category), Verbal Reactions, and Comments" which, throughout the text, are structured according to relevance, i.e. the most important information coming first (T. van Dijk, 1991, p. 68).

Applied to the DHA, Krzyzanowski suggests doing the thematic analysis with the aim to "decode the 'limits' of discourse (...) by means of decoding the meaning of text passages – usually taking place via several thorough readings – and then ordering them into lists of key themes and sub-themes" (Krzyzanowski, 2010, p. 81). Applied to my discourse analysis corpus, I coded the main mobilities the articles addressed as key themes and the further content as subthemes. In addition, Krzyzanowski (2010, p. 81) also distinguishes between primary and secondary topics and shows their relations and developments which can also unveil cross-cutting topics. I addressed this with a distinction between article and comment topics and showed how comments worked in a performative way when mobilising topics, as they took up some topics, ignored others, and also contributed further topics to the discourse.

5.5.4 Discursive Strategies: Nominations, Predications, and Argumentations

In addition to this entry-level analysis, Krzyzanowski identifies the analysis of discursive strategies as an in-depth part of DHA projects (Krzyzanowski, 2010, p. 83). The categories of

analysis for these strategies of self- and other-representation as prominently outlined by Reisigl and Wodak are reference (who is talked about), predication (how are they characterised), argumentation (how their positioning in power relations is justified), perspectivation (who is speaking from which angle), and mitigation/intensification (how explicitly or implicitly claims are made) (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001, p. 44ff). In line with others who have used the DHA and focused on only some of these strategies (for diverse foci, see e.g. Angouri & Wodak, 2014; KhosraviNik & Zia, 2014; Krzyzanowski, 2010), I especially used nomination and predication strategies to reformulate questions of discrimination also in terms of gendered postcolonial relations and the subjectivities at work therein. In addition, I analysed argumentation strategies employed in articles and comments. However, they are not mentioned explicitly in the results part, but rather informed my interpretations of nominations and predications as subjectifications and affective political identities by explicating conclusion rules behind statements (see Subchapters 7.4 and 7.5). These strategies helped me to answer how article authors and users discursively constructed identities of actors related to Malian and African transnational relations.

On the nomination level, I additionally followed KhosraviNik and Zia, who suggest analysing such discourse multimodally (KhosraviNik & Zia, 2014, p. 773ff). In contrast to their variety of – highly relevant – multimodal elements, including, for instance, visual, audio, hyper-linked, or orthographical features including typefaces, font sizes, spelling strategies, code switching, acronyms, stylised spelling, emoticons, unconventional punctuation etc. (KhosraviNik & Zia, 2014, p. 773ff), I did this in a very reduced way. In that regard, I only developed nomination as one of the visually manifested discursive strategies (Reisigl & Wodak, 2016, p. 46) and analysed which actors appeared in article images and how they related to the textual nomination patterns in article and comments.

In addition, I drew inspiration from Dorostkar, who identified a matrix-shaped predication pattern that included two positions on (in his case) the European Union, each with positive and negative evaluations (Dorostkar, 2014, p. 266). In accordance to my approach to mobilising narratives, I differentiated between two positions in my interpretations of predication strategies, i.e. a position that consolidates the postcolonial status quo, and one position that aims at transforming it. In my interpretation of predications, I then aligned them with these positions.

5.5.5 Emotions: Levels for Identifying Emotions in Discourses about Transnational Relations

As a last level of analysis, I explored the mobilisation of emotions in articles and comments. In line with Margaret Wetherell and colleagues (2015, p. 63), who emphasise the importance of considering discourse in the workings of affect, I integrated an analysis of emotions in my overall DHA framework (for more on my understanding of emotions, see Section 4.4.4). Asking about mobilising narratives, I suggest that emotions can be a way of emphasising claims, contradicting them, or also expressing unconscious or implicit dimensions involved in subjectifications of the self and others. This also ties in with my attempt to identify moments of affective governmentality in terms of gender and postcoloniality as outlined in the theoretical part (see Subchapter 4.2). In that vein, I also refer to Simon Koschut (2017, p. 283), who also seeks to identify "how identities of Self and Other are discursively connected to specific emotional expressions" and outlines that such circulating emotions can "work to position groups in world politics within structures of dominances and resistance" (Koschut, 2018, p. 506).

While I did not employ Koschut's focus on single emotion words in order to identify these emotional elements in the context of mobilising narratives, I explored two levels in Jochen Kleres' narrative analysis of emotions, which are the structure of narratives and the agency, i.e. who is doing what to whom in the construction of actors' identities (Kleres, 2010, pp. 190–195). In employing Kleres' approach for the analysis of the discourse on Malian transnational relations, I also drew inspiration from Sybille Reinke de Buitrago's approach to emotions in international relations, in which she used qualitative content analysis to reduce the text and extract the most relevant information about the self- and other constructions of, in her case, the US and Iran as friendly/trustworthy or dangerous (Reinke de Buitrago, 2018, p. 309). Building on these approaches, I explored how article authors and users constructed political identities and asked which emotions they used for justifying their inclusion of social actors in we- or they-groups. I focused on the predications of social actor groups and their embeddedness in the construction of we- and they-groups in specific articles as well as – through argumentation strategies – their roles in the overall discourse for analysing the (often indirect) articulations of emotions through narrative structure and agency in identity constructions. Finally, I interpreted the emotions I had identified as consolidating or transforming in accordance with Koschut's categorisation above.

Together, these levels of data collection and analysis address the multi-level context of mobilising narratives as well as the complex materialisation of discursive formations in this Malian-diasporic online news environment. In the following chapters, I will outline how these diverse analytical levels allowed for assessing mobilising narratives within a regime of postcolonial and gendered (media) governmentality.

6 Mobilising Narratives in Context: Malian-Diasporic Online (News) Infrastructures and Digital Platforms

Digitization has become the new 'civilizing' mission and the latest framework for rationalizing the new mode of colonization. Developing the broadband infrastructure is equivalent to the construction of imperial railways in the nineteenth century in order to facilitate the colonization of Africa. (Tamale, 2020, p. 393)

The exclusion of the majority of women from effective control over and access to resources means that as yet Africa has not achieved full citizenship for all. In sum, the concept of separate spheres renders citizenship in Africa to be a gendered citizenship. (Tamale, 2004, p. 54)

At the beginning of this exploration into mobilising online news and their relation to intersectional governmentality we need to ask about conditions and processes of mobilising narratives socio-geographically through Maliweb and its social media accounts on Facebook and Twitter. First, this chapter focuses on the access to online communication as a socio-political and historical context for using online news in the Malian(-diasporic) context. It details the distribution of online communication infrastructures, its socioeconomic implications, and socio-political factors influencing the use of online communication. Secondly, the chapter analyses the digital platforms Maliweb, Facebook, and Twitter as institutional situational contexts for the circulation of discourses. It shows how these platform operators govern the mobilising of narratives through regulations of access and connective interactions with their interfaces. In summary, this chapter shows which mobilities intersect on and through Malian-diasporic online news and how these are embedded in broader interrelated regimes of media governmentality that produce power inequalities in narratives that become mobile between actors in different social and geographic positions.

6.1 Socio-Historical and Political Context: Access to Online Communication

This subchapter addresses the infrastructural context of communication through and with online news in the Malian(-diasporic) context.⁸⁰ Therefore, it first addresses the geographical distribution of online communication infrastructure in Mali. Secondly, it outlines the socio-economic context of this infrastructure on the supply side (operators) and on the demand side (users). The latter also relates to the issue of intersectional digital divides in Malian(-diasporic) society. Thereby, the subchapter tries to convey some sense of whose experiences are most likely included by researching narratives that circulate through online news portals, and which voices are more likely excluded because they do not or cannot use online media. Moreover, this subchapter speaks to the socio-political dimension of online communication infrastructure in Mali, illustrating uses and struggles about online communication infrastructure on different geographic levels and by different actors that also show different visions for online communication. In that sense, the socio-political section also sheds light on whose needs are (said to be) considered by these politically relevant actors, and who can govern through infrastructures in this specific setting. The subchapter closes with a special focus on the infrastructural vulnerabilities that emerge from this context of online communication in relation to the Malian news landscape.

Throughout these sections, this subchapter presents the development of online communication and eventually online news at the intersection between technological conditions, intersectional positionalities of citizens, and (geo-)political influences. Thereby, it suggests that inequalities such as the digital divide unveil how a postcolonial, neoliberal, and gendered governmentality of online communication reproduces the special affectedness of marginalised – mostly by gender and class – groups in African societies as it has been observed for neoliberal economic policies since the Structural Adjustment Programs (see e.g. Traoré & M'Dela-Mounier, 2012). The subchapter shows that these socio-historical and political conditions allow narratives to become mobile socio-geographically through online news, but it also details how geographic, social, economic, and political forms of domination already structure this process of becoming mobile. This relation between becoming mobile and their structuring represents struggles over becoming mobile and thus relate to ideas of making mobile because certain actors are interested in including some parts of society in online communication and excluding others from it, and mobilise available resources accordingly. As we will see,

⁸⁰ Whereas this subchapter focuses on conditions for using online communication in Malian society as based on mostly national reports, it also integrates diasporic and transnational elements when I encountered them in the course of my observations and during interviews, thus taking up the connectedness of Malian society.

already the access to online communication can thus be seen as interrelated with postcolonial and gendered governmentality.

6.1.1 (Online) Communication Infrastructure in Mali: What's There, Where, and for Whom?

This section outlines the physical, spatial, and technological distribution of (online) communication infrastructure in Mali with a focus on the period of data collection, i.e. 2017 and 2018, up to 2019.⁸¹ In addition, it also points to social disparities that come with this infrastructure.

Physical-Technological-Infrastructural Conditions of Online Communication

During the past several years, network coverage of the Malian territory has improved, especially as the share of G3 and G4 networks has been increasing. As the 2018 index of the industry organisation for mobile network operators called GSMA shows, the network coverage in Mali rose from 85% of the population being covered by a G2 network, 21% by a G3 network, and 0% by a G4 network in 2014, to 100% being connected via G2, 66% via G3, and 31% via G4 networks in 2018 (see Figure 7).⁸²

⁸¹ For this subchapter, I used data from national, regional, and international institutions. Although this is an important step towards questioning and cross-referencing datasets, I still want to point to the intentions that can be written into such datasets, e.g. justifying the existence of a certain ministry, international NGO, or of investments into LDC communication sectors. In addition, I came across, for instance, international datasets (e.g. ITU) that were in fact based on regional datasets (e.g. Afrobarometer). Drawing from different datasets thus does not guarantee validation through different sources here, which, as in many other aspects, shows the difficulties of accessing statistical data in marginalised areas.

⁸² Although the ITU report shows slightly different numbers (ITU, 2018, p. 104), they still support this trend of rising coverage.

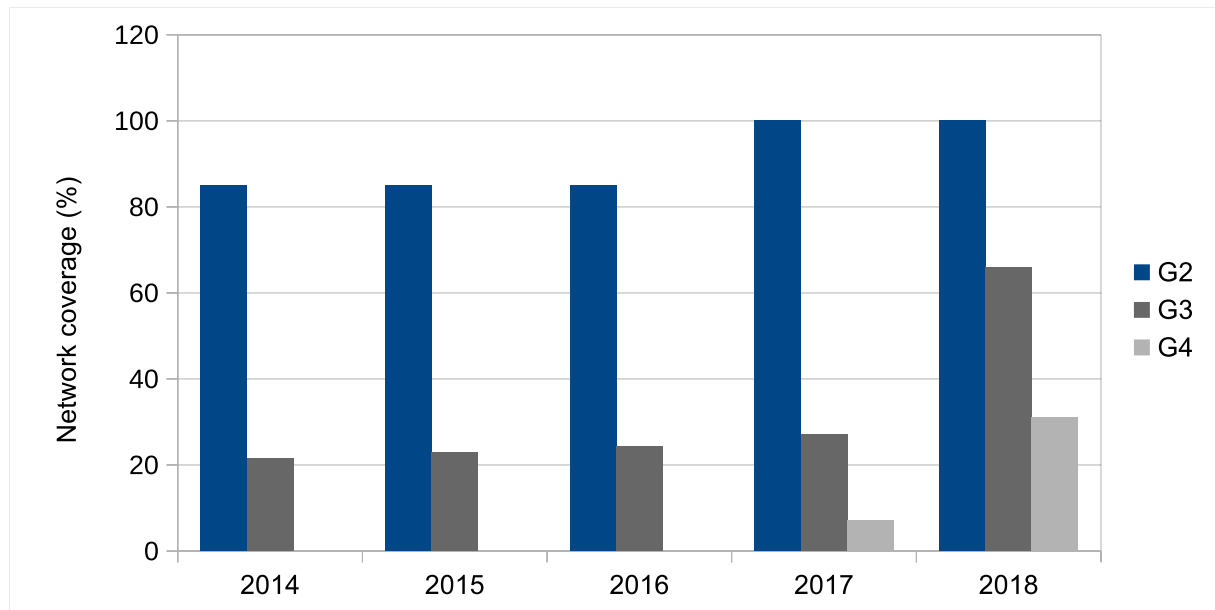


Figure 7: Network coverage of the Malian territory according to different network types, 2014-2018 (Data source: GSMA 2018, own visualisation)

In considering the geographical distribution of these networks within Mali, however, a range of disparities becomes apparent. The 2017 report of the Malian Authority for the Regulation of Telecommunications/ICT and Postal Services (Autorité Malienne de Régulation des Télécommunications/TIC et des Postes, AMRTP) indicates that only a minority of Malian districts that has gotten access to these networks while most districts are still covered by 2G networks. Considering the strong focus on Bamako (and some other major cities), this access is distributed very unevenly not only among rural and urban areas, but also among Southern and Central-Northern regions, a tendency that is still aggravated by security issues in Northern Mali (AMRTP, 2017, pp. 9–14; UN, 2020, p. 17). Another indicator for this geographic divide is that the proportion of the population within reach of fibre or microwave backbone networks drops drastically with increasing distance, for instance, in 2016 from 75.55% of the population within 100-km range, 42.30% within 50-km range, 25.20% within 25-km range, and only 13.05% within 10-km range (ITU, 2018, p. 106).

In addition, this rising coverage does not automatically mean that the quality and speed of the internet connection are rising accordingly. On the one hand, the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) found an increase in international bandwidth, e.g. from 344 to 598 bit/s per Malian internet user from 2015 to 2016 (ITU, 2017, p. 140). Additionally, AMRTP data show a continuous rise in internet bandwidth for Mali in total during the same period, from

10,686 in 2015 to 21,100 in 2016 Mbit (AMRTP, 2019c). On the other hand, the ITU also states that on a global level, Mali still has one of the slowest internet connections with below 1 Mbps (megabits per second) and thus does not profit sufficiently from the potential of internet technologies (ITU, 2017, p. 114). Also the GSMA only ranks the Malian network performance in terms of upload and download speed with scores of 10.9 and 13.9 out of 100 in 2018 (GSMA, 2020). In addition to problems with speed, Malian households have pointed to frequent cut-offs of the internet connection altogether (UN, 2020, p. 17f). Especially within Malian-diasporic online communication, Malian users of telecommunication services are thus also disadvantaged in relation to users situated in France (Keita, 2015, p. 32) – or in other countries with high-speed connections. This is also highlighted by reports that rank Mali as having a rather insufficient online communication infrastructure in comparison to other countries (see below).

Additionally, my interview partners as well point to this geographically differentiated quality of the telecommunication network. However, their personal positioning and imaginations also influence how they experience their respective internet connection (for more on the role of imaginations and experiences, see the Section 6.2.3 on affordances), which leads to diverse evaluations of their connection. In addition, Table 1 shows how interview partners employ different spatial levels when they evaluate the network connection in Mali:

Table 1: Evaluation of the(ir) network connection in Mali by selected interview partners

Evaluation and spatial level [spatial context information of the quoted interview partner]	Quotation
Everyone has a "right" (in the sense of access) to the internet through mobile phones (especially in Bamako) [has lived in Bamako, currently partly in Sikasso and Koutiala (two other Southern Malian cities)]	"So everyone, I think that everyone has a right to the internet (...) with the mobile phones. And we are pleased everywhere, (...) eh, in Bamako and such." [WhatsApp voice message from Samalbane, male NGO employee in his thirties, commuting between the cities Sikasso and Koutiala] ⁸³
Generally bad connection, also in	Syntia: "I understand, thank you...and when you are connected, how is

⁸³ "Donc, tout le monde, je pense que tout le monde a droit à l'internet, [incompréhensible] avec les téléphones portables. Et on plait partout, [incompréhensible] eh, à Bamako et ceci comme ça." [WhatsApp voice message from Samalbane, male NGO employee in his thirties, commuting between the cities Sikasso and Koutiala]

Bamako [lives in Bamako]	your network connection?" IP04: "Very very unstable, it is cut off it comes back we wait in one word the quality is very bad" [WhatsApp message from Victoire Sanogo, male teacher of over 50 years old in Bamako]⁸⁴
Good connection all over Bamako vs. bad connection in parts of the Kayes region [lives in Bamako, travels frequently to Kayes (a Western Malian region) for research]	Amadou Tamata: "yes, with the mobile phone, because with the networks Malitel or the network Orange, well, I can, I myself take my flat rate, I take a flat rate, and I connect, everywhere here in Bamako, I can connect because there is an internet connection, (...), so the access is very easy, everywhere." Syntia: "Ok. And when you leave Bamako?" Amadou Tamata: "Eh?" Syntia: "And when you leave Bamako?" Amadou Tamata: "Yes, when I leave Bamako to travel to Kayes, for example, if there is internet where I am going, I use it. But there are, there are regions, parts of Kayes, for example, where the network, there is the Malitel network, there is the Orange network, but the connection is of a very bad quality. So, it was not even (...) to communicate or consult your email." [Phone interview with Amadou Tamata, male researcher in his thirties in Bamako]⁸⁵
Bad connection in Gao [lived in Gao until 2013 (?) and contrasts this with experiences of good connection in Bamako – but also reported on instances of bad connection during the interview period]	"For a long time, I used the G3 key for connecting with my computer. Quite often, the connection was difficult because of the very bad speed. In Gao, for example, I had eventually chosen the time after midnight or the early morning for connecting because in these moments, the speed is acceptable. I remember waiting through a whole night to be able to send some attachments per email through the Yahoo site. I was really annoyed. In addition, it is almost impossible to communicate via Skype or to watch videos online." [Email conversation with Arouna Togola, male retired teacher in his sixties in a small town South of Bamako]⁸⁶
Good connection everywhere in France vs. bad connection in Africa	"Well, concerning social media, I come back to this, it is like I have told you, I do many things on the European level. But when I am in Africa, I

⁸⁴ Syntia: "Je comprends, merci...et si vous êtes connectés, la connexion du réseau mobile est comment chez vous?" – IP04: "Très très instable ça coupe ça revient on attend en un mot la qualité est très mauvaise" [WhatsApp message from Victoire Sanogo, male teacher of over 50 years old in Bamako]

⁸⁵ Amadou Tamata: "oui, avec le téléphone, parce que avec les réseaux Malitel ou le réseau Orange, donc, je peux, je prends moi même mon forfait, je prends le forfait, et je me connecte, partout à Bamako ici, je peux me connecter parce que il y a le réseau, [incompréhensible...réseau...] donc, l'accès et très facile. Partout." – Syntia: "ouais. Et si vous quittez Bamako?" – PI05: "eh?" – Syntia: "Et si vous quittez Bamako?" – Amadou Tamata: "oui, si je quitte Bamako pour partir par exemple à Kayes, si il y a l'internet, là où je parts, je l'utilise. Mais il y a des, il y a des régions, des parties à Kayes par exemple, où les réseaux, il y a les réseaux Malitel, il y a les réseaux Orange, mais la connexion est de très mauvaise qualité. Donc, ça n'était pas [incompréhensible] même de communiquer ou bien de de consulter sa boîte. Mais le ou eh, walla." [Phone interview with Amadou Tamata, male researcher in his thirties in Bamako]

⁸⁶ "Pendant longtemps, j'ai utilisé la clé 3G pour la connexion sur mon ordinateur. Bien souvent, la connexion était pénible à cause du très mauvais débit. À Gao par exemple, j'avais finalement choisi l'après -minuit ou le matin de bonne heure pour la connexion car en ces moments -là, le débit est acceptable. Je me rappelle aussi avoir veillé toute une nuit pour pouvoir envoyer des pièces jointes par email sur le site Yahoo. J'étais vraiment sur les nerfs. En plus, il est quasi impossible de communiquer par skype ou de regarder des vidéos en ligne." [Email conversation with Arouna Togola, retired male headmaster in his 60s, located in a small town in the South of Bamako]

[grew up in Mali but has lived in France for about 30 years and visits her family in Mali regularly]	cannot write these comments. Euh, for one, because there is a network problem" [WhatsApp voice message from Bintou Maiga, female employee in her fifties in Paris] ⁸⁷

In addition to this differential(ly experienced) network coverage, a myriad of other infrastructural aspects influence the access to online communication. Naffet Keita has detailed them in an extensive ethnographic study combining and comparing insights from Bamako, the Central Malian town Douentza, and the Northern city of Kidal. He identified important dimensions that surround, in his case, mobile phone communication but – given the importance of mobile phones and their similar relevance for computer-related online communication – are applicable to online communication as well. These include: the sale and repair of mobile phones and accessories, the trade of SIM cards, the access to recharge cards or the transfer of units, and the access to recharging options (for a detailed account see Keita, 2015, pp. 53–117).

One of these dimensions I still want to outline here is the access to electricity. Whereas this is not necessarily needed for using online media as such, mobile phones and computers need to be charged eventually to keep working. The 2019 Modular and Permanent Household Survey (Enquête Modulaire et Permanente aupres des Ménages, EMOP) by the Malian National Statistical Institute (Institut National de la Statistique, INSTAT) discovered that only 22.8% of the population has access to formal electricity (INSTAT, 2019, p. 3). However, this survey lists a variety of sources households use to get access to electricity, with the most important being formal electricity, solar panels, and battery-powered torches, a combination that increases the population's access to energy considerably. Here again, differences in access especially manifest between rural and urban areas and also between regions, with urban areas being mostly covered by formal electricity and rural areas by solar panels, and battery-powered torches (INSTAT, 2019, p. 68). In this context, Keita has found that actors who do not have access to formal electricity develop various innovative ways to recharge phone batteries, including the use of solar batteries, charging their phones with friends or relatives, charging them in shops that offer this service, or even charging them using motorbike engines or even bank notes (Keita, 2015, pp. 109–117).⁸⁸ As we will see with further aspects as well, the access to electricity also has an intersectional dimension, as, for instance, Winther and

⁸⁷ Bintou Maiga: "Donc, par rapport aux réseaux sociaux, je reviens là de su, c'est comme je t'avais dit, n b'è ko caman kè kanto farajèjamana kan quoi. Mais ni n bè Afriki, n tè se ka commentaire ninu kè. Euh, d'un, parce que, il y a un problème de réseau" [WhatsApp voice message from Bintou Maiga, female employee in her fifties in Paris]

⁸⁸ On the one hand, I am not sure if these ways of charging mobile phones also work with internet-enabled smartphones as the research of Keita is mainly based on "simple" phones. On the other hand, also Françoise Vergès writes in 2017 about this charging practice as a possibility for "digital Africa" (Vergès, 2017, p. 46).

colleagues found that women in rural areas often have less decision-making power over how electricity is used (Winther et al., 2020).

In addition, the geographic divide manifests in other services that are directly or indirectly related to online communication infrastructures. For instance, the ICT sector that includes services and material for online communication is also concentrated on Bamako (UN, 2020, p. 19). In another sense, however, online communication can also alleviate the unavailability of services that are even scarcer in marginal areas of Mali than mobile communication infrastructures. The Afrobarometer survey asked about the access to a range of local services that are in the respondents' sampling unit or in "easy walking distance". The answers to these questions show that more respondents have close access to cell phone services than, for instance, to post offices, market stalls, paid transport or good road conditions. Although cell phone coverage in this survey was also higher for urban areas (100%) than for rural areas (88%), and also showed a divide among regions, this service is still more available than many others, even in rural areas and mostly across regions (Afrobarometer, 2018b). In that regard, mobile phone communication, and ultimately online communication, can also be a substitute for other forms of connectivity (on further reflections on the relations between, for instance, communication and transportation technologies in Mali, see e.g. de Bruijn et al., 2016; Keita, 2015). This observation also supports David Morley's claims for a contextualised and integrated perspective on transportation and communication technologies (Morley, 2017, pp. 26–29).

So far, this section has shown that online communication infrastructures in Mali are increasing in availability, but also that they are embedded in geographic inequalities as well as connected to further infrastructural fields, building entanglements that either reproduce or mitigate unequal access to service infrastructures. In that regard, the geographic distribution of communication infrastructure already governs the mobilisation of Malian-diasporic online news by including some (Southern urban) and excluding other (Northern rural) parts of the Malian territory. As especially the account of alternative means for generating electricity has shown, however, Malian citizens also resist this exclusion through adaptive strategies (for more, see also Section 6.2.2 on accessing digital platforms). As Françoise Vergès writes:

Africa today uses only 4% of the world's electricity, but you do not need electricity to run a phone network; you just need a car battery, a bicycle, a solar panel. Despite the structural obstacles, digital Africa is a possibility and a fact in the making. (Vergès, 2017, p. 46)

In this line of thought, we now turn to the use of online communication by Malian citizens.

Means for and Extent of Accessing Online Communication Infrastructures

In the following, I depart from these physical conditions that enable or disable the access to online communication and illustrate how this development of online communication infrastructures reaches the Malian population. The most obvious means for doing so is to look at internet penetration rates, i.e. the percentage of a given society using the internet. According to the Malian Society for the Regulation of Telecommunication and Postal Services (Association Malienne de Régulation des Télécommunications/ TIC et des Postes, AMRTP), the internet penetration in Malian society has been rising considerably, e.g. from 18% in 2015 to 23% in 2016 (AMRTP, 2016, p. 47). Different measurements, however, also produce different numbers for this indicator. In contrast to the 23% measured by the AMRTP, the ITU arrives only at a 13% penetration rate in 2017 (ITU, 2019). This could be due to the fact that the ITU only counts persons 18 years and older who use the internet at least once a month. And when looking at the Afrobarometer survey, which is done through interviews with a representative set of people (18+ years old as well), we can see that 15% of its respondents reported using the internet, with their use pattern ranging from less than once a month (2.1%) to every day (5%) (Afrobarometer, 2018b, p. 76). This does not mean that the other 85% of Malian society do not have access though, as numbers could be different when also considering younger parts of society, i.e. those below 18 years who make up a big part of Malian society. But these numbers give us an idea about the considerable portion of the Malian population that is excluded from online discourses.

As Figure 8 indicates, what the ITU collection of data (from different Malian and African sources for different years) can still show, however, is that the percentage of Malian internet users has been rising significantly, especially since 2013.

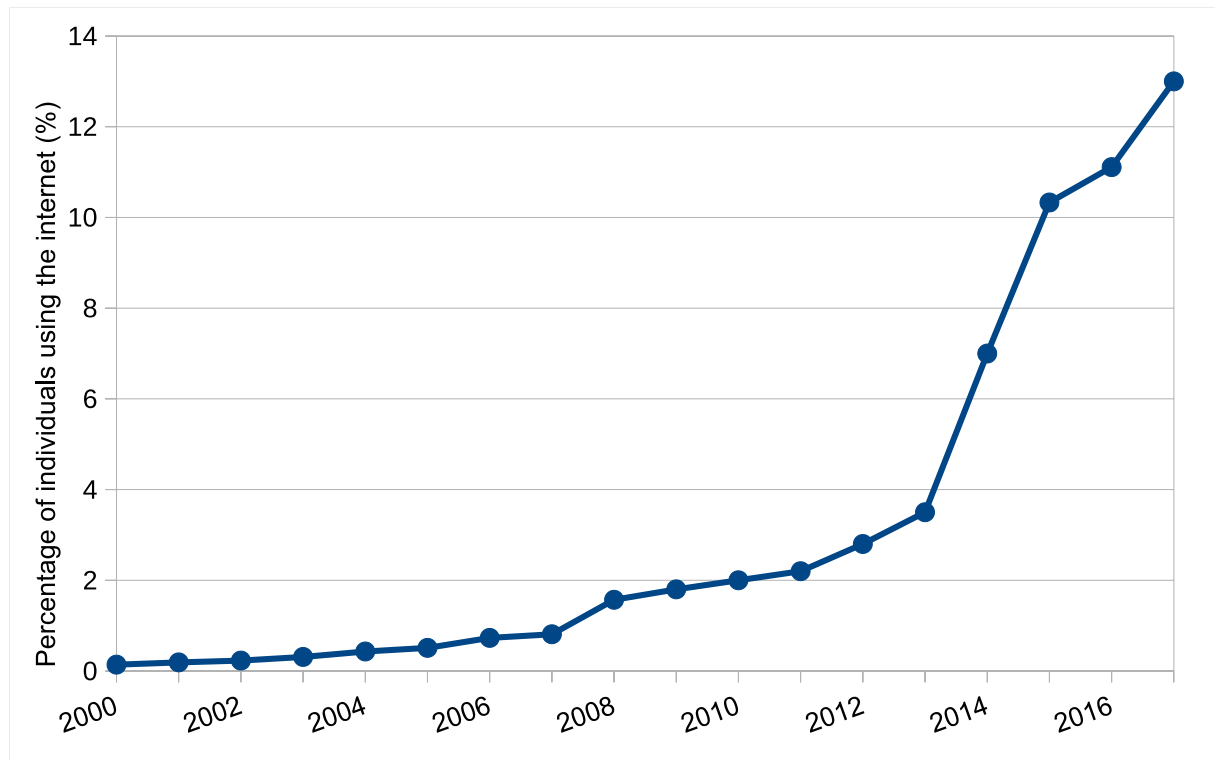


Figure 8: Increasing percentage of Malian residents using the internet, 2000-2017 (Data source: ITU 2019, own visualisation)

The AMRTP attributes this increasing access mainly to the extension of G3 technology, the increasing distribution of smartphones, and the decreasing prices for communication (AMRTP, 2017, p. 2f). As with the network coverage, however, the actual access to the internet is distributed very unevenly already in geographic terms (for further social differentiations, see Section 6.1.2 on the digital divide), between urban (50.2%) and rural areas (10.3%), and between regions, ranging from 71.1% of households having an internet connection in Bamako to, for instance, 6.2% in Mopti (Centre of Mali) and 7.6% in Gao (North of Mali) (INSTAT, 2019, p. 55). In overall terms, however, the access to online communication has been rising considerably over the past several years, as a 2015 report by the *Media in Transition and Cooperation (MiCT)* and *Friedrich Ebert Foundation (FES)* still evaluated the internet as marginal except for Bamako where 30% were online (MiCT & FES, 2015, p. 47).

Another aspect of the internet penetration is through which means internet subscribers use online communication. Whereas a variety of options exist, a clear majority of internet use in Mali happens through and thanks to smartphones (see Figure 9). In its 2016 report, for instance, the AMRTP found that 92% of internet users use mobile internet connections,

mainly through smartphones. This is in stark contrast to the small amount of users who access the internet via USB stick, fixed access, or even ADSL (AMRTP, 2016, p. 47).

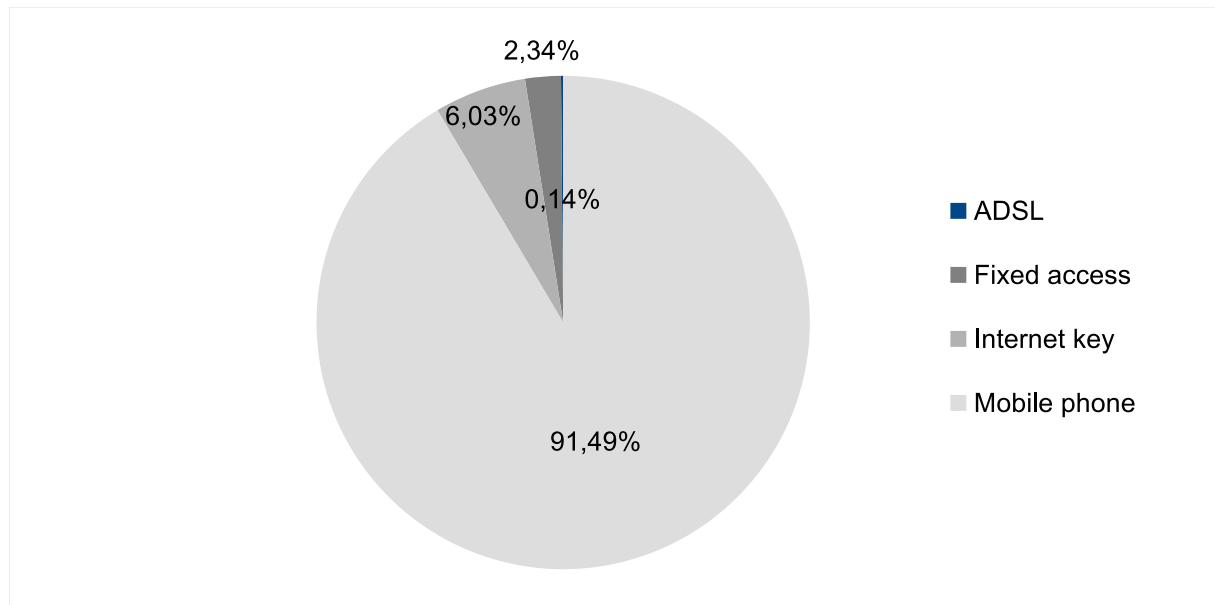


Figure 9: Partition of means for accessing the internet among Malian users (Data source: AMRTP 2016, own visualisation)

This distribution also hints towards a process of concentration as in the MiCT and FES 2015 survey, which still identified more diverse means for using the internet via DSL connection at home (23%), USB stick (32%), mobile phone (82%), a cyber café (33%), with friends/neighbours/family (24%), and at school or work (22%). Even though these numbers also allowed for multiple uses (MiCT & FES, 2015, p. 50), they still indicate the growing importance of the mobile smartphone in comparison to less mobile access options. And considering that owning a computer and a fixed internet connection is also an issue of means, this increasing importance of the mobile phone can also point towards – as well as facilitate – an opening of online communication for less advantaged groups of Malian society.

In accordance with this growing importance, and together with a rising number of localities covered by a mobile network, mobile phone subscriptions, and the rate of subscriptions, have been rising exponentially for Malian society during the past few years up to 120 subscriptions per 100 inhabitants in 2016 (ITU, 2018, p. 18).⁸⁹ This also applies to the share of broadband mobile phone subscriptions in 2016 that has been found as rising up to a share of 16% indi-

⁸⁹ Exceeding 100 subscriptions per 100 inhabitants is also due to the use of multiple SIM cards (see below).

vidually owned phones with internet access in 2016/2018 (Afrobarometer 2018) and 24.4% active mobile broadband subscriptions in 2016 (ITU 2017) – compared to 0.03% fixed broadband connections (ITU 2018). In addition to individually increasing access, this development also leads to an increasing proportion of households (8.9% in 2016 according to ITU) with an internet connection (Afrobarometer, 2018a; ITU, 2017, pp. 140, 144, 2018, p. 104; We Are Social, 2018, p. 102).

After the ubiquitous radio, mobile phones have thus become the second most important communication device in Malian households, with 83.7% of households owning a mobile phone and 120.3 phone subscriptions per 100 inhabitants. This is in stark contrast to the more immobile and much less important landline phones (1.2 per 100 inhabitants) or computers (4.4% of households) (INSTAT, 2019, p. 11, 2020, p. 18; ITU, 2017, p. 140). Most individuals and especially households in Mali thus have access to a (shared) mobile phone. In terms of mobile phone penetration, Mali is even seen as a leading nation among the Least Developed Countries (LDCs), with numbers ranging between more than 80% to more than 90% of Malian households – and about 74% of individuals – having access to a mobile phone (Afrobarometer, 2018a; INSTAT, 2019, p. 3; ITU, 2018, p. 19). The ITU attributes this expansive distribution to a range of sector reforms, falling prices and promotions, and the general strength and experience of the operators (ITU, 2018, p. 19). But here as well, looking at the frequency of use (or the connection quality), for instance, ranging from daily use (65%) to less than once a month (3.3%) shows that making use of mobile phones is distributed unevenly (for more on this issue, see the following Section 6.1.2) (Afrobarometer, 2018a).

Despite all these tendencies for increasing access, international indices such as the ICT Development Index or the Mobile Connectivity Index (see Table 2), have evaluated the Malian online communication infrastructure as performing rather poorly in international comparison. They mainly combine data about the access to communication infrastructure and (possibilities for) its actual use, including issues such as affordability or skills.

Table 2: *International indices measuring the Malian performance in terms of ICT, their sub-indices and criteria*

ICT Development Index 2017 (ITU): rank 155 (out of 176)	Mobile Connectivity Index 2018 (GSMA Intelligence): score 30.8 out of possible 100
• Access sub-index rank 146/176 ○ Landline subscriptions ○ Mobile phone subscriptions	• Infrastructure score 34.5 (out of 100) ○ Network coverage ○ Network performance

○ International bandwidth ○ Households with a computer ○ Households with internet	○ Other enabling infrastructure ○ Spectrum assigned to mobile network providers
• Use sub-index rank 153/176 ○ Individuals using the internet ○ Fixed broadband subscriptions ○ Active mobile-broadband subscriptions	• Affordability score 39.3 (out of 100) ○ Monthly costs of mobile tariffs ○ Handset price ○ Taxation ○ Income inequality
• Skills sub-index rank 169/176 ○ Secondary gross enrolment ratio ○ Tertiary gross enrolment ratio ○ Mean years of schooling	• Consumer readiness score 33.0 (out of 100) ○ Mobile ownership ○ Basic skills ○ Gender equality
	• Content and services score 20.01 (out of 100) ○ Local relevance ○ Availability

Although these two indices treat different aspects of access to online communication in different depth (for more on these aspects, see the following Section 6.1.2), they both highlight the fact that this access has an important socioeconomic dimension. Thus, these indicators – together with the socio-spatial disparities mentioned above – point to the next issue I want to address in relation to who can access Malian-diasporic online media, i.e. its socioeconomic contexts and digital divides.

6.1.2 Socioeconomic Context of Mobile Communication in Mali

Considering that the indices mentioned above also point to a socioeconomic dimension, we can approach this dimension from its supply side and from its demand side. In this section, I address the supply side with a focus on network operators, assuming that they also structure or influence the distribution of online communication. The focus on the demand side illustrates that the intersectional positioning of potential users influences their opportunities and conditions for using online media, a condition I address through the lens of digital divides. This ties in with Bruce Mutsvairo and Massimo Ragnedda, who claim that the digital divide in Africa is a multifaceted issue that emerges from a combination of social, national political, and postcolonial influences (Mutsvairo & Ragnedda, 2019a, pp. 14–21).

Network Operators for Malian(-Diasporic) Connectivity

Starting with the network operators, this section shows which operators are most important for online communication in Mali, which (inter)national influences may affect them, and how their investments reproduce existing geographical inequalities in the access to online communication infrastructure.

The Malian mobile communication market is mainly dominated by two operators, namely Malitel and Orange Mali.⁹⁰ Malitel is related to the national communication company Sotelma that emerged in 1989 from a restructuration of the Post and Telecommunications Office (Office des Postes et Télécommunications). Although the Malian state had nationalised its communication sector after independence, the French branch of Télécom became a partner of the Malian operator Ikatel in 2002 in a process of liberalisation and privatisation that included various Malian economic sectors and has been going on since 1999.⁹¹ Ikatel was renamed Orange Mali in 2006, with 70% owned by Orange France through the Senegalese subsidiary Sonatel. Against this backdrop, even Sotelma was privatised in 2009 when 51% of its share was taken over by Telecom Maroc, with the Malian state retaining 49% of its share – with a temporary drop to 20% (ITU, 2018, p. 19; Siméant, 2014, p. 159; UN, 2020, p. 15). However, as the further elaborations suggest, this privatisation also provided Sotelma with new means to compete with Orange Mali. Currently, Orange Mali is the second largest mobile service provider in Mali and it has been able to expand aggressively due to its access to a Sonatel-owned submarine cable network that runs from Dakar to the Western Malian town Kidira (ITU, 2018, p. 19,30; Keita, 2015, pp. 11–24).⁹²

According to a report published by the United Nations Conference on Commerce and Development, on the one hand, both operating companies were positively affected by the privatisation sector reform that was seen to make them stronger and more resilient. On the other hand, the same report also bemoans a lack of competition between the operators that would lead to a lack of investment in the network coverage, quality, and affordability for Malian society (UN, 2020, p. 16). Accordingly, within my Malian social media networks, I repeatedly came across

⁹⁰ In addition to Malitel and Orange Mali, the Malian state accorded a third licence to the Pan-African, Planor-owned operator ATEL/TELECEL in 2013, but they only started operating in 2018 and do not feature (yet) in the following considerations (ITU, 2018, p. 19; Siméant, 2014, p. 159; UN, 2020, p. 15).

⁹¹ In the eyes of some Malian civil society groups, this liberalisation and privatisation process was externally imposed (Keita, 2015, p. 16; Siméant, 2014, p. 185f).

⁹² Other transnational submarine cable connections come from Ivory Coast and Morocco (UN, 2020, p. 18). Internet providers that execute or manage this rising penetration in Mali include Afribone, Arc Mali, Dogon Telecom, Datatech, Comsates, and Fiyen (AMRTP, 2016, p. 48).

users' contributions in which they complained about the bad connection or services offered by both operators.⁹³

Looking at the economic performance of the two main operators in terms of their income, employment development, and investments, shows that Orange Mali performs slightly stronger than Malitel. AMRTP data indicate that both operators had increasing income between 2001/2003 (for Orange Mali) and 2017, with numbers rising from 51.14 to 168 billion FCFA⁹⁴ for Malitel,⁹⁵ and from 19 to 355 billion FCFA for Orange Mali. In addition, these data also show that investments made by the two operators have been volatile, especially for Malitel. Their investments jumped from 5.51 billion FCFA in 2009 to 56.6 billion FCFA in 2010, probably an effect of their privatisation. But then, they were lowered again between 2010 and 2013, which could be an effect of the Malian political crisis. Since then, investments have been more stable. Orange Mali investments, on the other hand, have doubled from 15 billion FCFA to 32.27 billion FCFA between 2004 and 2006, and again to 61.03 billion FCFA in 2017 (AMRTP, 2019a). While these numbers reflect the increasing importance of mobile communication in Mali, especially the volatile investment numbers also point to influences of the liberalisation process and the Malian political conflict.

We can also see this slight discrepancy in the engagement of the two operators when it comes to network coverage. The AMRTP 2017 report, for instance, finds that Orange Mali provides considerably more BTS with G3 networks and – since August 2017 – G4 networks than Malitel (AMRTP, 2017, p. 17), although Malitel has also been providing G4 coverage since 2018 (M. Togola, 2018; UN, 2020, p. 17). When it comes to the geographical distribution of their coverage, however, or more precisely the share of G3-G4 BTS per region, both operators favour Bamako and neglect Northern regions like Timbuktu, Gao, and Kidal (AMRTP, 2017, p. 20). Thus, both operators have an important influence in furthering online communication in Mali but they also reproduce existing geographic inequalities through their neoliberal orientation for profits, i.e. investing in the more populous and wealthy parts of Mali.

In addition, the operators also influence the selective access to online communication through their pricing structure. An overview by the think tank *Research ICT Africa* shows that prices

⁹³ When I outline my observations here and in the following chapters that present my findings, these observations are based on the documentations and reflections in my research diary (for more on the collection process, see Section 5.4.1).

⁹⁴ Franc CFA, highly contested West and Central African currency with origins in French colonialism, originally named "Franc in the French Colonies of Africa" (N. S. Sylla, 2020).

⁹⁵ Although the Malitel income was slightly lower in 2017 than in 2016 with 168 compared to 192 billion FCFA. In addition, an ITU report mentions that Sonatel is increasingly losing income due to services like Skype or WhatsApp that are free for users but still consume data volumes (ITU, 2018, p. 72f).

for the cheapest prepaid broadband product of 1GB in Mali were almost cut in half between end of 2017 and beginning of 2018. In that regard, Mali also fell from the 9th most expensive country in Africa to the 19th (Research ICT Africa, 2019). Accordingly, AMRTP data indicate that the national tariffs offered by Malitel and Orange Mali have either stagnated (between 2014 and 2018) or slightly decreased (before 2008). On the international level, however, prices for international calls within the African continent have been rising, while prices for calls beyond Africa fell between 2014 and 2018 (AMRTP, 2019b; INSTAT, 2018, p. 49). This supports "external" connections, a structure that is also mirrored in, for instance, trading structures of (investors in) African countries that privilege intercontinental over intracontinental flows.

In accordance with the similar importance of Malitel and Orange Mali, the number of people using the internet has been rising for both operators. Whereas Orange Mali was rather dominant in this sector until 2014, Sotelma jumped to an internet market share of almost 40% in 2016 (AMRTP, 2016, p. 48). In the MiCT and FES survey, around two thirds of the respondents also stated that they combine Malitel and Orange Mali contracts to be able to switch between them in times of strikes or connection problems (MiCT & FES, 2015, p. 41). This tendency of having multiple SIM cards and phone numbers to navigate the best and cheapest connection in terms of coverage and also special offers is confirmed by my own experiences in Mali in 2010 and in Burkina Faso in 2012 and 2014, as well as when interacting with users for the current research project.

In summary, these considerations show that the Malian mobile communication sector has been dominated by two providers, who are affected by neoliberal processes and whose investments have been reproducing geographic inequalities. Especially the last remark on multiple SIM card use, however, indicates that users develop resistant strategies to deal with this struggle and secure their access to online communication. As we will see below, however, this access as well is often distributed very unequally among users.

Users, Digital Divide, and Intersectional Positions

On the other side of this socioeconomic dimension are the potential users of mobile communication services. As we have seen in the research field in Chapter 2, diverse social structures intersect in Malian society, including gender, location, education, age, and income. These social differentiations also influence the access to and use of online media. This speaks to Alzouma's work on the mobile divide in Niger, in which the author argues that the mere

possession of a mobile phone and access to the internet does not mean that people would have equal access to using these media (Alzouma, 2013, p. 298).⁹⁶ I will capture this influence for Malian society in the sense of digital divide as articulated by Massimo Ragnedda. As outlined in more detail in the theoretical Section 4.4.3, Ragnedda describes a digital divide model with three levels, with one merely addressing the access to online communication infrastructure, the second level also addressing skills and motivation of potential users, and the third level asking about the potential to convert capital from digital media use into better life chances (Ragnedda, 2019, pp. 29–37). Adding an intersectional lens to this concept, the following pages show that the access to and the use of online communication tools are divided through, most importantly, intersections of gender, class, and location.

As a first attempt to capture such dividing factors, I take up the perspectives of communication that the *ICT Development Index* and the *Mobile Connectivity Index* mentioned above, referring to issues such as affordability, skills, and further social structures (specifically referring to gender relations for the Mobile Connectivity Index). In doing so, I want to acknowledge that such indices are embedded in processes of postcolonial and neoliberal (and gendered) subjectification that emphasise hierarchies between normalised "developed" and inferior "underdeveloped" states, thereby justifying the international governance of the former – a process Tokunbo Ojo (2016) has described as "geopolitics of ICT4D". Nevertheless, I will start with these reports in order to raise awareness to the marginalisation of Malian users on a global scale, before we will explore the socioeconomic context of mobile communication within Malian society in more detail.

These indices report a low level of skills for Malian society with education indicators such as low secondary (41.3% in 2016 according to the ITU 2017 index) and tertiary enrolment ratios (6.9% in 2016 according to the ITU 2017 index; 5.5% in 2018 according to UNESCO data in the GSMA 2020 index), a low adult literacy rate (33.1% in 2018 according to UNESCO data in the GSMA 2020 index), or the low number of mean years of schooling (2.3 in 2016 according to the ITU 2017 index) (GSMA, 2020; ITU, 2017, p. 148). These indicators thus suggest that a low level of formal education and the inability to read and write impede the access of Malian society to online communication.

In terms of affordability, the GSMA index furthermore suggests that Malian subscribers are disadvantaged economically as they have to pay relatively high rates, even for a 100MB

⁹⁶ But whereas Alzouma still equates internet access with computer ownership (Alzouma, 2013, p. 300), this connection is not as relevant anymore as we have seen most internet users in Mali access online content via their phone now.

prepaid mobile broadband data plan (score⁹⁷ 18.4 out of 100 in 2018) as well as for e.g. a 500 MB mobile broadband subscription (score 22.1 out of 100 in 2018), or for a 1GB mobile broadband data plan (score 14.4 out of 100 in 2018) (GSMA, 2020). This is further supported by affordability indicators determined by the ITU for 2016 that unveil that Malian users have to pay 4.2 US\$ for a 500 MB broadband subscription and 8.4 USD for each GB (ITU, 2018, p. 110). This is a lot if we compare it to the prices of food staples in 2018,⁹⁸ when, for instance, one litre of oil costs a little over 700 FCFA or one kilo of rice around 400 FCFA, which corresponds to 1.26 USD and 0.72 US\$, respectively (Exchange Rates UK, 2021; INSTAT, 2018, p. 65). In addition, the GSMA index also suggests that mobile phones themselves, even the "cheapest internet-enabled feature phone or smartphone," are considerably expensive for Malian citizens in comparison to the GNI per capita (score 7.4 out of 100 in 2018) (GSMA, 2020).

Also relating to affordability, the EMOP survey found that Malian households spent around 3.4% of their budget on communication in the second quarter of 2019, communication thus being the 5th highest household expense after the essentials like food (63.4%), clothing and shoes (7.9%), housing (6.8%), and transportation (6.7%). We also see a difference between urban households that spend relatively more (4.7%) than rural households (2.5%) on communication (INSTAT, 2019, p. 59). In addition, there are big differences between regions in terms of how much households spend on communication, ranging from 18.1 billion FCFA in Bamako to 0.7 billion FCFA in Gao – although households in the different regions also have vastly different budgets to begin with. This distribution is another sign of existing inequalities in access to online communication (INSTAT, 2019, p. 73). However, INSTAT also reports a slightly decreasing price index for communication between 2017 (105.0) and 2019 (93.9) which would speak to mobile communication becoming more affordable in the long run (INSTAT, 2018, pp. 66–69).

In addition to skills and affordability, the GSMA Mobile Connectivity Index includes gender relations in its equation. With a score of 42.2 out of 100, this index evaluates gender relations more positively than, for instance, skills or infrastructure provision. In order to grasp gender relations that are relevant for the access to online connectivity, the index measures contextual socioeconomic issues such as: gender parity in the years of schooling (score 41.9 out of 100; based on UN data), the gender parity in the proportion of the population that has some sort of

⁹⁷ The publicly available GSMA data mostly indicate normalised scores. Although they do not give us any concise numbers, they still situate the respective data.

⁹⁸ At the time of writing, only the 2010 and the 2018 statistical data were available online which is why I cannot provide a direct comparison with the 2016 situation.

money account, including bank accounts as well as, for instance, mobile money accounts (score 49.1 out of 100; based on World Bank data), the gender income parity in relation to the GNI (score 49.2 out of 100; based on UN data), and the position in the Women, Business and the Law WBL Index⁹⁹ (score 54.4 out of 100; based on World Bank data). This shows that Malian women are disadvantaged in their economic and educational capital for using online communication (GSMA, 2020). Furthermore, I would like to argue that some of these numbers such as the proportion of women in the population with a money account, only include more privileged groups of the population, as 83% of male Malians do not have access to a personal bank account (Afrobarometer, 2018b, p. 75). In addition, we should be careful not to de-contextualise or even culturalise such gender gaps, considering, for instance, that the non-education of Malian women was built in the colonial educational system (Sanankoua, 2004, p. 146). Therefore, exclusion patterns are still more serious for women hit by multiple intersecting marginalisations like location, education, and class (see below).

More specifically related to online communication, the GSMA Mobile Connectivity index also includes the gender gap in mobile phone ownership (score 45.7 out of 100; based on the Gallup World Poll data). Even more drastically, we see the unequal gender relations in the comparison of how many women and men use social media (score 12.9 out of 100; based on DataReportal and Facebook audience insights data) (GSMA, 2020). Although we will come back to this in the section on access to platforms (see Section 6.2.2), this score already suggests that there is an additional gendered dimension in the use of social media, i.e. an additional set of exclusions when we bring together gender and online media use.

Whereas these factors already unveil important aspects that structure the access to and use of online communication, I want to deepen this exploration and still point to further socio-economic (intersectional) structurations that differentiate the access to online communication in Malian society. As Chapter 2 suggested, such intersections can, for instance, mean a co-constitution of education, location, and gender, of income possibilities and location, or of employment, age, and gender. Through my exploration of Afrobarometer data, I argue that these social differentiations on a basic level influence access to online communication, i.e. who owns mobile phones and who has mobile phones with internet access.

We can see that during the 2016/2018 survey period, owning a personal mobile phone, and even more so a mobile phone with internet access, is more common for men than for women, for younger people than for older people, for people living in urban areas than for those living

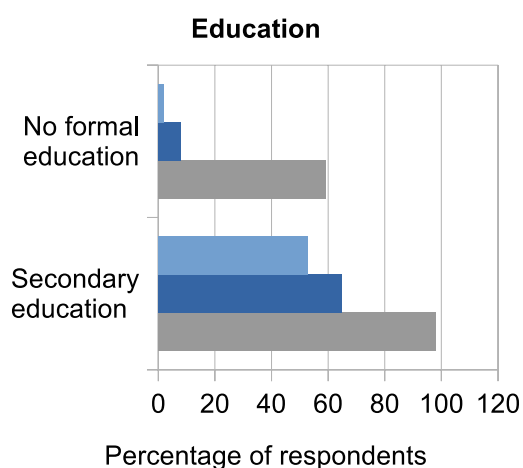
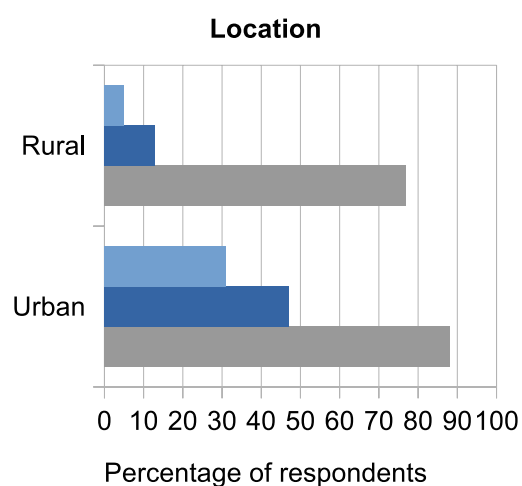
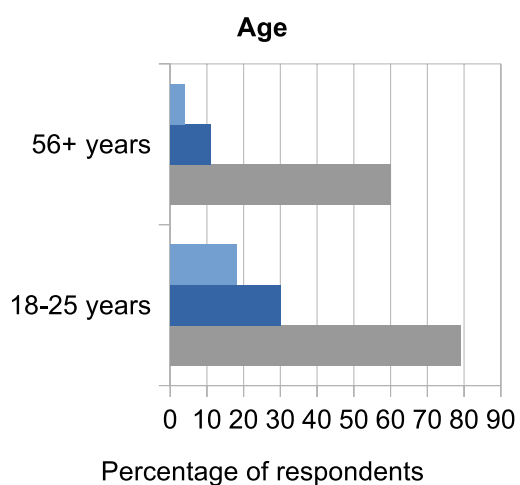
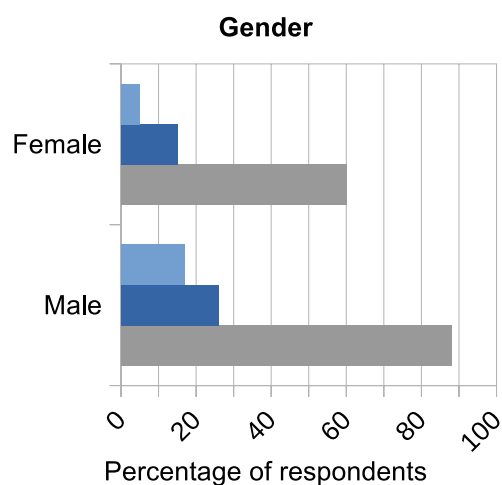
⁹⁹ This index "measures the legal differences on access to economic opportunities between men and women" (World Bank, 2021).

in rural areas, for those with a higher education than for those with a lower level of formal education, for those being employed or looking for employment than for those not looking for employment (of whom a big part were either homeworkers, or occupied in agriculture and commerce), and for those with no lived poverty than for those with high lived poverty (Afrobarometer, 2018a). This already indicates that a myriad of socioeconomic factors influence the access to mobile (online) communication (for more, see Figure 10). However, the fact that among those respondents who experience high lived poverty, 71% own an individual mobile phone, and 12% even one with internet access, also illustrates how important this means of communication has become in Malian society.

Several of these dimensions also intersect. For the educational level, we can see that the share of women who have a mobile phone with internet access is almost the same for the groups with no education (7.0% of female vs. 8.8% of male respondents own a phone with internet access), but especially among those who have informal schooling or some primary schooling, women are considerably less included than men, with 6.1% and 7.7% of women compared to 12.2% and 23.4% of men having a mobile phone with internet access. Starting from users who completed primary education, the percentages converge again. For the occupational groups, we can see another gendered dimension as all housewives/ homemakers in the sample are women, as are 75% of those who never had a job, and 70% of traders – whereas 100% of supervisors are men, as are 92% of shop owners, 89% of artisans, and 75% of farmers. Apart from the latter, these male-dominated occupational groups have higher access to mobile phones (with internet). In addition, it is noteworthy that 67% of students (63% of which, in turn, are male) have a mobile phone with internet connection, which means that they are among the groups with the highest access to such phones. Together with insights from Section 6.1.1, we can thus establish that access to mobile (online) communication is structured along the lines of gender, age, location, and class, with those having access being younger, male, urban, formally educated, and in more prosperous occupations (Afrobarometer, 2018a). This also corresponds to the 2015 MiCT and FES report that found that smartphones, the internet, and social media are mainly media for young men with higher education (MiCT & FES, 2015, pp. 4, 43).

In addition, (gendered) inequalities in the frequency of using the internet even exceed the ownership structure outlined above (see Figure 10), meaning that people report using the internet more often (here meaning those who state to use the internet a few times a week + everyday) if they are male, younger, formally educated, fully employed or looking for em-

ployment, experienced no lived poverty, lived in an urban location, and even "better" in Bamako (Afrobarometer, 2018a).



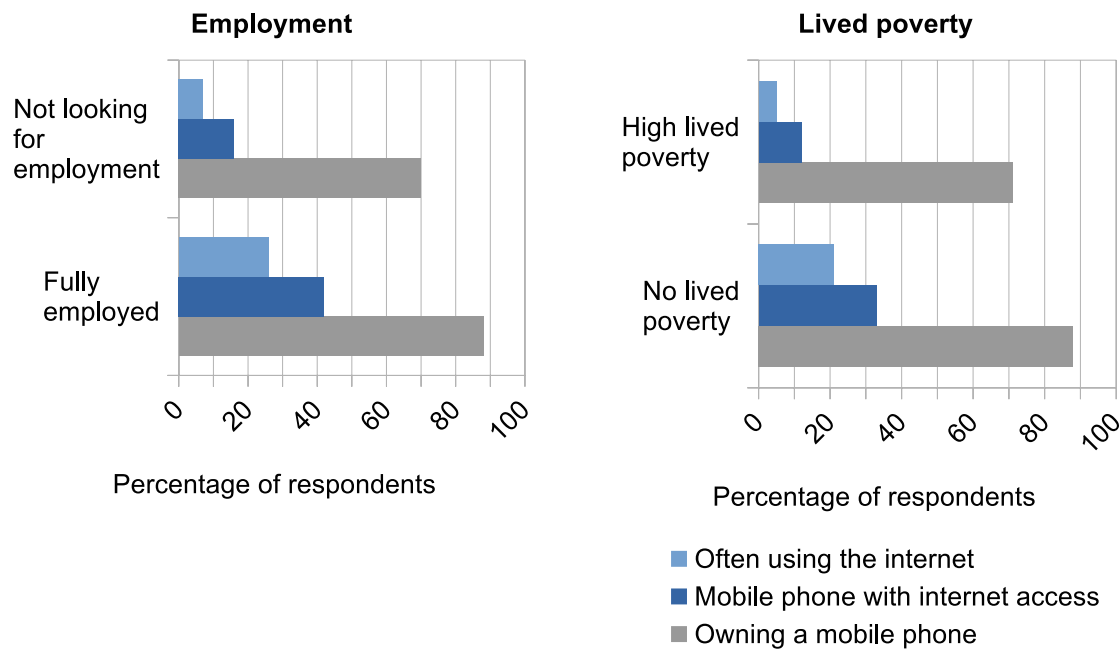


Figure 10: Social locations and digital divides in owning and using mobile phones with internet access among Afrobarometer respondents (Afrobarometer, 2018a, own visualisation)

Looking deeper into the gendered ramifications of the frequency of using the internet shows that even female respondents who have a mobile phone with internet access are considerably less likely to use the internet than their male counterparts, with 40% of these female respondents using the internet a few times a week or every day vs. 65% of male respondents, a pattern that confirms Ragnedda's (2019, p. 30) claim to go beyond access in evaluating the digital divide. This could be due to the fact that women generally have a lower level of formal education and less financially rewarding occupations in which they would have to use the internet (Afrobarometer, 2018a). This also ties in with what Nicholas Alozie and Patience Akpan-Obong (2017, p. 156) have found for other African countries.

These forms of exclusion point to an entanglement of the first and the second level of Ragnedda's digital divide model – access and skills and motivation – and support the assertions that the internet is an elite phenomenon within Malian society (MiCT & FES, 2015, p. 47ff). However, I would like to argue here that the Afrobarometer data also showed some tendencies for opening internet usage to more segments of Malian society. Looking at how the frequency of using the internet developed or changed over the years suggests that internet usage is slightly rising for all social groups. For instance, the portion of urban respondents using the internet a few times a week or every day increased from 7.5% in 2008 to 30.7% in 2016/2018, and from 0.1% to 4.7% for rural respondents in the same period. Moreover, we

can see some indices for an opening of internet usage to these social groups as, for instance, the (frequency of) use increases more for older age groups or for people with primary and secondary education – although the latter still excludes the huge group of people with no (formal) education (Afrobarometer, 2018a). In addition, those groups who own fewer individual phones mostly state that someone else in their household has one, which leads to a potentially even higher access rate to online communication across the socioeconomic groups listed here because the category "mobile phones with access to the internet" only covers individual phones (Afrobarometer, 2018a).

In addition to these access and use parameters, following Ragnedda's third level of the digital divide, i.e. the possibilities to convert capital from digital media use into better life chances (Ragnedda, 2019, pp. 34–37), another question to ask in this section is who can use online communication in ways that produce socioeconomic or political value. On the conditions side, this is related to education, i.e. who can read and write, who can speak French, etc., but it also intersects with, for instance, gender, i.e. when different gender groups have different amounts of time on their hands or are expected to use online communication media differently. On the use side, social positionings also influence for what purposes different people use mobile media. The MiCT and FES survey also found that many people (have to) choose not to use smartphones because simpler phones fit more with their inability to read and write (MiCT & FES, 2015, pp. 4, 41f) – showing that the second (skills) level and the third (use) level of the digital divide model are intricately linked as well. In addition, they also found that many respondents use their mobile phones mostly for making calls and rarely for accessing the internet because of their formal education level and lack of literacy (MiCT & FES, 2015, p. 44). And they stress that especially women mostly use their mobile phones for making calls (and sometimes for listening to the radio or music). The authors relate this to the greater freedoms of young men, and to traditional images of men being more knowledgeable in technological issues than women (MiCT & FES, 2015, p. 44). This also ties in with findings by Akin Iwilade, who studied the gendered use of social networks among Ghanaian and Nigerian university students and found that, even though female students often have more and more diverse access to digital media, they, for instance, evaluate their own abilities to use them lower and the (harassment) dangers associated with this use as higher than male respondents (Iwilade, 2015), a dimension of the social situational context of online communication we will further explore in Subchapter 7.1.

Accordingly, the MiCT and FES survey found that if people use the internet, they do so most often for Facebook (83%), then email (58% with 73% in Bamako), Viber (51%), Twitter

(21%), and WhatsApp (13%) in 2015 (MiCT & FES, 2015, p. 51). Here as well, however, they observed gendered distinctions with men appearing more attracted to technological services like using email, social networks, and search engines; and women using the internet more for making calls via Skype or WhatsApp (MiCT & FES, 2015, p. 52). They also found an age difference where increasing age indicated that people use the internet more for emails, searching for information for professional purposes, and listening to the radio, and less for social networks and watching videos (MiCT & FES, 2015, p. 52). While this implies a hierarchy of using the internet, I want to stress here that personal contacts can equally be an important source for information that seems to become especially relevant with the extension of social media (for more on this, see Section 7.1.2 on user practices for accessing information through and for social media).

Relating this to the question of the digital divide, we can see that there are severe discrepancies in Malian society on the supply and demand sides, discrepancies that affect different parts of the population very differently and thus also influence the movement of narratives between different actors and exclude other actors from participating in this mobilising process. This speaks to Alzouma's findings that the mobile divide in Niger is not only structured by a rural-urban divide, but that especially income and education work together to create a classed differentiation among mobile phone users in terms of access and use (Alzouma, 2013, p. 301f). According to Alzouma, rural location, (gendered) illiteracy, and poverty culminate in a limited use of mobile phones that includes irregularly (charging and) using them, sharing them, or using them only for calling (or even only being called by and thus even being more dependent on) family members and business contacts (Alzouma, 2013, pp. 302–306). This digital divide is especially severe if it reproduces a gendered public-private distinction that, according to Sylvia Tamale (2004, p. 54), leads to gendered forms of citizenship. In this line of thought, as Nicholas Alozie and Patience Akpan-Obong (2017, p. 155f) show, further factors like male-biased policies, education, domesticity, socioeconomic status, the design of technologies, and environments also influence such gendered divides. In addition to the socioeconomic conditions of governing mobilising narratives addressed in this section, we will therefore now turn to the socio-political dimension as another factor that influences the movement and distribution of narratives through online communication.

6.1.3 Socio-Political Influences: Multiple Actors, One Vision?

This section aims to show on which political-economic levels different actors govern the socio-geographic circulation of narratives through online (news) media in Malian(-diasporic) society. I will explore these influences through the lens of techno-politics as introduced by Antina von Schnitzler (2016), reflecting on the meaning that the political economy of online communication infrastructures has for relations between citizens and their state(s). However, I will not only focus on the Malian state, but also on international and (diasporic) civil society politics. I argue that the political economy of online media technologies not only influences the relation between Malian citizens and their state, but that it unveils postcolonial, neoliberal, and political struggles that also unfold between Malian citizens and further corporate and international actors.

International Socio-Political Influences: Geopolitical Struggles

The international political-economic influence on Mali's communication infrastructures has a long history. In this section, I therefore follow Mirjam de Bruijn and colleagues in their argument that the disparate growth of African communication sectors is also a result of historical developments like colonial infrastructure politics and the liberalisation of telecommunication sectors for the promotion of international investments (de Bruijn et al., 2013, p. 5f). While I have already elaborated some of these ideas in terms of their socioeconomic and geographic effects in the previous sections, the following explorations rather point to their social and political meanings and resulting struggles over the dominance in structuring access to online communication.

On the one hand, geopolitical and postcolonial struggles within digital communication infrastructures in Mali thus unfold through negotiations between the Malian state and a combination of international financial institutions, foreign states, and internationally operating digital corporations. In colonial times, the French colonisers not only used communication and transportation technologies to enable the mobilisation of colonial troops, but also to control the colonised West African societies. Naffet Keita sees a manifestation of these intentions, for instance, in the successive extension of the train, radio, and telegraph networks throughout the then Southern Sudanese territory (see Keita, 2015, pp. 11–15). As outlined in the previous section, the Malian state nationalised the communication sector after independence but – under pressure from the International Monetary Fund and World Bank – engaged in liberalisation and privatisation processes some years later, processes that opened the sector

to diverse actors and were indicative for the Eurocentric ICT4D paradigm proclaimed by Western states and international financial institutions (see Keita, 2015, pp. 16–22; Ojo, 2016, p. 28ff). In this context, the first influences came from the French telecommunication company Ikatel that later became Orange Mali (see above).

In recent years, however, other actors have also become important in providing Malian society with online communication services. China and the United Arab Emirates, for instance, have increasingly engaged in network provision and mobile phone trade during the past several years (Keita, 2015, p. 53; Ministère de l'Economie Numérique et de la Communication, 2019b). We can also see such negotiations of the importance of different powers, for instance, on the website of the Ministry of Digital Economy and Communication. Towards the end of 2018, on the one hand, the first picture on the home page reproduced the importance of relations with France, as it referred to a visit of the Malian delegation to the French government, dating back to the end of June 2018 (Ministère de l'Economie Numérique et de la Communication, 2019a). On the other hand, if exploring the website further, under "partners", the ministry listed Huawei as the first partner for providing digital communication infrastructures (Ministère de l'Economie Numérique et de la Communication, 2019b). As we will explore in more detail in the next Subchapter 6.2 on digital platforms, these developments unveil further geopolitical considerations that relate to Michael Kwet's observation that infrastructural investments by former colonial powers are now often taken over by digital corporations that have their own (neocolonial) agendas (Kwet, 2019, p. 7f). When interpreting the investment of Huawei as corporate engagement, however, we also have to be aware of "the complex hybrid of commercial and state power that characterizes the People's Republic of China" (Couldry & Mejias, 2019, p. 343). Moreover, Willem Gravett (2020, p. 145) points out that the increasing infrastructural involvement of Huawei in African states might make African governments prone to Chinese political influence.

On the other hand, the socio-political conditions and use of communication infrastructures in Mali also show signs of Pan-African and diasporic engagements that could counter such post- and neocolonial tendencies. On the phone network level, for instance, it is interesting to note that by 2018, three operators supplied the Malian market, operators whose affiliation (French, Malian/Moroccan, Pan-African) and struggle for the market shares (UN, 2020, p. 15) could suggest that French corporate influences in the Malian communication sector are challenged by the rise of (Pan-)African investors. In addition to this international engagement in Malian communication infrastructure and its potential ideological influence on Malian politics, we can also see its use by Malian institutions for diasporic communication and connectivity. The

diverse actors included in this group are, for instance, Malian diasporic institutions like the Ministry for Malians Abroad and African Integration and the Higher Council of Malians Abroad or also the Higher Council of Malians in France that use websites and social media to communicate with the diaspora (Haut Conseil des Maliens de l'Extérieur, 2020; HCMF, 2014; Ministère des Maliens de l'Extérieur, 2020).

This provision of and engagement with online communication infrastructures thus shows a geopolitical struggle that oscillates between (post)colonial corporate actors and potentially decolonial diasporic and Pan-African actors. Thereby, the techno-politics articulated here show that Malian(-diasporic) citizens are embedded in post- and neocolonial relations of domination through online communication. In addition to these international engagements, techno-political influences and struggles also manifest in relation to and on the Malian national level.

National Socio-Political Influences: Neoliberal Visions, National Unity, and Political Contestation

In addition to these international influences, a techno-politics perspective shows that also national political actors govern the access to online communication. As we will see, however, these actors as well often privilege neoliberal and nationalist interests over social inclusive goals.

On the national level, the state institutions that influence the development of online communication are, most importantly, the Malian Authority for the Regulation of Telecommunications/ICT and Postal Services (Autorité Malienne de Régulation des Télécommunications/TIC et des Postes, AMRTP) and the Ministry for Digital Economy and Planning (Ministère pour l'Economie Numérique et Prospective, MENP). The United Nations Conference for Trade and Development (CNUCED) identified three levels on which these actors are responsible for providing ICT services: (1) seeking offers for a global mobile (internet) phone license (MENP); (2) granting a general authorisation for independent networks and resource use (AMRTP); and (3) declarations granting the right to provide higher-quality services like access to internet communication (AMRTP) (UN, 2020, p. 16).

Core functions of the AMRTP (which emerged from the Committee for Regulation of Telecommunications (Comité de Régulation des Télécommunications, CTR) in 2011 (MENIC, 2014, p. 6)) consist of, on the one hand, ensuring that operators comply with existing laws and regulations, including environmental and sanitary norms, but also that they are treated equal-

ly, and, on the other hand, that access to networks is fairly distributed through "technological neutrality" and that service fees are adequate – without, however, specifying for whom. In addition, they assist the minister responsible for telecommunications and claim to safeguard national interests in the field of telecommunications and postal services (AMRTP, 2016, p. 13; UN, 2020, p. 15f). Accordingly, in their 2016 activities report, the latest one available on the AMRTP website, they list a number of national and international activities. On the national level, they include regulative actions such as, for instance, the approbation of operator services, and they list a number of initiatives for promoting increasing access to ICT, but so far mostly through studies that assess the situation (AMRTP, 2016, pp. 14–25). On the international level, the agency lists its participation in a number of meetings and workshops organised by telecommunications organisations such as the ITU that aim to improve the national ICT sector (AMRTP, 2016, pp. 25–31).

The Ministry of Digital Economy and Planning (Ministère de l'Économie Numérique et de la Prospective, MENP) has the mission to prepare and implement national ICT policies and thus describes itself as responsible for: implementing the ICT infrastructure and promoting its use, elaborating the regulative framework for the electronic communications services and networks and managing their offering, certifying keys for encrypting and electronic signatures, developing secure electronic administrative services, and monitoring developments in the digital economy (MaliMenp, 2020). In 2000, for instance, the Malian government adopted the Declaration on the Sectorial Telecommunication Policy of Mali (Déclaration de Politique Sectorielle des Télécommunications du Mali, DPST), followed by a national ICT policy (Politique Nationale des Technologies de l'Information et de la Communication) in 2005 (MENIC, 2014, p. 6f). In addition, while the ministry's website was not working and/or not securely accessible at the time of writing, the ministry operated active Twitter and Facebook accounts through which they provide information and promote several events like the pitch competitions #TechFridays or the celebration of the Global Telecommunications Day (MaliMenp, 2020; Ministère de l'Économie Numérique & Prospective, 2020). This supports the aforementioned importance of social media for political actors and institutions. In contrast to such communication activities, the CNUCED, however, evaluates the development of electronic administration in Mali as still being insufficient (UN, 2020, p. 19).

In addition to their regulative tasks, Malian institutional actors establish certain visions for online communication in Mali. We can capture such visions, for instance, in the digital development strategy for Mali (Mali Numérique 2020) that was drafted by the then Ministry of Digital Economy of Information and Communication for the period 2015 until 2020. The

document introduces "the digital" as an important means for social inclusion and human well-being through: access to information, knowledge and wisdom, the creation of employment opportunities, economic "development" of all sectors, including the local digital industry, transparent governance and effective administration, and the technological positioning of Mali in the region (MENIC, 2014, p. 3). As the strategy stresses the need to promote digital technologies for "all actors of the society", i.e. the state, enterprises, and citizens (MENIC, 2014, p. 8, translation from French, S.H.), it focuses mostly on increasing efficiency (gaining time, transparency) and productivity for all actors in their everyday actions (MENIC, 2014, p. 9f). The main focus of the strategy, however, lies on growth, productivity, and added value for enterprises and efficiency for the public administration (MENIC, 2014, p. 3), treating citizens rather marginally. On the international level, the *Digital Mali* plan portrays Mali as an important African player for the development of ICT in Africa, e.g. through the (co-)organisation of events on the merits of digital technologies, especially for "development" (MENIC, 2014, p. 8). It also envisions an important future role of Mali, as one of its goals is to make Mali into one of the technological hubs in West Africa (MENIC, 2014, p. 12). At the same time, however, the document also portrays Mali as behind "modern and wealthy nations" in the appropriation of digital networks for sustainable "development" (MENIC, 2014, p. 7f, translation from French, S.H.), thereby reproducing a Eurocentric normalisation of ICT infrastructures (a modernist tendency in the spreading of ICT that has been also problematised, for instance, by Flew & Rui Liu, 2016; Ojo, 2016).

In practical terms, the document outlines indicators that should allow the monitoring of developments in the following fields: providing access to online networks and services, increasing the production and distribution of digital content, improving the possibilities for use and digital services, developing the local digital industry, promoting the human capital, and installing digital trust (MENIC, 2014, pp. 15–56). On the national level, the strategy focuses especially on completing the national fibre optic network through the connection of Kidal, Gao, and Timbuktu with Mopti, and on the international level, on the transnational connections with Niger (from Gao), Algeria (from Kidal), Guinea (from Bamako), and Burkina Faso (from Sevare, close to Mopti) (MENIC, 2014, p. 19). On the one hand, this points to a political awareness of the need for including disadvantaged locations in the North and Centre of Mali and for increasing intra-African connectivity. On the other hand, the document does not specifically address the multiple intersectional exclusions from online communication infrastructure mentioned above, including gender, rural location, or poverty – it only twice mentions the need for integrating young generations and once refers rather

broadly to the need for creating affordable access (MENIC, 2014, p. 20,27). In that regard, and with its focus on promoting economic and administrative efficiency, the national political vision for digital media in Mali reproduces more a neoliberal logic than an inclusionary one. In addition, this project has geopolitical implications – for instance, in that its implementation is partly executed by the China International Telecommunication Construction Corporation (CITCC) and is co-financed by the Import-Export Bank of China (UN, 2020, p. 18). This shows that such visions are embedded and negotiated within national and international networks of diverse actors and power relations between them.

In terms of political visions, I argue that extending the communication infrastructure – beyond the neoliberal developmentalist idea – throughout Mali can further be seen as a national political project that enables decentralisation measures (as suggested by the national extension of the national fibre optic network envisioned above) as well as conflict communication. Although large discrepancies between e.g. Bamako and the rural areas still remain, the connectivity of Northern and rural areas increased considerably only in the past few years, following the logic that if the Malian state cannot build (enough) roads to connect the nation, they will do so via means of communication (Keita, 2015, p. 31). The rise of mobile media formations thus promotes the participation in online communication for an increasing part of the Malian(-diasporic) society (for more, see Section 6.1.1). Considering the extensive development of ICT infrastructure since 2012, government efforts to increase access to online communication could be a way to promote national unity through connecting the nation, as well as to increase control over communication channels, especially since they compete with rebel, separatist, and Islamist groups, who also use digital media to spread information and mobilise the population (see e.g. Bos & Melissen, 2019; de Bruijn et al., 2015). For instance, in preparation of the Conference for National Understanding (Conférence d'Entente Nationale, CEN) in March 2017, a milestone in the Malian peace process, the Malian government created a dedicated Facebook page as a way to inform the public about the conference. One of my interview partners also observes more generally that political actors have become more active on social media since the 2012 political crisis:

To tell the truth, from the coup d'état in 2012 onwards, the ministers and other actors of the political sector have joined Twitter. Which was not the case before. It is from 2012 onwards that they started to make this space a means of communication. Which gives us the opportunity to

debate with them. [WhatsApp conversation with Bakary, male film producer in his thirties in Bamako]¹⁰⁰

In this line of thought, on the one hand, the Malian government is seeking to improve the access of the Malian population to online communication infrastructures. Therefore, the government, for instance, has created a Universal Access Fund (Fonds d'Accès Universel, FAU) that redistributes 2% of the operators' turnover. This fund is also administered by the Agency of Management of the Universal Access Fund (Agence de Gestion du Fonds d'Access Universel, AGEFAU). In addition, the Malian state has received funding from the ITU in order to develop its ICT communication sector (FES, 2016, p. 109; UN, 2020, p. 19). It also launched the Internet Exchange Point of Mali (MLIX) in February 2018 for faster, more secure, and more affordable connections between (inter)national users (UN, 2020, p. 19). In addition, the AGEFAU planned to create solar-panel powered centres that should provide internet access to marginalised groups of the population in poorly connected zones (UN, 2020, p. 19). Together, these measures can be seen as an attempt to alleviate the existing geographic divide in the access to communication infrastructures and to thereby connect the Malian nation in itself and within transnational communication networks.

In addition, political actors are engaged in regulating market forces at work in the online communication sector through ICT policies and the regulation of the communication market. In terms of the ICT policy, the expert panel behind the FES Media Barometer states that a national ICT policy exists but has not yet been properly implemented (FES, 2016, p. 109). The ITU places Mali in the third generation of regulation of communication markets, which combines "[e]nabling investment, innovation and access" with a "[d]ual focus on stimulating competition in service and content delivery, and consumer protection", between a situation of partial liberalisation and a situation of integrated regulation based on economic and social policy goals (ITU, 2018, p. 38). In that sense, the government shows a negotiation between the neoliberal tendencies mentioned above and more regulative policies.

On the other hand, government actors sometimes directly restrict citizens' access to online media, for instance when they cut social media or similar services during times of political crises or tensions. Adeboye Adegoke and colleagues (2019, p. 5) identify such influence as an increasing tendency in African states, a tendency they attribute to the "impact of Chinese and Russian models of Information controls exported to Africa". And also Gravett (2020) sees a

¹⁰⁰ En vérité, à partir du Coup d'Etat de 2012, les ministres et autres acteurs de la scène politique ont rejoint twitter. Ce qui n'était pas le cas avant. C'est à partir de 2012, qu'ils ont commencé à faire de cet espace un moyen de communication. Ce qui nous offrait l'opportunité de débattre avec eux. [WhatsApp conversation with Bakary, male film producer in his thirties in Bamako]

danger of African governments importing the Chinese model of internet governance. Whereas the FES expert panel emphasises that the Malian government in principle encourages the access to newspapers and satellite TV (FES, 2016, p. 98), the CNUCED report states that operators execute network blockages that were imposed by the state for reasons of security and public order, a phenomenon they identify as a growing concern within African states (UN, 2020, p. 18). The Media Foundation for West Africa, for instance, reported on Facebook disruptions prior to a big demonstration by the Malian opposition in June 2017, or during upheavals triggered by struggles between supporters of the political activist Ras Bath and the police in August 2016. Oppositional actors accuse the government of blocking the social networking site in order to prevent online mobilisation (MfWA, 2017). In addition, political actors also influence the media sector as such in terms of content and structures. But this will be part of the next subchapter that deals more specifically with the vulnerabilities of Malian(-diasporic) news infrastructures.

As a last dimension in these socio-political influences, I want to mention that these international corporate and national government influences are not of a deterministic nature, but that certain actors also (try to) resist this dominance. NGOs, civil society, and international organisations have their own agendas and projects in promoting and using online communication, as further actors that navigate often in between the transnational and the national level, and between the political and the social level. Diverse (dominant and resistant) political actors use online media, and recently especially the social media sites Facebook and Twitter, in order to communicate with a Malian(-diasporic) public. Examples include: political activists like Fatoumata Harber¹⁰¹ and Ras Bath;¹⁰² the Malian presidency and individual ministers like the minister of digital economy and planning, of foreign affairs, or the health minister; transnationally operating institutions like the French embassy in Mali, or supranational entities that are active in Mali like the MINUSMA, as well as individuals who use Twitter to either support or criticise existing social and economic structures. This use of social media by diverse political and civil society actors shows that digital media are perceived not only as a way to promote economic growth and efficient administrative services but also as a way to improve political communication. However, we have to keep in mind that, in doing so, these political actors also aim for an audience that is biased in terms of gender, age, location,

¹⁰¹ Fatoumata Harber, situated in Timbuktu, *inter alia* is a psychopedagogy teacher, human rights activist, activist blogger (blogging under the name "Tunbutu Woye"), and general secretary of the Malian blogging community *Doniblog*.

¹⁰² Ras Bath (Mohamed Youssouf Bathily being his given name) is a trained lawyer and an oppositional political activist who became popular through a radio show in which he promised to "shock in order to teach" but after provoking political restrictions, increasingly used social media to spread his ideas.

education, and economic standing. On the other hand, this development equally shows that the government-enabled online communication infrastructure is also used for dissenting voices that oppose national and international politics, thus creating tensions in this provision of infrastructures.

Coming back to Antina von Schnitzler's (2016) techno-politics and the meaning that the political economy of online media has for relations between the citizens and the state, we can observe that the provision, regulation, and use of online communication infrastructures in Mali articulate a number of struggles. These struggles revolve not only around national unity (decentralising online communication) and neoliberal reforms (liberalisation of the communication sector and neoliberal developmental visions for national use of digital technologies), but also around international relations (struggles over geopolitical dominance and diasporic voices) and more general questions of political ideas (regulation vs. articulation of political dissent). Beyond this socio-political meaning of communication infrastructures and their regulation, von Schnitzler also encourages a bottom-up perspective that accounts for the – potentially subversive – interactions of individuals with certain infrastructural objects and subjectivities that emerge from these interactions. This is an issue we will further explore in Subchapter 6.2 on user engagement with online platforms.

In summary, this perspective of techno-politics has unveiled processes of governing relations between Malian citizens and the state by promoting neoliberal but also unified self-governance, and by controlling political critique and by using online communication for voicing this critique. Together, these considerations show in which ways political practices and visions are also structuring possibilities for narratives becoming mobile in the Malian-diasporic online media space. As a last dimension that can influence this access, we will now turn to the Malian news landscape as an assemblage of actors and practices that enable and hinder the circulation of narratives.

6.1.4 The Malian News Landscape: Intersectional Exclusions and Vulnerabilities

This section does not specifically deal with online communication. But in order to further contextualise the following subchapters, I seek to give a short overview of the news landscape in Malian society. Here as well, I am aware that this excludes the context of diasporic users of Malian online news portals. However, considering that Malian publications and users are the most important ones in my study and that diasporic users as well have strong considerations

for the Malian context in terms of, for instance, evaluating news sources, I still keep my focus on the Malian sector for now.

The information I provide here mainly stems from two sources: first, the Afrobarometer online dataset (Afrobarometer, 2018a) and an adjoining report published on that dataset that deals with the Malian news and freedom of expression (Haidara & Isbell, 2018); and secondly, the FES expert panel media barometer that provides insight into national (media and civil society) expert debates on the situation of different media, and equally of the freedom of expression and freedom of the press (FES, 2016). The information from the expert panel is already negotiated and contested within the panel, so what I can present here is no consensus but rather a collection of diverse voices and opinions.

One aim of this section is to analyse the Malian news sector through the lens of infrastructural vulnerabilities (M. Gillespie et al., 2018, p. 5, for more see Section 4.4.3), asking how dependent Malian citizens are on (online) media for accessing information and how endangered their access to information through these media is. This introduction to the Malian news landscape thus outlines the context of "media governmentality" (Begg, 2012, p. 12) within which the struggles over domination, self-management, and resistance relating to Malian online news discourses occur.

Differential Access to Diverse News Media and Resulting Dependencies

Looking at the Malian news sector very generally, we can see that it consists of a mix of available formats, including TV, radio, newspapers, internet and social media, and mobile phones. All these formats entail different conditions and practices of use. The FES expert panel estimated that TV and radio stations cover around 80% of the national territory. Especially for radio stations, they highlighted disadvantages such as financial problems and a low coverage of only 20 to 30 kilometres, and advantages, including a high number (375) of regularly broadcasting stations and their variety of programs (FES, 2016, p. 96). For newspapers, they estimated the number of Malian printed papers at 120. However, the panel evaluates the access to newspapers as inadequate because of their limited and slow geographic distribution as well as their high prices (the expert panel estimated their price at two loaves of bread). This is in addition to the general problem that a big part of the Malian population does not have access to newspapers due to illiteracy (FES, 2016, p. 97). In this, context, however, Siméant (2014, p. 65) reminds of the "titrologue" effect that in many African countries, the content of newspaper also spreads through those who cannot afford to buy a paper and only

read the first pages displayed at news stands, and through those who tell this content to others who cannot read or – as I might add in relation to communicating news online – are out of reach of newspaper distribution.

For online news, the panel lists three different formats, including news portals that publish articles from other sources, online newspapers with their own staff and articles, and online versions of printed newspapers (FES, 2016, p. 97). As a last potential source for news, the panel mentions mobile phones, presumably as a way to access social media and get information through calls and messages. Here, they mainly stress the increasing affordability of mobile phones, including those with an internet connection, but also the limited network coverage in the country (FES, 2016, p. 97). Looking at this availability through the lens of infrastructural vulnerabilities, I want to argue here that Malian citizens can, on the one hand, become dependent on online media for accessing information if no other means are available (although radio mostly is), and, on the other hand, that their access can also be endangered when the necessary internet connection is disrupted (for geographic, economic, or political reasons as described in the following).

In accordance with this differential availability, the different news media are also of very different importance within the Malian population. According to the Afrobarometer survey in 2017, for instance, the most important source for consuming news is the radio (64%), then TV (39%), and then the internet (8%) and social media (9%), which have recently overtaken newspapers (4%). As the last remark indicates (see also Figure 11), this importance has also changed over the past several years (Haidara & Isbell, 2018, p. 4).

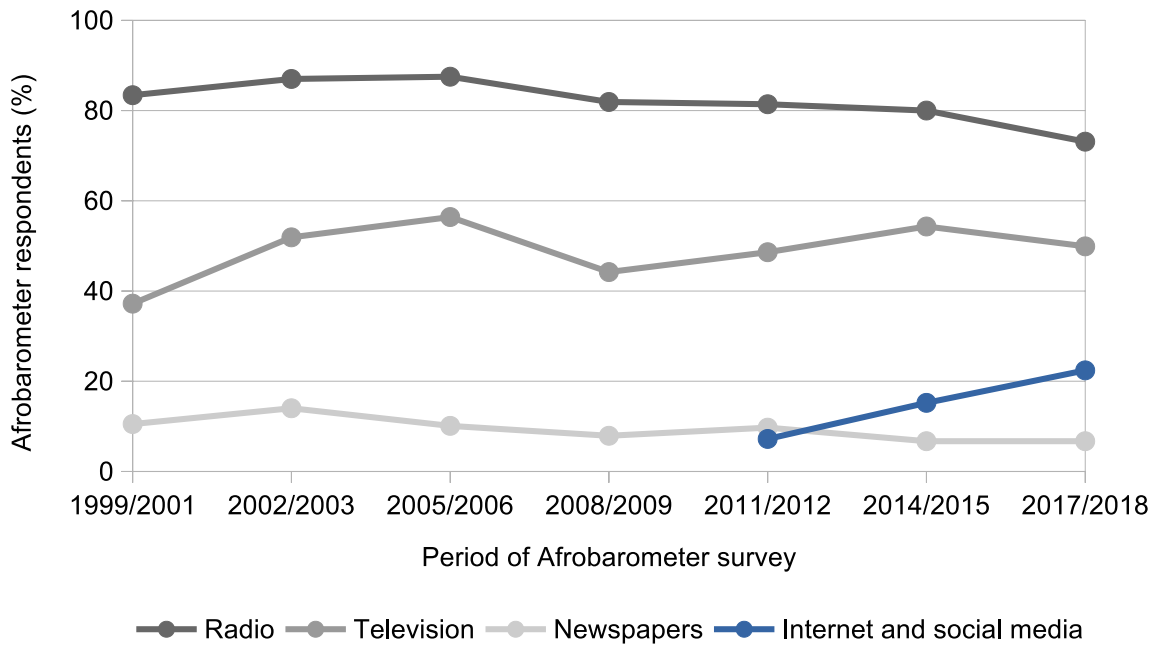


Figure 11: Development of news sources that Malian Afrobarometer survey respondents use "a few times a month", "a few times a week", or "every day" (Afrobarometer, 2018a, own visualisation)

In addition, we can see that the consumption of news as well is structured through intersectional positionings. In geographic terms, Afrobarometer data suggest that people use all media sources more (often) when they live in urban areas (see Figure 12). This hints to the importance of physical infrastructures, i.e. the availability of radio stations, TV stations, the distribution of newspapers, and the availability of cell phone coverage and internet connections in urban and connected areas. This rural-urban divide seems to be even more important than regional differences, since I could not identify any regional effects (for instance, no North-South divide) in this dataset (Afrobarometer, 2018a).

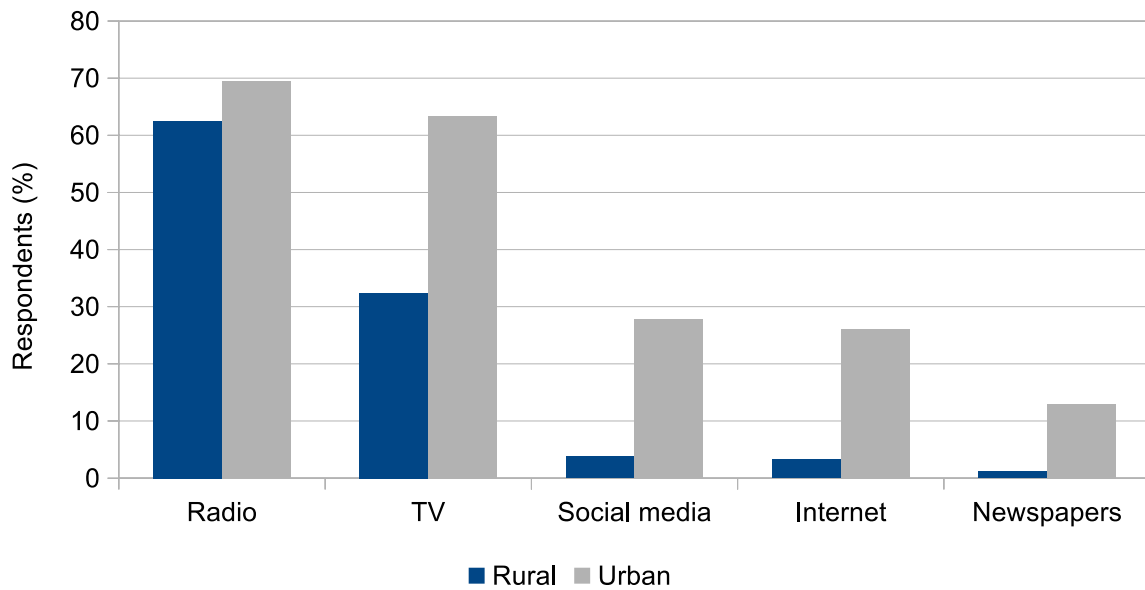


Figure 12: Rural-urban differences between the percentages of respondents, who report using different news sources daily or a few times a week (Source: Afrobarometer 2018, own visualisation)

As mentioned above, these geographic patterns are also related to socioeconomic positionings. For all media sources, their use has increased in relation to a lower living poverty index and higher employment status. In addition, certain occupational groups like housewives, farmers, unskilled manual workers, and traders use all sources considerably less, whereas, for instance, upper-level professionals and students use them considerably more. This relates to how the use of most news sources increases considerably with the education levels of the respondents. The only rather inconsistent source is the radio, which could be a tribute to the importance the radio has gained for informing the Malian (illiterate) public since the Malian democratisation process of 1991 (see e.g. Schulz, 2012b, p. 34,77). Together, these patterns point to the importance of being able to read and write to access news via newspapers, the internet, and social media – but it also points to economic positionings that are behind access to certain education levels and media varieties (Afrobarometer, 2018a).

Two social variables that are not directly connected to the economic positioning of respondents but still structure the intersectional differentiations in the use of news media are age and gender (see Figure 13). For the different age groups, most of the survey data do not show any consistent pattern. For newspapers and internet news, there is no pattern at all, for the use of radio news it slightly increases with age, whereas the consumption of TV and social media

news slightly decreases with age. This points to differences between age groups in their media use, related to their affinity to e.g. visual and online media, and also to their educational status. These patterns, however, are much more visible if we look at gendered news consumption. Here, we can see that female respondents use all news media considerably less than male respondents (Afrobarometer, 2018a). This can come from the different amount of time women have to use media because of their multiple care and work responsibilities. But it could also be because of social norms about women using certain media to inform themselves and their participation in the public sphere more generally (see e.g. Gottlieb, 2016, p. 102f).

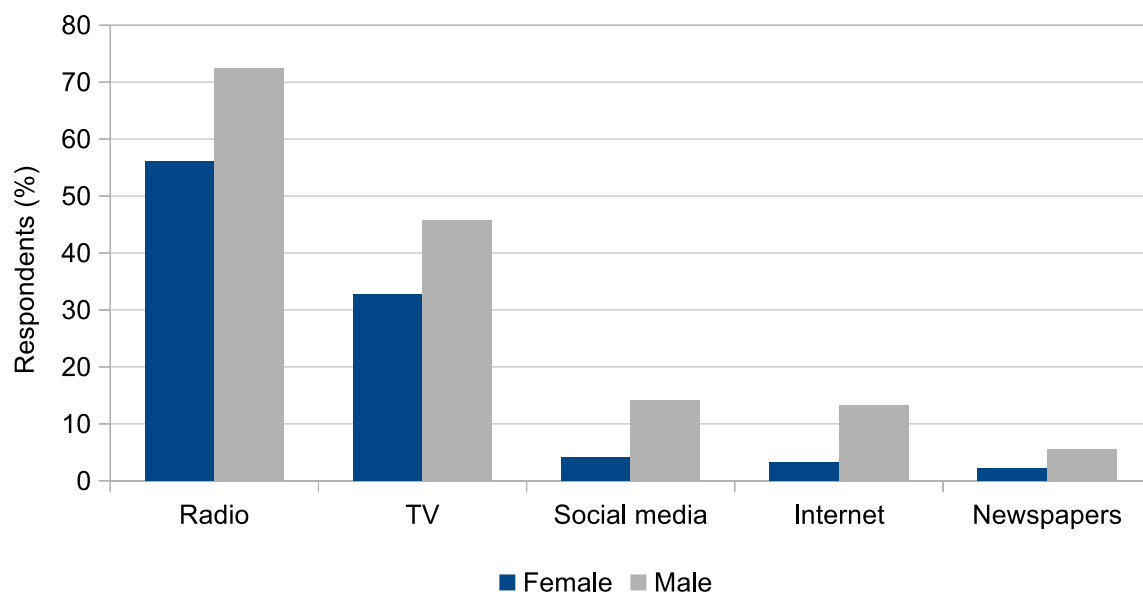


Figure 13: Gendered differences between percentages of respondents, who report using the different news sources a few times a week or daily (Source: Afrobarometer 2018, own visualisation)

Combining these different positionings, we can see that the radio seems to be the most available and accessible medium for getting news in Malian society. However, we can also see that some social groups – e.g. men vs. women, persons in urban vs. in rural areas, formally educated vs. illiterate persons – are privileged or disadvantaged across the different news sources. In that regard, some social differentiations (e.g. gender, education) seem to have more influence than others (e.g. age, region). The news sources most important for the present work – internet and specifically social media – are embedded in these patterns. Therefore, they at first sight seem not to open new possibilities for access but rather aggravate the patterns of exclusion for certain social groups (e.g. female persons not having a mobile phone

with internet access, with high lived poverty, without formal education). In that sense, they support the exclusionary pattern in the Malian news media landscape and existing infrastructural vulnerabilities for those with the most limited access. For those who do have access to these diverse news sources, however, the internet and social media offer possibilities for diversified, personalised, and easier access to information.

Economic, Social, and Political Vulnerabilities of Media Actors and Content

In addition to these instances of availability and use, the Malian news sector itself is influenced by important economic, social, and political vulnerabilities. In economic terms, the structure of the news landscape makes independent and high-quality reporting very difficult. Important aspects are that the ownership structures of news media are not really transparent, often veil hidden interests, and tend towards concentration (FES, 2016, p. 100f). Adding to the ownership structure, the advertising market as a source of income for Malian news actors is rather insufficient. On the one hand, there are not enough advertisers to support Malian media financially. On the other hand, this increases the power of the existing advertisers as they can force media actors into, for instance, exclusive contracts, or as media actors engage in self-censorship in reporting only favourably on these advertisers (FES, 2016, p. 111). The financial constraints that result from these economic difficulties have an important impact on the kind of reporting Malian media actors can provide. The FES panel experts, for instance, mention the example of reporting during the Malian crisis right after the 2012 coup and during the beginning of the international military intervention in 2013, when Malian media actors were disadvantaged in relation to better funded and better equipped international news companies that dominated reporting on the Malian crisis during that time and were even favoured by the Malian government (FES, 2016, p. 108). These considerations show that the access to information within the Malian news media sector is dependent on some dominant media actors and advertisers, which, in turn, endangers the opportunities for independent information.

In terms of social vulnerabilities, I approach the reports on the Malian media landscape with two questions: How inclusionary are Malian news media? And how free do journalists (and citizens) feel in articulating their opinions? In terms of the first question, the FES expert panel remark positively on the government efforts for linguistic diversity as, for instance, broadcasts in the different Malian national languages are scheduled on national television and radio shows (FES, 2016, p. 105f), or as several authorities have signed the *Media Charter for the*

Respect of the Image of Women and Their Right to Information and Expression (FES, 2016, p. 103f). On the other hand, however, they emphasise that these efforts are insufficient and point to persistent institutional and representational exclusion of ethnic minorities since, for instance, private stations are often dominated by one of several ethnic groups, as media used stereotypical and denigrating representations of Tuareg groups, or as minority questions are politicised by media. In addition, the panel identifies the situation as even worse for other minorities that are excluded, for instance, on the basis of their sexuality or ability, as they lack any attributed media space for articulating their concerns (FES, 2016, p. 105f).

In a similar vein, the panel bemoans the lack of female voices in Malian media, referring to female journalists as well as to women as visible objects of reporting, e.g. on newspaper front pages.¹⁰³ Moreover, the panel highlights stereotypical gender representations in religious radio stations (FES, 2016, p. 103f). This discursive discrimination also ties in with the 2016 statistical report by the National Centre for Documentation and Information on the Woman and Children (Centre National de Documentation et d'Information sur la Femme et l'Enfant, CNDIFE) that observes severe gendered biases in publications (directors and journalists), radios (managing positions, journalists, entertainers), and news-related regulatory bodies (CNDIFE, 2016, p. 127ff). The – mostly male – FES panel experts identify different reasons for such discrimination, including a lack of trained women, but also a lack of initiative from the women themselves (FES, 2016, p. 103f). However, the fact that the panel does not address more structural gendered hierarchies in the news sector and society more generally shows that the panel itself is not free from a gender bias.¹⁰⁴ This unveils that socially marginalised social groups are additionally vulnerable to being marginalised and discriminated against within the Malian news landscape.

When we ask about how free Malian journalists and citizens feel to express their opinions, the Afrobarometer survey suggests that context is crucial here. In general, many respondents express a feeling that their freedom to speak their mind is diminishing (Haidara & Isbell, 2018, p. 3). On the one hand, this has intersectional implications, as this freedom is perceived as less attainable to women, younger adults, and people living a higher poverty level, and more by men, older adults, and people not living in poverty or at a lower poverty level (Haidara & Isbell, 2018, p. 2). On the other hand, this feeling is also related to the current crisis, as many people are afraid of increasing social tensions or causing threats by terrorist

¹⁰³ Temo Tamboura (2016), on the other hand, published a study in which they emphasised the quality of awareness raising for gender-based violence by public and private Malian media actors.

¹⁰⁴ This could still be exacerbated by the gendered distribution of panellists, with only four out of 13 participants being women.

activities when articulating certain opinions. Haidara and Isbell also identify this as one reason why around 75% of the survey respondents would agree to government interventions in media to prevent harm for the Malian society (Haidara & Isbell, 2018, p. 4). And also the FES expert panel suggests that because of verbal or physical threats, fear of Islamist attacks, abuse of telephone tapping, observation of text messages, or being prosecuted in court, journalists and citizens practiced self-censorship when it comes to sensitive issues like the conflict in the North, religious issues, or issues surrounding gender equality and sexuality (FES, 2016, p. 74,81-84). It is interesting to observe, that the agreement with government interventions has even increased between 2014 and 2017 (Haidara & Isbell, 2018, p. 5).¹⁰⁵ These complex contextual implications could be one reason for an ambivalent perception of the freedom of expression as two thirds of respondents see the freedom of expression – of individuals, associations, and NGOs – and of the press increasing whereas one fifth sees them as diminishing (Haidara & Isbell, 2018, p. 2). This suggests that threats to the use of news infrastructures here are very context-sensitive and can thereby change not only for different socio-political groups, but also throughout time or according to different groups' perceptions of the overall situation.

On the legislative and political level, several indicators promise a favourable impact on the Malian news infrastructure. First, Article 7 in the 1992 Malian constitution guarantees freedom of expression and freedom of the press (FES, 2016, p. 80; Haidara & Isbell, 2018, p. 1). Additionally, several other legal instruments support a diverse and independent media landscape. Here, the FES expert panel mentions that media actors are even consulted during the legislative process, although only in its early stages (FES, 2016, p. 93). Secondly, the Malian government has ratified several regional and international instruments supporting the freedom of expression and freedom of the press – although the FES panel experts are divided in their opinion of whether this was a pure ratification issue that was not followed by any actions like monitoring, or if the government showed a genuine effort with these ratifications (FES, 2016, p. 86f). And thirdly, the Malian civil society is seen as supporting press freedom and mobilising against its violation, although tensions are reported between Malian civil society and press as well (FES, 2016, p. 92).

This is the (rather) positive side of the political dimension. On the negative side, the FES expert panel criticises the existence of legislative measures in Mali that allow for prison

¹⁰⁵ However, this could have changed dramatically considering the increasing anti-government protests and sentiments that have still been rising – and ultimately resulted in a military coup in August 2020 – since the last survey was conducted.

sentences for press offenses (FES, 2016, p. 80,85). In addition, they argue that political actors execute implicit (and sometimes overt) political pressure on publications, especially on government journals to report favourably (FES, 2016, p. 99). The panel experts report on arbitrary restrictions of press coverage such as when security forces urged a journalist to stop counting the president's number of trips (FES, 2016, p. 86). On the other, more incentive-oriented side of the influence spectrum, Siméant mentioned the per diem practice that Malian politicians use to structure journalistic reporting (Siméant, 2014, p. 66). In addition to influencing press freedom like this, the government also makes the access to certain information more difficult – although one of its goals formulated in the *Mali Numérique* document is to support the Malian media to provide interactive, real-time information through public-private partnerships (MENIC, 2014, p. 26). On the legislative side, the government can classify certain information as secret or confidential if it is related to national security (FES, 2016, p. 85). Even if there is a legislative guarantee to certain information being public and fair public access to (sometimes outdated and unreliable) statistical information, the FES panellists argue that government actors have employed this classification option frequently with other information during the past, especially during the post-2012 period, thus classifying information that would be relevant for critical reporting as confidential (FES, 2016, p. 89f). And, as mentioned above, sometimes the government also blocks certain media outlets altogether, as during the 2018 elections (Haidara & Isbell, 2018, p. 1). In addition, the FES panel criticises that the Malian state impedes Malian press freedom through financial measures, for instance, when it favoured international over national media in the distribution of the already insufficient state funding (FES, 2016, p. 102), or when granting only selective access to government advertising as possibility for publications to increase their income (FES, 2016, p. 110). All these factors can lead to acts of self-censorship and the increasing vulnerability of critical journalists and media outlets.

Together, these insights show that the Malian media landscape is potentially offering diverse formats and opinions but also that this potential diversity of information and access to it is severely endangered by the social, economic, and political contexts of the Malian media landscape. Assessing the Malian (online) news landscape through the lens of infrastructural vulnerabilities thus means acknowledging that, on the one hand, online news media operate next to a diverse group of other media that offer access to more diverse voices. On the other hand, the contextual embeddedness of these (online) media also creates dependencies as well as economic, social, and political threats for media actors and audiences. In addition, precarious situations make persons vulnerable to losing their access to (online) media altogether,

considering the intersectional dimensions in using them. On the positive side, however, online media could also be less dependent on some contextual issues such as, for instance, on national advertisers. In principle, this could allow them – within the context of their own exclusionary structures – to overcome some of these economic, social, and political vulnerabilities and offer opportunities for more independent and critical debate (for more on the realisation of such opportunities, see Subchapter 7.1 on the positioning of online news actors).

In summation, this subchapter on the access to online communication in the Malian(-diasporic) context has shown that diverse actors, positionings, and processes influence the distribution, access, and use of online communication infrastructure more generally, and of the Malian news sector more specifically. More specifically, we have seen that neoliberal, postcolonial, and patriarchal structures of domination govern this context for mobilising narratives. Considering my initial question of who is, therefore, not represented in this work, I argue that these explorations have unveiled that online news media privilege the voices of male, urban, educated and economically well-situated users as those who own internet-enabled mobile phones, use them to access the internet, and, moreover, to search for information online. However, we have also seen that digital media have become more accessible to other social groups as well, on the one hand, and that they can offer sites for critical engagement (with international actors or the state), on the other hand. Bringing these two observations together means that we can explore the socio-geographic mobilising of online news for voices that are critical of the socioeconomic and political status quo, but equally that we have to evaluate such media discourses with their potential socioeconomic bias in mind and not generalise the articulated positions as "Malian(-diasporic)" per se. Before I will turn to the discursive engagement through online news, however, I want to acknowledge that beyond this infrastructural level, the mobilising of narratives in socio-geographic terms is further influenced on the digital platform level.

6.2 Institutional Situational Context: Digital Platforms and the Mobilisation of Narratives through Media Governmentality

The last subchapter addressed moments of socio-geographic mobilisation in Malian online communication and news infrastructures as part of the broader socio-political, economic, and historical context of online news discourses about Malian transnational relations. The present subchapter then engages with the interfaces of different digital platforms as the institutional situational context of said discourses. For the present work, these platforms include the Maliweb website, Facebook, and Twitter. Following my interest in the socio-geographic mobilisation of narratives, I argue that this institutional situational context level is also a site for negotiating power relations in the making and becoming mobile of public online news discourses. I illustrate that platforms are institutional actors that govern the circulation of such public news discourses through domination of user (inter)actions, but that these users can also either comply with or resist this platform governance.

As outlined in Subchapter 4.2, I look at this understanding of platform power through technologies of governance according to Foucault, unveiling struggles between governing as "the way in which the conduct of individuals or of groups might be directed" (Foucault, 1982, p. 790) and instances of "counter-conduct" that resist such governing (Burchell et al., 2007, p. 201f). In this line of thought, I follow work on neoliberal (social) media governmentality (see e.g. Begg, 2012; Castro, 2016 in Section 4.2.1) to understand online media platforms as institutional actors that use their politico-economic and social positioning, the access to their services, and platform features as means to govern potential users. While the following explorations of platform power do not address the gendered and postcolonial manifestations of media governmentality per se, this chapter shows how gendered and postcolonial context (Section 6.2.2) and content (Section 6.2.4) are entangled with a neoliberal platform environment that is set up to rather reproduce than alleviate socioeconomic inequalities.

More specifically, I show how these struggles manifest in the circulation of (news) narratives and the construction of a news discourse, since the flow of information is one important field of influence of digital platforms that van Dijck and colleagues see as one reason for extending the focus on users from their role as consumers to their position as citizens (van Dijck et al., 2019, p. 5). In this context, it is mostly digital corporations that regulate the governance of this flow of information. Van Dijck points to struggles over public values arising from the increasing power of and governance through digital corporations and argues that "the Ameri-

can platform ecosystem hardly allows for public space on the internet and tends to favor commercial benefits and private interests over public ones" (van Dijck, 2020, p. 2). In addition, I draw from Michael Kwet's notion of digital colonialism that explains how platforms exert "privatised forms of governance" (Kwet, 2019, p. 7) in a postcolonial setting through their design and control of software, hardware, and related networking (Kwet, 2019, p. 8ff). Following these considerations, this subchapter unveils in which ways Facebook and Twitter, and – to a lesser extent Maliweb – reproduce this favouring of commercial benefits in their regulation of the circulation of online news.

In addition, I also apply an affective dimension to this media governmentality that explores how emotions become effective in the struggle over conduct and counter-conduct between platforms and users. In order to do so, I build on the concept of "affective governmentality" (Sauer & Penz, 2017, for more, see Section 4.2.3) that integrates affect to produce and commodify social relations in corporations and state administration (Sauer & Penz, 2017, p. 41f). I seek to illustrate how digital corporations and especially social networking sites use affects to further their capitalist growth through their governing of social relations as well as the information and exchange in the mediated digital public sphere. Integrating affects into the interpretation of platform governmentality through access, affordances, and advertising thus unveils instances of governance of others and the self that additionally work through the mobilisation of emotions.

In order to account for the different positionalities of the platforms treated here, this subchapter starts by introducing Maliweb as Malian-diasporic online news portal, on the one hand, and Facebook and Twitter as globally operating social networking sites, on the other hand. This introduction is followed by a description of social, technological, and regulative factors that structured the access to these platforms. Where possible, it gives some insights into the user demographics of the platforms as a whole to provide an example of who uses these platforms and who is excluded from their use. In its third section, the subchapter turns to the modalities of using the platforms themselves. It introduces connectivity as a core affordance that regulates ways of using the platforms, as well as compliant and resistant engagement with the interfaces by the users. Building on these considerations, the subchapter closes by pointing to advertisements as a further effect and vehicle of intersectional affective media governmentality that materialises on the digital platform level.

6.2.1 Introducing the Platforms: Maliweb, Facebook, and Twitter as Institutions for Mobilising Narratives

This section briefly introduces the online news portal Maliweb and the social networking sites Facebook and Twitter as media institutions that regulate the context in which news narratives circulate. Since I will engage more deeply with their diverse functions in the affordances section, the following subsections only serve to explain the institutional characterisations through which I look at these platforms.

Maliweb: The Malian-Diasporic Online News Portal

I first introduce Maliweb as a Malian-diasporic online news portal by outlining its two core functions, i.e. offering a platform for the consumption and discussion of news published by Maliweb itself, Malian, and international sources, as well as offering a platform for connecting users in Mali with users in the Malian diaspora.

Maliweb was launched in 2002 as one of the first online news portals that offered news about Mali. On a daily basis, the portal provides not only various Malian and international news articles, but also press releases by the Malian government or civil society associations, and open letters by political or academic actors. These publications inform on categories like "politics", "economy", "the North", "sports", "diverse", "world", "radio", "video", and even the Malian branch of the French horserace betting company "PMU Mali", in addition to diverse permanent and event-related dossiers.¹⁰⁶ Moreover, the Maliweb portal offers information beyond news articles, including videos and radio broadcasts, weather information, and a daily horoscope. Apart from this information, the Maliweb portal is also an important space for advertising as it provided multiple spaces for publicity on its site. And in terms of interactions, the portal offers users the chance to participate in discussion forums and in reacting to material published on Maliweb through comments (Maliweb, 2020b; for more on features for informing, interacting, and advertising, see the Section 6.2.3 on affordances).

The computational intelligence service website Wolfram|Alpha provides some statistics on the Maliweb website that are based on estimates by the US-based web traffic analysis company Alexa (Wolfram Alpha LLC, 2021c) and indicate the importance of the website: Throughout 2020, for instance, the website had between 100,000 and 200,000 page views per day with

¹⁰⁶ In addition to my observations, also the 2021 edition of the international publisher of travel guides and magazines *Petit Futé* mentions Maliweb as a site providing Malian and international information on a diverse range of issues and also stresses its weekly "press releases from the country's Council of ministers" (Petit Futé, 2021).

views sharply rising in mid-April to a range from 500,000 to almost 700,000 page views until the end of May (Wolfram Alpha LLC, 2021a). During the same period, the number of daily visitors oscillated between a little less than 40,000 to around 100,000 visitors, also with two peaks of around 130,00 visitors in May and June 2020 (Wolfram Alpha LLC, 2021b). In this timeframe, both peaks reflect a time of increasing political protest, a pattern that further confirms the importance of Maliweb for debates on (Malian) politics.

Beyond its own platform, the Maliweb website also offers links to its Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube accounts. Across these social media accounts, Maliweb describes itself as "The first portal for debate and news about Mali" (see e.g. Maliweb.net, 2020c, 2020a; YouTube, 2020, translation from French, S.H.). Most importantly, Maliweb has operated its Facebook page since August 2010 with more than 145,000 subscribers in December 2020 (Maliweb.net, 2020b), and a Twitter account since September 2011 with more than 40,000 followers in December 2020 (Maliweb.net, 2020a). As Figure 14 shows, these numbers have constantly been on the rise since May 2017, with Twitter followers even showing a six-fold increase. In addition, Maliweb has a YouTube account through which the portal mostly publishes radio broadcasts and press reviews. This account was not actively used during the beginning of my research, which is also why I did not include the YouTube account in my material. However, Maliweb had reactivated it around mid-2017 and began to use it more regularly, which resulted in 86,400 subscribers in September 2020.

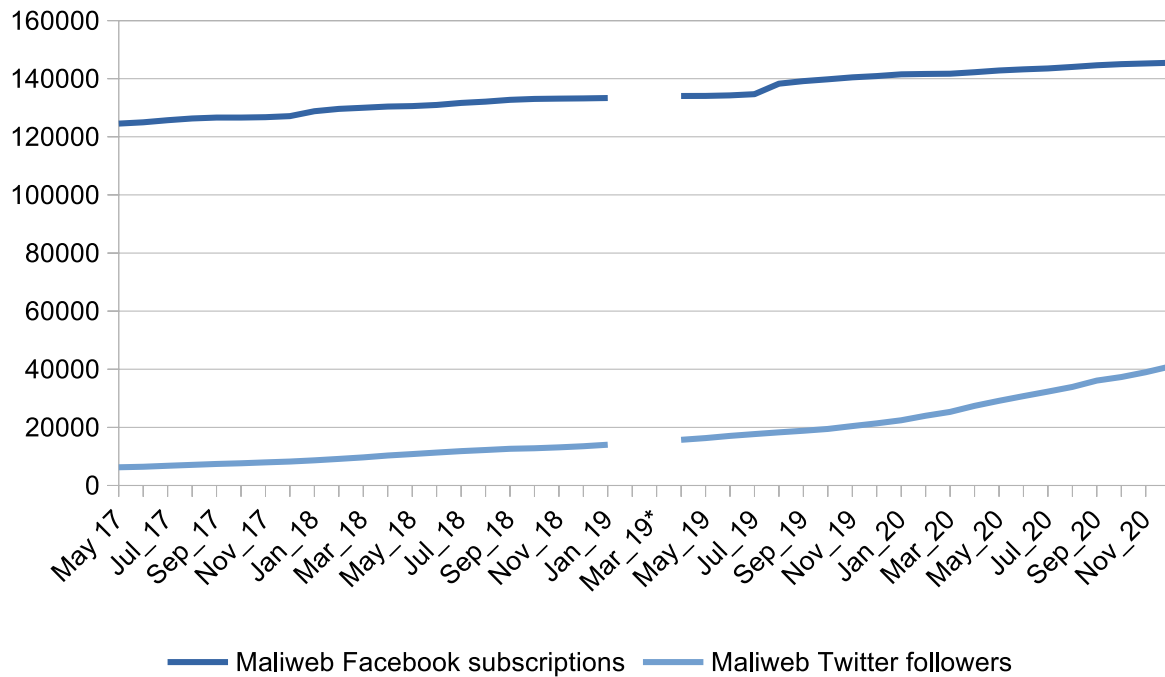


Figure 14: Development of subscriptions to and followers of the Maliweb Facebook and Twitter accounts 2017–2020 (Maliweb.net, 2020b, 2020a, no data collection in February and March 2019, own visualisation)

Moreover, Maliweb has established further connections to digital corporations that did not appear on its website. For instance, Maliweb opened a LinkedIn account, which by 27th January 2021, however, only had 51 contacts (LinkedIn, 2021). Maliweb also offered an app in the Google Play store with more than 10,000 installations by January 2021 (Google Play, 2021). In addition, the news portal also seems to have tried several other sites for networking and distributing its contents, but did not stick with some of them. For instance, Maliweb still had a Pinterest account linked to its website until 2018. While this account has not been deactivated (Pinterest, 2021), it has not been actively used since 2016. Finally, Maliweb also has a SoundCloud account with three followers and four tracks that has not been used since 2016 either (SoundCloud, n.d.).

Based on this information and my observations, I characterise Maliweb as a Malian-diasporic online news portal. On the one hand, it functions as an online news portal in the sense of the FES media barometer that distinguishes between two online news actors in the Malian news landscape: "portals and content aggregators which reutilise articles from other publications", on the one hand, and "proper online newspapers" with their own editorial office and published articles (FES, 2016, p. 97). Because Maliweb shows a mixture of having their own editorial

office that publishes articles but also publishes articles from the written press,¹⁰⁷ I treat it as an online news portal in this subchapter, but I also consider it as a publication in the Section 7.1.1 on the positioning of media outlets and journalists as part of the social situational context.

In addition to functioning as an online news portal, Étienne Damome characterises Maliweb as a website related to the African diaspora. As indications for this, he mentions that Maliweb has a designated section for immigration issues and – with its publication of many Malian print newspapers – offers a link between diasporic users and Malian media outlets (Damome, 2011, p. 148). According to his classifications of African diasporic websites along the lines of (1) their reference scheme (e.g. continental, regional, national, ethnic), (2) the diversity of their formats (e.g. general, topic-related), and (3) their operator-audience relation (e.g. personal blog, diasporic association, participatory sites) (Damome, 2011, p. 147), Maliweb is a website building on (1) a national reference scheme, (2) diverse issues, and (3) following a participative frame that is open to the wider Malian-diasporic society. However, considering the low accessibility to print media in Mali described in Section 6.1.4, I would like to argue that Maliweb could be a similarly important source of information for people living in Mali as it is for people living in the Malian diaspora. Together with the fact that the Maliweb website states having its office in Bamako and my observation of diverse Malian and internationally based consumers of Maliweb content, I do not consider Maliweb as a classical diasporic website because it does not fulfil two distinctive criteria: First, the institutional setting of Maliweb is not located outside of Africa but they state they are based in Bamako (Damome, 2011, p. 147). And secondly, the news portal is not administered by a diasporic group with one of its purposes being to facilitate the orientation of the Malian diaspora in a specific host country (Ogunyemi, 2018). However, with its slogan "*virtuellement au Mali*" (virtually in Mali), the portal explicitly (also) addresses users outside of Mali who need to practice virtual mobility to be in Mali (virtually). Moreover, as I will show in the following subchapters, Maliweb fulfils core functions ascribed to diasporic news and websites, including connecting the diaspora with their "homeland" through information and means for communication (see Section 7.1.1 on socio-geographic locations of publications, journalists, and users), fostering a sense of identity (Subchapter 7.4 on identifications through articles and comments), and

¹⁰⁷ The internationally oriented news website *Courrier international* presents Maliweb as a charitable portal in that sense: "Certain publications of the Malian written press do not have the means to operate their own websites. The portal Maliweb offers to accommodate them" (Courrier international, n.d, translation from French, S.H.).

influencing issues in the "homeland" (Section 7.6 on connections between online and offline environments) (Damome, 2011, p. 147; Ogunyemi, 2018).

Through its website but also through its connection to diverse social networking sites, Maliweb thus constitutes a contact zone between Malian and international media, users in Mali, the Malian diaspora and non-Malians worldwide. As its use of social media shows, however, Maliweb is also dependent on social networking sites for distributing its contents to a wider audience. In the following, I will briefly present Facebook and Twitter as the two sites I identified as most important in and for my research.

Facebook and Twitter: Two Social Networking Sites with Different Face(t)s

The following considerations outline that Facebook and Twitter are social networking sites that differ in their positions and influences as digital corporations in the context of neoliberal (and postcolonial) media governmentality.

The Facebook corporation describes itself as an internet company "constantly iterating, solving problems and working together to connect people all over the world through our apps and technologies" (Facebook, 2021) and whose products "empower more than 3 billion people around the world to share ideas, offer support and make a difference" (Facebook, 2020c). In contrast to this beneficial view, however, there is a much more critical perspective to this globally operating media company.¹⁰⁸

First, Facebook is a digital corporation with wide-ranging social, economic, and political power. Van Dijck counts Facebook as one of "the Big Five tech companies" (including Alphabet-Google, Amazon, Apple, Microsoft, and Facebook) within the "American platform ecosystem" that exerts important economic and social influence on US but also increasingly European societies.¹⁰⁹ According to Mark Zuckerberg in 2017, Facebook even wants to become a "social infrastructure" (quoted in van Dijck, 2020, p. 2). Castro quotes Facebook as servicing almost "a quarter of the world's population" in 2016 (Castro, 2016, p. 88). Whereas Facebook hence operates "the world's major social networking service", the company has additionally acquired companies or applications like WhatsApp, Instagram, or Messenger that furthered its importance as a platform for social interaction. Critics thus have increasingly voiced concern over its domination of the social networking market, and also their influence

¹⁰⁸ For more on the Facebook history see, for instance, Helmond and colleagues (2019).

¹⁰⁹ José van Dijck and colleagues outline that these digital corporations gain power through their global datafication and commodification that, in turn, give them control over "technical and economic standards" and "platform mechanisms" which are crucial processes for their accumulation of power (Dijck et al., 2019, p. 3).

on public discourse (van Dijck et al., 2019, p. 7). In addition, Michael Kwet argues that Facebook has a considerable market advantage through dominance in the data market, i.e. the information they have on Facebook users (Kwet, 2019, p. 13). In that vein, Facebook extended its capturing of data flows to further websites – such as Maliweb – through, for instance, the option to embed their "like" button. And the Facebook corporation gains even more momentum through its situational cooperation with the other Big Five tech companies like Apple (van Dijck et al., 2019, p. 8). Beyond their provision of a social networking platform, Kwet (2019, p. 12) shows that Facebook has even engaged in the provision of internet infrastructure itself through its "Free Basics" version that offers free internet access, but provides this access only to content that is, in turn, filtered by Facebook.

However, the dominance of Facebook goes beyond the online communication market. For instance, companies like Facebook are criticised for exerting political influence as their information flow is found to be politically biased, also because they are perceived as necessary (infra)structures by political actors (van Dijck et al., 2019, p. 10). Michael Kwet, moreover, quotes "leftist outlets" who claim that Facebook privileges "mainstream liberal media" (Kwet, 2019, p. 12). At the same time, however, Mutsvairo and Ragnedda (2019b, p. 359) criticise that despite Facebook's influence on African society and the considerable African market, the corporation would still marginalise the continent, for instance, through the location of its Africa office in Dublin, or through the lacking accountability to African courts. Therefore, authors like Dal Yong Jin (2016, p. 323) even speak of "platform imperialism", considering the global expansion of US-based, transnationally operating digital corporations like Facebook and their control over, for instance, social networking sites and smartphones. In a similar line of thought, Michael Kwet argues that corporations like Facebook are "the new imperialists in the international community" and speaks of their activities as a new – digital – form of colonialism (Kwet, 2019, p. 4). Nick Couldry and Ulises Mejias, on the other hand, see the extraction and monetisation of data by digital corporations like Facebook as a more globally effective form of data-related colonialism (Couldry & Mejias, 2019, p. 337,340; for more, see Section 3.1).

In contrast to this infrastructural importance of Facebook, Twitter is presented as a micro-blogging service with far less social, economic, and political control, declaring itself as an "open service that's home to a world of diverse people, perspectives, ideas, and information" (Twitter, 2021). However, some voices still criticise Twitter for similar influencing and dominating practices. Van Dijck also mentions Twitter as influencing public opinions through, for instance, the distribution of hate speech (van Dijck, 2020, p. 1). In addition,

Michael Kwet includes Twitter in his idea of a new form of colonisation through digital technology, arguing that both Twitter and Facebook have dominated social networking platforms (Kwet, 2019, p. 6). In this line of thought, Thomas Poell and colleagues also see an unequal relation in the connection between corporations like Facebook and Twitter, on the one hand, and newspapers, on the other hand, as the latter would be "working for" the former:

Whereas, for example, newspapers were for a long time successful non-digital two-sided markets attracting readers and advertisers (Argentesi & Filistrucchi, 2007), they are increasingly turned into platform complementors offering content to end-users through platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, who then 'monetise' this content by surrounding it with advertisements. (Poell et al., 2019, p. 7)¹¹⁰

As a way to grasp this increasing power of social networking sites, Thomas Poell and colleagues speak of platformisation as "the penetration of infrastructures, economic processes and governmental frameworks of digital platforms in different economic sectors and spheres of life, as well as the reorganisation of cultural practices and imaginations around these platforms" (Poell et al., 2019, p. 1).¹¹¹ Considering these influences, van Dijck and colleagues argue for a reconceptualisation of the power of platforms:

First, we suggest to expand the notion of consumer welfare to citizen wellbeing, hence addressing a broader scope of platform services' beneficiaries. Second, we recommend considering platform companies as part of an integrated platform ecosystem, acknowledging its interrelational, dynamic structure. And third, we shift attention from markets as level playing fields towards societal platform infrastructures where hierarchies and dependencies are built into their architecture. (van Dijck et al., 2019, p. 1)

In this line of thought, I would argue that, at the time of writing, Facebook can be seen as a platform in the sense of Poell and van Dijck, whereas Twitter is a powerful digital corporation but with less means of control and socioeconomic and political implications. Thereby, when I speak of platforms in this work, I do not refer to the meaning elaborated by Poell and van Dijck, but to the assemblage of technological interfaces, regulations, and technological features that becomes apparent (in different forms) in Facebook, Twitter, and the Maliweb website.

What I could establish for both social networking sites, however, is their influence, control, and domination in the sphere of providing information and connecting users, i.e. the spheres

¹¹⁰ Accordingly, Michael Kwet stresses the threat that Facebook (and Google) pose for African news media as they present unfair competition in the advertising market (Kwet, 2019, p. 7).

¹¹¹ For more on seeing digital platforms as infrastructures see also Jean-Christophe Plantin and Aswin Punathambekar (2019) and Tarleton Gillespie (2010).

this work focuses on. As we will address in more detail in the affordances Section 6.2.3 (and have seen in the theoretical Section 4.2.1), Castro thus describes how social networking sites like Facebook function as "typical dispositives of neoliberal governmentality" (Castro, 2016, p. 88). On the one hand, Castro also identifies social and economic dimensions of neoliberal governmentality in the functioning of social networking sites that reach into myriad parts of their users' lives in order to collect and monetise their data and thereby commercialise social relations (Castro, 2016, pp. 92–95). On the other hand, Castro also argues that users sometimes employ social networking sites in resistant ways that challenge the "current hegemony of neoliberalism" (Castro, 2016, p. 96f).

Following this ambivalent relation to power through governmentality, I conclude that Twitter and especially Facebook are no neutral social networking sites, but powerful actors that exert neoliberal and postcolonial domination in the global (increasingly mediated) society. However, in the sense of resistant use, a lot of research also shows that they are an effective means for connecting societies and for counter-hegemonic social and political change, (also) in African contexts (see e.g. Okoth, 2020; Omanga, 2019; Strand, 2019; Uwalaka et al., 2018). So, there is a tension between the powerful position of these social networking sites and their application by less powerful – media and private –actors of global society that, as we will show especially in the affordances section, are governed by these corporations, but only to a certain extent.

In the following sections, I will follow up on this governmentality through social networking sites, but also the embeddedness of Maliweb as a Southern online news actor in this global power constellation, illustrating who has access to these different platforms (Section 6.2.2), in which ways they govern the circulation of narratives (Section 6.2.3), and to which extent these circulations can include further venues for gendered and postcolonial governmentality through, for instance, advertising (Section 6.2.4).

6.2.2 Differential(ising) Access to Maliweb, Facebook, and Twitter

In addition to the general online communication and news infrastructures, also on the level of the media platforms, diverse processes of exclusion and inclusion, of regulation and resistance are in place. As I will illustrate for the Malian context, this differential access to online news through Maliweb and its presence on Facebook and Twitter manifest as a mutually influenced product of users' actual use of these platforms, the potential users' context, and the regulation

through the platforms themselves. In this context, I show how Maliweb, Twitter, and especially Facebook use the access to their platforms as a first stage for affectively governing user interactions with them, a power relation that is reinforced by difficult access conditions that potential users have to overcome in the first place in order to mobilise narratives on their own terms.

User Preferences and Structures

One aspect that highlights the differential access to online platforms and thus to mobilising narratives is the characteristics of users that appear as using these platforms.

In terms of popularity among users, the importance of Maliweb as an online news portal, for instance, becomes evident in its being mentioned by diverse sites that deal with news on Mali (AllYouCanRead, 2020; BBC, 2019). In addition, it has a growing Facebook and Twitter audience (Maliweb.net, 2020b, 2020a), and is mentioned as a site for diasporic users (Damome, 2011, p. 147). Unfortunately, I did not get access to any statistics on the user base of the Maliweb website. The following considerations thus rather focus on Facebook and Twitter.

Looking at social media use in Mali, the online statistics service *Statcounter GlobalStats* suggests that Facebook was the most important social networking sites during the time of research, most of the time directing more than 95% of traffic to other websites, compared to Twitter with less than 2% between 2017 and 2020 (statcounter, 2021). Whereas this only represents users in Mali again, I assume that Facebook is also important for diasporic users, if they are engaged with social media and online news in order to connect with Malian society. In this line of thought, Section 7.1.1, for instance, shows from my observations that the Maliweb Facebook posts are interacted with by diasporic users as well.

Looking at Facebook, the "We Are Social" platform states that 1.7 million people in Mali have used Facebook at the beginning of 2018. Although this still is a relatively small number, considering that the Malian population was 19.4 million in 2018 (INSTAT, 2018, p. 6), the fact that it increased by 31% since January 2017 suggests that the platform is becoming more important. On the other hand, the data point to a gender bias with 76% of the Facebook profiles declared as male and only 24% of the profiles declared as female (We Are Social, 2018, p. 98). In order to get a more detailed idea of who has and uses access to Facebook as the most important social media platform in Mali, in mid-2020, I explored the audience insights statistics that Facebook offers to potential advertisers as a way of exploring which

audiences they could target. In line with the "We Are Social" results and the patterns of the more general access to online communication in Mali (see Subchapter 6.1), these statistics show that Facebook users in Mali are predominantly male (76%), highly educated (5% graduate school, 69% college, 26% high school), living in Bamako,¹¹² and French speaking (94%) (Facebook, 2020a).

For Twitter users, I found even less information on their (non-US) user demographics. This could also be due to the fact that African users are still a marginal group in the global Twitter audience. A collection of social media "self-service advertising tools," however, estimates that Twitter serves 19,600 persons as the Malian "addressable advertising audience", with 16% female and 84% male users (Kepios Pte. Ltd. et al., 2019, p. 25). Considering the more elite distribution of Twitter as mentioned by, for instance, Grant Blank (2017) or Ester Hargittai (2018), we can assume that exclusionary tendencies here are still higher than on Facebook – although David Cheruiyot and Charu Uppal (2019, p. 260) mention an increasing "vibrant Twittersphere in several African countries", suggesting that the importance of Twitter in Mali as well might increase considerably in the future – a development that is also suggested by the growing number of Maliweb followers on Twitter.

Of course, these insights have to be taken with caution, considering that they result from a combination of opaque Facebook and Twitter data management and non-verifiable user profile information. Together with the information I gathered in interviews (for more on the characteristics of my interview partners see Section 7.1.1) and insights on the digital divide outlined in Section 6.1.2, however, I assume that these audience insights at least present a general pattern of access to the use of social media platforms by Malian users. Taken together, this information thus suggests that the access to online news through related social media platforms in the Malian(-diasporic) online sphere is structured through multiple positionings along the lines of gender, age, class, and location that further reproduce existing inequalities in the more general access to online communication.

Context: Infrastructures, Affordability, and Socio-Cultural Barriers

In order to explain the exclusionary access to these platforms for the mobilisation of online news, an exploration of their context of use highlights different factors that influence the

¹¹² Most "top cities" referred to Bamako or neighbourhoods in Bamako. The first city outside of Bamako was Sikasso with 2%, followed by Ségou with 1%, Kayes with 0.8%, Koutiala with 0.6%, Timbuktu with 0.6%, Mopti with 0.5%, Gao with 0.2%, Sévaré with 0.2%, and Bandiagara, Bougouni, Kidal, Kita, and Koulikoro with 0.1% (Facebook, 2020a).

unequal access to online news. Many of these factors relate closely to the dimensions I outlined in the subchapter on online communication infrastructures. Accordingly, the MiCt and FES survey also identifies a combination of electricity cuts, infrastructural limits, and low purchasing power as elements impeding the use of social networks (MiCt & FES, 2015, p. 8). Therefore, the following paragraphs only highlight some factors that became relevant for the access to specifically Maliweb, Facebook, and Twitter during my observations and interviews with users. I show that the exclusion from access to these platforms happens on diverse levels and through diverse means, but I also unveil moments in which users counter these exclusions.

Most notably, access to these platforms is limited by users' internet connections. During interviews, users mention different experiences with online connectivity. One interview partner, who has lived in Gao and Bamako, for instance, argues that the Maliweb website was rather big for the internet connection in "certain regions like Gao" (Arouna Togola). In that regard, the site favours Southern Malian users already on this very basic level (in addition to other mechanisms that we will encounter later). Other interview partners, however, mention the same for regions in Central Mali ("à l'intérieur du pays"), so that the – mostly G2 – connection beyond urban centres would impede the use of social media, especially their multimodal elements like images and videos (e.g. Bakary). In addition, several interview partners mention that they only started using social media platforms once they were accessible through their mobile phones, contrasting this to the outdated practice of visiting internet cafés with expensive but insufficient network power (Amadou Tamata, Samalbane).

Another factor limiting the access to Maliweb, Facebook, and Twitter is the affordability of online communication. Whereas some users do not mention this at all, others link their social media use to their financial capacities (Victoire Sanogo, Bakary) or highlight the lack of affordability as a core constraint for African users' access to social media, concurrently with essential expenses like food (Bintou Maiga). Especially the following response by Victoire Sanogo shows that the affordability not only influences *whether* users access online platforms but also *how* (long) they can use them:

Syntia: I apologise, I did not formulate this well...I wanted to know a little more about your conditions for using Facebook. For example, when you access the network, do you use your mobile phone or a computer; how many times per day or week are you connected, do you do this in a specific place...? Is it more clear like this?

Victoire Sanogo: Yes I connect with my mobile phone not for long because the flat rate is very expensive I pay a little of a fixed fee every day when this is finished I disconnect myself it's like this

I pay a little fixed fee every day when this is finished I stop there

So our conditions for connecting are very difficult [WhatsApp message from Victoire Sanogo, male teacher of over 50 years old in Bamako]¹¹³

However, one Bintou Maiga also stresses the desire of African (youth) users to connect via social media and to voice their opinions. She mentions strategies that potential users develop in order to circumvent affordability issues to still access social media platforms through, for instance, free Wi-Fi access points:

So sometimes it's not because they do not want to talk in the media eh! It's not that, their problem is not this. What is their problem? It's the money. Walla. If you don't have money, you cannot buy phone units. If no phone units are on your phone, you cannot go online. Do you see? So, that's why there are many young people who go to some places where there is the Wi-Fi. Like, for example, in the quartier where I grew up, at the city hall, at the city hall of the municipality where I grew up, they go every evening euh, climb the walls of the city hall to capture the Wi-Fi and to be able to speak. Walla. So, and this is, there are many people, they cannot benefit from this because, there where there is no city hall next door or where there is no, if there is no Wi-Fi close to them, they cannot allow themselves. Walla. So, it's not because they do not want to speak in the media, because they do not want to, that's not the question. The question is that they do not have the money. If they don't have the money, if they don't find money, their priority is not to buy phone units to put in your phone. Their priority is already to be able to provide food for their family [WhatsApp voice message from Bintou Maiga, female employee in her fifties in Paris]¹¹⁴

¹¹³ Syntia: Désolée, je me suis mal exprimée...je voulais savoir un peu sur votre conditions d'utiliser Facebook Par exemple, si vous accédez le réseaux, utilisez-vous votre portable ou un ordinateur; combien de temps par jour ou semaine êtes-vous connecté, c'est dans un lieux spécifique...? Est-ce que c'est plus clair comme ça? – Victoire Sanogo: Oui je me connecte avec mon téléphone portable pas pendant longtemps car le forfait coûte très cher Jpays un peu de forfait quand ça finit je me déconnecte c'est comme ça – je paie un peu de forfait chaque jour quand ça finit je m'arrête là bas – Donc nos conditions de connections sont très difficiles [WhatsApp message from Victoire Sanogo, male teacher of over 50 years old in Bamako]

¹¹⁴ Donc, des fois, c'est pas parce que ils veulent pas parler dans les médias eh! O tèt, u ka problème nin tèt o ye quoi. U ka problème ye min ye? C'est le, wari dè ye quoi. Walla. Si, ni wari t'i'i bolo, ii tèt se ka crédit san. Ni crédit t'i'i ka téléphone na, tu peux pas aller sur internet. Est-ce que tu vois? Donc, c'est qui fait que, jeuni caman bè yenni nò, u bè taga yòrò dò la, là où il y a le wifi quoi. Comme par exemple, dans mon quartier où j'ai grandi, à la mairie, à la mairie de la commune où j'ai grandi, ils vont tous les soirs euh, escalader les murs de la mairie, pour pouvoir capter de la wifi quoi, et pour pouvoir parler. Walla. Donc, et c'est, il y a beaucoup des gens, ils peuvent pas en profiter, parce que, là où il y a pas de mairie à côté ou là où il y a pas de, si la wifi n'es pas trop près de chez eux, ils peuvent pas se permettre quoi. Walla. Donc, c'est pas parce que, ils veulent pas parler des médias, parce qu'ils veulent pas, c'est pas la question. La question est que wari dè t'u bolo quoi. Ni wari t'u bolo, ni u ye wari sòrò, u ka priorité tèt eh crédit san ni ii ka kè téléphone na. U ka priorité ye pouvoir déjà donner manger à la famille [WhatsApp voice message from Bintou Maiga, female employee in her fifties in Paris]

Taken together, this also reinforces the notion that location matters, in this case being close to municipality structures that have an internet connection, not just for a suitable connection, but also for solving financial connection problems. Moreover, as the following evaluation by Sirani indicates, the difference between access options to social media between users living in Mali and those living in the Malian diaspora still reinforces the inequalities in contributing to online discourses among these actors.

Or, no, I have the connection, up until now, I have not had any connection problems with Facebook. Only when I go on holidays to Mali where I do not have the connection. The unit-based connection, with that, I am not on Facebook often. [Phone interview with Sirani, female company employee in her forties in Marseille]¹¹⁵

In addition to these general network and affordance issues, one user also mentions the government social media cuts prior to the 2018 elections as one example for not being able to connect to Twitter (Bakary).

Another contextual dimension that limits the access of some to online news and especially social media is the danger of socio-cultural conflict. Most notably, this seems to work on the gender level. Whereas none of my interview partners mentions this directly, I found it revealing that the only female users that reacted to my interview requests are living in the Malian diaspora. In addition, they were the only ones providing a detailed account of being criticised by personal acquaintances for their engagement on Facebook, although they frame this more as a result of their being in the diaspora and thus living in different – non-Malian – realities connected to different values (Bintou Maiga, Sirani). Moreover, Samalbane assumed that I was not that frequently on Facebook because my husband would not approve of it. This ties in with social debates on gendered media use in Mali (see e.g. Heywood & Ivey, 2021; Schulz, 2012a). It also relates to a broader unease with social media in Malian society that I observed in various critical articles that questioned its influence on social values and norms. Especially this connection to values and norms, however, is an important element in gendered hierarchies in Malian society that are being re-interpreted and partly re-enforced in the light of neoliberal changes in material and income-related gender relations (see e.g. Schulz, 2012b, pp. 66–69). Here as well, Bintou Maiga elaborates on the conflicts that sometimes emerge between those using social media and those who see this form of expression as a danger to social values:

¹¹⁵ Ou, non, j'ai la connexion, jusqu'à présent, j'ai pas eu des soucis de connexion avec Facebook. Apart quand je vais en vacance au Mali où je n'ai pas la connexion. La connexion unité, là je suis pas souvent sur Facebook. [Phone interview with Sirani, female company employee in her forties in Marseille]

Because even if I, I visit social media, I have a friend with me, who has no means, who has no phone, he only needs to hear something I talk about with my friends online, and indeed, he will not like it. He will tell me, but listen, only because you have a mobile phone, you should not, there is some talk that you should not say, and because it is not proper. Because there are things, you can say something, but you cannot say it all. Have you understood? Because it is not appropriate, he will say you say some things and leave the rest inside you. [WhatsApp voice message from Bintou Maiga, female employee in her fifties in Paris]¹¹⁶

Also related to the socio-cultural dimension is the literacy of potential audiences of online news. In principle, the access to online news (articles) is impeded by the necessity to at least be able to read the respective articles. But Maliweb, for instance, also offers videos and radio press reviews. Together with the internet connection issue (i.e. the fact that videos require a better connection), this could explain why radio reviews are very popular on Facebook with up to several thousand views in relation to a few dozen comments or at most, a view hundred likes in reaction to article posts. In addition, this could be influenced by the traditional importance of and thus affinity for the radio in Malian society as mentioned in Sections 6.1.1 and 6.1.4.

The final contextual issue I want to address here and that is linked to literacy and also to postcolonial persistencies in online communication and social media is that of language (Mutsvairo & Ragnedda, 2019a, p. 14). Whereas this is equally an issue on Facebook and Twitter, I will focus here on manifestations of language(s) on Maliweb as an exemplary way of negotiating the access of audiences with different language capacities. In the Maliweb website environment, several elements document the ongoing socio-cultural importance of the French language. The main language of Maliweb is French, which reflects the persistent importance of the former colonial language as Mali's official language, dominating in law, politics, education, and the media (Skattum, 2008, p. 116). Accordingly, almost all articles, advertisements, and most comments are written in French. And even the Maliweb terms of use urged users to write in French: "The User also undertakes to: (...) Write their messages in French and small letters" (Maliweb, 2020a, translation from French, S.H.).¹¹⁷ This indicates postcolonial influences that intersect with exclusions based on class, especially since mostly the higher classes in Mali use French in everyday life. Rainer Tetzlaff, for instance, mentions

¹¹⁶ Parce que, même si moi, je vais sur les réseaux sociaux, j'ai un ami avec moi, qui n'a pas les moyens, qui n'a pas de téléphone, il suffit qu'il entende quelque chose que je parle avec mes amis sur internet, et ça va pas le plaire en fait. Il va me dire, mais écoute, c'est parce que téléphone b'ii bolo, ii kana, kuma dò bè yen nò, ii kana to k'olu fò, et parce que o man nyi quoi. Ko dòw bè yen, ii b'a, bè dò fo, mais ii kana a bèè fo quoi. Est-ce que ii y'a faamu. Komin an ka kan, a b'a fo ii bè dò fo ka dò to ii kònò. [WhatsApp voice message from Bintou Maiga, female employee in her fifties in Paris]

¹¹⁷ "L'Utilisateur s'engage en outre à : (...) Rédiger ses messages en langue française et en lettres minuscules" (Maliweb, 2020a).

the French language as an important ruling instrument among the French centralised governance modalities. He outlines that this emphasis on the French language also fragmented colonised societies into elites who managed to be considered as "évolués"/"developed" due to their language competence, and the rest of the population, a differentiation that also hindered post-colonial nation building (Tetzlaff, 2018, p. 89ff). On the other hand, Ingse Skattum points out that for some social groups, the official language also functions as an alternative to dominant national languages like Bambara (Skattum, 2008, p. 115).

Some website features, however, also challenge the primary role of French language. As mentioned above, Maliweb has offered a daily radio news review in Bambara since October 2017 (e.g. Maliweb, 2017b), which is also posted regularly on Facebook and Twitter. Articles with headlines or parts of their text written in Bambara appear, albeit rarely (e.g. Bolly, 2017). In addition, Maliweb publishes a weekly "image of the day" that mostly consisted of a photo collage of Malian and international politicians with Bambara speech bubbles that are translated in French in footnotes. So here, Bambara is clearly the primary language compared to French. In addition, some advertisements consist of a mix of French and Bambara and the political activist Ras Bath also addresses his audience in some Bambara videos distributed on Maliweb (e.g. Maliweb, 2017a). And while most users write their comments in French, some also use Bambara, other Malian national languages, English, or they mix different languages. These instances of non-French language use thus enable users, media actors, and advertisers to counter French centrality and become more inclusive for non-French speaking users. However, even the focus on Bambara also excludes Malian(-diasporic) users who speak neither of the two languages and reproduces a Southern Malian dominance. The languages of (the context of) mobilised narratives thus negotiate the access to these narratives on classed and postcolonial levels.

In addition to language and literacy, however, also digital literacy is a limiting socio-cultural contextual factor in the use of online platforms. Amadou Tamata outlines this especially for Twitter, which he perceives as a more complex platform than Facebook:

What is it that discourages some from using Twitter? Because it is often difficult to have followers on Twitter. Well, you can be interested in certain things, but if you don't know many of your acquaintances are not on Twitter, then it's difficult to have many followers on Twitter. Walla. (...) And, beyond this, the people do not master Twitter that well. (...) That's true, the people do

not master how to tweet, how to re-tweet, (...) how to tweet, walla. [Phone interview with Amadou Tamata, male researcher in his thirties in Bamako]¹¹⁸

Whereas this could relate to the fact that Facebook has been in use for a longer time and that people are just more used to it, Twitter also seems to be a site that appears to be more public and less private than Facebook, or at least is oriented in this way in its self-presentation as global public sphere (Twitter, 2021).

In addition, the experience recalled by Issa Kamara unveils how access to the internet, electricity, affordability, and language can interact in different ways, depending on the socio-geographic position of the potential user. However, in line with research on digital media use by refugees and migrants (see e.g. Almenara-Niebla, 2020; Dhoest, 2016; Georgiou, 2012), this account also shows how important the connectivity to social media platforms like Twitter can be, especially in diasporic situations.

Syntia: ... and was your way of using Twitter different when you were in Algeria and Libya? If yes, could you tell me a little more about how it was different? Thank you

Issa Kamara: It's not too different. In Algeria, the internet connection is very good, less expensive and I had more time there than when I was in Libya and here in Mali. In Libya, Trables particularly, the problem is that there are always power blackouts, and without electricity, there was neither network nor internet. The internet connection is slow in several quarters and it was difficult to view the pictures on Twitter. In Mali, I use it well but I do not rt [re-tweet] and post a lot, the only problem here is that the internet fee is expensive. In Algeria, is more usable than Libya and Mali. (...)

Syntia: I see, thank you for explaining! And when you can or could not use Twitter because the internet connection is not good or too expensive, how is this for you?

Issa Kamara: There, I kept thinking about that it's only temporary. That's what put me at ease. At a time there without connection you are out of the world, being in Libya particularly (...) which means that you have no access to anything, you don't go out, the journals are in Arabic and English that we do not speak and understand. [WhatsApp conversation with Issa Kamara, male electrician and construction worker in his twenties in Bamako]¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ Ça qui décourage un peu les uns sur Twitter, c'est quoi? Parce que, c'est difficile d'avoir souvent des followers sur Twitter. Bon, tu peux t'intéresser à certaines choses, mais quand tu connais pas beaucoup des connaissances ne sont pas sur Twitter, donc c'est difficile d'avoir beaucoup des followers sur Twitter. Walla. (...) Et, en dehors de ça, les gens ne maîtrisent pas trop Twitter. (...) Ça c'est vrai, les gens ne maîtrisent pas comment tweeter, comment re-tweeter, (...) comment tweeter, walla. [Phone interview with Amadou Tamata, male researcher in his thirties in Bamako]

¹¹⁹ Syntia: ...et comment tu utilises Twitter, c'était différent quand tu as fait l'Algérie et la Lybie? Si oui, pourrais-tu me dire un peu plus comment c'était différent? Merci – Issa Kamara: Y'a pas assez de différence. En Algérie, la connexion internet est très bonne, moins chère et j'avais plus de temps là-bas que quand j'étais en Libye et ici au Mali. En Libye, Trables précisément le problème est qu'il y'a tjrs coupure de courant, et sans

In contrast to these multiple exclusions, social networking sites portray themselves as alleviating exclusion from digital platform use. The Facebook Terms of Service, for instance, explicitly highlight how Facebook addresses some of these access factors by providing their services without asking for fees (for the exchange of personal data, see more on the power dimension in this below), by using innovative technology that facilitates the use of Facebook for e.g. differentially enabled persons, or by operating globally through their international data management system (Facebook, 2019). Thereby, the Facebook terms of use portray an image of the corporation as globally connective, inclusive, and open to everyone. We will see, however, that this image of beneficially inclusive platforms does not cohere with other regulations that structure the access and the use of Facebook, but also of Twitter and Maliweb.

Affective Governing of Access (for Data) through the Platforms' Terms of Use¹²⁰

This different image already starts with the regulation of access to Maliweb, Facebook, and Twitter that define criteria for including and excluding potential audiences. Here, we can see that Facebook has the most elaborate regulations. Through these regulations, and especially through the regulations relating to data generation, digital platforms exert their initial attempts at affectively governing users, as they convey feelings of fear of being excluded from as well as feelings of hope of being included in an exchange of information and opinions. They do so by regulating who can engage on their platforms and thus mobilise narratives socio-geographically.

For all three platforms – the Maliweb website, Facebook, and Twitter – the basic criteria for being able to use their services is to agree to their terms of use and their conditions (Twitter, 2020c, p. 3,12). For Facebook, this includes the Terms of Service and the Data Policy as well as their renewed versions (Facebook, 2018). For Twitter, this also requires agreeing to

courant y'avait pas de réseau ni internet. La connexion internet est lente dans plusieurs quartier et c'était difficile d'afficher les images sur Twitter. Au Mali, j'utilise bien mais j'fais pas bcp rt et post, le seul problème ici est que le forfait internet coûte chère. L'Algérie, c'est utilisable que la Libye et le Mali. (...) – Syntia: Je vois, merci d'expliquer! Et quand tu ne peux ou pouvais pas utiliser Twitter parce que la connexion internet est pas bonne ou trop chère, c'est comment pour toi? – Issa Kamara: J'avais en tête là-bas que c'était momentané. C'est ça qui me mettais à l'aise. À un moment là bas sans connexion tu es hors du monde, étant en Libye précisément (...) c'est à dire tu n'as accès à rien, tu sors pas, les journaux sont en arabe et anglais que nous ne parlons et comprenons pas. [WhatsApp conversation with Issa Kamara, male electrician and construction worker in his twenties in Bamako]

¹²⁰ In the following, I use the term "terms of use" to include all the different regulative documents I analysed, and use the specific designations if speaking about the specific documents of Facebook (Terms of Service, Data Policy, Community Standards), Twitter (Twitter User Agreement, Privacy Policy, The Twitter Rules), and Maliweb (General Terms of Use / Conditions Générales d'utilisation de nos Services; Code of Ethics / Notre charte d'éthique).

"applicable laws, rules and regulations" (Twitter, 2020c, p. 6,15). For Maliweb, this means agreeing to their legal terms, i.e. the conditions of use (Maliweb, 2020a). In addition, Maliweb and Twitter include age as an access criterion. The Twitter User Agreement and Facebook Terms of Service state that users have to be at least 13 years old (Facebook, 2019; Twitter, 2020c, p. 3,12).¹²¹ And the Twitter Privacy Policy additionally mentions that users have to be legally old enough to consent to the data processing or having a guardian do it for them (Twitter, 2020c, p. 36). And also the Maliweb General Terms of Use emphasise that minors could only use the site with the permission of their parents or legal guardians, who also are responsible for the minors using the site in accordance with the Terms of Use (Maliweb, 2020a).

Gaining Access Through Creating an Account

Most importantly for governing access to their services, however, the platforms suggest that potential users create accounts, although they do so with different levels of urgency and social control. For the Maliweb platform, I observed that it is possible to register on the website by providing a username and an email address, but this is not a necessary condition for using any of its basic functions that relate to online news like reading articles or posting comments. In addition, it is possible to give any number of personal details when creating a Maliweb account, but none of these details are requested by Maliweb, and as far as I have come to know, this information is also not publicly visible, at least not on the article level.¹²² As an additional indication for their different business model, the Maliweb General Terms of Use even discourage users from providing their "real" identities or offering any personal information in order to protect their data (Maliweb, 2020a).

For Facebook, on the other hand, creating an account and providing personal data is listed as a rather strict requirement, as in their Terms of Service, this is the first condition for using Facebook. Moreover, the Facebook Terms of Service and Community Standards repeatedly urge users to use their real name and true information about themselves in order to create an "authentic" environment for interaction, and even threaten that users might have to change their user name if it is claimed by another user and not related to the name they "use in every

¹²¹ This seemed to be an important criterion since Facebook pages also had to provide for additional technological securitisation to comply with existing laws in that sense (Facebook, 2020d).

¹²² This could have been different for discussion forums, but since they had not been actively used for years, I did not explore them in more depth.

day life" (Facebook, 2019, 2020b). This social control of data generation is closely connected to an affective appellation to users as responsible and accountable persons:

Who can use Facebook – When people stand behind their opinions and actions, our community is safer and more accountable. For this reason, you must: Use the same name that you use in everyday life. Provide accurate information about yourself. Create only one account (your own) and use your timeline for personal purposes. (Facebook, 2019)

Thus, Facebook emphasises the importance of users representing authentic identities of "real" individuals – a requirement that might be influenced as much by its promise to connect people as by its business model to provide its clients with information viable for personalised advertising (see e.g. Castro, 2016; van Dijck, 2020).

The Twitter Privacy Policy, in turn, approaches users' datafication by appealing to users' needs for expressing themselves, governing through a hope of fulfilling this need. Interestingly, Zajc (2015, p. 43) identifies authenticity as "one of the key techniques of Twitter users", thereby raising questions about different – essentialising vs. constructivist – meanings of authenticity as interpreted differently by Facebook and Twitter. In that vein, the Twitter User Agreement mentions creating an account as optional, as the terms stated explicitly that audiences could also use certain services like searching and viewing public content without creating an account (Twitter, 2020c, p. 22). In addition, the Twitter Privacy Policy even suggests that users can also employ pseudonyms or create multiple accounts to represent multiple facets of their personalities: "Your display name and username are always public, you can use either your real name or a pseudonym. You can also create and manage multiple Twitter accounts, for example to express different parts of your identity." (Twitter, 2020c, p. 22). Although the Privacy Policy and Terms of use emphasise that users need an account to be active, i.e. to upload or share content on Twitter (Twitter, 2020c, p. 8,22), the personal data Twitter requires for creating an account are much less strictly defined than the ones Facebook required: For Twitter, an account name, a username, a password, and viable contact information (email or phone number) are enough to sign up (Twitter, 2020c, p. 22).¹²³

However, the Privacy Policy states that Twitter might collect further information on, for instance, the location of users to provide their services (Twitter, 2020c, p. 26), log data that would be stored for 18 months (Twitter, 2020c, p. 34) and – as the Twitter User Agreement mentions – potentially transferred and processed by Twitter and its partners in Ireland, the US, and other countries (Twitter, 2020c, p. 4). Beyond their account information, users who

¹²³ If some user aims to use Twitter in the name of an organisation or business, however, the Terms of Use require that they are authorised to do so (Twitter, 2020c, p. 3,12).

want to use Twitter thus also have to agree to this additional collection and sharing of information, the release of which, in this case, is governed by mobilising hope for meaningful expression through public exchange.

Gaining Access Through Agreeing to Data Collection and Processing

In addition to the creation of accounts, platform providers govern data extraction by appealing to feelings of obligation and hope for useful exchange and information. In that vein, the Facebook and Twitter terms also mention the need for users to agree to their data being processed. In general, the platform providers state in their terms of use – most notably in their data policies that users have to accept when using the services – that they collect certain (personal) user data for certain purposes, which make the users identifiable to the providers to different extents. For the online news portal Maliweb, these personal data mainly include data gathered from users' patterns of using the website and the information provided by users themselves (Maliweb, 2020a) – which in most cases are very limited, only including a user name and, if the users have chosen to add this to their comments, an email address. The social networking sites Facebook and Twitter, on the other hand, state to collect further information provided by, for instance, users' devices, their interactions on and beyond the platforms, and third-party actors like advertisers, in addition to information provided by users in their posts, tweets, profiles, and accounts (Facebook, 2018; Twitter, 2020c, pp. 22–29). And the Twitter Privacy Policy states that this information could also be combined to provide a more comprehensive picture of users (Twitter, 2020c, p. 29). This collection and combination of data shows especially well how these social networking sites do not limit their datafication measures to the use of their platforms but extend it in a biopolitical way to a myriad of fields of users' everyday lives that unfold in digital media environments but are also connected to their lives beyond digital media.

The Facebook Data Policy and Twitter Privacy Policy, then, provide a list of purposes for which they collect said information in order to justify this collection. This list includes the provision of personalised and secure services and supporting product research and development by Facebook and Twitter themselves, offering evaluations to advertisers and supporting third partners (such as service providers but also legal institutions) with aggregated information, and serving the users' or public interest through personalised information and support for research (Facebook, 2018; Twitter, 2020c, p. 31f). In addition, the Facebook terms emphasise that this transfer of data could also enhance a "consistent experience" across

devices or Facebook products or even help users with using their services (Facebook, 2018). Moreover, the Twitter terms mention answering to user requests as a purpose for collecting data on users (Twitter, 2020c, p. 24). Both, Facebook and Twitter, however, also state their efforts to protect users' personal information (Facebook, 2018; Twitter, 2020c, pp. 33–37). In addition, they affirm that they would delete data when they are not necessary anymore, when users delete their accounts, or after an automatic period (e.g. Facebook deleting search history logs after 6 months, Twitter deleting log data after 18 months) (Facebook, 2018; Twitter, 2020c, p. 34). Whereas this list shows the social networking sites' intent to also display their collection of data as in the users' or even public's interest and thereby gain users' trust in handling their personal data, we should not forget that datafication is one of the core economic imperatives for these companies.

The postcolonial context of this work makes questions surrounding data collection by Western digital corporations like Facebook and Twitter an especially charged issue. This is because, as Engin Isin and Evelyn Ruppert (2019) outline in their chapter on postcolonial data politics, data collection has been a biopolitical colonial instrument for controlling and mapping colonised societies. Moreover, they argue that current digital data projects can still be seen in this light as a postcolonial governing mechanism. In addition, Payal Arora (2019) identifies (post)colonial structures in differentiated understanding of and prerequisites for privacy.

We can see this geopolitical component, for instance, in the platform terms of use, as some users experience more protection of their data through international regulations than others. The Facebook terms, for example, grant a special – legally required – protection (of sensitive information) to EU citizens and also their special rights through the GDPR (Facebook, 2018). And the Twitter Privacy Policy mention more privacy rights for EU and EFTA citizens (e.g. not collecting browsing histories) as well as their adherence to the EU-US and Swiss-US privacy shield (Twitter, 2020c, p. 28,36). These patterns suggest that the personal information of some citizens – mainly from Western countries – is more protected and more belonging to themselves than that of others.

This further emphasises the need to consider datafication as linked to postcolonial governance. But – as van Dijck (2020) and also Castro (2016) show – the datafication of platforms is also a central issue in the overall neoliberal governance of social media platforms. The data generation through user accounts thus allows for observing the confluence of postcolonial and neoliberal affective governmentality in the circulation of Malian-diasporic online news as the

persistence of colonial structures is reinforced through neoliberal power relations. With their dominant position in relation to (postcolonial) states as well as to users depending on these platforms for information and communication, social networking sites employ affective technologies of governance that subject users to a regime of datafication. Moreover, they combine these technologies of governance with affective technologies of self-governance through which users should identify with and act according to their subjectification as data generating entities.

Keeping Access Through Compliant Behaviour

In addition to the affective governing through granting access, the digital platforms also govern users through the fear of being excluded again, i.e. through the deactivation or blocking of their accounts, in case of non-compliant behaviour. Whereas the following also pertains to the governing of interactions (see Section 6.2.3), it also is an important moment in the affective platform governing through access.

In that vein, whereas Twitter only mentions the legal barring from receiving services as a criterion for not granting access to potential users (Twitter, 2020c, p. 3,12), Facebook goes in greater detail here. In their Terms of Service and Community Standards, the list of persons who are not eligible to use the Facebook services include those who do not comply with the Facebook terms or policies, convicted sex offenders, mass or multiple murderers, or individuals and organisations that were engaged in human trafficking, terrorism, or further criminal activities (Facebook, 2019, 2020b). This emphasises the authority of the Facebook regulations, placing them on the same level as severe criminal activities. The Maliweb group, on the other hand, does not specify any criteria that would preventively ban potential audiences from using their services.

In addition to these absolute exclusion criteria, all three platforms' terms of use indicate that certain user behaviours are not acceptable if users wanted to use the platforms. For Maliweb, this is stated as the requirement that users should not engage in any activities that would cause harm to Maliweb or other users (Maliweb, 2020a). For Facebook and Twitter, their terms state that behaviours that breach these terms could lead to different levels of sanctions, from warnings to the suspension or even termination of users' accounts. In the Facebook Terms of Service, reasons for suspending or terminating an account include violating the terms, privacy policies, laws, or third party rights, so this is rather focused on adhering to existing regulations (Facebook, 2019). In addition, the Community Standards mention that the level of

sanctions does not only depend on the severity of the violation, but also on the user's history on the platform (Facebook, 2020b). This could be seen as a further attempt at disciplining users into compliant behaviour (for more, see Section 6.2.3). The Twitter User Agreement additionally points to economic reasons as they mention several grounds for such sanctions, including violating the user agreement, creating a risk or possible legal exposure, engaging in unlawful conduct, showing prolonged inactivity or no commercial viability (Twitter, 2020c, p. 9,18). Accordingly, also among the users that have interacted with the Tweets assessed for this project, I came across several accounts that have been blocked for not obeying the Twitter rules.

However, the platforms can stop providing their services for other reasons as well. The Twitter User Agreement mentions a number of reasons for which they could end the contract temporarily or permanently, including, for instance, limitations of storage, or user inactivity (Twitter, 2020c, p. 6,15). In some ways, this creates a feeling of constant potential loss and precarious access to the Twitter service, affecting users as participants in a capitalist project. The explanation of potential reasons for terminating Twitter accounts, for instance, interweaves legal and corporate standards:

We may suspend or terminate your account or cease providing you with all or part of the Services at any time for any or no reason, including, but not limited to, if we reasonably believe: (i) you have violated these Terms or the Twitter Rules and Policies or Periscope Community Guidelines, (ii) you create risk or possible legal exposure for us; (iii) your account should be removed due to unlawful conduct, (iv) your account should be removed due to prolonged inactivity; or (v) our provision of the Services to you is no longer commercially viable. (Twitter, 2020c)

However, the terms of use also mention that users as well can delete or deactivate their Facebook and Twitter accounts. In doing so, however, they at the same time point to the losses that this termination entails. In that sense, the terms of use suggested that the use of these platforms was not just about the platform, but also about access to something bigger. The Facebook Terms of Service, for instance, state that users then would choose not to be part of "the Facebook community" anymore, adding a social connectivity element (Facebook, 2019). In addition, the Facebook Data Policy warn that users would lose all posted content if they delete their account and suggest just deactivating accounts as an alternative (Facebook, 2018). For Twitter, the User Agreement mention the possibility to deactivate the account (Twitter, 2020c, p. 8,17) whereas the Privacy Policy still informs of the possibility to reactivate the account for 30 days (Twitter, 2020c, p. 34).

Together, this regulation of access to the different platforms points toward forms of affective governmentality in the interplay between differentially positioned platform regulations and – their enabling and constraining of – users' decisions. Considering the infrastructural, economic, and social difficulties several users experience when accessing digital platforms, the affective governing through the fear of being excluded from and the hope in and loyalty for being included in these forms of information and communication could be even more effective. In terms of the institutional situational context of Malian-diasporic online news, however, the power of platforms does not stop at their regulation of access. As the next section outlines in more detail, Maliweb, Facebook, and Twitter also regulate the interactions on their platforms that, in turn, influence the socio-geographic mobilising of narratives between Malian-diasporic and (inter)national media actors and users.

6.2.3 Platform Features and Connectivity as Their Core (Imagined) Affordance for Governing the Use of Maliweb, Facebook, and Twitter

After outlining some factors that influence and affectively govern the access to the Malian-diasporic online news discourse explored in this work, the situational context on the platform level is also influenced by the interfaces and their structuring of user interactions with content and with each other. By looking at interactions through the platform interfaces, I demonstrate that this is another level on which gendered and postcolonial governmentality becomes effective. Research on the biased nature of algorithms, for instance, has shown that historical, racialised, classed, and gendered inequalities persist in these algorithms and further reproduce inequalities on multiple levels such as education, employment, the justice system, advertising, up to civic engagement through, for instance, online petitions (Buolamwini & Gebru, 2018; Eubanks, 2012; O'Neil, 2016).¹²⁴ In relation to mobilising narratives, Cecilia Strand (2019, p. 239) identifies this reliance on algorithms as a central problem in the equal access to online discourses – in her case on Twitter – as users' economic and social resources also influence more or less privileged positioning through the algorithms, a process she calls "asymmetric visibility."

Drawing inspiration from such algorithmic inequalities – whose exploration goes beyond the scope of this work – I argue that also an affordance-based analysis unveils how neoliberally oriented, assumedly egalitarian platform features reproduce gendered and postcolonial

¹²⁴ The negative impact of these algorithms on a big part of marginalised peoples' lives leads Cathy O'Neil (2016, p. 3) to call algorithmic models "Weapons of Mass Destruction".

structures, through the affective governmentality by (Western) digital platforms. Therefore, I demonstrate how "imagined affordances" (Nagy & Neff, 2015) of these platforms' features structure the movement of narratives between diverse actors in diverse social and geographic positions, using connectivity as an example for a core affordance in this context. Van Dijck outlines how digital platforms engineer new forms of connectivity by creating weak ties between human and non-human actors, between individuals and groups, that correspond to essential human needs for exchange, information, and self-expression (van Dijck, 2013, p. 142). In relation to media governmentality, we will use an affordance perspective to explore how digital platforms govern this engineering of connectivity through a combination of social rule and technologies of the self. In addition, we will explore in which ways users resist to this governance.

We will thus establish through connectivity not only how the neoliberal rule of digital platforms leads to forms of self-governance, but also how we can also see resistance to this governmentality in user interactions. Moreover, zooming into values shows how these forms of neoliberal control, techniques of the self, and resistance to it, are negotiated between different actors. In this context, an affective governmentality perspective further enhances the notion of imagined affordances, not only seeing how users develop affects in relation to certain technological features (as assumed by the imagined affordances concept, see Section 4.4.3), but also how platform operators govern interactions with these features through appealing to affects of users. As I will demonstrate in relation to connectivity, this affective governmentality works essentially through feelings of fear of being excluded, of social obligation, and hope for inclusion, as also observed by Castro:

The injunction of connectivity refers to the social pressure not only to be registered on and to log in to networks, but also actively participate in them. Given that certain types of interactions occur only in that space, whoever remains on the outside is condemned to certain isolation. Being permanently connected is the necessary condition both to monitor what happens to others and to report one's own experiences from one moment to the next. (Castro, 2016, p. 89)

Building on the analyses of my observation protocols, the platforms' terms of use, and interviews with users of the platforms, this section thus explores how (affective) media governmentality materialises through connectivity as platform affordance, its imagination and regulation through operators, and user imaginations of and interactions with them.

Establishing Connectivity: From a Technological Parameter to an Imagined Affordance

Generally speaking, connectivity can describe the state of or ability to construct connections. In the context of digital platforms that are governing the circulation of online news, however, I will show that connectivity goes beyond technological parameters and can be seen as an affordance.

The technological genre analysis (see Section 5.5.2 and the Appendix) suggests that connectivity through Maliweb, Facebook, and Twitter is a complex endeavour that materialises on three levels. First, Dorostkar and Preisinger's schema of computer- or internet-mediated communication (Dorostkar & Preisinger, 2017a, p. 763) shows how the different platforms Maliweb, Facebook, and Twitter offer different forms of connecting users to content and to each other, as the circulation of online news between Maliweb, Facebook, and Twitter leads to a circulation of narratives between different platforms with different forms of communication (news website, social networking sites), and with different designs and genres materialising in their articles, posts, and comments. Secondly, the analysis of general communication parameters (such as conceptual and semiotic communication mode, or durability), adapted from Dorostkar and Preisinger (2012, p. 11ff) as well as from Gruber (2008, p. 364ff), unveils many similarities as well as increased possibilities for the social networking sites, for instance, when it comes to the semiotic communication in comments that can occur through texts and emoji on Maliweb, and through texts, emoji, audio, video, and images on Facebook. And third, further design-specific parameters according to Dorostkar and Preisinger's (2012, p. 14f) display of parameters developed by Herring (2007) highlight the institutional framework that is created through technological features, rules, and norms as a framework for interactions of operators, journalists, and users.

These design-specific parameters suggest that the platforms through which narratives circulate not only enable this circulation but also regulate them through technological settings, social norms, and legal means. In order to explore this regulatory moment in technological parameters of Maliweb, Facebook, and Twitter in more depth, the following affordance analysis shows that these features are not neutral technological or legal parameters that allow for an equal discursive participation for all potential users. As a concept that focuses on the relations between technology and their use by different actors, affordances rather unveil struggles over (self-)governance through online (news) media that manifest, for instance, in certain values connected to and interpretations of using online news portals and related social media accounts. As the theoretical assumptions on affordances have shown (see Section

4.4.3), I thus do not assume a deterministic relation between these features' functions and their effects, but I take into account how they were imagined by their designers (mainly through terms of use¹²⁵ and observations), and how they were assessed, evaluated, used, and adapted by users (mainly through my own observations, but also via interview transcripts).

In this regard, I am aware of van Dijck's warning that platform mechanisms are "largely opaque and out of sight for users and governments" (van Dijck, 2020, p. 2) as well as of the very differential positioning of the Malian-diasporic online news platform Maliweb in contrast to the digital corporations Facebook and Twitter. Through affordances, I seek to illustrate that platform operators influence the socio-geographic movement of narratives on the regulative-technological level by constructing platform features that govern (potential) users, but that users (and journalists) as well can make use of these features in diverse ways and thus bring their own – compliant or resistant – influences, imaginations, and practices to the table. In addition, I interpret the imaginations of affordances (by platform operators and users) and their dominant or resistant uses as one manifestation of this struggle within (social) media governmentality. In that sense, the affordances theory and its explication and adaptation to digital media can function as an indicator of where such struggles could emerge (i.e. in imaginations, affects, values, practices of use) in the realm of online media.

Building on the work by Evans and colleagues (2017) and by van Dijck and Poell (2013), I identified connectivity as the central affordance in my material that unveils such struggles over governing the socio-geographic movement of narratives. Van Dijck and Poell describe connectivity in the social media age as "the socio-technical affordance of networked platforms to connect content to user activities and advertisers" to define "how connections are taking shape, even if users themselves can exert considerable influence over the contribution of content" (van Dijck & Poell, 2013, p. 8). This affordance can thus structure which kind of information circulates between whom under which conditions and which possibilities for agency emerge for different actors. Additionally, however, I also consider in which ways operators and users imagine platform features and in which ways they use them to connect users and content. With regard to the governing of interactions with online news, this analysis of connectivity thus shows between which actors and contents the respective platform features afford connections, based on which imaginations, and through which means. In addition, it shows which experiences and uses increase or hinder the connectivity among users, media

¹²⁵ Although I cannot assume that every user has read these terms, I assume that they still influence the interactions of Facebook, Twitter, and Maliweb with their users and provide information on their imaginations of their relations with users.

actors, and content. Finally, this section illustrates how the negotiation of values related to connectivity unveils forms of affective (social) media governmentality.

Platform Operators' Imaginations and Regulations: Affectively Governing through a Connectivity Imperative

As a first element of this media governmentality through affordances, the imaginations and regulations of platform operators translate into forms of socio-technological rule. Van Dijck (2013, p. 145), for instance, mentions an ambiguity in Facebook's interface development that "may be interpreted either as an attempt by engineers and owners to make the platform serviceable to a maximal number of users, or as the corporation's attempt to manoeuvre its users into commercially exploitable terrain". In the following, I seek to demonstrate that the official discourse by digital platform operators points towards the former, user-oriented interpretation, whereas the neoliberal context of these platforms necessitates the latter, namely the monetisation of user interactions.

As one form of socio-technological governance, the platform providers offer a myriad of features for connecting users and content. Thereby, they, on the one hand, speak to users' hope for exchange, sociality, and self-expression, and, on the other hand, to their fear of missing out or neglecting possibilities for this exchange. In general terms, all three platforms, i.e. the Maliweb website, Facebook, and Twitter, enable the circulation of multimedia content. For Maliweb, this mainly relates to articles from the Malian and international press, but they also allow for contributing articles written by users in a designated section. On the one hand, this content is circulated directly between its authors and readers on the respective platforms. On the other hand, certain features also allow for connections within and between the platforms. When reading articles on Maliweb, for instance, social media icons under the headline and at the bottom of the article suggest connecting to Facebook, Twitter, etc. whereas suggestions at the end of the article lead readers to the next article or to articles on the same issue. When clicking on the images in the Maliweb Facebook posts or tweets, in turn, users are normally connected back to the website.

In addition to consuming content on these platforms, the providers also imagined certain activities for users that would allow them to circulate their opinions and connect with other users, thereby speaking to the aforementioned need for exchange and raising hope of being able to fulfil this need. On Maliweb, the General Terms of Use mention that users can interact with other users, article journalists, and editors through comments and the aforementioned

contributions.¹²⁶ They specify that such comments should be easy to understand and contribute to a constructive debate without any form of discrimination (Maliweb, 2020a), thus trying to keep the discussion open for *everyone*, although with a rather normalised range of interactions.¹²⁷ As a contrasting approach, the Twitter User Agreement warns potential users that they might encounter "offensive, harmful, inaccurate or otherwise inappropriate" content (Twitter, 2020c, p. 4), so their focus seems to be more on keeping the discussion open for *everything*. In this context, users can also write comments on Facebook and Twitter, but as social networking sites, they offer more possibilities for exchange than Maliweb. Here, the possibility to address users or issues via @ or # already show additional encouragement for connectivity on these platforms.¹²⁸ In addition, on Facebook and Twitter, users can also contribute to the circulation of content through sharing/retweeting and liking practices; and they can send personal messages through the platform messaging services. For these personal messages, Facebook provides even more options since they also offer voice messages towards the end of the research period.¹²⁹ On Facebook, users can further connect in dedicated groups, as in the public Maliweb Facebook group that was administered by Maliweb since December 2017 (Groupe de Maliweb.net, 2021).

In addition to this hope for exchange, platform operators also govern the interactions with their interfaces through invoking fear of being excluded from this exchange. In their terms of use, Maliweb, Facebook, and Twitter also specify certain rules or criteria for engaging with their services in general and connecting with other users in particular, thus further specifying how they imagine connectivity to take place on their platforms. As mentioned in the access section above, the most general criterion was the adherence to the respective terms of service or use. In addition, (Facebook and) Twitter mention the "applicable laws" as legal frameworks for interacting through their platforms. This refers to European member states' or Irish law for Facebook (Facebook, 2019), laws in California for Twitter (Twitter, 2020c, p. 10), and the Malian law as the applicable legal framework for Maliweb (Maliweb, 2020a). This

¹²⁶ In addition, I have encountered instances when Maliweb asked users directly for their opinion through polling via the website and their Facebook account.

¹²⁷ Additionally, the Maliweb website offers the possibility to engage in discussion forums, that has, however, not been used for several years – already hinting at instances when users do not use features in the way platform providers imagined them.

¹²⁸ Especially on Twitter, however, Maliweb operators seemed not to be too keen or optimistic about further connecting since they did not use any forms of addressing through @ or # (e.g. in contrast to another online news portal Malijet) during the time of research.

¹²⁹ At the time of writing, however, sending voice messages was not possible anymore. Instead, a Facebook notification was displayed in Facebook messenger as explanation: "This is to respect new rules for messaging services in Europe. We're working to bring them back."

already shows differences in national and international legal frameworks for the different – more or less internationally operating – providers.

But apart from these legal frameworks, I still want to illustrate certain rules or criteria for interaction that the operators specified in their terms. First, these rules regulate the interactions with others in themselves. Here, all three providers ask users to refrain from threatening others or calling for violence. In this line of thought, they also try to ban content that supports sexual violence, bullying or harassment, exploitation of adults and especially children, sexual solicitation, hate speech, insults and discrimination, intimate images, or suicide and self-injury (Facebook, 2020b; Maliweb, 2020a; Twitter, 2020c, p. 38f). Together, these rules should guarantee for all three platforms that they provide a secure environment for all users in which they can feel free to speak. While all three platforms mention important rules here, we will see later on that this engagement rather is reminiscent of Chatzidakis and colleagues' (2020, p. 891f) critique of a form of "carewashing" or "corporate care", as digital platforms "offer us a temporary comforting balm whilst failing to address the deeper structural crisis".

In addition to such general rules for user interactions, the platform operators also seek to regulate the quality of content that is circulated when users connect through a fear of exclusion or at least marginalisation. For instance, Maliweb, Facebook, and Twitter ban the circulation of manipulated or fake content and information, in the case of Maliweb even rumours, as a way of providing credible content on their platforms (Facebook, 2020b; Maliweb, 2020a; Twitter, 2020c, p. 7,16,39). Especially Maliweb also bans commercialisation in general, as does Twitter when they proscribe unauthorised advertising, as a way of keeping commercial and information-related interests separate (Maliweb, 2020a; Twitter, 2020c, p. 40). And all three providers request that users must not tamper with their or their partners' services themselves, on the content (spam) and on the technological level (scraping) (Facebook, 2019, 2020b; Maliweb, 2020a; Twitter, 2020c, p. 6f,16), thus further strengthening the attempt to create a secure and credible environment for interaction and circulation.

Before further engaging with user responses to these provider governance, however, I would like to mention that sometimes, the imaginations of the platform providers also may not materialise because of technological disruptions of connectivity-enhancing features that curb the effectiveness of connecting content and users. During my observations, such disruptions included technological difficulties with the internet connection or the platforms themselves (contact with platform operators not working, site not loading, content switching too quickly, comments invisible, broken links to the website), or content that was hidden (filtered com-

ments) or no longer available (e.g. deleted due to copyright claims or violations of community standards). In addition, platform operators themselves sometimes diminish user connectivity, for instance, when Maliweb operators started to close comment sections after one year.¹³⁰ And sometimes, I experienced that just the fact of changing interfaces (of Maliweb, Facebook, and Twitter over the years) restricts one's connectivity as time was needed to reorient and get into usual habits of using the platforms again.

After these explorations of the imaginations of providers and the opportunities and constraints they offer users for connectivity, elements that I see as the providers' attempt to affectively govern others', i.e. users' conduct, we will now look at the users' side of the connectivity affordance, i.e. at moments of affective self-governance and resistance in their imaginations, their practices of using the platform features for more or less connectivity, and the emotions they articulate as arising in relation to this connectivity, and its features. In that vein, I draw from Van Dijck (2013, p. 142), who mentions that within digital platforms, users can embody "roles as compliant content generator and subversive user".

Users' Imaginations of and Emotions towards Connectivity Features

Beyond this platform operator governance, users thus play an important part in the effectiveness of the platforms' affective governing of and towards connectivity. At first, some user imaginations of what these platforms can and should be used for in terms of connectivity confirm the platform providers' focus on connecting ever more people and their opinions. When users talk about what they can use the platforms for,¹³¹ they see these platforms as a means for exchanging and discussing with others (e.g. Arona Thiaw), for finding and distributing information (e.g. Samalbane), as well as for reconnecting with people with whom they have lost contact (e.g. Arouna Togola), or for learning new languages (e.g. Adama Diarra). On the exchange level, some stress the possibility to exchange with users in different positions (e.g. Jacob), to experience intercultural encounters (e.g. Adama Diarra), or to sustain contact within the Malian-diasporic community (e.g. Bintou Maiga, Bakary). Thereby, the connectivity imperative speaks to users' desire for accessing information and social exchange.

¹³⁰ On the other hand, this could be a way of encouraging users to comment only on more recent debates.

¹³¹ These considerations especially refer to Facebook and Twitter since I did not manage to do interviews with Maliweb-only users. Some of the Facebook and Twitter users, however, also used the Maliweb website which stresses the difficulty of seeing these platforms as completely separate entities.

For me, Facebook is a space for discovering people of all horizons and in all possible situations or something. It's a place for informing oneself and others as well. [WhatsApp conversation with Jacob, male teaching assistant in his thirties in Sikasso]¹³²

On a temporal level, these imaginations of and related desires for exchange and information also include an expectation of regular connectivity. Especially on social networking sites with their tracking features, this imagination of regular connectivity can lead to a technology-induced affective social control of users' connectivity through feelings of obligation and resulting self-governance. During my research, for instance, I experienced this control with one user who repeatedly commented on my absence from Facebook and tried to find reasons for my not being there more frequently.

Good evening Syntia, Syntia, Syntia. From eleven o'clock and fifty minutes, midday, until now, Syntia is lost on the social networks, she has a meeting, or else, when will, she is really concentrated on the family, the education of the children, the husband is there, and this like that, or, she takes a walk or she comes and goes. [WhatsApp voice message from Samalbane, male NGO employee in his thirties, commuting between the cities Sikasso and Koutiala]¹³³

Further, I started to imagine exchange on the different platforms as a form of synchronous conversation or interaction where features like the message status allowed me to see if the other person had received and read my contribution. In consequence, I often waited impatiently for their answer when they had read my messages or started to worry about them when they had not read them. In addition, I sometimes asked myself why users were not active on certain days, assuming, for instance, that it was due to a certain weekday or a holiday. So as Samalbane mentioned above did, I, too, started to look for reasons why users were not as active as I expected them to be. This points to an imagination of regularity, of regular connectivity, or even compulsory connectivity that is created through the available tracking-enabled features and ties in with the platform providers' goal to increase connectivity. In this line of thought, Jennie Germann Molz and Cody Morris Paris (2015, p. 183) have described this "monitoring" or "interpersonal surveillance" as one of the social effects of social media affordances.

In addition, I encountered similar user imaginations of and hope for exchange through comprehensive and regularly circulating content, as several users stress the direct and "live"

¹³² Facebook est pour moi d'abord un espace de découverte des personnes de tout horizon et de n'importe quelle situation ou chose. C'est le lieu de s'informer ou d'informer aussi. [WhatsApp conversation with Jacob, male teaching assistant in his thirties in Sikasso]

¹³³ Bonsoir, Syntia, Syntia, Syntia. A partir, onze heure cinquante, le midi, jusqu'à maintenant, Syntia est perdu sur les réseaux sociaux, elle a un entretien, ou bien, quand est-ce que, elle est concentré vraiment la famille, l'éducation des enfants, le mari est là, et ceci comme ça, ou, elle fait un tour ou elle va-et-vient. [WhatsApp voice message from Samalbane, male NGO employee in his thirties, commuting between the cities Sikasso and Koutiala]

access to information and others' voices and opinions that they perceive as provided by the platforms.

So often, these people, they are late. So, their information, they give this information to the citizens at very specific moments, mostly at the 20 o'clock news, and the eight o'clock news in the radio, like this like that, the 19 o'clock in the radio. (...) Well, often, you need to be faster, the income of information is faster at Malijet [other popular online news portal, S.H.] and Maliweb, sources for information that are very fast in relation to ORTM [public Malian broadcasting station, S.H.], that's why they allow to some to be faster in acquiring information. [WhatsApp voice message from Samalbane, male NGO employee in his thirties, commuting between the cities Sikasso and Koutiala]¹³⁴

This was also an impression I got throughout my observations, that these platforms, especially through their high frequency of publishing and posting articles from a myriad of sources, offer immediate access to information as well as an overview of diverse opinions and points of view. Sometimes users even refer to their social media use as an essential activity of "seeing the world"¹³⁵ or – in the opposite way when they are disconnected – as being "outside the world".¹³⁶ On the other hand, however, I also remarked through my simultaneous use of Facebook, Twitter, and the Maliweb website that there are different pieces of content on the different platforms, which, then, curbed my imagination so that I could obtain a comprehensive overview with only one platform. This could also be a reason why several interview partners state that they not only use one platform to stay informed but multiple ones, thus further increasing their connectivity beyond the platforms explored here.

In contrast to this importance of online connectivity, users themselves, however, also imagine this affordance as exclusive when they stress that the exchange of content and users is not equally accessible for everyone (for more on the social locations of users and hierarchies between them, see Subchapter 7.1). In that vein, *being able to* connect through the platform features is also related to feelings of pride and superiority in relation to inferior others. Some users, for instance, imply that they need certain competences to be able to use social media

¹³⁴ Donc souvent, ces gens là, ils sont en retard. Donc, leurs informations, on donne ces informations aux citoyens à des moments bien précises surtout au journal du 20 heures, et les journales de huit heure dans la radio, et ceci comme ça, le 19 heures dans la radio. (...) Bon, souvent, il faut aller plus vite, il y a la recette des informations est plus vite dans les Malijet et Maliweb, sources de l'information qui sont très rapides par rapport à l'ORTM, c'est pour cette raison ils se permettent au certains d'aller plus vite pour hacker des informations. [WhatsApp voice message from Samalbane, male NGO employee in his thirties, commuting between the cities Sikasso and Koutiala]

¹³⁵ "voire le monde" [WhatsApp voice message from Samalbane, male NGO employee in his thirties, commuting between the cities Sikasso and Koutiala]

¹³⁶ As one interview partner expressed it: "without connection, you are outside of the world" ("sans connexion tu es hors du monde") [WhatsApp conversation with Issa Kamara, male electrician and construction worker in his twenties in Bamako].

effectively. Others imagine Facebook and Twitter as different spaces, with Twitter being used in more professional ways and Facebook being more oriented towards entertainment and superficial engagement. These users also relate this differentiated imagination to the modalities of user contributions with a privilege for written language and a denigrating attitude towards audio-visual-only contributions, a tendency that points to the class bias in Twitter interactions I already mentioned above, a bias that manifests in the interpretation of user interactions with connectivity affordances here.

So, I connected, I followed everything relating to medicine, walla, so, this allowed me to be informed about many things and then to have a reliable information. Because on Twitter, the information is more accurate on Twitter than on Facebook or else on Instagram because Facebook, Instagram that's mostly entertainment, entertainment, entertainment. There is a little professional on Facebook, but on Twitter, there it's much more eh professional, in my opinion. [Phone interview with Amadou Tamata, male researcher in his thirties in Bamako]¹³⁷

Beyond these more specific aspects, users also articulate emotions towards connectivity-affording features and connectivity through social or online media as such. Based on user accounts and my own interactions, I argue that interaction with Maliweb, Facebook, and Twitter produces a struggle of love, familiarity, and dependency, on the one hand, and mistrust, suspicion, and fear, on the other hand. On the one hand, users articulate that being connected through these platforms is crucial for them and that they love or have loved being connected through these platforms, especially when it is important for them to be connected across space where they experience "moments of communion that bring me closer together with my contact persons,"¹³⁸ or to have access to important information. On the other hand, however, (sometimes the same) users articulate their increasing mistrust towards fake information and fraudulent activities being channelled through Maliweb, but even more through the more participatory formats of Facebook and Twitter. For some users, this mistrust also is connected to a fear of negative real-world consequences for their online activities. Moreover, some users differentiate between platforms, seeing, for instance, their frequency of using them as an indication of how much they trust them or how their relationship of trust has changed towards different platforms.

¹³⁷ Donc, je m'ai connecté, je suivait tout ce qui concerne la médecine, walla, donc, ça me permettait d'être au courant de beaucoup de choses et puis d'avoir une information fiable. Parce que sur Twitter l'information est plus précise sur Twitter que sur Facebook ou bien sur Instagram parce que Facebook, Instagram c'est plutôt divertissement, divertissement, divertissement. Il y a un peu de professionnel sur Facebook, mais sur Twitter là c'est beaucoup plus eh professionnel quoi, à mon avis. [Phone interview with Amadou Tamata, male researcher in his thirties in Bamako]

¹³⁸ "des moments communion qui me rapprochent de mes interlocuteurs" [Email conversation with Arouna Togola, retired male headmaster in his 60s, located in a small town in the South of Bamako]

So, that's for telling you that since then, because for some years now, (...) I don't visit Facebook all the time, all the time, because it scared me a little. Well, we use Facebook because everybody uses it. Certainly, I like Facebook a lot, I like it a lot leaving comments, pictures, talking about certain things that I like. But since we don't know a lot about it, and that's why I sometimes distrust it. Because, I have my niece who studies currently in Tunisia, (...) we communicated a lot through Facebook. Walla. And one day, for instance, I said to her, but wait, why did your profile on Facebook change? Instead of your picture, there is a picture of a European person. In fact, of a white person. She said, yes Auntie. My Facebook account was hacked. And from that day on, that made me click. It, it, I became afraid. [WhatsApp voice message from Bintou Maiga, female employee in her fifties in Paris] ¹³⁹

Amadou Tamata: Yes, I love Twitter, I love Twitter a lot, and do you know why I accepted your interview?

Syntia: Why?

Amadou Tamata: Because it's on Twitter, I trust Twitter more than Facebook, because on Facebook, there are many fraudsters and on Facebook also the people, the people send me invitations, I don't accept [Phone interview with Amadou Tamata, male researcher in his thirties in Bamako]¹⁴⁰

In that sense, some emotions contribute to the providers' effort to govern the increasing connectivity of users according to their terms, whereas other emotions appear as potential grounds for the failure of the providers' imaginations, i.e. when some users leave an affective impression through their behaviour that discourages other users from connecting (further).

Compliant and Resistant User Practices in Relation to Connectivity Features

So how do users interact on Maliweb, Facebook, and Twitter to perform connectivity more or less? My observations and interviews with users indicate that especially in interaction with Facebook and Twitter, some employ practices of self-governance following the providers'

¹³⁹ Donc, c'est pour te dire que depuis là, parce que il y a quelques années, (...) n tè taga Facebooku kan tout le temps, tout le temps, parce ça me fait un peu peur. Bon, on va sur Facebook parce que tout le monde y va. Sûrement, j'aime bien Facebook, j'aime bien mettre des commentaires, des photos, parler des certaines choses qui me plaît en fait. Mais comme, anw tè caman dòn a la, et c'est pour ça des fois que je me méfie quoi. Parce que j'ai ma nièce qui étudie en ce moment en Tunisie, (...) on communiquait beaucoup sur Facebook. Walla. Et, comme par exemple un jour, je l'ai dit, mais attend, pourquoi ton profil a changé sur Facebook? A la place de ta photo, il y a la photo d'une Européenne. En fait, d'une blanche quoi. Elle a dit oui, Tantie. Mon conto Facebook a été piraté. Et depuis ce jour là, ça m'a fait déclic quoi. Ça m'a, ça m'a, j'ai pris peur quoi. [WhatsApp voice message from Bintou Maiga, female employee in her fifties in Paris]

¹⁴⁰ Amadou Tamata: Oui, j'aime Twitter, j'aime beaucoup Twitter, et vous savez pourquoi j'ai accepté votre interview? – Syntia: Pourquoi? – Amadou Tamata: Parce que c'est sur Twitter, j'ai plus confiance à Twitter que sur Facebook, parce que sur Facebook, il y a beaucoup d'arnaqueurs et sur Facebook aussi les gens, les gens m'envoient les invitations, je n'accepte pas [Phone interview with Amadou Tamata, male researcher in his thirties in Bamako]

imaginings and perform practices of increasing connectivity through their commenting or sharing activities, or just through their emphasis on always being connected. In addition, on the social networking sites, increasingly frequent practices of mutual liking, sharing, or commenting on one's own contributions result in increasing mutual visibility through algorithms which, in turn, creates a sense of shared everyday experiences, as outlined, for instance, by Mirca Madianou (2016).

Beyond this connectivity on the specific platforms, most of my interview partners increase the connectivity between platforms when they use multiple platforms to find, access, and validate information. In addition, I observed how some users extend this connectivity beyond the platforms, e.g. when they link to their own blogs or websites, when they address important persons like the Malian president in their comments, or when they try to organise offline events like a protest. Sometimes, users even create direct content-related connections to the events reported about when they state to have been there or to have first-hand experiences of the event or place. And in some cases, users' connections outside of the platforms lead them back to the platforms, e.g. when they get information through (offline) friends or were led by Facebook friends to Maliweb contributions and ultimately the website.

When I am looking for information on malian [sic!] news, I consult maliweb, malijet and maliactu I can have other complementary information on social media. For instance if I see an information on Gao, I consult a friend who is situated in the location through WhatsApp or messenger in order to verify . [Email conversation with Arouna Togola, retired male headmaster in his 60s, located in a small town in the South of Bamako]¹⁴¹

Especially such connectivities through digital platforms that relate into users' everyday lives unveil biopolitical moments in social media governmentality that can structure users' social relations through the circulation of online news.

However, some resistant user experiences and actions in my observations and interviews show that certain practices also disrupt the encouraged connectivity and thereby support a form of counter-conduct to the platform providers' governance. In that regard, some users more actively challenge the connectivity imperative. For instance, they limit the experience of "authentic" connectivity by using pseudonyms or non-human pictures. Whereas the latter might also have religious or platform-related reasons (on Maliweb, for instance, it is very rare for users to have profile pictures whereas most users on Facebook and Twitter have some),

¹⁴¹ Quand je cherche des informations sur l'actualité malienne, je consulte maliweb, rmalijet et maliactu Je peux avoir d'autres informations complémentaires sur les réseaux sociaux. Par exemple si je vois une information sur Gao, je consulte un ami qui se trouve dans la zone par WhatsApp ou messenger pour vérifier . [Email conversation with Arouna Togola, retired male headmaster in his 60s, located in a small town in the South of Bamako]

some interview partners also indicate that they have reduced their visibility on Facebook and Twitter due to fraudulent activities, cyber criminality, or insulting reactions (e.g. Adama Diarra). Some users thus have rearranged their profiles and privacy settings so that it is not possible to befriend them or send them messages, or even to find them under their previous username (e.g. Issa Kamara, Sirani). Arouna Togola even deletes or blocks "friends" who post wrongful or insulting content. And some have reduced their viewing, commenting, and interacting publicly altogether, be it because of experienced insults, because they fear online revenge or repercussions in real life, or because of generational or socio-cultural conflicts (e.g. Amadou Tamata, Issa Kamara, Aurore Eyoémana).

and then I registered [with Twitter] and I thought that it's great, this suited me completely but Today it has become complicated and I deleted a lot on and sometimes changed alias. (...) Because of the fact that there are many more fake accounts, it's very risky the new acquaintances today, with the smallest things you can get into trouble, of of the sort like...and I changed alias because I was followed by certain persons even when I unfollowed them they followed me [WhatsApp conversation with Issa Kamara, male electrician and construction worker in his twenties in Bamako]¹⁴²

In addition, one user even tries to distance himself internally from interactions on the platforms to avoid being affected by violent content and interactions.

On the social networks, on the other hand, the shock of ideas can be violent. People can debate quite violently but this stays exclusively on the network (...) Personally, I avoid to live with the pressure of the networks outside the networks. Once I am disconnected, I take up the course of my life without thinking about them. I take time before I memorise the names of certain accounts. I said to myself that not knowing the names allowed for not tying what they say to my private or professional life [WhatsApp conversation with Bakary, male film producer in his thirties in Bamako]¹⁴³

Thereby, users not only counteract the connectivity imperative that is established by Maliweb and especially Facebook and Twitter, but they also challenge the biopolitical engagement of digital platforms in their lives.

¹⁴² et puis j'me suis inscrit je trouvais que c'était super, ça me convient totalement mais Aujourd'hui c'est devenu compliqué et j'ai effacé bcp sur et changer de pseudo quelques fois. (...) Du fait que y'a bcp plus fack compte , c'est très risquant les nouvelles connaissances aujourd'hui , à la moindre chose on peut se mettre dans la merde, de de trucs comme ...et j'ai changé de pseudo par ce que j'étais suivi par certaines meme si je les unfollow ils me suivent [WhatsApp conversation with Issa Kamara, electrician and construction worker in his twenties in Bamako]

¹⁴³ Sur le réseau par contre, le choc des idées peut être violent. On peut débattre assez violemment mais ça reste uniquement sur le réseau (...) Personnellement, j'évite de vivre avec la pression des réseaux en dehors des réseaux. Une fois déconnecté, je reprends le cours de ma vie sans y penser. J'ai du temps à mémoriser les noms de certains comptes. Je me disais que ne pas connaître les noms permettait de ne pas relier ce qu'ils disent à ma vie privée ou professionnelle [WhatsApp conversation with Bakary, male film producer in his thirties in Bamako]

Negotiating Community-Related Values and Affective Governmentality of Neoliberal Connectivity

As a last affordance dimension that is related to affective governmentality, we look at the promotion and negotiation of values. A very central value in terms of connectivity is the importance of community. First, platform operators connect the hope for genuine exchange to the promise of creating an online community. This is especially articulated in the Facebook Terms of Use that, for instance, state that "[e]very day, people use Facebook to share their experiences, connect with friends and family, and build communities" (Facebook, 2020b). In addition, this construction of a community value appears in their use of corporate images and slogans such as, for instance, the (in)famous "Facebook map" that shows a connection of persons from all over the world. Interestingly, neither the Twitter User Agreement nor the Twitter Rules mention the construction of a community as an important value but rather emphasise "the value of a global public conversation" (Twitter, 2020b). On the other hand, the terms of use of the normally less interactive online news portal Maliweb stress the community value as they state that users can engage with "members of its [Maliweb] community" (Maliweb, 2020a translation S.H.). In contrast to the approach of Facebook as a globally operating social networking site, however, the Maliweb news portal shows a more Malian-diasporic orientation in their idea of community building. This becomes visible in their slogan "virtually in Mali" ("virtuellement au Mali") and logo (including the colours of the Malian flag) that rather point to a focus on Mali and thereby limit the addressed community (see also the characterisation of Maliweb as Malian-diasporic platform in Section 6.2.1). This shows a negotiation of national-diasporic versus transnational orientations in the imaginations of providers that – together with the interactions of users – construct idea(l)s of communities as important fields of interaction on the social networking sites but also, within the realms of its fostering of connectivity of users, on the online news portal Maliweb.

On the one hand, this focus on an online community that connects users can be used to speak to users' desire and hope for belonging, a feeling that should increase users' online engagement. On the other hand, the diverse affordances that especially Facebook and Twitter but also Maliweb provide for enhancing connectivity mobilise further affects for encouraging users to connect with these "online communities". The sheer availability of diverse features for connecting with other users, including, most importantly, commenting, sharing, and evaluating (e.g. "liking") features, aim at provoking more and more interactions and therefore use fear of missing out or neglecting possibilities for further connectivity – and thus for being

informed or connected with their close ones, or for finding new contacts. Features that could nurture such fears are, for instance, the quantitative displaying of reactions to articles that appear on Maliweb (number of comments), Facebook (number of comments, emotive reactions, and shares), and Twitter (number of comments, retweets, and likes) alike, or when these platforms emphasise how many "friends" or "people you are following" have already engaged with certain accounts or contents. Thereby, platform providers use the desire to belong for governing users' frequency and quality of engagement with content on their platforms.

Related to this construction of communities, providers (and users) also articulate certain values that refer to the interactions within their communities or the public conversation, although with different foci. In general, all three providers stress the importance of users' safety, the respect of human dignity, and users' privacy as crucial values that should be respected when exchanging on their platforms (Facebook, 2020b; Maliweb, 2020a; Twitter, 2020b). Twitter and Facebook, however, also explicitly mention freedom of expression and opinion as important values (Facebook, 2020b; Twitter, 2020b). In this regard, however, the Facebook terms further articulate that the aforementioned values and freedom of expression, especially together with "public interest" can be in conflict and that Facebook decides after a risk-benefit calculation including the public interest, users' vulnerability, and "international human rights standards" as deciding factors in such situations:

We want people to be able to talk openly about the issues that matter to them, even if some may disagree or find them objectionable. In some cases, we allow content which would otherwise go against our Community Standards – if it is newsworthy and in the public interest. We do this only after weighing the public interest value against the risk of harm and we look to international human rights standards to make these judgments. (Facebook, 2020b)

In general, however, the platforms' terms of use function as an instrument for governing (potential) users through the fear of exclusion from connectivity, of not being seen, heard, or connected (anymore). Sophie Bishop (2018, p. 73) has observed this fear as inducing practices of self-optimisation among vloggers on YouTube, but I argue that this is a fear that could equally increase the compliance of Facebook and Twitter users. In the Twitter information accompanying the user agreement, for instance, the corporation evokes fears of being excluded from the global public sphere for not complying with their rules:

In order to maintain a safe environment for users on Twitter, we may suspend accounts that violate the [Twitter Rules](#). (Twitter, 2020a)

Twitter's purpose is to serve the public conversation. Violence, harassment and other similar types of behavior discourage people from expressing themselves, and ultimately diminish the value of global public conversation. Our rules are to ensure all people can participate in the public conversation freely and safely. (Twitter, 2020b)

In a similar way, the Maliweb General Terms of Use emphasise the possibilities that come with using the site for commenting while at the same time evoking fears of being excluded from these possibilities by emphasising the power of Maliweb in declining this participation:

MALIWEB offers you its pages for exchanging with the editors and the members of its community. It is a space for reactions, discussion, information that is open to registered users. The participants thus have to obey to the basic principles of debates:

maliweb.net is the only judge of the messages they publish online, or not – including for reasons that might not be included in the following list. (Maliweb, 2020a)¹⁴⁴

In this line of thought, all three platform providers urge users to engage in the management of their feelings. Together, the platform operators require their users to manage their emotions as digital citizens in a way that leads to feelings of disgust towards noncompliant behaviour like criminality, human trafficking, or pornography/sexual exploitation, on the one hand, and to feelings of love and solidarity towards diverse and especially marginalised social groups.

The User commits to not: (...) Publish, save or distribute content that is obscene, violent, defamatory, hurtful, threatening, malicious, abusive towards any physical or moral person, User of this service or not, or encouraging the discrimination, hate of a person or group of persons for reasons including their political opinions, their origin or their true or alleged belonging or non-belonging to an ethnic group, nation, race or a given religion, or their sexual orientation. (Maliweb, 2020a)¹⁴⁵

During my observations and interviews, I found that some users comply with this management of feelings. When asked about their experiences with users articulating differing opinions, for instance, I was surprised that the majority of my interview partners stress their own tolerance in such situations.

¹⁴⁴ MALIWEB vous ouvre ses pages pour échanger avec la rédaction et les membres de sa communauté. C'est un espace de réaction, de discussion, d'information ouvert aux internautes inscrits. Les intervenants doivent donc répondre aux principes élémentaires du débat : maliweb.net est seul juge des messages qu'il met en ligne, ou non – y compris pour des raisons qui ne seraient pas répertoriées dans la liste ci-dessous. (Maliweb, 2020a)

¹⁴⁵ L'Utilisateur s'engage à ne pas : (...) Mettre en ligne, enregistrer ni transmettre des éléments obscènes, violents, diffamants, injurants, menaçants, malveillants, abusifs à l'égard de toute personne physique ou morale, Utilisateur du service ou non, ou incitant à la discrimination, à la haine d'une personne ou d'un groupe de personnes à raison notamment de leurs opinions politiques, de leur origine ou de leur appartenance ou de leur non-appartenance vraie ou supposée à une ethnie, une nation, une race ou une religion déterminée ou de leur orientation sexuelle. (Maliweb, 2020a)

Syntia: That's very good, yes...and in that, which experiences have you made with people who have a different opinion on issues?

Jacob: Every individual has its opinions. So I respect everybody in their diversity. [WhatsApp conversation with Jacob, male teaching assistant in his thirties in Sikasso]¹⁴⁶

This compliance in a sense of affective subjectification combines the working of affects in the subjection of users under platform regulations with their self-identification as subject in the process of performing affective labour within these power relations (for more on affective labour, see Section 7.1.2). This becomes even more articulate in instances when – as I repeatedly observed – users start to moderate heated discussions, arguing for a civilised tone since mutual insults were not considered "Malian". In that vein, however, users also articulate this compliance as not related to the platform terms but to their own cultural values and social norms which raises further questions about the entangled or parallel power structures at work here.

In addition to these comprehensive values for interacting, we have seen above (for more, see Section 6.2.2) that Facebook and Twitter, as social networking sites that offer accounts, also articulate a value of authenticity. But whereas Twitter mostly sees authenticity as a value that goes against manipulating information or impersonating others (Twitter, 2020b, 2020c, p. 39), the Facebook Community Standards encourage authenticity more towards representing "real" persons and their actions (Facebook, 2020b). Their Terms of Service thus evoke feelings of social obligation in that users should provide enough "real" information to be able to experience meaningful and authentic interactions and connectivity. In addition, Facebook pressure users to provide correct information by threatening them with feelings of shame for not being "upstanding" persons that contributed to the safety of the online network (Facebook, 2019).

On the other hand, the social networking sites also mobilise feelings of fear and potentially shame by pointing out the users' lack of control in further distribution or taking back information they have shared after they have posted (Twitter, 2020c, p. 25). This is used to encourage users to choose the information they share wisely. But on a more general level, as all three providers argue in terms of the well-being of users, they convey a sense of a safe environment, creating a space in which users should feel safe to share their thoughts and opinions – and thereby provide relevant content for the operators (Facebook, 2020b; Maliweb,

¹⁴⁶ Syntia: C'est très bien, oui...et dans cela, quelles sont vos expériences avec des gens qui ont une vue différente sur des sujets? – Jacob: A chaque individu son opinion. Donc je respecte tout le monde dans sa diversité. [WhatsApp conversation with Jacob, male teaching assistant in his thirties in Sikasso]

2020a; Twitter, 2020b). Therefore, the affects that are used to govern users' behaviour here circulate between a need for sociality and a need for security.

That such values also need to be seen as a result of the respective context of the platforms is seen, for instance, in the articulation of the value of integrity. Whereas the terms of use of the globally operating social networking sites Facebook and Twitter mention integrity only in terms of the integrity of their platform (Twitter, 2020c, p. 24,28,32),¹⁴⁷ or of their products, services, and "community" (Facebook, 2018, 2019), the terms of the more nationally-diasporic operating online news portal Maliweb engage in the protection of the "integrity of states or territories" (Maliweb, 2020a) – as an online news portal that operates in a (legal) national context of separatist conflicts. In addition to the context, however, this also reflects the different scopes of interest of the different types of platforms that are both of corporate origin, but once (in the case of Facebook and Twitter) more driven by neoliberal logics, and once (in the case of Maliweb) more by national political urgencies. The combination of these diverse values alludes to the importance of commercial interactions and neoliberal values on the platforms. Commercialisation here is a process that can be further enhanced through or even be dependent on the provision of a secure and free environment for user interaction, and – in the case of Maliweb – the setting of a stable political environment. In that sense, the Maliweb General Terms of Use indirectly mobilise the fear of national division to make users compliant with certain ways of expressing their opinions.¹⁴⁸

An overarching debate that becomes visible when comparing terms of use and users' activities and imaginations is the responsibility to protect these values and conditions in a sense of self-governance. In this context, the platform providers also govern through emotions of fear and security as, on the one hand, they evoke feelings of threat in their descriptions of possible violations of their terms of use by non-benevolent users. In that vein, they stress their own importance for protecting users, thus aiming to make users compliant to their rules, as they could still need the providers' help in a case of violation of said terms by other users. On the other hand, the platform providers do not provide any guarantees but rather through their attempted regulation of user behaviour ultimately stress the users' responsibilities for adhering to these terms and creating a favourable environment for debate. For instance, the Twitter User Agreement implies that users need to expect such content and absolves Twitter from any responsibilities and leaves the actual compliance responsibilities with the users:

¹⁴⁷ Although Twitter mentions the integrity of elections as a value users should adhere to (Twitter, 2020c, p. 39, 2020b).

¹⁴⁸ In a similar way, website features that point to Muslim holidays can also evoke feelings of religious solidarity and compliance with Muslim values among users.

You understand that by using the Services, you may be exposed to Content that might be offensive, harmful, inaccurate or otherwise inappropriate, or in some cases, postings that have been mislabeled or are otherwise deceptive. All Content is the sole responsibility of the person who originated such Content. We may not monitor or control the Content posted via the Services and, we cannot take responsibility for such Content. (Twitter, 2020c, p. 4,13)

In resistance to this self-governance that leads to a neoliberal assignment of responsibility, some of my interview partners stress the responsibility of the platform providers, especially of Facebook and Twitter, and claim that they should provide more strict regulations of interactions that violate codes of conduct, e.g. those that are insulting or threatening. Even though the following quotation neglects the already existing platform standards, it still shows that some users resist this idea of self-regulated connectivity.

I think that (...) Facebook should be a little more euh, ... regulated in particular with regard to the, to the freedom of expression. Well, I think that that's not at all politics of [connection interrupted]. It needs a charter, for explaining, because I miss that this can exist, for explaining to the ones and the others, that visiting the social networks, there are rules to respect. [Phone interview with Sirani, female company employee in her forties in Marseille]¹⁴⁹

Other users, however, implicitly comply with the self-responsibility value, for instance, when they find ways of dealing with such content themselves. These users engage more critically with opportunities for connectivity, but at the same time take up the imagination of platform providers about users' self-governing as responsible digital citizens when they are more engaged with maintaining an environment for themselves and others that is favourable for increasing connectivity. In order to generate a safe environment, for instance, some users create criteria for accepting new friends or followers such as only accepting new requests from certain platforms or from accounts with profile pictures (e.g. Amadou Tamata, Arouna Togola). Others report violations to Facebook, warn of fraudulent activities on the platform, try to verify information, or ask others for clarification (e.g. Bintou Maiga, but also in my observations). Especially in the context of (gendered) online harassment and cyber hate, however, this self-responsibility has been criticised by feminist researchers as a neoliberal way of deflecting responsibility from digital platforms to (female, racialised) users (see e.g. Baer, 2016; Jane, 2017; Kämpf, 2014).

¹⁴⁹ Je pense que (...) Facebook devrait être un peu plus euh ... encadré notamment par rapport à la, à la liberté d'expression. Bon, je pense que ce n'est pas du tout la politique de [connexion interrompue]. Il faudrait une charte, pour expliquer, parce que je manque que ça peut exister, pour expliquer aux uns et aux autres, que la visite des réseaux sociales, il y a des règles à respecter. [Phone interview with Sirani, female company employee in her forties in Marseille]

Taking these imaginations, practices, and values together, the connectivity affordance appears as an important element in structuring the socio-geographic mobilities of narratives, i.e. the movements of content between actors in different geographic locations, as well as their interactivity, i.e. the interaction of certain actors. At the same time, looking at connectivity through the lens of governmentality has shown that these mobilisations happen through a negotiation of attempts at affectively governing users' (self-)conduct and their counter-conduct. Especially in this regard, we also saw that Maliweb, as an online news portal, has much less influence on but also faces much less resistance by users than the social networking sites Facebook and Twitter.

Summed Up: Affective Media Governmentality through Imagined Affordances

Through a perspective on the (affective) media governmentality of platforms that materialises through their technological features, this section showed how the platform operators Maliweb, Facebook, and Twitter control the connectivity affordance through hope for information and exchange, the obligation for (compliant) engagement, and the fear of exclusion from exchange of information and opinions. In addition, this section demonstrated which possibilities and constraints users face when engaging with connectivity.

By combining terms, observations, and user accounts, I have shown that this process is sometimes conflictive and sometimes cooperative and that it also includes asymmetric power relations, especially between providers and users, but also within providers and users with different economic, social, and cultural resources. On the provider side, we saw important differences between the online news portal Maliweb and the social networking sites Facebook and Twitter. Whereas Maliweb appears as a more one-way platform for circulating narratives – with the exception of user comments – the participatory nature of the social networking sites, on the one hand, seem to offer users more options for exchange. On the other hand, however, through the users' acceptance of the Facebook and Twitter terms of use, users also agree to their content and data being available for certain uses by the platform providers. Thus, these affordances of online communication technologies are also imbued with intersectional power inequalities between media agents and users in different social and geographic positions that enable platform providers to exert governance and even biopolitical influences on users' lives.

Discourses that circulate through online news media are thus a co-construct not only of users and journalists, but also of platform providers' influence on which narratives circulate in

which way and who engages with them. In that regard, the connectivity affordance highlights the practices that enable or constrain the socio-geographical movements of content between actors and platforms. In addition to providing an institutional situational context of discourse, connectivity thus also feeds into the social situational context that influences the hierarchies between actors in debates (for more on this dimension see Section 7.1.2). But while these explorations of affordances unveiled techniques of a neoliberal governmentality that platform operators exert through design and regulations as well as through the self-governance of users, they also showed subversive moments in the engagement of users with platform features that Adrienne Shaw has described as "dominant/ hegemonic use", "negotiated use", and "oppositional use" (Shaw, 2017, p. 598).

In that sense, affordances contribute importantly to the becoming mobile of narratives between actors in different social and geographic positions. They unveil moments of mobilisation as they are influenced by the different strategies that different actors use in the process of engaging with (social) media platforms. In the next section, we will still look at advertisements as one brief example for a feature and actor combination that emerges from neoliberal platform governance but already reaches further into content-related forms of gendered and postcolonial governmentality.

6.2.4 Translocal and Transnational Interfaces: Advertising as Means for Connectivity and Intersectional Affective Governmentality

As a last facet of (affective) media governmentality and its influence on mobilising narratives on the platform level, we will now briefly turn to the role of advertising. I consider advertisements, on the one hand, as a result of the connectivity that emerges from neoliberal governmentality of platforms with the aim of connecting users to advertisers, and, on the other hand, as part of the platform interfaces that contextualise the discursive engagement of users on this platform. In that vein, we will first explore how advertisements are integrated in digital platforms as a by-product of translocal and transnational¹⁵⁰ connections that might mobilise user activities beyond online news discourses, but at the same time negotiate postcolonial influences. Secondly, we will look at some of these advertisements on the Maliweb website in more detail and see how they can function as means of intersectional affective governmentali-

¹⁵⁰ In the following, I use the term "translocal" in order to account for connections across space that can happen within or beyond national borders and thereby create "links between the local and the transnational" (Georgiou, 2010, p. 25). In contrast, I use the term "transnational" in instances when it is particularly important that connections transcend national boundaries.

ty themselves as they contribute to the formation of intersectional subjectivities (as described, for instance, by Begg, 2012, p. 87).

Translocal and Transnational Connectivities and (Contested) Postcolonial Persistencies through Advertisements and Liked Pages

As one effect of the connectivity affordance explored above, advertisements that appear on the Maliweb website, Facebook, and Twitter contribute to further translocal and transnational connections. This translocality becomes most prevalent with the advertisements that are an important part of the Maliweb website, with advertisements meaning all third-party actors that publish content in the Maliweb advertising spaces. On the website, a combination of fixed and location-based advertising contributes to a translocal impression of sometimes being in several places at once, as they simultaneously address audiences in the location of the news portal and of its users, i.e. in (mostly) Mali and – in my case – Germany and Austria. Moreover, when I changed locations during the research period such as for conferences, these advertisements made me additionally aware of my current location when they changed to, for instance, Norwegian or Swiss advertisements.

Similar assumptions can be made for the liked pages preview on Facebook.¹⁵¹ When visiting the Maliweb page on Facebook, three of the pages liked by Maliweb are regularly selected and displayed on the right column of the page, followed by an invitation to view all of the pages liked by Maliweb. This preview also seems to depend on users and algorithms, as I observed that, when leaving the public view of the Maliweb page and logging into my own Facebook account, they changed from a preview of other Malian news media to more diverse Malian-diasporic, West African, or globally operating actors and institutions. For the overall interpretation of this feature across platforms, however, we need to consider that the advertising spaces on Maliweb are much more visually prominent, i.e. taking up much more space, than this liked pages preview on the Maliweb Facebook page.

Together, these advertisements and liked pages feature a diverse range of actors representing companies, media and journalists, politicians and political institutions, artists, supranational associations, and sports teams. As displayed in Figure 15, an exploration of these advertisements and liked pages, collected from the screen captures on every second day between May

¹⁵¹ Whereas Twitter also has opportunities for displaying affiliations through following other users, I did not integrate this into the interface analysis, because the users that an account – here Maliweb – follows are not displayed when visiting the Twitter account. They might influence to some extent, which further accounts Twitter suggests for following, but this goes beyond the scope of this subchapter.

and December 2017, suggests that they contribute to a translocal and transnational experience of the Maliweb and Facebook interfaces. On the one hand, Maliweb combines more actors from diverse countries, including Mali, Germany, Ivory Coast, Norway, Senegal, France, and the US. On the other hand, especially the Facebook liked pages include actors operating on different levels, including the local (often Bamako), national, West African, African, transnational (e.g. Malian-diasporic), trans-continental (France-Africa), and global levels.

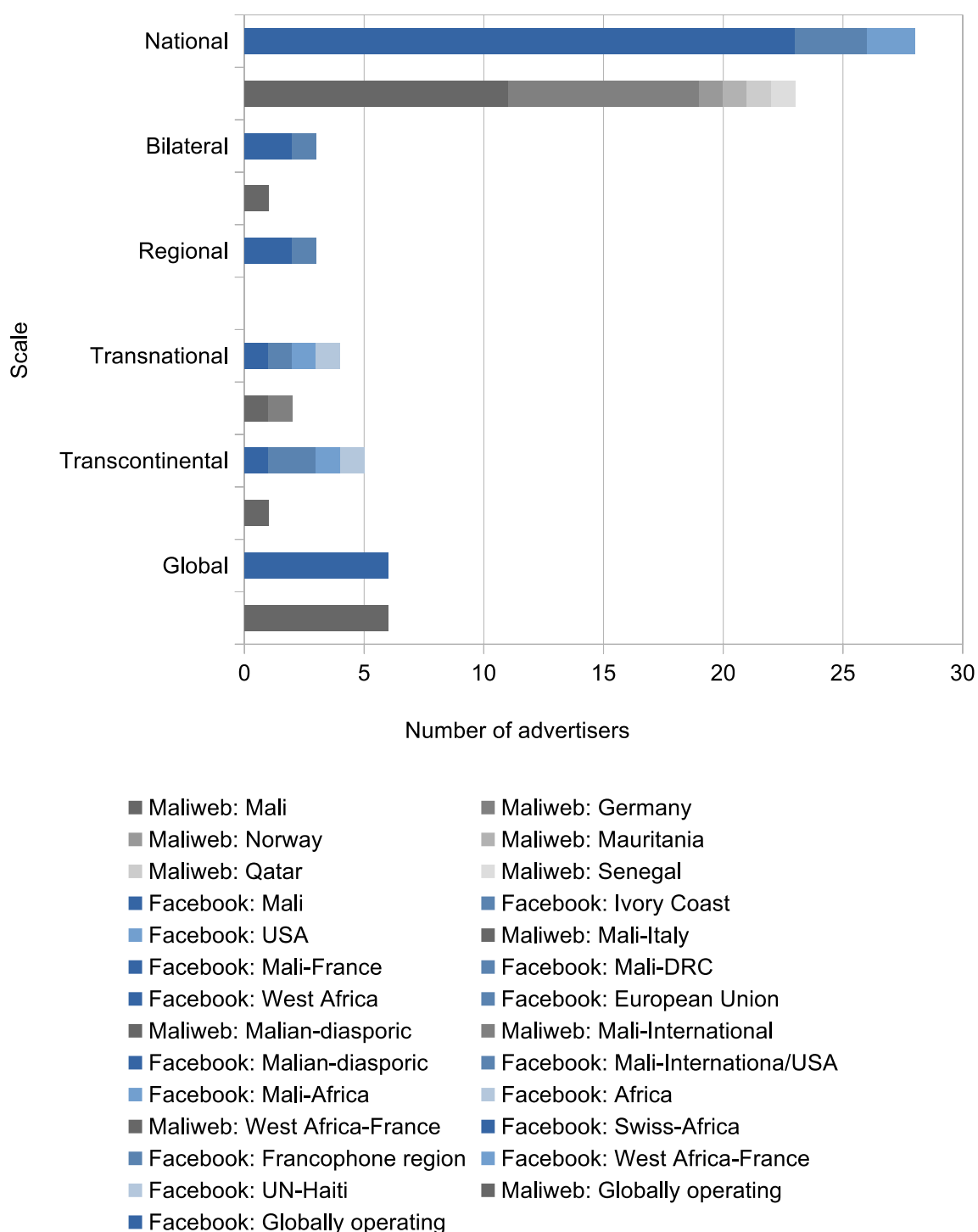


Figure 15: Geographic positioning of advertisements and liked pages observed on the Maliweb website and Maliweb Facebook account between 22 May and 21 December 2017 (Maliweb, 2020b; Maliweb.net, 2020b, own visualisation)

Through these translocal and transnational references, the advertising on Maliweb and Facebook supports virtual mobilities that potentially connect users to (images from) diverse

locales and nations. On the one hand, this creation of translocal and transnational spaces seems to open possibilities for information and the participation in the globalised society. On the other hand, the engagement of these diverse actors also points to struggles over the persistence and transformation of postcolonial relations, as the combination of advertisements can be seen as one manifestation of struggles about (post)colonial influence on Malian-diasporic conduct through "cultural technologies of rule" (Adebanwi, 2017, p. 66) and resistant cultural practices. I want to illustrate this by introducing some advertising corporations that were or became more prominent on the Maliweb website during my observations.¹⁵²

One sign of postcolonial persistence are two French companies that regularly appear in advertisements on the Maliweb website: the network provider Orange Mali and the TV operator Canal+. The importance and postcolonial implications of Orange Mali for Malian communication infrastructures was already mentioned in previous subchapters (see e.g. Sections 6.1.2 and 6.1.3). In addition, Canal+ is among those French media corporations for which Jedlowski describes a "renewed engagement (...) in West Africa" (Jedlowski, 2017, p. 684). On Maliweb, the Canal+ advertisement appears in the right column of the website, between a Malian bank advertisement and a list of Malian radio channels. During the research period, its advertisement changed, for instance, between information on special offers, international sports scenes, and program previews for a Nollywood production. In May 2019, Canal+ also opened a call-centre in Bamako (M. Traore, 2019), which illustrates its transnational territorial materialisation. These two companies thus represent an ongoing socio-economic influence of French companies in this part of the virtual Malian-diasporic public.

However, advertisements on the Maliweb interface also point to other emerging powers. For instance, an advertisement for the Chinese company Alibaba.com became more prominent on the landing page. After I had observed a first ad placement by Alibaba.com in November 2018, the company already appeared in four locations on the website in May 2019. This could indicate the increasing economic influence of Chinese political and economic entities in Mali, considering that Alibaba.com is among the partly state-controlled companies that form the Chinese part the "political-ideological hemispheres (...) of online geopolitics" (van Dijck et al., 2018, p. 26). In addition, during the 2019 Ramadan season, for instance, also the Qatar-based company YaraOil provided an advertisement frame on the website, thus reflecting

¹⁵² Considering that I did not find any clear pattern in my observations of the Facebook liked page previews and, moreover, expect them to be even more personalised, I only focus on advertisements on the Maliweb website here.

emerging connections between Mali and various powers in the Middle East that are additionally articulated in articles (see Subchapters 7.2 and 7.4).

But the website also shows the influence of further Western (inter)national entities. For some weeks in spring 2018, the advertisement spot at the top of the website featured a banner of the Project for the Gender Certification of Malian Companies (Projet de Certification Genre des Entreprises Maliennes, PROCEGEM), a cooperation between several Malian institutions, Sweden, Denmark, and the United Nations Women's program that reflects the ongoing importance of international "development" agencies in Mali (see Section 2.4.1). Moreover, a field for calculating currency exchange appeared on the website with the default exchange from US dollar to Franc CFA. This could reflect the growing importance of the USA as a destination for Malian migrants (P. Cissé & Doumbia, 2012, p. 3f) and reflect the fact that Maliweb addresses diasporic users.

In addition, diverse event-based advertisements sometimes are combined on the website in a manner that constructs transnational links between actors from diverse Southern locations. In that regard, Muslim holidays and seasons feature prominently such as Ramadan (advertisement frame by the Mauritanian noodle brand Pasta Prima), Maouloud (picture with Maliweb holiday wishes on the homepage), or Tabaski (advertising frame by the Senegalese platform *Wari*). In addition, the Maliweb website occasionally combines a holiday-related frame, advertisements, and articles that provide a connective element for users from diverse locations and challenge the importance of postcolonial reference frames.

Together, these diverse advertisements show how connectivity that emerges through neoliberal platform governmentality creates an environment for the translocal and transnational engagement of companies and further institutional actors, and how these actors reproduce and contest postcolonial persistencies. Moreover, the display of these advertisements and like pages further indicates their own contribution to intersectional power relations through affective media governmentality, as outlined below.

Intersectional Affective Governmentality through Advertisements

In addition to unveiling struggles over postcolonial power relations on the level of advertising actors, the content of website advertising and liked pages also shows gendered exclusions on the Maliweb and Facebook interfaces that intersect with postcolonial hierarchies and use affects to construct intersectional subjectifications as an important part of governmentality through advertising. Because when specific persons are represented through these advertise-

ments and liked pages, they are mostly male (politicians, artists, journalists) or female in a sexualised and racialised way (for instance, in an advertisement for "dating Thai women", or in one featuring a stereotypically "big-haired" Black woman trying to choose from a myriad of Western communication offers). In other advertisements that feature goods or services provided by female workers or entrepreneurs as, for instance, food or clothing, the women who produce said goods or services are not shown at all. This is reminiscent of McClintock's (2009, p. 751f) observation that the labour of working women is rendered invisible by "commodity racism" and related imperial advertising. The same, however, also applies to products that are not traditionally produced by female workers like, for instance, furniture, and thus points to overarching capitalist patterns in the cultural economy that make manual (exploited) labour invisible. In addition to these exclusions, advertisements in that sense also govern affectively through speaking to desires for consumption, luxury, and social mobility and, in a sense of an "imperial mode of living" (see e.g. Brand & Wissen, 2017, p. 52ff), aim to integrate users into a global consumer society, as also outlined by Begg (Begg, 2012, p. 89f).

Moreover, the advertisements and liked pages contribute to gendered and classed subjectivities, as they speak to desires for domesticity and wealth as well as for public exchange and participation at the same time. In some regards, the Maliweb website produces an advertising space for domesticity through advertisements for clothing, food, furniture, and even sexual relations. In other regards, the website unveils connections and bridges between the private and the public space through simultaneous advertisements for public (political, cultural, sports) events, transportation companies, and political institutions. In addition to this simultaneous advertising of public and private entities, advertisements for ICT services can be seen as a bridge between private and public spheres that allows for a biopolitical influence on potential consumers' lives through subjectifications. As the following examples of Maliweb and Orange Mali illustrate, such ICT-related advertisements further support the affective governance of and through connectivity outlined in this subchapter. Through their prominent advertisements on the Maliweb website, for instance, Malitel and Orange Mali seek to govern through notions of opportunity and hope for being easily connected, once on a social level and once on a developmentalist level.

First, the Malitel advertisement that appears regularly on the Maliweb homepage (see Figure 16) draws on Malian hospitality and interpersonal affection. This is supported through the visual element of (one male and two female) persons in traditional Malian clothing that smile happily while talking on the phone, together with the slogan "Offer a better welcome to your

close ones when they call you".¹⁵³ This encourages users to perceive mobile communication as a means of easily performing care within their social networks.



Figure 16: Screenshot of Malitel advertisement on the Maliweb website (design by Malitel, captured from www.maliweb.net, 28.08.2017)

The colourful (red background, women in colourful traditional clothing) and playful (music visualised through notes and headphones around the male person's neck) appearance of the Malitel advertisement is in contrast to another ICT-related advertising by Orange Mali that has a darker and – apart from the orange Orange Mali logos – less colourful design. In that vein, the Orange Mali advertisement that equally appeared on the Maliweb landing page (although not as regularly) shows that these affective subjectifications can have further postcolonial implications as they implicitly evoke feelings of hope *and* inferiority. The following advertisement, for instance, stresses the hope for digital advancement and "development" that comes with Orange Mali as "the first operator to offer you the... G4 [network]" (see Figure 17).



Figure 17: Screenshot of Orange Mali advertisement on the Maliweb website (design by Orange Mali, captured from www.maliweb.net, 12.09.2017)

In accordance with modernist and developmentalist ideas of ICT use and distribution (see e.g. Arora & Rangaswamy, 2013; Flew & Rui Liu, 2016; Ojo, 2016), this advertisement is reminiscent of McClintock's commodity fetishism, i.e. the thought that the object of the mobile phone transforms the non-connected African societies into connected, modern global citizens. In this context, the glowing tablet in the Orange Mali advertisement shows a parallel to McClintock's analysis of imperial soap advertisement in which "a black and implicitly racialized coal-sweeper holds in his hands a glowing, occult object. Luminous with its own inner radiance, the simple soap-bar glows like a fetish, pulsating magically with spiritual

¹⁵³ "Offrez un meilleur accueil à vos proches lorsqu'ils vous appellent." (www.maliweb.net)

enlightenment and imperial grandeur" (McClintock, 2009, p. 753). With these ambivalent emotions that combine feelings of hope with feelings of inferiority, Malitel and Orange Mali might seek to further the inclusion of users into their capitalist endeavour and, more broadly, into a global capitalist consumer society.

In summary, these explorations not only showed that online news media circulate through platforms that feature further connections to translocal and transnational actors. Looking closer at the companies and institutional actors behind advertisements and page previews as well as at the content of their advertising unveils, on this interface level as well, struggles over intersectional exclusions and affective governmentality based on postcoloniality, but also gender and class.

At the end of this subchapter, we have gained insights into how digital platforms contribute to neoliberal affective media governmentality as they regulate the access and connectivities of users through measures of socio-technological control and self-governance of users. In that regard, we have seen how users sometimes act in compliance with this governmentality and sometimes in resistance to it. Moreover, as I have demonstrated, on the one hand, through user accounts on their conditions of access and on their imaginations of connectivity, and, on the other hand, through the engagement and productions of advertising companies on Mali-web, this neoliberal affective media governmentality encounters and feeds from postcolonial and gendered structures that often work to reproduce socio-political inequalities on the platform level. In addition to these possibilities for mobilising narratives for and against intersectional governmentality on the context levels of online communication and digital platforms, we now turn to the mobilisation of postcolonial and gendered governmentality through the discursive circulation of narratives.

7 Discursively Mobilising Postcolonial and Gendered Governmentality through the Circulation of Narratives

In resistance, the exploited, the oppressed work to expose the false reality—to reclaim and recover ourselves. We make the revolutionary history, telling the past as we have learned it mouth-to-mouth, telling the present as we see, know, and feel it in our hearts and with our words. (hooks, 2015, p. 3)

As a second facet of mobilising narratives, this chapter on the symbolic and cultural mobilisation of narratives about Malian transnational relations departs from the notion of cultural mobility. As outlined in more detail in Section 4.4.4, Stephen Greenblatt refers to cultural mobility as a contingency that emerges from the exchange of cultural goods, promoted by the contact of moving people, ideas, and objects, but at the same time limited by the persistent tendency of experiencing cultures as fixed (Greenblatt, 2010, p. 1,16). Now that we have explored the socio-geographic, economic, and political conditions that influence the access to online news and the interactions with digital platforms through which Malian-diasporic online news circulate, this chapter focuses on the discursive mobilising related to the discourse about Malian transnational relations that emerges through the socio-geographic movement of narratives. I assume that this movement of narratives between actors in different geographical and social positions can lead to the consolidation or transformation of narratives that are entangled with postcolonial power relations. Based on the assumption that dominant media discourses often construct Southern identities in an exclusionary manner, the idea of cultural mobility thus specifies in which moments a transformation of such narratives through circulation can happen. In this line of thought, cultural mobilisation further draws from notions of mobility studies that point to (postcolonial) power relations being negotiated through constructions of belonging within physical as well as cultural regimes of mobility (Englert, 2021, p. 128f; Glick Schiller & Salazar, 2013, p. 189). Considering these connections of narratives to power relations, I will further use this chapter to illustrate how the symbolic mobilisation of

narratives becomes entangled with forms of political mobilisation on different levels, from interactions, via discursive identity constructions, to their emotional mobilisation.

In order to explicate how such processes of cultural mobilisation manifest in the realm of public online discourses about Malian transnational relations, I also draw from Wale Adebani, who applied Foucault's concept of governmentality to the bifurcation of (post)colonial publics in African societies as "cultural technologies of rule" that are in large part based on a (post)colonial constitution of "mentalities of government" (Adebani, 2017, p. 66). This chapter thus goes beyond the forms of media governmentality explored in the previous chapter and demonstrates how such mentalities – in the sense of being compliant with (post)colonial governance but also resisting it – become evident in constructions of identities and belongings. In that regard, the following explorations focus on the subjectification – the discourses constructed about and by others – as one dimension in this postcolonial governmentality. In addition, as outlined in the introduction and theoretical considerations on intersectionality, such projects of (post)colonial governmentality as well as their national(-ist) counter-movements have always been intricately linked with patriarchal gender relations (see e.g. R. Connell, 2016; Enloe, 1990; hooks, 2015; Lewis, 2008). Therefore, I seek to illustrate in the following how intersectional structurations of gender and postcoloniality – in addition to, for instance, class and ethnicity – materialise in these "cultural technologies of rule" and how they relate to "mentalities of government" in the Malian postcolony.

In this chapter, I explore such forms of cultural mobility and governmentality through online news and their immediate social context. In his book *Nation as Grand Narrative*, Adebani argues that print media are an important site for politics of meaning in the construction of Nigerian nationhood (Adebani, 2016, p. 7f). Although this mostly addresses the national level, I argue that we can explore similar processes in discourses about Malian transnational relations – which themselves are also crucially related to ideas about the Malian state and nation – that emerge when print media are mobilised through digital communication. In addition, Adebani (2016, p. 13, see also p. 25f) points more explicitly to the negotiation of power relations in media: "Meaning is deployed or mobilized in the press, either to establish, nourish, and sustain relations of domination (power), (...) or to counteract, subvert, or deflect the same". Transferring this mobilisation of meaning to the circulation of online news, I argue that postcolonial gendered governmentality manifests on three, albeit entangled, levels: (1) the social interactions between those who make these narratives circulate (Subchapter 7.1), (2) the exchange of information and opinions that leads to consolidating and transforming

subjectifications (Subchapter 7.2, 7.3, and 7.4), and (3) the articulation of emotions within these discursive constructions (Subchapter 7.5).

These are also the core meanings my interview partners attribute to their use of online news and social media more generally.

In relation to interactions, some users focus on the inclusionary options of online media, i.e. that they allow for the participation of a diversity of voices and a free exchange of ideas (e.g. ARONA THIAW). In terms of transnational relations, one user also argues that the intercultural exchange of opinions, attitudes, etc. offered by social media could positively influence relations between nations (Adama Diarra). In this line of thought, Aurore Eyoémana emphasises the possibility of taking issue with persons to whom they would not have access in the offline realm. This becomes even more relevant as users also observed political actors joining "their" social media platforms (e.g. Bakary). One user identifies this as a new, unknown way for political confrontation.

So (...) my presence in social media, on Facebook, resembles the life in Greece, the ancient one. (...) The agora, that was a place of encounter where the authorities, the administration, the people. The whole world (...) gathered around the agora, sharing their points of view, the cultural diversity that existed. The diversity of research, a political question, a social question, economic, conflict-related, everything was decided at the agora. With Facebook, you meet many people, many foreigners, relations, other members. (...) Seriously, I understand, I understand Facebook as the Greek agora. [WhatsApp voice message from Samalbane, male NGO employee in his thirties, commuting between the cities Sikasso and Koutiala]¹⁵⁴

In relation to the exchange of information and opinions, interview partners understand their use of online news and social media as an exchange based on consuming and producing information. On the one hand, users see their consumption of social media as a way of informing themselves about what is going on (e.g. Békaye Konaré). One user articulates that this helps him to debate current issues later on (e.g. Samalbane, Arouna Togola). On the other hand, journalists and users use social media for providing information themselves, to inform the public, be it the Malian or the international public, and to eventually get (international) support for their causes (e.g. Victoire Sanogo, Gabriel Dossou, Aurore Eyoémana). This

¹⁵⁴ Donc, (membre), l'importance, ma présence sur les réseaux sociaux, sur le Facebook, ça rassemble la vie en Grèce, l'ancienne. Les philosophes Grèces, il ont formulé cet [incompréhensible] , qui dit que si il y a pas d'agora, ils sont barbares, ils sont ignorants, puisque il n'y a pas d'agora. L'agora, c'était un lieux de rencontre, où les autorités, l'administration, le peuple. Tout le monde [incompréhensible] s'est rassemblé autour de l'agora, partager des points de vue, la diversité culturelle qui était là. La diversité des recherches, une question politique, une question sociale, économique, et conflictuelle, tout était décidé à l'agora. Avec le Facebook, on rencontre beaucoup des personnes, beaucoup des étrangers, des relations, des autres membres. (...) Vraiment je comprends, je comprends le Facebook comme l'agora Grèce. [WhatsApp voice message from Samalbane, male NGO employee in his thirties, commuting between the cities Sikasso and Koutiala]

opportunity for consuming and producing information is especially important in times of socio-political crises and uncertainties – as with users who emphasise that exchange via social media alleviates the feeling of not knowing about what is "really" going on (e.g. Samalbane, Aurore Eyoémana). Moreover, Aurore Eyoémana relates this to the past, before social media, when African citizens were misinformed by their governments. In addition, she emphasised the value of citizens being able to provide information in opposition to ruling political elites. Together, these accounts emphasise possibilities for information an exchange through online news and social media:

(T)here are interesting pages on Facebook where you can exchange, discuss, document yourself about the notions of security and peace in Mali [Email conversation with Arouna Togola, retired male headmaster in his 60s, located in a small town in the South of Bamako]¹⁵⁵

As I will show for the entailed subjectifications, the interview partners, furthermore, frame this provision of information as having consolidating or transforming effects such as, for instance, informing about the positive actions of the Malian president, on the one hand, and criticising the Malian postcolonial relations, Malian national politics, or other African rulers and their authoritarian practices, on the other hand. Thus, this can be about voicing support or voicing critique. This can also happen indirectly if users support contributions by others that reflect or contradict their values. What is more, they see the claims of marginalised citizens (who often do not have access to online discourses) represented online through those who do have this access, including intellectuals, students, or political activists (e.g. Bintou Maiga, Aurore Eyoémana). Sometimes, the interview participants also connect this to calls for action or socio-political claims. In that sense, we can already see that online news are embedded in a broader presumptive environment – as mentioned by CDS scholars – where production and consumption, and authors and audiences merge. But we also see that this is not per se transforming but can also have consolidating effects.

And thirdly, in relation to governing (through) emotions, some users – and one journalist – experience their interaction with online news as a form of free expression of thoughts with a transforming effect. For some, this idea to promote change is a general motivation for their online engagement (e.g. Ousmane Traoré). For several users, their transforming engagement is in some way related to the Malian conflict, from being *the* starting point for becoming active online to trying to work specifically for peace in Mali (e.g. Arouna Togola, Sirani).

¹⁵⁵ Il y a des pages intéressantes sur Facebook où on peut échanger, discuter, se documenter sur les notions de sécurité et de paix au Mali. [Email conversation with Arouna Togola, retired male headmaster in his 60s, located in a small town in the South of Bamako]

Sirani, for instance, contrasts her "interventions" now with their prior use, which was "only" for staying in contact with family and friends. At minimum, the conflict seems to have provoked some form of engagement. Others see their online engagement as supporting those who criticised, for instance, the Malian government or social injustice, thereby indirectly helping those who suffered from said socio-political problems.

Well, it's not all the time, all the time, how do they say, you can help a person, to find that it is not through money. You can help a person with your speech. You can help a person by sharing. Through the social media. [WhatsApp voice message from Bintou Maiga, female employee in her fifties in Paris]¹⁵⁶

Aurore Eyoémama even portrays her engagement together with others using rather (digitally) militarised terms, while actually promoting a form of pacifist fighting through civil disobedience ("the pacifist digital army" / "l'armée numérique pacifique"), a subjectification that further underlines the mobilising potential of engaging with online news.

In line with these journalist and user accounts, the goal of this chapter is to explore intersectional processes of cultural mobility and symbolic contingency through a governmentality lens in the realm of online news. Drawing on the idea that identities and belongings are created in a dialogical process, the first subchapter starts with an analysis of interactions among users and article authors (and operators). This analysis serves as a contextual dimension of this cultural mobility that unveils power relations and hierarchies that influence this dialogue. The second subchapter explores the discourse about Malian transnational relations and its implications for contingent subjectifications. The third subchapter points to some dimension of governmentality on the article level that regulate the participative and exclusionary forces of genres. Going one level deeper, the fourth subchapter then outlines how journalists and users employ discursive strategies to construct narrative identities about certain groups that are represented in this discourse. And the last subchapter outlines how the articulation of diverse emotions materialises as consolidating or transforming within a post-colonial gendered governmentality.

¹⁵⁶ Bon, c'est pas tout le temps, tout le temps, comme on dit, ii bè se ka mògò dèmè, ka sòrò, a ma kè wari ye. Ii bè se ka mògò dèmè, ni ii ye kuma ye. Ii bè se ka mògò dèmè, par partager. Sur les réseaux sociaux. [WhatsApp voice message from Bintou Maiga, female employee in her fifties in Paris]

7.1 The Social Situational Context of Producing and Consuming Online News¹⁵⁷

Before I engage with the discourse created through the circulation of online news, I account for CDS work on online identities that suggests considering the technological and social parameters of identities that are constructed online. Whereas I have outlined the technological parameters in the previous chapter (especially Section 6.2.3), I now turn to the social parameters that are influential for the cultural mobilisation of narratives and the construction of identities, including the social positions of and hierarchical interactions between actors. In that vein, I argue that the social situational context can influence the possibilities for contingency, as intersectional power relations materialise in social locations and interactions and thereby contextualise subjectifications as part of a gendered postcolonial governmentality.¹⁵⁸ In the case of intersectional social locations, the diverse positionings of operators, journalists, and users can contribute to different viewpoints being articulated and brought into the discussion.

7.1.1 Intersectional Social Locations of Publications, Journalists, and Users

I first assess the social positions of Maliweb, publications, journalists, and users as different actors that are involved in the exchange of cultural goods through online news. This section thus explores possibilities for the contingent mobilisation of narratives through the constellation of participants in this specific public sphere. Therefore, I evaluate their intersectional social locations in a sense of Yuval-Davis' (2011b, p. 11) idea of them being related to identifications and belongings as well as importantly treated separately from identifications and belongings. This then shows from which different social positions the different actors speak and which implications this has for the cultural mobilisation of narratives, i.e. who has which opportunities in their respective positions with their respective capital to engage in the circulation of narratives or news in which way. These social locations, then, also contextualise

¹⁵⁷ While the rest of the results outlined here follow my theoretical framework that differentiates between the context of discourses (Section 4.4.3) and the discourse itself (Section 4.4.4), I included this social situational context in the second results chapter. I did so mainly because it presents a more immediate context and entanglement with the following discourse than the online communication and platform levels outlined in Chapter 6.

¹⁵⁸ Because of my processual approach to the data generation (see Subchapter 5.4), however, we have to keep in mind that this social situational context does only include the perspectives of actors that contributed to the discourse, but that it cannot account for their experience in the same moment in which the discourse was produced. However, their accounts still give valuable information on their past experiences of online interactions and the general context for mobilising narratives online.

the relations of gendered and postcolonial governmentality that emerge through hierarchical interactions (see Section 7.1.2). In addition, however, I will also reflect on Yuval-Davis' remark that we have to consider the salience of such positionings as well as their constructed nature. It is especially in the latter sense that, for instance, profile information provided by users can express social locations and identifications at the same time.

For exploring these social locations, I focus on the corpus I selected for the analysis of the discourse on Malian transnational relations and, more specifically, material gathered through observations, interviews with journalists and users, the profile information of users who commented articles in that corpus,¹⁵⁹ and the metadata analysis of the articles archived from Maliweb. In summary, this section illustrates that – in accordance with the previous chapters – we can, on the one hand, see a certain focus on male, Southern Malian or even Bamako-based, and middle and higher class (in terms of elite professions or education) actors. On the other hand, the following analysis also shows that diverse actors in diverse social locations exchange with and through Malian-diasporic online news.

Socio-Political Locations of Maliweb

Considering the social positions of Maliweb as an actor who is also publishing articles on the news portal, my observations first point to the political embeddedness of Maliweb. On the one hand, Maliweb publishes pro- and anti-government articles and, on its Facebook account, has also liked government pages as well as those of oppositional parties. Thus, the portal seems to be politically diverse, undecided, or not leaning directly towards a specific political party. If we look at the metadata of the March to May 2017 articles, however, we can see that the journal *L'Indicateur du Renouveau*, a publication that is seen as rather critical of the Malian government, makes up the most published articles. Considering that Maliweb decides which articles to publish, this could indicate some favouring of oppositional opinions. On the other hand, the frequency of government advertising on the page rather suggests that Maliweb supports the government – or at least is in an economic relation of dependency with government institutions, as this could also be an issue of funding, i.e. that they just cannot afford to turn down government advertising (for more on economic vulnerabilities of publications in the Malian news landscape, see Section 6.1.4). In addition, as Section 6.2.4 has shown, Maliweb is also embedded in economic relations with diverse advertising companies. As

¹⁵⁹ This, however, only includes a selection of users who were informed on my research. For more on this selection process, see the Section 5.3.4 on informed consent and Section 5.4.3 on the selection process in the methods chapter.

these relations further negotiate postcolonial, national, and Pan-African influences, the positioning of Maliweb as a publication raises questions about the interdependencies of the portal and national as well as international political-economic actors.

Locations of Newspapers and Further Institutions

Given the newspapers and other article author institutions that contributed to the articles selected for the discourse analysis, we see a wide range of sources that already point to possibilities for exchange in addition to hierarchical relations between publications. On the one hand, the publications show struggles between nationalist, diasporic, postcolonial, and decentralising influences. Most sources are Malian (e.g. *L'Indicateur du Renouveau*, *L'Essor*, *Le Démocrate*) or French (e.g. *RFI*, *ouest-france.fr*, *AFP*), with the Malian sources again being focused on Bamako. Beyond those two national reference frames, however, articles in the discourse analysis corpus also appeared via publications that are based in Belgium (*Belga News*), the UK (*bbc Africa*), and Senegal (*African Press Agency/APA*). In addition, several of these sources have transnational orientations including *RFI*, *Jeune Afrique*, *APA*, and *AFP* – although with most having their headquarters in France.

On the other hand, we have a combination of media actors, state institutions (e.g. *Gouvernement du Mali*), and an international organisation (*Nations Unies*) that contribute to the circulation of narratives on Malian transnational relations. In accordance with these different positions, my journalist interview partners – writing for newspapers that are both close to and critical of the Malian government – have also described the diverse orientations of newspapers. These relate to more or less overt political orientations. Mostly, as in the publications' self-descriptions, they describe their journals as providing general information in the sense of covering a diverse range of issues. This is in contrast to the findings by the FES (2016) report, which states that Malian publications are rather limited to politics. One journalist even claims that the combination of all these issues (politics, economy, society, culture, environment) could lead to a consolidation of democracy, thus acknowledging the political implications of all these issues. Another interview partner further stresses the critical stance of a newspaper he publishes in, as being critical towards Malian politics also internally, as he reports on regular philosophical debates on the newspaper level. In general, this suggests that Maliweb connects voices from publications and institutions with different political positions and thereby contributes to research that explores digital public spheres in African contexts that

work not only outside the political sphere, but can also include political actors (see e.g. Omanga, 2019, p. 179).

Another issue that influences the social positioning of publications is their temporal dimension, in terms of maturity and publishing rhythm. In terms of maturity, some newspapers that contributed to the articles in the discourse analysis corpus have been published for several years, some have just emerged, one even in 2017, the year when I started my data collection of articles. In that regard, these publications combine voices with different levels of maturity in the news media market and public opinion. And the journals also follow different temporal rhythms, i.e. some are produced daily, some biweekly, some weekly. This difference in rhythms also has implications for their importance on Maliweb because the non-daily issues are especially disadvantaged – for instance, as they received fewer comments – with regard to topics that other daily publications have already published days before them. These differentiated positions further influence hierarchical relations between newspapers in their contributions to the political discourse on Malian transnational relations.

Moreover, the diverse social locations of publications manifest in diverse ranges of connectivity: Whereas some newspapers and institutions have their own website, Facebook, and Twitter account, or LinkedIn account, others have only a Facebook account or no online presence whatsoever. And also, within the Maliweb website, for instance, a display of the number of articles published by each publication can create a hierarchy between publications who have published a lot and those who have only published a little through the portal (although this only works for non-international publications that are usually published on the portal by Maliweb itself and thus do not have a separate article count).

Together, these considerations show that the articles selected for analysing the discourse on Malian transnational relations combine a diverse set of publications. However, we have also seen that location, institutional affiliation, temporality, and media presence create hierarchies between publications that might also affect their (possibilities for) reporting.

Socioeconomic Locations of Journalists¹⁶⁰

On the journalist level, both individuals who work for newspapers as well as individual writers who are not connected to a particular newspaper contribute to a translocal and trans-institutional mobilisation of narratives between actors with diverse positionalities. First, some of the interviewed journalists work for different newspapers or even news formats. Among my interview partners, several state to work for or publish in more than one newspaper, one even named up to eight or nine publications. Another journalist also published on his personal website, and two others were active in TV news, with one even having her own show.

When assuming individual names as a basis for gendered identification of journalists who wrote the articles in the discourse analysis corpus, their group reproduces gendered structures in the Malian news landscape, as most of the individually named journalists are male (22) whereas only one is female. This observation mostly applies to the Malian publications, because the international sources (like RFI, APA, AFP) often do not name any specific authors of their online articles. In the two cases where they did so, however, these are also male names. However, Malian sources sometimes as well do not have the journalist's name attached to an article but only "the editorial", ¹⁶¹ or "a correspondence", or they even just name the publication.

In contrast to this seemingly uniform gendered perspective, we can see that journalists from the discourse analysis corpus have a diverse range of backgrounds like professional (journals) or informal press (writing as a passion), economic (architecture), educational (university), political (oppositional politics), or civil society affiliations (diasporic association). In terms of location and ethnicity, I observed that most journalist voices speak from a Southern Malian positioning. Most of the journalists are located in Bamako – as are their publications. However, among my journalist interview partners, all articulate some form of migration history. For some, this migration history unfolds on the national level. Among my interview partners, for instance, one journalist came from a housewife and farmer family in a Southern Malian village, went to a bigger city for school and came to Bamako for his studies, studies that were essentially financed by his mother who was selling agricultural products in their village to

¹⁶⁰ This subsection is mainly based on interviews I conducted with journalists. Since this group did not include persons affiliated with national or international institutions (such as the Malian government, United Nations), or with international newspapers (such as APA, FRI), the following positionalities focus on Malian journalists. In addition, because my group of five journalist interview partners is quite small, I do not relate the statements in this subsection to the specific interview partners, in order to avoid them being identified through the combination of classifying information about them.

¹⁶¹ In this context, however, I also only observed one publication to have a female person publishing editorial articles on Maliweb throughout the years, so the (Malian) editorials as well can be assumed to have a gendered hierarchy.

raise money and send it to Bamako.¹⁶² Three of the other journalists I interviewed, on the other hand, emphasise their international migration experience, with one raised in Bamako and having come back after almost 30 years in France, and the others having come to Bamako from other West African countries (Togo and Ivory Coast). So here again, we see the cultural mobility of narratives connected to a physical movement of those who share these narratives.

In addition, journalists voice (national) political positions that indirectly also influence their social location in news-related debates. On the one hand, some journalists report rather favourably on the government, and one of my interview partners also seems to take pride in the fact that he has travelled with the Malian president IBK. On the other hand, some journalists are rather critical of the government, or even engaged in oppositional politics. And then, some journalists claim to be independent but are in some way connected to the government journal or government associations.

Adding to these insights, accounts from the journalist interviews show that geographic, social, and political positions are often more complex than these classifications suggest or present to us. This becomes apparent from the political positions from which the journalists write. In terms of Malian transnational relations, these political positions point toward the same premises (beneficial relations for Mali), but different opinions on how to reach them. Whereas one journalist defends the perspective of French political elites on relations between Mali and France, he also encourages further relations of Mali with e.g. Russia or China. Another one is very critical of the postcolonial relations with France, especially as performed through the UN intervention. This person, however, also mentions internal factors that would hinder Malian progression and evokes Malian nationalism as well as a need for democracy and transformed international relations. Two others emphasise rather generally that transnational relations should be beneficial to the Malian nation, or that this was the criteria by which to measure such relations.

In general, these diverse locations are also connected to the working conditions of journalists publishing on Maliweb. My interview partners – although often in more secure positions at the moment – judge these as quite (economically) precarious for Malian journalists as many journalists earn only low wages or none at all, and they had no social security. This also ties in with the precarious situation of many publications, which is also a reason why journalists sometimes move between publications with more or less economic difficulties (for a more general account of precarious working conditions in the Malian media sector, see FES, 2016,

¹⁶² This background also challenges preconceived notions about gendered and urban-rural superiority.

p. 127f). In addition, one interview partner deplores that the Malian government would not encourage writing and research. Nevertheless, the same person voices a strong passion for writing, researching, and doing journalism.

Together, these explorations show that the authors of articles in the discourse analysis corpus and interviews speak from diverse but also – at first sight – privileged positions in terms of gender, class, and location. When looking more deeply into their trajectories, however, we can identify more complex socioeconomic locations that are reminiscent of Amina Mama's assertion that in African societies "every person is connected to poor persons through their family, every family has multiple classed statuses in it" (African Feminist Forum, 2017, p. 14:15-14:44). In addition, these locations are further complicated by the political positionings of journalists and other article authors. This unveils a complex embeddedness in relations of governmentality that manifest in the media sector as well as on the discourse level.

Self-Locations of Users: Multiple Voices, Multiple Privileges

In addition to journals and journalists, the (Facebook and Twitter) users that commented on the articles in the discourse analysis corpus, and with some of whom I did interviews, are also situated in a variety of social locations that, however, show a dominance of voices along the lines of gender, location, ethnicity, and class. This supports the previously developed assumption that especially Facebook and Twitter are mostly accessible to a small part of the Malian population that is mostly male, formally educated, and based in Bamako or other urban environments (see Section 6.1.2 for overall online communication and Section 6.2.2 for Facebook and Twitter). In this subsection, I mainly base my insights on the Facebook and Twitter users since they provided more elaborate profile information and – although sometimes use the Maliweb website as well – were the only ones who reacted to my interview requests. In the following, I first illustrate the distribution of users as mentioned in their profiles and interviews according to the categorisations based on location, gender, sexuality, age, religion, class, and ethnicity. In some cases, I supplement this material with observations in order to interpret it more meaningfully. Based on the more comprehensive characterisations of my interview partners, I will, then, give an idea of how these diverse categorisations came together to create intersectional social locations from which users speak to consolidate or transform gendered and postcolonial "mentalities of government" (Adebanwi, 2017, p. 66).

First, the geographic distribution of the users shows a focus on Bamako, but also supports the idea that the circulation of news through Maliweb creates a Malian-diasporic space. Among

the website usernames, only one states a location, i.e. Paris. Whereas many others voice some Malian or African affiliation in their usernames, this does not necessarily say something about their geographic location but more about their identifications and constructions of belonging (for more on identifications and belongings through comments, see Subchapter 7.4). What the Facebook and Twitter profile information show is that the commenting users have some focus on Mali and more specifically Bamako, but they are also translocally and transnationally dispersed, with others locating themselves in the North of Mali, in other West African cities, in other parts of the African continent or on other continents altogether. Among my interview partners, however, there seems to be a reinforced focus on urban areas in Southern Mali and Europe, as four are located in Bamako, another three in villages close to Bamako, two in the Southern Malian city Sikasso, one in Dakar, and another three in European cities (Paris, Marseille, undeclared location in Malta). However, several of these users have come from rural areas, or they have family or living experience in Northern Mali, or they also have been mobile within the West African and Mediterranean region. This shows that the locations we see here are only a snapshot of users' lives and positionalities. They indicate between which current locations narratives circulate, but they do not necessarily account for the diverse locations that users have already visited and of which they might carry embodied memories (see e.g. the Arouna Togola's account on visiting Maliweb or being online in Gao, Section 6.1.1).

In terms of gender relations, my observations, on the one hand, show a male dominance among users. This appears through a range of processes: First, as Figure 18 shows, most articles across platforms are discussed by more users who identify as male than users who identify as female. Sometimes, comment threads even consist of male-identified users only.¹⁶³ Moreover, an interesting issue in terms of gender relations online is also their ambiguity. Through the profile information, for instance, I still marked 41% of Maliweb and 10% of Twitter users as only "probably" male or female because their names are only considered male or female in the Malian context (and can indicate a different sex in other contexts) and –

¹⁶³ In my observations, some male-identified users justified or reinforced these exclusions on the argumentative and linguistic level, e.g. when one used a derogatory critique of the Malian justice system being "feminised," or when one posted a quoted statement arguing that male domination was nonexistent. In this line of thought, I also often came across debates that were criticising gender equality as Western import. This could be related to discourses about Malian feminism by e.g. xx [see Siméant 2014]. On the other hand, user (inter)actions also showed some emancipatory tendencies that pointed to an equalising trend or aspiration in users' gender relations. For instance, I came across a number of commenting users that were explicitly feminist (according to their profiles). Furthermore, within debates, some users supported gender equality.

in contrast to Facebook – they do not (have to) define a gender in their profile information.¹⁶⁴ This further points to the constructed nature and potential fluidity of social categorisations, especially in online environments.

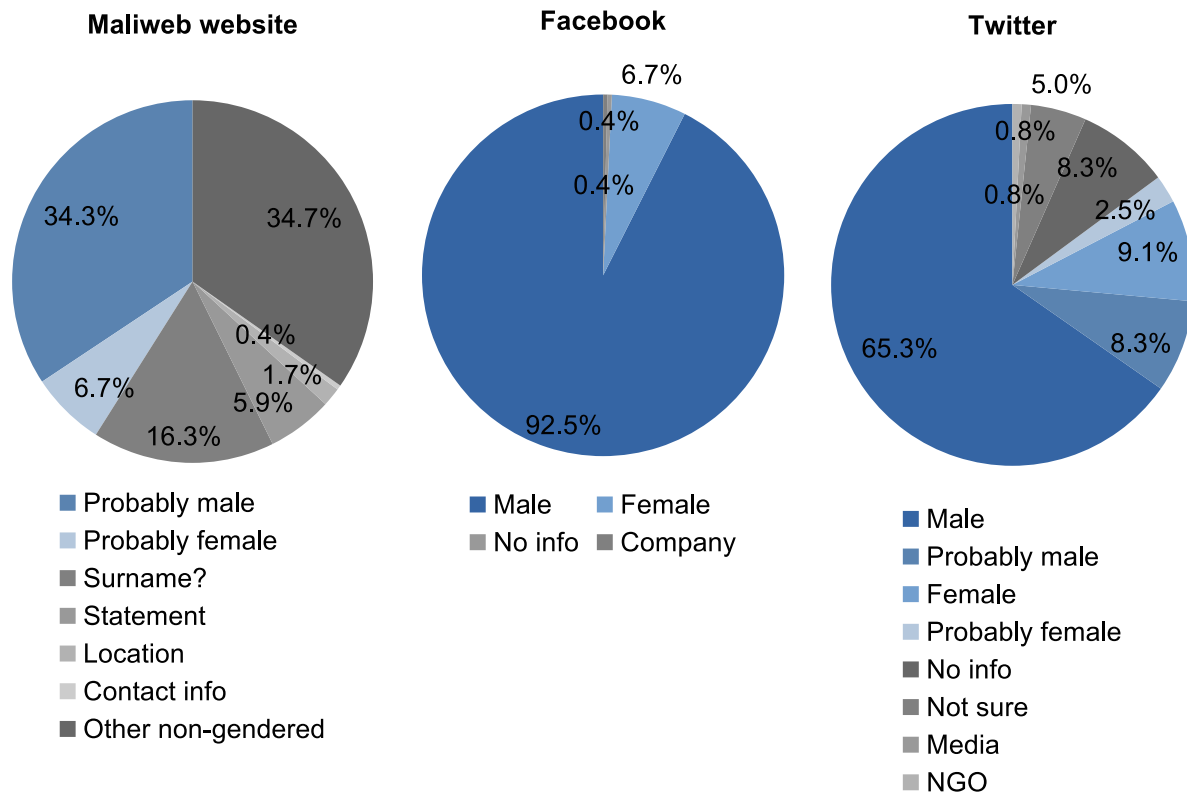


Figure 18: Gendered and non-gendered identifications of users as articulated in their usernames and profiles on Maliweb, Facebook, and Twitter (including users who have commented on the articles selected for the detailed analysis, own visualisation)

Related to the gender relations are also relations of sexuality. Here, however, my observations in relation to the Maliweb users' social locations are quite limited. In my interviews and profile information, sexuality did not arise as an explicit issue. I could assume for those who are married and have children in Mali that they are officially heterosexual, but I cannot be sure about their actual self-positioning. I also did not ask my interview partners about their sexuality because of the sensitivity of the issue in Mali (see Section 2.2.2) and I did not want to offend them. Thereby, the issue of sexuality is mostly silenced, which, in accordance with the media reporting on minority issues mentioned in Section 6.1.4, also reproduces heter-

¹⁶⁴ In one observation, even a user with a male user name articulated in their comment that it was still possible that they were a female user. In another observation, users undermined this ambiguity by addressing others with gender-related names or attributes like "sister".

normative norms in the public sphere. During my observations, however, I also came across instances when Malian-diasporic users defended the rights of homosexual people. On Mali-web, for instance, I observed several articles on homosexuality as a Western import and incompatible with Malian Muslim culture that are followed by user discussions during which typically at least one user defends homosexuality as an individual, private, and free choice that needs to be respected by society (see e.g. Diabaté, 2017).¹⁶⁵

Another dimension of social locations I observed was age. Although I did not capture age in the profile information, the distribution of my interview partners covers a broad range of age groups, from users in their early twenties to users in their sixties. This small sample, however, needs to be taken with caution, considering the decreasing internet use by elderly people in Malian society (see Section 6.1.2) and more general ageist tendencies in online communication (see e.g. Rosales & Fernández-Ardèvol, 2020). In addition, my observations suggest that age is an important structuring element in the construction of discourses. Sometimes, user interactions exclude or marginalise youth issues, e.g. when they delegitimise a youth protest in their comments or when they do not comment on youth issues at all. However, I also increasingly observed instances in which non-youth users praise the (mostly Malian or African) youth or raise awareness for youth issues like the problematic entanglement of education and class. In addition, I came across several users who identify as young or articulate their youth in their profile information. For instance, 13 Facebook and Twitter users self-identify as students, a positioning that is associated with youth and a negotiation between (Western) knowledge and immaturity. In general, the positive representation of young people in this environment is often associated with a hope for them changing things for Mali or Africa, mostly in terms of taking their fate into their own hands and freeing the country/continent from external influences (as also outlined in Section 2.2.3 and Section 7.4.2).

Moreover, some users also negotiate religious social locations. Whereas, as Figure 19 shows, most Facebook and Twitter users do not articulate any religious affiliation in their public profile information, some identify as Muslims, Christians, or religious in a more unspecific way. In my observational material, however, several users articulate their religious affiliation in their username, profile information, profile picture, or content they share. Mostly, these are Muslim affiliations, but also Christian and Evangelical affiliations appear occasionally. In the discourse analysis corpus, religious affiliations are on occasion related to power relations in this specific communicative situation, for instance, when users delegitimise others' opin-

¹⁶⁵ However, the framing of homosexuality as a "choice" still raises questions about the understanding of sexual identities (I give many thanks to Taylor Rosemeyer for this observation).

ions, either because of their lack of, or their being manipulated by religious commitment. In a broader connection of religion and racialisation, moreover, I observed one user who posted antisemitic content on the Maliweb website for a while. And some users voice their convictions in a very prescriptive and strict way, which could also intimidate other users. On the other hand, some users articulate their unease towards (monotheistic) religions, also in their usernames or in their content, a positioning that indirectly opposes users who voice religious affiliations. As we will see later (see Section 7.4.2), this secular presentation is in contrast to discursive identifications with religious societies and the importance of God in some subjectifications.

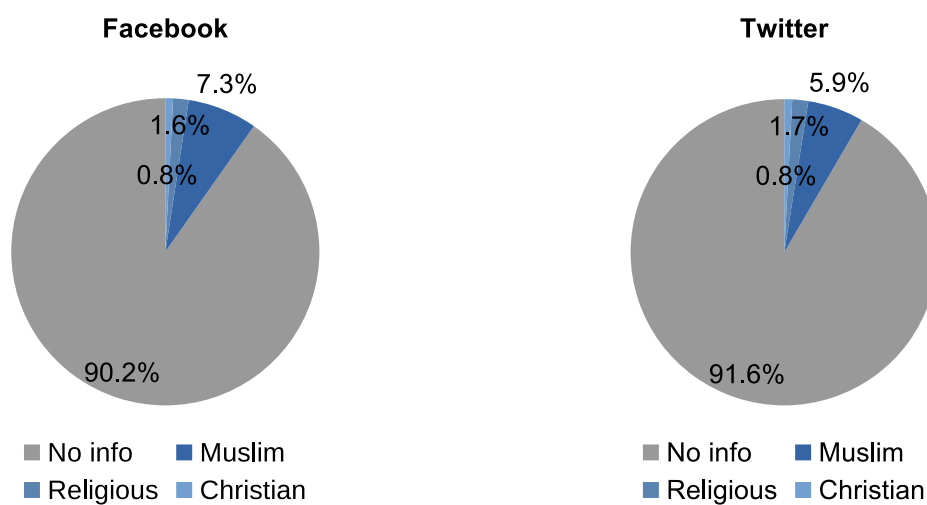


Figure 19: Religious distribution of users as articulated in their usernames and profiles on Facebook and Twitter (including users who have commented on the articles selected for the detailed analysis, own visualisation)

As the next dimension of social locations, I explored the classed positioning of users. In my material, I found two different manifestations of this positionality, namely education and the occupation users provide in their profiles.

Looking into users' education, Figure 20 indicates that most of the users do not name any education, especially on Twitter. If they do, however, they mostly state to have attended some form of university. However, Facebook users also name a number of different other school forms they have visited, and one Twitter user mentions being a self-educated person. While this focus on a university education points towards an elite group of users, users thereby also highlight the diversity of possible means for getting an education and thus could also contest dominant ideas about being an educated person. This is further supported by Bintou Maiga, who emphasises the complementary function of and need for exchange between different

types of education such as, for instance, Western and qur'anic education. On the one hand, the fact that users come from diverse educational backgrounds indicates that narratives circulate between users on different educational levels and can thus act as connective objects. On the other hand, however, as most users articulate a similar elite educational background and only some users express alternative ones, narratives circulate mostly between university graduates and only some non-university educated persons who, in the end, could end up being dominated by those in more privileged positions. However, interpreting the effect of these diverse educational positions is also about how users behave or which commenting strategies they employ – as we will see in the next subchapters that deal more with the discourse itself – as an important factor for the dominance (or not) of certain positions.

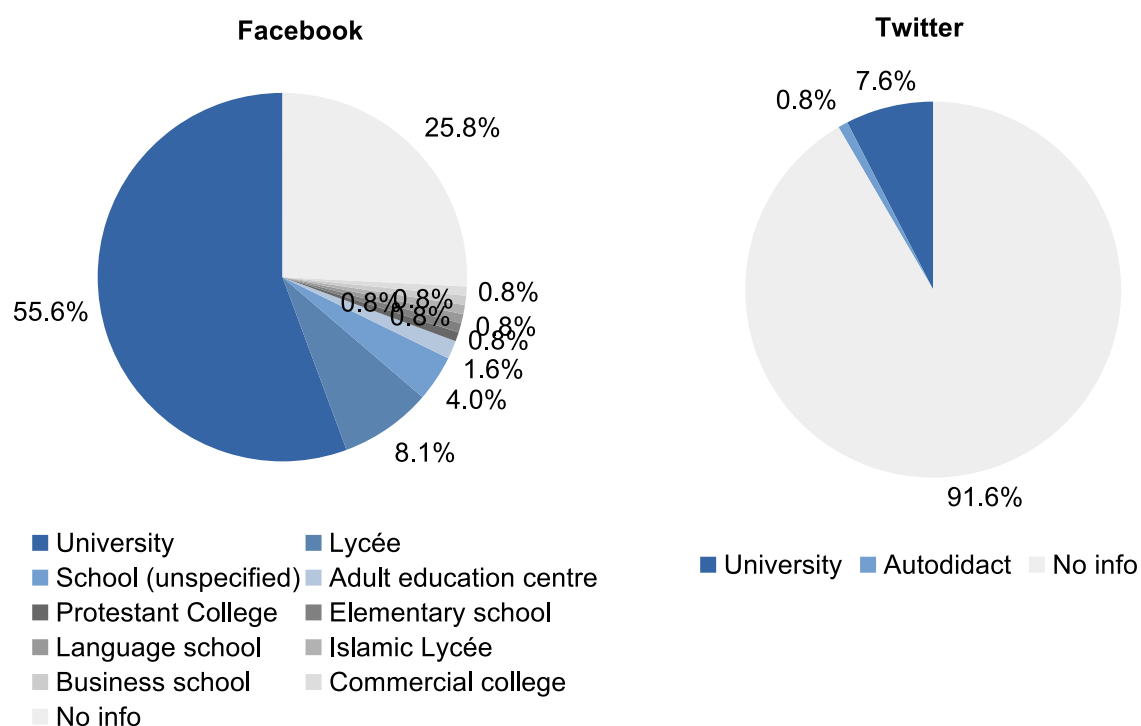


Figure 20: Education-related distribution of users as articulated in their profiles on Facebook and Twitter (including users who have commented on the articles selected for the detailed analysis, own visualisation)

For the occupation dimension, the commenting users represent a very diverse range of occupations. In general, many Facebook and Twitter users articulate their professions in their profile information or in their personal description. And still others show their occupation in profile pictures, like being on a construction site or sitting at a desk. On the Maliweb website,

some users even articulate their expertise in comments, in their signature, or username (e.g. "mining engineer"). In general, these displays show a diversity of occupations. Among my interview partners, for instance, they state that they are working as a "development" expert, teachers, researchers, a construction worker, NGO and public service employees, a film producer, and an entrepreneur. Also, according to users' Facebook profile information, the circulation of news has thus created a potential meeting place between a student and a school director, a barber and a ministry employee, and a retailer and an army employee, amongst many other occupations. Among the Twitter profiles, a similar mixture exists, bringing together, for instance, a secretary and a CEO, an activist and a politician, a sportsperson and a salesperson, a student and a civil servant, and an artist and an engineer. This diverse range of occupations bridges some socioeconomic differences. In addition, the increasing occurrence of actors who articulate activist interests I observed, especially on Twitter, also hints towards using this circulation as a way of political mobilisation, or – in the terms of this chapter – as a way of connecting everyday citizens, debates, and political causes also on the user level. On the other hand, however, especially in combination with the educational structures mentioned above, this diversity could also result in a hierarchy between those who speak from a more powerful position, and those who rather are expected to listen and submit. So here, we have to consider if such diversities encourage exchange in the sense of a general public sphere or if it rather hinders the emergence of subversive counter-publics.

Normally, however, the occupations that are shown like this are mostly connected to middle-class occupations like entrepreneurs,¹⁶⁶ employees, or even politicians. What is lacking here is the display of manual labour or informal activities that are very important in the Malian context (see Section 2.2.4). This could, however, also be an issue of self-presentation as Issa Kamara, for instance, works in manual construction work but does not display this in his profile. Another occupation that, however, is completely missing in the profile information, interviews, and even observations – and only appears as one's parents' occupation in interviews as testament to interview partners' simple background – is that of farmers. This could be for multiple reasons: First, farming could just not be considered as valuable as these other (middle-class) occupations – up to the point that they are not considered as an occupation at all, as I had, for instance, observed during interviews with Malian farming families in 2010. Moreover, this gap could also reflect the actual exclusion of persons in rural areas. Finally,

¹⁶⁶ However, one also has to consider the respective position of the persons in their respective context, for instance, if a person is self-employed in Mali, this can mean running a big business or it can mean owning a shop with regular customers, or being a mobile vendor with neither regular nor sufficient income – as was also described by Schulz (2012b, p. 60ff) as possible classed differentiations of Malian women working in retail.

users also do not articulate unemployment in their professional status. This, however, could still be an important condition for several users, either hidden in the accounts that do not provide any occupational information or in occupational information that is displayed but not actively pursued anymore.

The last dimension I introduce for the social location of users is their ethnicity. This social location has important implications, also because of ethnic tensions in Mali that have a long history and were reinforced over the past several years *inter alia* due to independence claims by certain Northern groups that are often associated with Islamist groups or even conflated with terrorist groups in the public discourse (see especially Sections 2.2.6 and Section 2.3.1). Despite the general reputation of Mali as being a very positive example for diverse ethnic groups living together, this context suggests that tensions exist and that these tensions could influence the interaction of users. In the interaction on Maliweb, Facebook, and Twitter, ethnic affiliations could be identified through family names in usernames (as family names are often associated with certain ethnic groups, see e.g. N. Cissé, 2001) or the explicit integration of ethnicities (e.g. "The Fulani") in usernames; places of origin; profile pictures that point to certain ethnic affiliation through associated attire or references (e.g. a meme/picture frame saying "proud to be Fulani"); or the use of certain languages that also point towards certain ethnic affiliations. On the website, for instance, some users (repeatedly) use Bambara sayings to strengthen their arguments. However, specific ethnic affiliations do not mean that perceived ethnic affiliations create strictly separated social groups. Some of my interview partners, for instance, mention interethnic marriages and connections in their families that also sustain connections between families in the South and North of Mali. Considering this complexity, I did not fix users to ethnic groups by, for instance, deducing their ethnicity from their user names. The general impression from the names and interactions I observed, however, is that ethnic groups from the South of Mali seem to be more represented in the selected discourse fragment on Malian transnational relations than ethnic groups from the Centre and North of Mali.

Together, these categorisations present different social locations with potential tensions and inequalities. In the following, I show how such social locations come together in the persons of single users, exemplified with my interview partners. In that sense, they serve as an example for the complexity of users who engage in debates on Malian transnational relations. After assessing their positionalities in terms of age, gender, occupation, social relations, location, migration history, place of origin, and education, I found no single exactly matching positionality among my interview partners. This shows that users involved in discussing

online news that circulate through Maliweb are indeed in diverse and complex social locations, and that everyone is marginalised in some position and privileged in other positions. The following list exemplifies this for the user interview partners:

- Issa Kamara: The young¹⁶⁷ male worker who comes from Western Mali and lives in Bamako after being mobile internationally, without a school degree (but with vocational training).
- Békaye Konaré: The young male university student who comes from Southern Mali and lives with his family in rural Southern Mali after being mobile nationally.
- Bintou Maiga: The adult female employee who comes from Central Mali and lives in a European city after being mobile internationally, divorced and has children, and has vocational training.
- Sirani: The adult female employee who comes from Mali and lives in a European city after being mobile internationally, with a university degree.
- Samalbane: The young male employee who comes from rural Southern Mali and lives in a Southern Malian city after being mobile nationally and internationally, with a university degree, and is married with children.
- Jacob: The young male employee who comes from a Southern Malian city and lives in the same city after being mobile nationally, with a university degree.
- Amadou Tamata: The young male employee who comes from Western Mali and lives in Bamako after being mobile inter/nationally, with a university degree/doctorate.
- Victoire Sanogo: The adult male public employee who comes from Southern Mali and lives in Bamako after being mobile nationally, married with children, and has a university/teaching degree.
- Arouna Togola: The adult male retired public employee who comes from rural Southern Mali and lives in a small Southern Malian town after being mobile nationally, married with children.
- Adama Diarra: The young male employee who comes from Southern Mali and lives in rural Southern Mali after being mobile nationally, married with children, and has vocational training.

¹⁶⁷ In accordance with Elena Sánchez-Montijano and José Sánchez García (2019, p. 3), I draw the line between "young" and "adult" around the age of 30 years.

- Bakary: The young male entrepreneur who comes from another West African country and lives in Bamako after being mobile internationally, and has a university degree.
- Arona Thiaw: The adult male entrepreneur who lives in Dakar after being mobile internationally.
- Aurore Eyoémama: The young female entrepreneur who comes from France and lives in a European city after being mobile internationally, is engaged with children, and has a university degree.

What stands out in this mapping of positionalities was that a lot of the users have moved during their lives for educational reasons. Education thus seems to be a big driving force and also raises interesting questions about the connection and entanglement of knowledge and mobility, and in some sense also about physical and social mobility.

In addition, these social locations also have a gendered dimension that seems to be related to the scale of movement. All three female interview partners have been mobile internationally (for education and work) and live outside of Mali, whereas all male interview partners live in Mali, even if they have been mobile internationally before. While this disrupts the traditional picture of mobile men and immobile, or differently mobile women in a gendered (Malian or West African) mobility regime (see e.g. Cresswell & Uteng, 2016; Hertrich & Lesclingand, 2013; Rodet, 2015), this pattern, however, highlights that women living in Mali are not actively represented in the deeper insights I gained from the interviews.

In addition, the social locations of users are also influenced by their diverse political positions that go beyond their contribution to the selected discourse fragment, i.e. their belonging to a majority or minority position in regard to specific topics.¹⁶⁸ In this context, my interview partners articulate differing positions in their communication, although many point to some overarching issues. Especially with regard to Malian transnational relations, one group rather focuses on the negative influence of postcolonial, neocolonial, or imperial relations, but mostly also in connection to national politics, i.e. with these politics being adversely affected by international relations (e.g. Samalbane, Aurore Eyoémama). Some also articulate an additional critique of capitalist structures here (e.g. Victoire Sanogo). Among this group, some see alternative powers like Russia and China as a potential solution, others just as

¹⁶⁸ I could also observe this coming together of diverse positions beyond the discourse analysis corpus as users voiced different opinions on, for instance, the constitutional reform or the "Azawad" question, but they also engaged in issues related to transnational relations like favouring Putin or Qaddafi, or voicing critique of the FCFA or the French intervention, or they were promoting (Pan-)African figures like Thomas Sankara, Nelson Mandela, or Paul Kagame. And some also articulated concern for the environment.

another threat. And several emphasise the interdependencies between African and Western countries, not only presenting themselves as victims but also as essential to the current system. On the other side, some interview partners rather stress internal social and especially political problems (like corruption or nepotism) as reasons for Mali's weak standing in its transnational relations, especially due to its lack of credibility (e.g. Békaye Konaré). Some are rather in the middle, as they acknowledge the potential usefulness of transnational relations, especially those users who are employed through international funding, but they still call for a reformulation or adaptation of these relations, mostly in terms of Western actors needing to be more honest (e.g. Amadou Tamata). One issue that is, however, quite overarching is the emphasis on Malian or African societies as being responsible for their future, sometimes related to a quest for a (Pan-)African renaissance or activism (e.g. Aurore Eyoémana). And whether users consider external or internal political influences as more important, many articulate a nationalist view, emphasising that the value of the Malian nation in that regard, is somehow separated from politics. And all who mention it emphasise their claim for a united Mali. Thereby, the different positions on Malian transnational relations between which these narratives became mobile, in some ways also find a common ground, but also illustrate that narratives becoming mobile happens not only between different geographic positions but also between different social and political positions.

In summary, despite some emancipatory tendencies and these diverse political positions, social relations in this discourse are often characterised by a dominance of male, heterosexual, Southern, middle-class, formally-educated positionalities. In some instances, however, otherwise marginalised actors and positions (e.g. from and on the North of Mali, non-Western educated, or female actors) get to participate in this discourse and – as we will see later – also contribute alternative positions. In terms of mobilising subjectifications for or against gendered postcolonial governmentality, the diversity that is visible in this context offers potentials for exchange that can either consolidate or transform (post)colonial "technologies of rule" (Adebanwi, 2017, p. 66). This is especially valuable if, on the interaction level, different social locations are combined with a cooperative mode of interactions so that actors can really learn from each other on the discursive level. However, if that is rather a cooperation of people in similar social locations, this can also go into the direction of creating echo chambers (as also argued by Strand, 2019, p. 239), which would hinder the contingency of narratives. In addition, a conflicting cooperation or a set of social locations that rather results in hierarchies and exclusionary behaviour could also hinder the contingency of narratives as marginalised actors might not voice their real opinions, they might not be heard, or may be silenced in the

debate. In order to evaluate the exchange between these diverse social locations in more detail, I will be looking at related processes of conflict and cooperation, exclusion and inclusion next.

7.1.2 Hierarchical Interactions and Their Implications for Processes of In/Exclusion in Dialogical Constructions of Subjectivities

In addition to exploring the social locations, I also account for the experienced interactions between operators, article authors, and users in order to explicate hierarchies and processes of inclusion and exclusion that structure their interactions. I accessed these interactions through general observations, interviews with users and journalists, and the analysed articles and comments. In more general terms of identity constructions online, this relates to Yuval-Davis' (2010, p. 271f) ideas on dialogical identities, as she emphasises how identities are constructed in relation to others, which accounts for intersectional hierarchies in their construction but also their ephemeral character and as such, their potential for cultural mobility and contingency in diverse contexts.

In relation to the workings of postcolonial and gendered governmentality in this online environment, this subchapter shows how interactions between users and journalists regulate ways of engaging, i.e. how they "conduct the conduct" (Adebanwi, 2017, p. 66; referring to Foucault's notion of conduct, see also Foucault, 1982, p. 789) of social actors that construct the discourse on Malian transnational relations through online news. In some ways, this section creates a link between media governmentality on the context level and the governmentality of publics through mentalities and subjectifications on the content level because these interactions influence the content and access to its debate, but they are also influenced by media governmentality and especially the (self-)governance through social media regulations.

Perceived Relations between Journalists, Users, and the Maliweb Portal

Before we turn to interactions between article authors and users that structure the circulation of online news, I briefly introduce opinions voiced about Maliweb by these groups. These opinions provide insights into perceived relations between Maliweb as publishing outlet, on the one hand, and article authors and users as producers and consumers of the published content, on the other hand.

During my interviews, journalists and users also gave their own – sometimes rather contradictory – evaluations of Maliweb. For journalists, positive factors of the Maliweb portal include that it offers an inexpensive opportunity to make the journalistic work accessible to a national and international readership, especially if they have no website or social media account of their own where they can publish their work (e.g. Harouna Kassambara, Gabriel Dossou, Abdoulaye Cissé, Aminata Touré). Especially Abdoulaye Cissé, one of the co-founders of Maliweb, also stresses the high quality of their information. On the negative side, some journalists argue that the portal is only one of many by now (after it was among the first to provide online information on Mali), thus questioning its reach (e.g. Aminata Touré). This could also be a reason why several publications publish in multiple news portals. In addition, I observed that international newspapers occasionally reproach Maliweb of using and publishing their articles without their consent. This is also suggested by one user, who claimed that Maliweb only publishes minimally edited articles from other publications instead of producing their own (Bakary). Journalists and users thereby question the utility of portals like Maliweb for (international) journals and rather present them as undeserving beneficiaries. In a similar line of thought, Aminata Touré argues that Maliweb should actually pay the journals for the articles they published, thus questioning the free exchange of content and platform altogether.

For the users, many stress the positive sides of Maliweb. Some have a long history with the portal and emphasise its usefulness for their causes, including, for instance, having a space for debate, getting material for their research, or connecting with family and the Malian society during times of international migration (e.g. Bintou Maiga, Samalbane, Bakary). Others rather value the quality of information provided on Maliweb, its fast provision of content, its diverse topics, and especially its combination of national and international information (e.g. Amadou Tamata, Jacob, Samalbane, Arouna Togola). For one user, his endorsement of Maliweb is, moreover, ideologically motivated to support "nationalist" media (Jacob). Lastly, some emphasise that they trust Maliweb or think of it as providing credible information – also in comparison to other news portals – since, for instance, the government also uses it for giving announcements.

The same connection to the government, however, is a reason for users not to trust Maliweb and to assess the portal as being too close to national authorities. They rather question its credibility in a more general context of Malian media being influenced by political actors and being prone to manipulation (e.g. Jacob, Issa Kamara, Sirani). Sirani emphasises this through comparing Maliweb to international media and assessing the latter as more trustworthy as

they would be less prone to manipulation. In the same line of thought, several users also question the credibility of the information provided on Maliweb, accusing the portal of spreading rumours and fake news, or more generally information without sufficient proof (e.g. Békaye Konaré, Samalbane, Arouna Togola). Therefore, users also employ strategies for verifying information published via Maliweb, through, for instance, searching for original sources, or double-checking with other publications and personal contacts (e.g. Samalbane, Arouna Togola). And one user even counters the fast production of news, as she tends to wait 24 until 48 hours before reacting in order to confirm stories (Bintou Maiga). This also resonates with some problems of the Malian news landscape in terms of independent reporting we identified in Section 6.1.4.

Together, this shows that already on the level of the Maliweb portal, article authors and users perceive hierarchies and diverse potential political influences in the production and circulation of online news.

Dialogical Hierarchies between Users and Journalists through Comments

In this subsection, I explicate some of the interactions between users and journalists that constitute a context for dialogical constructions of identities and belongings through cooperation and contestations that are embedded in broader forms of gendered and postcolonial governmentality. In order to assess the intersectional implications – especially along the lines of gender, class, and postcoloniality – of interactions between and among users and journalists, I approach them through the lens of digital affective labour. As outlined in Section 4.4.3, affective labour aims at the formation of human relations with the ultimate goal of increasing the competitiveness of corporations in capitalist economies (Hardt, 1999, pp. 91, 96; Sauer & Penz, 2017, p. 41). Considering that connectivity and community are core appeals (and accumulative strategies) of the social networking sites Facebook and Twitter, and to some extent of Maliweb (see Section 6.2.3), I argue that interacting journalists and users perform affective labour in the context of debating online news on these platforms. In addition, I consider the consolidating and transforming power relations created through affective labour by focusing on gendered hierarchies and constructions of masculinity and femininity in user interactions.

Beyond these hierarchies, interactions between and among journalists and users do not always follow the ideal of affective labour that – also in the sense of platform operators who originally designed their platforms as to avoid conflicts (Castro, 2016, p. 96) – creates feelings of

community and connectivity. In some instances, these interactions also result in less supportive affective actions like critique, disputes, insults, or even threats. In that regard, however, both manifestations of digital affective labour show instances of reproducing and challenging intersectional – especially gendered and classed – social relations that are embedded in this specific postcolonial context.

In this context, I identified three different forms of comment threads: The first is a string of comments that do not relate to each other; the second is a collection of comments that rather unanimously side on an issue; and the third is a succession of comments that refer to each other and controversially debate the respective issues, often in combination with comments that are supporting each other's opinions. Such more or less hotly debated issues include, for instance, the French intervention in Mali, Mali's relations with the US, homosexuality, Malian unity, postcolonial responsibilities, and the performance of national political elites. These controversial debates manifest in forms, with and without insults, but can both be seen as a form of conflict (for more on differentiations of 'civil' and 'uncivil' discourses online, see Krzyzanowski & Ledin, 2017). Based on these different forms, I differentiate between performances of affective labour that manifest as cooperation, and those that manifest as conflict with their specific implications for intersectional power relations between journalists and users.

Forms of Cooperation between and among Journalists and Users

First, users and article authors perform digital affective labour through forms of cooperation. However, as we will see, even these cooperative interactions are imbued with social hierarchies that further structure the circulating and contingency of narratives.

Journalists mention a range of positive effects that come from interactions with their articles (i.e. comments or other reactions). These include appreciation for their writing, intellectual exchange, or even further contacts for potential publication.¹⁶⁹ Two interview partners also emphasise that the comments allow them to improve their work. In addition, we can see a gendered difference in their interpretation of digital interactions with readers as digital affective labour. As a form of professionalisation of these potential relations with readers, male journalists interpret comments to their articles as proof for their articles being interesting and appreciated (or stated not being interested in those comments) and thereby maintain a

¹⁶⁹ In this context, I also observed that users sometimes addressed the journalists in comments, agreeing with them, supporting their point of view, or even thanking them. However, I have also observed that users sometimes corrected journalists in their comments.

journalist-reader hierarchy, or they even interpret comments by useful contacts as extensions of their professional networks. The only female journalist, on the other hand, frames these relations with readers as a learning opportunity, thus putting herself in an inferior position to her – probably mostly male – readers:

I remember, I wrote an article that was published on Maliweb, that was when I was an intern. The comments were heavy. Since then I loved it that my articles are published on Maliweb. The comments help us a lot to improve. [Questionnaire answer by Aminata Touré, a female journalist with her own TV show]¹⁷⁰

What comes to mind, I can meet someone (...), yes I agree with you or I do not agree with you, (...) but there are also journalists who may, who tell me (...), well I think this is very interesting, well the next time when you want to publish something, think of us, give it to us and we will certainly publish it. Walla, well, that's the relations like this, be it the discussions, I meet people who talk to me, or also the journalists. [Phone interview with Ousmane Traoré, male architect, writer, and oppositional politician]¹⁷¹

The users as well voice several positive experiences from their interactions (mostly with other users) and the subsequent forming of relations through their affective labour. In doing so, they emphasise functional and deliberative uses, on the one hand, and at relational uses of online (news) media, on the other hand.¹⁷²

On the functional level, some users emphasise that online (news) media use is a means of gathering and evaluating information by sharing one's own information and receiving those of others, a process of learning from each other that one user describes as a form of "give and take" (Jacob). One user even sees this as a whole research process he makes accessible to others and contributes to an assembly of information in the sense of the Greek agora (Samalbane). In this line of thought, I also observed how some users share information on Facebook that aims at correcting fake news, thus contributing to this search for credible information. In addition, one user even sees the information shared through Facebook as orienting towards

¹⁷⁰ Je me souviens, j'ai fait un article qui a été publié sur Maliweb, c'était quand j'étais stagiaire. Les commentaires étaient ouf. Depuis lors j'adorais que mes articles soient publiés sur Maliweb. Les commentaires aident beaucoup à nous améliorer. [Questionnaire answer by Aminata Touré, a female journalist with her own TV show]

¹⁷¹ Ce qui me revient, je peux rencontrer quelqu'un (...), ouai je suis d'accord avec vous ou je suis pas d'accord avec vous, (...) mais il y a des journalistes qui peuvent, me disent (...), bon je trouve ça très intéressant, bon la prochaine fois si vous voulez publier quelque chose, pensez à nous, donnez à nous, on va certainement publier. Walla, donc c'est des rapports comme ça, soit des discussions, je rencontre des gens qui m'en parlent, ou bien des journalistes. [Phone interview with Ousmane Traoré, male architect, writer, and oppositional politician]

¹⁷² Only one user mainly focused on the negative side, just mentioning that the exchange with some users was "ok."

job and income opportunities (Adama Diarra).¹⁷³ Additionally, this form of digital affective labour as performed by users shows a gendered dimension since it is mostly male users who present their exchanges in such a utilitarian way. This also ties in with Zerai (2019, p. 8), who mentions research that has shown how male Nigerian mobile phone users portrayed their phone use as work-related, whereas they accused female phone users of using their phones only for sexual relations. Thereby, they are also to some extent professionalising their personal social interactions, in the sense of the platform operators as consumers *and* producers of content. In addition, this also shows compliance with Eurocentric, modernist ideas of digital "development" that value such functional interactions higher than more leisure-oriented forms (for more on this debate on digital leisure, see Arora & Rangaswamy, 2013). The following reflections show that this (implicit) gendered dimension is also related to a classed and Eurocentric normalised understanding of using social media and performing affective labour through them:

Syntia: And how are these discussions for you?

Adama Diarra: Since they often direct me, in that case, it's fine. (...) For example the recruitment notices, the employment opportunities etc.... With Facebook and the friends one can know everything [Email conversation with Adama Diarra, male pharmaceutical technician of 31 years in a small town in the region of Koulikoro]¹⁷⁴

On the deliberative level, male interview partners often stress a rationalised form of managing emotions online, thereby implicitly presenting themselves in contrast to postcolonial and gendered mentalities of irrational and thus illegitimate emotional displays (see e.g. Bargetz & Sauer, 2015, p. 95f). In that regard, some users value the free exchange of opinions, mutual respect, and courtesy as preconditions for freedom of expression (e.g. Arona Thiaw). In this vein, most users emphasise their own attempt to respect others' views (e.g. Jacob, Arouna Togola). Victoire Sanogo further hints at the principles of rational argument when he declares to respect all other opinions while trying to convince them of his point of view. Several interview partners thus value the diversity and rational exchange of opinions as forms of deliberative interactions.

¹⁷³ And also on the Maliweb site, I observed that users suggested contacts and a potential internship to the subject of an article who wanted to become an engineer.

¹⁷⁴ Syntia: Et ces discussions sont comment pour vous? – Adama Diarra: Puisque sa m'oriente souvent, dans ce cas c'est bien. (...)Par exemple les avis recrutements, les démarches d'emploi etc.... Avec Facebook et les amis on peut tout savoir [Email conversation with Adama Diarra, male pharmaceutical technician of 31 years in a small town in the region of Koulikoro]

Syntia: When you publish or comment on publications on Facebook, which experiences have you made with people who have a different opinion?

Victoire Sanogo: I respect the option [sic!] of people who have different points of view while trying to convince them so that they understand what I am saying [WhatsApp message from Victoire Sanogo, male teacher of over 50 years old in Bamako]¹⁷⁵

On the other hand, some users also voice alternative – Sauer and Penz speak, for instance, of "a 'modernisation' of gender relations in the sense of Connell and Messerschmidt (2005)" (Sauer & Penz, 2017, p. 54) – interpretations of affective labour, as female and male users, as well as, for instance, users with and without a university education emphasise their interactions as having a relational quality.¹⁷⁶ For instance, Adama Diarra claims to mostly exchange with people he knew personally in order to be able to engage more meaningfully. In addition, another user explains her liking and retweeting practices in this context as a way of valuing and supporting others' contributions, as well as for furthering mutual (transnational) understanding (Bintou Maiga). One user also emphasised the diversity of cooperative interactions they performed, from debating news to exchanging family pictures and funny videos, a diversity they experienced as "moments of communion" (Arouna Togola). Lastly, Bakary explains that he organises offline events with other Malian Twitter users that have led to important friendships.

To say the truth, I was a loner. But since some years, we organise meetings beyond the networks. Football matches or "barbecue parties" with the "Malian twittos". I have formed genuine relations with some who are my friends today. [WhatsApp conversation with Bakary, male film producer in his thirties in Bamako]¹⁷⁷

These users thus highlight how forms of online cooperation lead to relations beyond online media. Together, these forms of cooperation show how journalists and users perform digital affective labour through their interactions, but also at times interpret this work in ways that

¹⁷⁵ Syntia: Si vous publiez ou commentez des publications sur Facebook, quelles expériences avez-vous faites avec des gens qui ont un point de vue différent? – Interview partner 4: je respecte l'option des gens qui ont des points de vue différents tout en essayant de les convaincre pour qu'ils comprennent ce que je dit [WhatsApp message from Victoire Sanogo, male teacher of over 50 years old in Bamako]

¹⁷⁶ On the website, features like holiday wishes by Maliweb combined with the same wishes by diverse users could contribute to a certain form of community formation. In addition, according to my observations, several users interacting with these online news articles seemed to know each other. For instance, they asked about their families, they unveiled additional information about other users' location or education, or they referred to former interactions ("for once we agree").

¹⁷⁷ J'étais à vrai dire, un solitaire. Mais depuis quelques années, nous organisons des rencontres en dehors des réseaux. Des matchs de foot ou des "barbecue party" avec les "twittos maliens". J'ai noué de véritables relations avec certains qui sont aujourd'hui des amis. [WhatsApp conversation with Bakary, male film producer in his thirties in Bamako]

either reproduce or challenge gendered and classed hierarchies as well as Eurocentric developmentalist ideas of Southern media use.

Forms of Conflict between and among Users and Journalists

In addition to these cooperative forms of digital affective labour, the platform-moderated creation of relations also manifests in conflicts that might challenge social hierarchies, but more often exacerbate the exclusion of marginalised others. On this conflict side, journalists and users as well voice less cooperative experiences through interactions with other online actors that have different intensities as well as different implications for the reproduction and contestation of intersectional hierarchies. In that sense, these forms of conflictive interactions point less to the performance of digital affective work per se but more to practices that unveil and challenge the "numerous divisions within the realm of immaterial labor" (Hardt, 1999, p. 97) and their embeddedness in intersectional inequalities.

On the transforming side of conflictive interactions, two female users emphasise that online interactions allow them – and also other users – to critique other (imagined) users they would not be able to engage with in a critical way in offline situations, thereby challenging their exclusion from public discourse (Bintou Maiga, Aurore Eyoémana). In that regard, the political activist Aurore Eyoémana mainly points to the opportunities for critical encounters between citizens and state representatives, thus framing this inclusion through critique in a political way and thereby also countering ideas of politics as masculinised field that (relationally working) female actors have no access to or opinion on.

Because it's thanks to Twitter and Facebook and all this that the people discover that they could (speak to) a president of the republic, or to a minister, or to a simple policeman of the quartier (...), to whom one can talk and tell them the truths. The people, the Africans suffer in silence. So, we need to wake up [Phone interview with Aurore Eyoémana, female entrepreneur and political activist in her twenties in Malta]¹⁷⁸

The other user, Bintou Maiga, emphasises the possibility to articulate herself online without being interrupted by others who disagree with her frankness – a hurtful practice that is reminiscent of the classed and racialised habit of keeping things to oneself that was already described by bell hooks (hooks, 2015, p. 2f). Considering that, throughout our interactions,

¹⁷⁸ Parce que c'est grâce à Twitter et le Facebook et tout que les gens découvrent qu'on pouvait (parler à) un président de la république ou bien un ministre, ou bien un simple policier du quartier (...), à qui on peut parler et lui dire les vérités. Les gens, les Africains subissent en silence. Donc, il faut réveiller [Phone interview with Aurore Eyoémana, female entrepreneur and political activist in her twenties in Malta]

this user often refers to examples that deal with social hierarchies along the lines of gender and age, this possibility for critique through digital affective labour counters ideas of femininity as submissive and always supportive of the (male, older) ones they are connected to, and rather is reminiscent of a digital variety of "talking back" (hooks, 1989, p. 7ff). In that vein, this form of critique also challenges the ideal of masculinity as being able to control women (see e.g. Schulz & Diallo, 2016, p. 244).

You can allow yourself to say, what you cannot say more above, you can in fact say it more below. When I tell you 'more below', that means that you are not face-to-face to the person who signals you either with a sign of the head or with gestures to tell you no, you should not do this! So, that's the advantage of commenting already, or of sharing certain things through the social networks, in contrast to sharing them with the people, to sharing them with someone who is face-to-face to you in fact. [WhatsApp voice message from Bintou Maiga, female employee in her fifties in Paris]¹⁷⁹

Both female users mention that the other (elite and assumed male) users are not used to critique and do not tend to engage with their contesting comments online, but rather take offline (repressive) means to silence them. This is in line with another male user's experience of conflictive online interactions and highlights the multiple relations between online conflicts and their offline environments. This male user even did not want to talk about his negative exchange experiences, and just kept repeating that they have had negative consequences for his life and that he could not talk about it (Issa Kamara). Also the female entrepreneur and political activist Aurore Eyoémama emphasises that such online contestations can lead to offline reactions, telling me about a government-critical person in the diaspora, who received a package with two vipers as a form of "mystical" aggression, assumedly from Gabonese political elites. Bintou Maiga, on the other hand, seems to mostly experience conflicting reactions to her often-critical comments outside of social media, stating that her friends would rather call her to discuss these issues (while sometimes "secretly" agreeing with her opinions) as issues that should not be debated in public. This shows the embeddedness of digital affective labour in offline political contexts with their social hierarchies, even if the involved users are situated in their respective diasporas.

However, especially such social hierarchies are also reproduced – as well as contested – in more adversely conflictive online interactions. These conflictive comments, then, appear in

¹⁷⁹ On se permet de dire, ce qu'on peut pas dire plus haut, on peut le dire plus bas quoi en fait. Quand je te dis 'plus bas', ça dire que tu n'est pas en face de la personne qui te fait soit un signe de la tête ou bien des gestes pour te dire non, il faut pas faire ça! Donc, c'est l'avantage déjà de commenter, ou bien de, de partager certaines choses à travers les réseaux sociaux, que de partager avec les gens, que de partager avec quelqu'un qui est en face de toi en fait. [WhatsApp voice message from Bintou Maiga, female employee in her fifties in Paris]

different intensities. In my observations, for instance, I came across users who merely employ a light, mocking tone when crossing other users, but I equally encountered severe insults and physical threats that users write to other users, verbally and sometimes supported visually (e.g. with knife icons). Therefore, the potential effect of such conflicting interactions for social hierarchies also depends on their tone.

Among my journalist interview partners, three mention conflicting user reactions to their articles.¹⁸⁰ Ousmane Traoré critiques them as biased comments motivated by political partisanship, Aminata Touré claims that they were "shockingly critical" at first, and Harouna Kassambara experiences insults against his person and even family that he admits are hurtful and that he believes to be possible because of the anonymity online. The latter journalist thus also sees the platforms as responsible for deleting such comments. By admitting his own emotional vulnerability and asking the platforms to shield him from these insults, he thereby also challenges ideas of hegemonic militarised and heroic masculinity that rather stresses invincibility in situations of conflict.

Walla, but well. Often, it's also to see now, the comments that contain the insults, that's the sites who have to see now, how to delete this. Walla, walla. Because often it's, when you see the insults, people insult you, your fathers and your mothers often as well, that often hurts. [Phone interview with Harouna Kassambara, male journalist working for an important Malian weekly]¹⁸¹

Also on the user level, several users – male and female – identify anonymity as an important reason for insulting comments as people can say them "behind their phones" (Amadou Tamata) or "behind their screens" (Sirani) and can thus avoid the social situations that would normally forbid such comments.

In that way, most users have experienced insulting, derogatory, or even violent comments by other users that emphasise the gendered, classed, and ethnicised implications of their digital affective labour in the online environment.¹⁸² Some female (diasporic) users identify cultural

¹⁸⁰ In my observations, I also came across several instances in which users critiqued the respective article journalist, be it for wrongful information, mistakes, their style, a lack of clarity on their sources, or even exclusion (in that case, Ivoryphobia).

¹⁸¹ Walla, mais bon. Souvent, c'est aussi de voir maintenant, les commentaires qui contiennent les insultes là, c'est les sites qui doivent voir maintenant, comment supprimer ça quoi. Walla, walla. Parce que souvent c'est, quand tu vois des insultes, on t'insulte, tes pères et tes mères souvent aussi, souvent ça fait mal. [Phone interview with Harouna Kassambara, male journalist working for an important Malian weekly]

¹⁸² In my observations, insulting comments were also not always based on the debate but sometimes directed at the person, delegitimising their contributions because of their privileged geographic and social location (living in Bamako, being able to afford daily Maliweb visits), because of their youth, their ethnicity, or because they were not seen as being worthy of being Malians. As Marjan Nadim and Audun Fladmoe (2019, p. 3f) have shown,

parameters for conflicting interactions. One sees this as a more general fear of social change through social media and of Malians abroad "forgetting their roots" (Bintou Maiga). In a more intersectional way, another diasporic female user sees her opinions being delegitimised especially since she is a woman abroad and relates the insulting tone of many discussions to the majority of other users being men.

Ah yes yes, and the disrespectful exchanges, not from my side, but other users who, euh, because we are women, because we live abroad, we are completely, we don't have the right to give our opinion, (...) but it's true that, with some it's ok, but the majority, the users, who (...) mostly are men, insulters, disrespectful. (...) that's the majority that interacts on the social networks. [Phone interview with Sirani, female company employee in her forties in Marseille]¹⁸³

In her experience, male users mobilise affects to exclude female voices with references to their missing patriotic attachment as an attempt to reclaim a hegemonic nationalist masculinity in the context of digital affective work, thereby trying to immobilise the social status quo. They do so by controlling which affects and mobilisations are articulated in a specific post-colonial setting that prioritises nationalism, Pan-Africanism, or religion as more valid attachments than (transnational) feminism (as problematised also more globally by e.g. Carole Boyce Davies, 2020). In the specific Malian context, this is reminiscent of the dismissal of publicly speaking women as lacking modesty (Lackenbauer et al., 2015, p. 30f). Moreover, in the comments analysed in the next chapter, I also encountered a male user accusing a female diasporic user of (not) being a "good" Muslim, which further unveils male control over interpretations of morality and piety, both of which exclusions were equally identified, for instance, by Schulz (2012a, p. 24).

In contrast to this interpretation of conflictive comments by female users, male users interpret insults and derogatory comments more from a class angle, presenting themselves as superior and thereby claiming their (hegemonic) masculinities. One male user, for instance, attributes others' annoyance with his long comments to Malian society not appreciating the written word and being more interested in images and videos – a trait he connects to or claims to observe along a more general loss of morality in comparison to the Malians of the 1960s, i.e. the (socialist) post-independence period.

such forms of group-based harassment have more detrimental and thus exclusionary effects on those addressed than content-based harassment.

¹⁸³ Ah oui oui, et des échanges irrespectueux, pas de ma part, mais des autres internautes qui, euh, parce qu'on est des femmes, parce qu'on vit à l'étranger, on est complètement, on n'a pas le droit de donner son avis, (...) mais c'est vrai que, avec certains ça va, mais en majorité, les internautes, qui (...) sur la plupart sont les hommes, insulteurs, irrespectueux. (...) c'est la plupart qui interviennent sur les réseaux sociaux. [Phone interview with Sirani, female company employee in her forties in Marseille]

So the problem of Mali, of the whole Mali is that the Mali [sic!] does not read. The Malian does not read, he is very focused on the image, the pictures, the videos...and the publications, the comments the research and stuff like this, the population (...) is never a part of this. The other thing, if you publish a lot, they don't even look at it (...)! But often, I meet these people, they look at me, since they look at me in boredom, (...) you, you talk too much, you talk too much. But I, I talk for you, I research a lot, I share (...) my conviction, with you! With regard to these people, there are many people who do not understand. [WhatsApp voice message from Samalbane, male NGO employee in his thirties, commuting between the cities Sikasso and Koutiala]¹⁸⁴

Such interpretations of conflictive (gendered) interactions, then, point to an entanglement of masculinity and class differentiations as observed by Schulz and Diallo for constructions of masculinity in the Southern Malian context: "young men's diverse masculinity constructions show first, in arguments about the need to regulate women's behavior, and second, in efforts to present oneself as morally superior and intellectually more enlightened than other men" (Schulz & Diallo, 2016, p. 238).¹⁸⁵ In that regard, male users reproduce a rationalised form of hegemonic masculinity, especially when their digital affective labour is not recognised as such or is even disrupted by others.

In order to deal with such conflictive comments, the interviewed users articulate diverse strategies that I categorise as affirmative, defensive, and withdrawing. In that regard, whereas no user claims to write in another way because of potential insults, my interview partners seem to either continue writing what they think, limit their audiences, or stop writing altogether:

1. Affirmative: Especially Bintou Maiga, Samalbane, Sirani, and Aminata Touré affirm the need to keep on speaking their mind. They ignore such conflictive comments, challenge them, and claim their freedom of opinion. Bintou Maiga, however, also uses text messages as more private means (than vocal contributions) when residing in Mali to avoid social pressure and debates.

¹⁸⁴ Donc, le problème du Mali, du Mali entier est tel que le Mali ne lit pas. Le Malien ne lit pas, il est très concentré à l'image, des photos, les vidéos...et les publications, les commentaires, les recherches et ceci comme ça, la population (...) fait jamais parti. L'autre là, si tu publie beaucoup des choses, ils regardent même pas (...)! Mais souvent, je rencontre ces gens là, ils me voient, lorsque ils me voient à l'ennui, (...) toi, tu parles trop, tu parles trop. Mais moi, je parle pour vous, je fais beaucoup des recherches, je partage (...) ma conviction, avec vous! Par rapport à ces gens là, il y a beaucoup des personnes qui ne comprennent pas. [WhatsApp voice message from Samalbane, male NGO employee in his thirties, commuting between the cities Sikasso and Koutiala]

¹⁸⁵ In contrast to further elaborations by Schulz and Diallo (2016), in case of Samalbane, the quote above is not related to a construction of superior in relation to Muslim others, considering that Samalbane himself is manifestly religious. Although this was not mentioned by my interview partners, during my observations, I additionally observed ethnic affiliations or tensions that, for instance, manifested in denigrating comments on other users based on their ethnicity, or more generally in debates about the value and danger of ethnic identifications.

2. Defensive: Bintou Maiga and Sirani as well, in combination with Arouna Togola take actions against such comments to protect themselves. The two female users, for instance, mention reporting insulting comments to Facebook. And Sirani additionally changed her settings so that she cannot receive private messages by non-Facebook friends anymore. The male user Arouna Togola states that he deletes comments or even persons from his friends list in cases of derogatory or insulting comments.
3. Withdrawing: Finally, the female interview partners Bintou Maiga and Sirani, as well as the male interview partners Amadou Tamata and Bakary limit their virtual and emotional exposure to conflictive interactions. One user was rather silenced and often does not comment anymore to avoid insults (Amadou Tamata). Another group of users, having become suspicious, rather disengage from debates by, for instance, deleting insulting comments. And Bakary further emphasises the need to leave such "violent" debates online and not even remember the users' names, and to disengage also internally.

As we see especially with Sirani, these strategies can also be employed simultaneously, i.e. that users continue to contribute but seek to filter reactions they get, thus they are somewhat structuring or trying to control the principally open interactions. Even though female as well as male users state that they employ affirmative and withdrawing strategies, I still want to highlight that the disruption of female public interactions has a more severe impact on the circulation of narratives that is already dominated by male users in the Malian-diasporic context.

We can conclude from seeing these perspectives on journalist and user interactions as digital affective labour that they influence the way that narratives are circulated or even interrupted. On the one hand, users explicitly support the participation of some users while, especially through conflictive interactions, delegitimising those of others, mainly based on the latter's mobility-related, classed, and gendered social locations. On the other hand, in corporate forms of digital affective labour, users and journalists also more implicitly negotiate inclusion and exclusion along these lines through differently evaluating diverse – functional, deliberative, or relational – ways of engaging with social media in cooperative ways.

In relation to mobilising narratives culturally within a regime of gendered and postcolonial governmentality, these considerations on social locations and affective labour show that contingencies and transformations of narratives through circulation are not free-floating

phenomena. In contrast, an intersectional, affective labour perspective explicates processes that can hinder or encourage such cultural transformations through hierarchical social interactions. And it emphasises in which ways these interactions create the social situational context that governs the socio-geographic mobilisation of the discourse on Malian transnational relations. The contents of this discourse present the next level we explore in terms of narratives as mobilising gendered and postcolonial governmentality.

7.2 Delineating the Discourse on Malian Transnational Relations through Critical Mobilities

Before entering into the specifics of subjectifications within gendered and postcolonial governmentality of online news, I first situate these subjectifications within the discourse on Malian transnational relations. On the topic level, this subchapter outlines possibilities for mobilising narratives for and against gendered and postcolonial "cultural technologies of rule" (Adebanwi, 2017, p. 66). Therefore, I outline the topics that are addressed in the articles I selected for a more detailed analysis. I argue that the topics and discourses related to the discourse on Malian transnational relations, if approached through an im/mobility lens, unveil the constitutive but also contested nature of im/mobilities and Malian transnational relations, and thereby offer a power-sensitive account of Malian transnational relations. In that sense, the topics already show moments of ideological consolidation and contestation in relation to postcolonial, gendered, and classed structures. In addition, bringing article topics and discourses on Malian transnational relations together with comments and looking at their recontextualisations and intertextual and interdiscursive references unveils how topics circulate not only through articles but how the discourse is shaped by user interactions as well.

On the content level, this allows me to "decode the 'limits' of discourse" (Krzyzanowski, 2010, p. 81) that emerged in the selected articles and comments. First, this shows which topics and their relations to im/mobilities were important in this context for describing Malian transnational relations. In that regard, I refer to mobility studies and show how these topics and articles represent critical mobilities, in the sense of mobilities that are controversial and constitutive for Malian society as well as challenging normalised ideas of ever-increasing mobility (for more on critical mobilities, see Section 4.1.2). In addition, I draw from van Dijk, who argues that topics already point to ideological ideas (T. van Dijk, 1991, p. 68) and are thereby a first step in the examination of "mentalities of government" (Adebanwi, 2017, p. 66). On the functional level, this subchapter shows how certain topics move through articles and comments and thus also change, for instance, in their hierarchical order. This can, for instance, unveil processes of reproduction and contestation of existing power relations and thus positions of consolidation and transformation on the topic level.

Together, this content and functional level can illustrate how narratives move through articles and thereby unveil their contingency in the sense of cultural mobility and its relation to governmentality as an assemblage of "cultural technologies of rule" (Adebanwi, 2017, p. 66)

in a postcolonial context. In the following, I illustrate which topics and discourses emerged in the articles in relation to the discourse on Malian transnational relations. In addition, I show the same for the article images, pointing to intersectional exclusions that are reproduced and reinforced through these images. I further relate this to the im/mobilities addressed in the discourse and show how they are socially constitutive – including in mirroring social hierarchies – but also how they provide opportunities for contestation. I close this exploration of the discourse with diverse forms of im/mobilisations that happen through recontextualisation and intertextual and interdiscursive references through user comments.

7.2.1 Discourses, Topics, and Subtopics related to the Discourse on Malian Transnational Relations

As outlined in the procedure for selecting the articles on Malian transnational relations (see Section 5.4.3), I view the im/mobilities of persons, objects, and ideas as central contents of the wider discourse on Malian transnational relations. Later on, I show in which ways these transnational relations also account for critical mobilities that are controversial, but also constitutive for social relations or Malian-diasporic society as such. First, however, I want to show which discourses and topics emerge from this mobility perspective on Malian transnational relations.

Looking at the topics that are debated in the selected news articles in relation to the discourse on Malian transnational relations, we can identify a number of topics and subtopics that highlight the comprehensive nature of Malian transnational relations but also the reproduction of a French significance in this discourse fragment. These topics and subtopics are listed here from general to more specific topics:

- Malian and African embeddedness in the international migration regime: migration between Mali and France, including the political and economic importance of the Malian diaspora, but also human trafficking in Libya;
- Malian embeddedness in the international trade regime: juxtaposing detrimental rice imports with advantages of promoting locally produced rice;
- Malian embeddedness in the international "development" regime: IMF evaluations of Malian economic policies as part of international credit conditions;

- The international military interventions in Mali following the 2012 crisis: focus on interventions by France and the UN, mainly from a critical point of view but also rationale for and future of the interventions;
- The suspicions about international support for separatist groups in Mali: voiced in reaction to events like an invitation of a CMA delegation by a US-based NGO, a controversial homework assignment by a French teacher in Mali, the cooperation of French forces with separatists while excluding the Malian army, and the perception of a differential treatment of Northern Malian and Catalan separatism;
- The history of French colonialism: mutual influences through the colonial army, education and population policies, taxes, and differential treatment of ethnic groups;
- The contemporary relations with France: their changing nature and continuing mutual engagement through mutual visits and meetings between the French and Malian presidents, French "development" cooperation and investments, joint military and anti-terrorist operations, but also struggles for postcolonial independence;
- The opportunities for alternative international partnerships: deepening military and political relations with Russia, China, Saudi Arabia, and the G5 Sahel;
- The Malian solidarity with Palestine: emphasised by the Malian government and civil society after the decision by Donald Trump to move the Israeli embassy to Jerusalem.

In general, this shows a multi-faceted presentation of Malian transnational relations in its diverse fields. While these topics reproduce a focus on France and thus unveil postcolonial dependencies, they also unveil the struggle for alternatives to these dependencies. In addition, building on these articles, I identified a number of further discourses that emerged as related to the discourse on Malian transnational relations:

1. The *discourse on Malian domestic politics and debates* oscillates between positions that legitimised the government of the president IBK as well as further political elites, and those who – especially including political activists – criticised these elites. This evaluation of domestic politics unfolded in reaction to internal issues like the Malian economic policies, an envisioned constitutional reform, or the Malian peace process, which, however, were also connected to transnational relations like the IMF evaluation or the French influence on the Malian antiterrorism approach.
2. The *discourse on the Malian internal conflict* connects detrimental effects of the conflict in terms of the security and humanitarian situation with approaches to the con-

flict. On the national level, it introduced ways of dealing with it through, for instance, the government peace process and the CEN. On the international level, this discourse especially focused on the Algiers Agreement and military interventions.

3. The *discourse on the Malian nation* mainly emphasises potential achievements of Malian society, specifically through its establishment as an important regional rice producer and regional leader.
4. The *discourse on Pan-Africanism* brings forward visions of Pan-African collaboration, especially through the engagement of political activists and the African youth, an engagement that could ultimately lead to more or "real" African independencies, for instance, with the creation of an own Pan-African currency independent of the current FCFA.
5. The *discourse on transnational African relations* introduces a more general evaluation of relations between African countries and the rest of the world as broader transnational relations in which the Malian nation is embedded. On the one hand, this discourse emphasised persistent inequalities in the realms of trade, migration, and currencies, and more specifically relations between African countries and France. On the other hand, it portrayed Pan-Africanist engagement and historical transnational relations within the African continent as an alternative to transnational external relations (with countries from the Global North).
6. The *discourse on French domestic politics and debates* mainly revolves around the 2017 presidential elections, evaluating the platforms and probabilities of Emmanuel Macron and Marine Le Pen.
7. The *discourse on French transnational relations* focuses on the relations between France and Africa or Mali. It debates the influences of the French government on the African level, in areas like the currency system FCFA and the debate on fertility of African women. With regard to French influence on Malian society, the discourse elaborates on mutual engagements in the fields of politics and migration, and on more unilateral French involvements in the fields of military interventions and economic investment.
8. The *discourse on Russian transnational relations* mostly focuses on the relations between Russia and Mali, its difficulties in the past, but even more the potential for increased engagement by Russia through military and ideological support for combating separatist movements.

9. The *discourse on US transnational relations* emphasises the negative influence that actions of the US government and civil society actors have on Southern peace processes. Once, these endangering effects are identified in the decision of the US president to move the US embassy in Israel to Jerusalem, and once in the event a US NGO had organised and had invited the Malian (former) separatist organisation CMA.
10. The *discourse on the United Nations* mainly unfolds through the evaluation of the MINUSMA intervention in Mali, outlining its rationale, prerequisites, critique, and its likely future.
11. The *discourse on the Palestine-Israel conflict*, on the one hand, criticises the US embassy decision as doing wrong to Palestinians and Muslims more generally, and, on the other hand, affirms Malian solidarity with the Palestinian people in its quest for national sovereignty and unity.
12. The *discourse on the Catalanian secession movement* situates this movement within parallel European secession movements, outlines the European and French critique of the movement and its juridical consequences on the national Spanish level, as well as relations between (international reactions to) the Spanish and the Malian case.
13. The *discourse on national sovereignty* mainly appears in reaction to the Catalanian secession movement, and in reaction to quests for national sovereignty in relations between Mali and France, emphasising the need for national governments to defend national sovereignty and unity.
14. The *discourse on international migration* outlines historical and contemporary reasons for migration within and from African countries, its ambivalent manifestations through remittances and human trafficking, and the role of African heads of state.
15. The *discourse on international trade* emerges through debates on inequalities in the Malian rice trade and possibilities for Malian self-sufficiency.
16. The *discourse on Islam*, on the one hand, emphasises the richness of Muslim culture and, on the other hand, how this culture is being threatened through Western involvements like the US embassy decision.
17. The *discourse on population policies* mainly revolves around a Macron critique of the high fertility of African women and contrasts a position that emphasises automatic relations between fertility, "development", and security with a position that highlights the role of colonial legacies, education, the health system, and good governance.

This list shows that the Malian transnational relations that are debated in these articles relate to domestic Malian issues as well as to transnational relations of further states and supranational constructs (Africa, EU, France, Russia, US, United Nations, Palestine, Israel), and to the overarching issues of international migration, Islam, and population policies. What is interesting here as well is that France and – to a limited extent Spain – are the only other states whose internal affairs are mentioned as well. This further emphasises the importance of postcolonial relations and the issue of Malian unity in this corpus.

Furthermore, these diverse discourses are also connected through a diverse range of overlapping topics. These overlaps demonstrate the connections between diverse states and issues that are reproduced through this postcolonial mobility perspective on the discourse on Malian transnational relations. In general, these topics are often connected to the Malian conflict, also when they belong to discourses on the transnational relations of other states. This highlights the international interventions in Mali post-2012 as a crucial discursive moment at the time that led to further debates about national sovereignty and political legitimacy. However, the topics also relate to more general debates, once on Malian and African postcolonial relations and options for decolonisation, and once on national political elites and the necessity or possibility for political change. The discourse on Malian transnational relations is thus crucially linked to national and international political debates in this postcolonial context.

7.2.2 Visual Delineation of the Discourse

In addition to the articles themselves, these diverse topics and discourses are selectively reproduced through the article images. In that regard, I am not going into the specifics of the representations in articles, but rather outline to which topics these images are related. In that sense, the pictures already give a hint of the different im/mobilities that are talked about and who is im/mobile here. This is an issue that is also important because the article images are at the top of articles and an important hint or eye-catcher for potential readers. They become even more important on Facebook and Twitter because of the mostly visual modality of posts and tweets.

Exploring who or what is displayed in the article images unveils to the following types of topics that reproduce and confirm the above identified foci on Malian national and transnational politics, Pan-Africanism, and the Malian conflict – with an important focus being on IBK and Macron:

- Malian politics: IBK, IBK + other politicians, Abdoulaye Diop (Minister of External Affairs and International Cooperation), Boubou Cissé (Minister of Finances and Economy), Moussa Mara (leader of oppositional party YELEMA), Housseini Amion Guindo (former Minister of Sport), Oumar Mariko (leader of oppositional party SADI) + other activists, group of election observers, military parade
- Malian(-diasporic) civil society: Bamako demonstrators, Malian-diasporic demonstrators, Ras Bath + other activists
- The (Malian) conflict: AQMI fighters, CMA delegation + *white* person, helicopters, nomadic person + "Azawad" flag, Mali-"Azawad" map, West Africa map
- Burkinabe research: Jean-François Kobiané (demographer and leader of Superior Institute of Population Science, Burkina Faso)
- French politics: Emmanuel Macron, Jean Luis Arajol (French Republican in Mali), Evelyne Decors (French ambassador in Mali) + Malian co-speakers at press conference (Ujdm members), Marine Le Pen
- France-Mali relations: François Hollande + IBK, IBK + Macron
- France-Africa relations: CFA bills
- UN: António Guterres
- Catalonia: Carles Puigdemont
- Pan-African activism: Kemi Seba
- Places: Bamako scenery
- Fertility of African women: Black babies, Africa fertility map
- International trade: rice sacks

What already becomes observable here is the visual dominance of male politicians and political elite actors. The only two identifiable female actors portrayed are French, so there is an additional postcolonial layer that reinforces the exclusion of Southern women. Also, the non-Malian actors that are portrayed are also mostly French and not, for instance, Saudi Arabian or Russian¹⁸⁶ – so in some way, the visual topics undermine the post-colonial alternatives that are inherent to the article topics. In class terms, there are several visual collectivis-

¹⁸⁶ For instance, the articles on IBK's visit in Saudi Arabia were accompanied by a picture of the Malian president, and the articles on Russian armament support were accompanied by the image of two helicopters.

ing representations of protesters, but the visual focus is still on elite persons, and mostly politicians. Even when the article topics are originally not about these elite persons (like the Libya slavery scandal), they are still the focus of visual attention – a focus that mutually reinforces the article focus.

7.2.3 Transnational Postcolonial Im/mobilities as Constitutive of Malian/African Social Processes and Debates

In addition to the intersectional structures that appear in the article and picture topics, I argue that the events these topics emerges from, i.e. the transnational mobilities of people, objects, and ideas, and the qualities of their movements unveil debates about who and what can be mobile in this postcolonial setting and thus show how these im/mobilities are constitutive of gendered and classed postcolonial relations of Malian and African societies. In that regard, the regime of mobilities that becomes visible here can be seen as a discursive manifestation of "mentalities of government" (Adebanwi, 2017, p. 66) through postcolonial and gendered governmentality. Therefore, I identified the movements that the selected articles focus on as differentially mobile. Whereas most people, objects, and ideas that are the core subjects of these articles are described as mobile, they are not all voluntarily mobile and some mobilities are also not in the direction that was initially intended, or they are not controlled by those who are affected by these mobilities. Therefore, this points to first power inequalities in these transnational relations as this intentionality also depends on who makes the rules for the respective movements. Figure 21 shows how I attributed these qualities to the moving people, objects, and ideas.

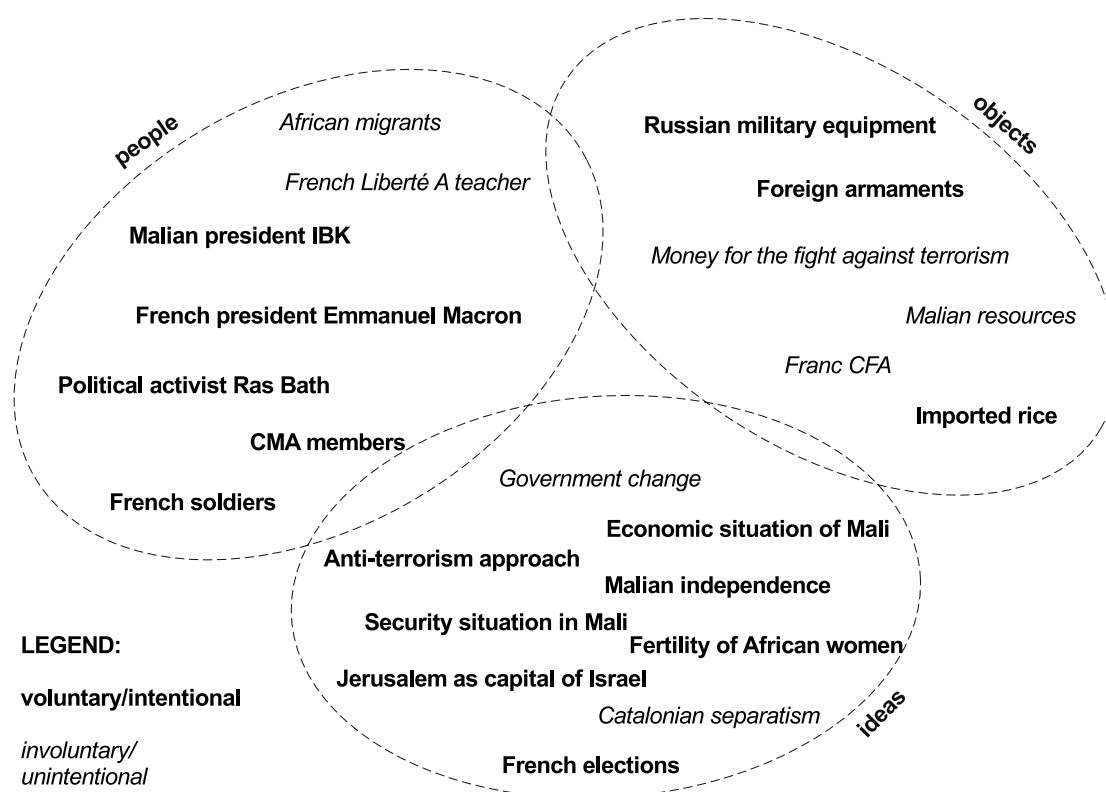


Figure 21: Control-related qualities of moving people, objects, and ideas selected on Maliweb 04/2017–01/2018 (own visualisation)

The grouping of mobile people shows many intentional and voluntary movements. These include movements from Mali abroad, as with the travels of the Malian president IBK to France (Adohoun, 14.04.2017) and Saudi Arabia (Présidence de la République du Mali, 17.04.2017), or of the CMA members to New York where they have been invited by a US-based NGO (Diarra, 17.01.2018; RFI, 13.01.2018). Other reported movements are directed towards Mali from abroad, as with the official visit of Macron in Gao (Koné, 22.05.2017; Présidence de la République du Mali, 19.05.2017; Traoré, T., 22.05.2017), the French soldiers that have come to Mali in the course of the French military intervention (francetvinfo.fr, 11.01.2018; La Rédaction de Maliweb, 10.01.2018; Sy, 11.01.2018), or the political activist Ras Bath, who has been touring among the Malian diaspora and is reported as coming back to Mali (Fatogoma, 04.08.2017; Sogoba, 04.08.2017). The two involuntary mobilities include the diverted movements of African migrants who have been sold as slaves in Libya (Gouvernement de la République du Mali, 18.11.2017; Koné, 21.11.2017; Présidence de la République du Mali, 18.11.2017), and the movement of a French teacher who has been expelled from Mali due to a homework assignment related to the "Azawad" controversy that was

interpreted as threatening Malian national sovereignty (Maliweb/Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, 23.10.2017).

The grouping of mobile objects shows reports about the intentional movement of Russian military helicopters (bbc Afrique, 29.09.2017; Sogoba, 04.10.2017) and imported, mainly Chinese, rice to Mali (Traoré, A., 16.05.2017). Also qualified as intentional, but intentionally interrupted, is the movement of foreign armaments due to a military embargo against Mali (Coulibaly, 04.05.2017). Then, however, the articles also report on unintentional movements. They include money from EU states that was paid to release hostages and diverted to the financing of terrorist groups in Mali (Cissé, 19.09.2017). In addition, articles report on unintentional movements that are of vital concern for Malian society but ultimately controlled by French actors, including the movement of the West African currency Franc CFA (Bagayoko and Koné, 30.11.2017; Diallo, 18.07.2017; Jenue Afrique, 12.09.2017) and of Malian resources – the latter a suspected hidden motivation of the French military intervention (Correspondance particulière Le Démocrate, 05.04.2017; Coulibaly, 31.05.2017). This group especially emphasises postcolonial inequalities in that Malian society has very little decision-making power when it comes to those reported mobilities of objects since the intentions were mostly those of actors outside of Mali.

The grouping of mobile ideas then is rather difficult to differentiate in terms of intentionality. I argue that most ideas and information moved intentionally as their distribution has been intended or at least foreseen by the actors who voiced them. This applies to ideas that move from abroad to Mali or transnationally (including Mali) as with the French ideas on combating terrorism (RFI, 24.05.2017; Sow, 08.04.2017), debates about the French elections (Belga, 23.04.2017; Thera, 27.04.2017; Touré, 26.04.2017), a comment by Macron on the fertility of African women during a press conference (Jeune Afrique, 15.07.2017; ouest-france.fr, 11.07.2017), and Trump's decision to move the US embassy to Jerusalem (AD/od/APA, 8.12.2017; Fofana, 14.12.2017; RFI, 14.12.2017). Other information is reported as moving back to Mali after initially being collected in Mali, being processed abroad or by actors who have come from abroad, and then distributed internationally. This mainly applies to the UN report on the Malian security situation (Conseil de Sécurité des Nations Unies, 15.06.2017; Nations Unies, 18.06.2017) and the IMF report on the Malian economy (O.D., 12.05.2017; Traoré, C.M., 20.11.2017). Two movements that I consider unintentional were: those ideas about Catalanian separatism that are diverted to rather conflictual contexts including the Malian conflict around Northern separatism, and that are later interrupted with reports about the juridical persecution of the Catalanian president Puigdemont (AFP, 27.10.2017; La

Rédaction de Le Sursaut, 23.10.2017); and ideas of the French generational government change that is applied to the Malian context with speculations about a potential "Malian Macron" (Keita, I., 11.05.2017; Sissoko, 10.04.2017) – although their intentionality could be scrutinised as a sort of cultural political imperialism or at least Eurocentrism.

Based on these considerations on the intentionality of movements, we can see that already on the topic level, the circulation of online news mobilises narratives on Malian society as embedded in a wide range of flows that move in different directions and are differentially regulated. Those movements thereby point to postcolonial dependencies as they unveil the multiple influences of people, objects, and ideas that travel to and from Mali. In addition, the distribution of intentionality of these movements emphasises that Malian (but also foreign) actors sometimes have control of those dependencies and sometimes they do not. This shows that a combination of questions about im/mobility and postcoloniality is not only important for identifying postcolonial moments in movements, but that im/mobilities can also help to identify varieties of postcolonial relations and their inherent power inequalities.

7.2.4 Intersectional Structurations of Malian and African Transnational Im/Mobilities

In addition to this more general identification of movements that are constitutive for Malian postcolonial relations, an intersectional perspective on these movements also unveils further socioeconomic inequalities and exclusions that arise on the topic level of circulating online news. Talking about a postcolonial and gendered mobility regime as a result of (post)colonial "cultural technologies of rule" (Adebanwi, 2017, p. 66), then, also brings forth the implication of who is mobile and who is immobile in this constellation. Considering the focus on mobilities in the articles of the discourse analysis corpus, we can mainly assess this by looking at the exclusions that are produced here, i.e. who is not mobile and which relations of power inequalities does this reproduce?

The mobilities explored here first show that this is a rather gendered manifestation of the international relations debate: The moving people are all men, the objects mostly relate to the military sphere – with the FCFA and rice exceptions – and the mobile ideas that are explicitly about women appear only in the debate about the fertility of African women and on Le Pen as presidential candidate. Thus, these representations rather reproduce a distinction between mobile men and immobile women as well as between powerful *white* women and subjected,

instrumentalised Black women and thereby emphasise connections of postcoloniality and gender in this corpus.

Moreover, these movements also show a class division, since individual moving actors reported about are rather privileged (IBK, Macron, French teacher) whereas, for instance, African migrants do not appear as individuals and are rather collectivised in the articles on the Libya slavery scandal. Whereas this is the same with the French soldiers, who only appear as objects in the reports about protests against their presence, their portrayal is often different in the broader context of Maliweb discourses, as, for instance, in individualising articles about French soldiers who have been killed in Mali (see e.g. *Le Point.fr*, 2018). In terms of mobile objects, especially armaments, the FCFA, and (anti)terrorism money are objects about whose movements the general Malian citizens have little say. Only with the question of consuming imported rice or local rice, they, in theory, have a choice (although this is agency is questioned in the article as well, see Traoré, A., 16.05.2017). This, however, also has to be seen in the context of often-restricted local purchasing power. Furthermore, when it comes to the moving ideas articles report about, they are mainly concerned with, voiced by, or exchanged between political elites and international organisations. This points to connections between the positionality of actors involved and the qualities and evaluations of movements.

In addition, the reported im/mobilities also have an ethnicised and localised dimension as they often denigrate former rebels and proponents of "Azawad", some dealing with the conflict explicitly (see e.g. *Correspondance particulière Le Démocrate*, 05.04.2017; Coulibaly, 04.05.2017; Koné, B., 22.05.2017; *La Rédaction de Le Sursaut*, 23.10.2017). The only exception is the antiterrorism approach debate, which criticises the French influence more than the government's intent to negotiate with former rebels (Sow, 08.04.2017). Moreover, articles on protest marches show a privileging of Bamako as a site in this discourse analysis corpus since, for instance, protests against the French military intervention were reported to have taken place in Northern locations as well (see e.g. M. Togola, 2019), but user reactions and platform positioning regularly privilege the Bamako marches – maybe also due to its more prominent (male, Southern) participants.

In postcolonial terms, France is the most prominent foreign power, but also the most contested one in the articles. The debates about French mobile people, objects, and ideas also relate to other actors, for instance, to Malian politicians and their relations with France (see e.g. Sow, 08.04.2017), or the struggle for more autonomy with increasing Russian engagement (see e.g. Sogoba, 04.10.2017). This contestation points to a struggle for more independence in

this online news debate. The movements of the people, objects, and ideas portrayed here also show that some articles problematise the free movement of e.g. French soldiers (see e.g. francetvinfo.fr, 11.01.2018) or the FCFA currency (see e.g. Bagayoko and Koné, 30.11.2017), a problematisation that challenges hegemonic narratives of ever-increasing "modern" movements.

These gendered, postcolonial and classed structures are still reinforced in combination with images. Some marginalised groups are visually replaced by powerful actors such as how the articles on African (enslaved) migrants depicted members of the Malian government (Gouvernement de la République du Mali, 18.11.2017; Présidence de la République du Mali, 18.11.2017). In addition, some marginalised groups are even visually replaced by pictures that show non-human objects, as the article on the trading of rice – which is a potential economic activity that Malian women could be related to – visually replaces (female) traders with a picture of sacks of rice (Traoré, A., 16.05.2017), or as an article on the mobile history of the Tuareg visually replaces them with a map of Mali (Correspondance particulière Le Démocrate, 05.04.2017).

This circulation of articulated movements thus reflects the intersection of postcolonial power relations with further inequalities, including class, ethnicity, locality, and gender. This further illustrates how mobilities are constitutive of (Malian/African/global) society, as they also mirror social inequalities and thereby emphasise the need for an intersectional analysis of the discourse on Malian transnational relations.

7.2.5 Contestations in Relations between Topics, Discourses, and Mobility "Headlines"

In addition to these intersectional moments in transnational movements, we can also see that ideological reproductions and contestations appear in the relation among and between topics and discourses. On the one hand, the internal focus of topics that contribute to a discourse already indicates some ideological orientation. For the discourse on the international migration regime, for instance, we can see a strong focus on im/mobilities on the African continent, a focus that contrasts the often-Eurocentric focus on South-North migration from African to European states (as bemoaned, for instance, by Whitehouse, 2012a, p. 4f).

On the other hand, ideological contestations also become visible in the relation of different topics to the im/mobility events mentioned above. Such connections of topics (within and

between articles) point to struggles of diverse influences or positions that can unveil negotiations in relation to certain im/mobilities. Examples for such struggles include:

- On the mobile antiterrorism approach: the CEN and government peace process (RFI, 24.05.2017) vs. the French antiterrorism approach (Sow, 08.04.2017);
- On the mobile Catalanian separatism: the critique of the Catalanian secession movement vs. suspected international support for Malian separatists (La Rédaction de Le Sursaut, 23.10.2017);
- On the mobile Malian resources: the suspected hidden reasons of the French military intervention (Correspondance particulière de Le Démocrate, 05.04.2017) vs. the official rationale of the French military intervention (Coulibaly, 31.05.2017);
- On the mobile russian helicopters: the hope for alternative international relations vs. the fear of neo-colonial relations (Sogoba, 04.10.2017);
- On the mobile French soldiers: the rationale for the French military intervention (Traoré, T., 22.05.2017) vs. the critique of the intervention (Sy, 11.01.2018);
- On the mobile IBK: the (often wished for) alternative international relations with e.g. Saudi Arabia (Présidence de la République du Mali, 17.04.2017) vs. the critique of IBK's (absent) governance in times of crisis (Sissoko, 24.07.2017).

In general, these struggles point to crucial, and sometimes connected, debates on the French and further international (military) interventions and the evaluation of the Malian president IBK. Most importantly, these struggles demonstrate that the transnational mobilities explored in this discourse fragment are socially contested and thereby show possibilities for culturally mobilising (and potentially resistant) narratives in the circulation of Malian-diasporic online news.

7.2.6 User Comments as Im/Mobilising Practices

Another level where we can see this cultural mobilisation on the topic level is through user comments. In general, user comments can confirm the topics that are mentioned in articles, they can ignore them, and they can add further topics. In that regard, comments point out the workings of performativity in the selected discourse fragment, either through technologies of the self that consolidate relations of gendered and postcolonial governmentality, or through resistant practices that aim at transforming these relations.

On a first – article – level, I show that diverse relations exist between topics of individual articles and comments on them that influence the cultural mobilisation or immobilisation of the limits of the discourses explored here.

First, some individual articles have been reacted to by Twitter users, but only retweeted and liked but not commented on.¹⁸⁷ In principle, this creates a cultural immobilisation of narratives as they are further distributed without a contingency effect, just the way they are. However, this also is only an ephemeral assessment as, through their socio-geographic mobilisation, it is still possible that these articles are subsequently commented upon and thereby culturally mobilised by other users. On the content side, the three tweets in this category deal with the critique of international interventions in Malian sovereignty. The following articles belong to this group:

Article focus and topics	Comment topics
Debate around dialogue with jihadists (RFI, 24.05.2017) • CEN • French antiterrorism approach • Government peace process • Problems for the peace process	→ Tweet: none
"Azawad" as French invention (Correspondance particulière de Le Démocrate, 05.04.2017) • Critique of French military intervention • French colonialism • Transnational African relations	→ Tweet: none
+ in combination with Facebook (see below) Scandal about "Azawad"-related homework assignment (Maliweb/Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, 23.10.2017) • International support for separatists • Malian sovereignty	→ Tweet: none

In the second category, articles and comment relations reproduce the topics of the article, thus also reproducing the delineation of the discourse and also somewhat contributing to a cultural

¹⁸⁷ The same is possible for Facebook posts as well but in my corpus, I did not consider any posts that had not been commented upon.

immobilisation and sedimentation of the narratives, at least on the topic level. The one article and tweet in this category include the following:

Article focus and topics	Comment topics
Government communication on the Libya situation (Gouvernement de la République du Mali, 18.11.2017) • International migration regime	→ Tweet • International migration regime

A third pattern is that comments take up all of the article topics and extend them. This as well is no real transformation but rather an extension of the discourse that, however, involves opportunities for contingency and cultural mobilisation of narratives.

Article focus and topics	Comment topics
+ in combination with Twitter (see below) Scandal about "Azawad"-related homework assignment (Maliweb/Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, 23.10.2017) • International support for separatists • Malian sovereignty	→ Facebook thread • International support for separatists • Malian sovereignty • Critique of IBK governance • Praise of IBK governance
Will Mara follow Macron? (Keita, I., 11.05.2017) • Change of Malian government	→ Facebook thread • Change of Malian government • Macron family relations • Pan-African visions • Political engagement of Malian society

Fourth, in one case, comments mobilise narratives culturally as they primarily extend the discourse by not reproducing the article topics and only integrating new topics. By not taking up the topics addressed in the article, these comments also immobilise some narratives and mobilise others and thereby also engage in a discursive mobility regime.

Article topics	Comment topics
Government regrets Trump's Jerusalem decision (AD/od/APA, 08.12.2017)	→ Tweet

• Critique of Jerusalem decision	• X • Defence of Jerusalem decision • Critique of IBK governance

As a fifth option, we have more complex patterns where comments take up some article topics, leave others, and add their own. This points to opportunities for consolidating and transforming the discourse, and also for a selective mobilising practice or strategy. In itself, this pattern can have different manifestations as users either take up many topics and only added some elements, or they only reproduce one or a few topics and use them as a starting point for introducing their own narratives. Depending on these manifestations, the socio-cultural movement of narratives produce more or less transforming cultural mobilities. And we see a connection to the social constitutive element of the critical mobilities explored here (e.g. of ideas), as the original focus on one issue is sometimes extended to include broader and more overarching topics (e.g. the Jerusalem decision extends to critique of IBK governance). In that vein, users tend to contribute either a postcolonial dimension or a dimension that is critical of national political elites – or to both dimensions being connected. In addition, this complex pattern already highlights contingencies and controversies in the cultural mobility of narratives as they point to diverging opinions and standpoints (e.g. critique of vs. rationale for French military intervention).

Article focus and topics	Comment topics
Protest march for the Palestinian people (Fofana, 14.12.2017) • Critique of Jerusalem decision • Importance of Islam • Malian solidarity with Palestine	→ Facebook comment thread • Critique of Jerusalem decision • X • Malian solidarity with Palestine • Critique of IBK governance • Defence of Jerusalem decision • International migration regime • Malian socioeconomic problems • Malian sovereignty • Precarious security situation in Mali • Separation of religion and politics
Demonstration by US-based Malian association against the armament embargo and the international	→ Facebook thread

interventions (Coulibaly, 04.05.2017) • Critique of French military intervention • Critique of international intervention • Malian sovereignty • Precarious security situation in Mali	• Critique of French military intervention • Critique of international intervention • Malian sovereignty • X • Critique of IBK governance • Critique of political elites • Critique of US interventions • Ghanaian international relations • Negative evaluation of Malian economic governance • Political engagement of Malian society • Political-economic importance of the Malian diaspora • Praise of the Malian nation • Rationale for the French military intervention • Rationale for MINUSMA
7 to 8 children – Macron on African fertility (ouest-france.fr, 11.07.2017) • Debate on fertility and "development" • Debate on fertility of African women • International "development" regime	→ Facebook thread • Debate on fertility and "development" • Debate on fertility of African women • X • Critique of Franc CFA • Culture • French colonialism • French national political situation • International migration regime • Macron family relations • Pan-African visions • (Post)colonial cooperation between France and Africa
Event with the activist Kemi Seba in Bamako (Diallo, 18.07.2017) • Critique of FCFA • Critique of French military intervention • France-Mali relations • Post(-)colonial cooperation between France	→ Tweet • X • X • X • X

and Africa	
• Pan-African visions	• Pan-African visions • Hope for political activists

A sixth and even more complex pattern shows a mixture of platform-specific comments that are mobilising and immobilising topics, i.e. when comments mobilise the narrative through topics on one platform and immobilise them on another platform.

Article focus and topics	Mobilising comments	Immobilising comments
Scandal on "Azawad"-related homework assignment (Maliweb/Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, 23.10.2017) • International support for separatists • Malian sovereignty	→ Facebook thread • International support for separatists • Malian sovereignty • Critique of IBK governance • Praise of IBK governance	→ Tweet (none)

Together, we can see that the relations between articles and comments are very diverse. What becomes apparent, however, is that they often contribute to a selective cultural mobilisation of specific narratives, already on the topic level. Therefore, these topics show that there is contingency in how the discourse on Malian transnational relations can be constituted.

In addition to these relations between individual articles and their comments, the topics analysis shows more generally what users contribute to all commented articles taken together. Here, we can see the complex pattern again of some topics being repeated, others shut down, and still others added, implying a selective mobilisation of issues. In this specific article selection, users tend to ignore the peace process and positive general relations between Mali and France/Malian transnational relations, and instead focus more on the critique of Malian relations with France and the UN/West, but they also add further topics that relate to a critique of national politics, a positive evaluation of the Malian-diasporic nation, and even positive evaluations of the military interventions. In that regard, users mobilise further ideological struggles, especially on the level of national and transnational politics, on the political and social levels.

In a sense of recontextualisation, we can also see cultural mobilisations when putting user comment topics in relation to the topics of the overall discourse fragment, i.e. all analysed news articles, and show how users also introduce topics that were circulating in other articles (such as the French national political situation). We can see that users pick up several topics and add new ones, so their engagement not only reproduces the news discourse explored here but also extends it. A comparison of the topics ignored and added by users shows that users focus more on controversial relations between Mali and France and rather leave less controversial ones (e.g. "development" contributions by Malians in France) aside. In addition to Malian transnational relations, this also extends to domestic issues such as, for instance, constructive ideas for solving the conflict with the North or in the North or even Malian society itself.

Taking this together, we can see to which discourses users contribute and which discourses they add to the debate. In that sense, cultural im/mobilisations also unveil interdiscursive relations that emerge in this discourse. Looking at such interdiscursive relations by comparing discourses in all analysed articles and comments, we can see that the comments ignore more general discourses about international trade and national sovereignty – although users debate issues in more contextualised ways, for instance, in debates about Malian sovereignty and the international military interventions, or in debates about the negative impact of international trade regimes on African economies. What is also interesting is that the only discourse that is added by the comments is about Ghanaian transnational relations. All the other discourses users refer to are already present in the articles they commented on or in other articles. Therefore, the contingency through commenting seems to be more effective on the topic level. On the other hand, the articles seem to cover the most important issues for the users on the discourse level. In that regard, cultural mobility can also be seen as related to scale.

In summary, this delineation of the culturally mobilised discourse on Malian transnational relations shows that, on the topic level, articles and comments about transnationally mobile persons, objects, and ideas confirm a critical mobility perspective on the discourse about Malian transnational relations that unveils intersectional exclusions, as well as their embeddedness in national and (Pan-)African socio-political contexts. Thereby, the critical mobility perspective of this thesis already points to important connections between postcolonial and national politics, on the one hand, and between postcolonialism and Pan-Africanism, on the other hand. On the analytical level, this construction of the discourse through article, image,

and user topics illustrates the diversity in processes of cultural im/mobilisation that reproduce intersectional inequalities but also open moments for ideological contestations within gendered and postcolonial governmentality. In order to show how this discourse is working in more detail, we will look at the discursive strategies and the cultural mobility that is at work (or not) on the level of identities and belongings constructed in articles and comments. The following subchapter, however, still presents an interlude in this analysis of discursive mobilisation, as it still outlines article genres as instrument for governing the participation in the public discourse outlined here.

7.3 Governing the Public: Political Participation and Exclusion through Genres

Before I address the subjectifications that articles and comments create, I first want to introduce the genres these articles belong to and their impact on mobilising narratives. In line with KhosraviNik, who suggests that Habermas' concept of an ideal public sphere and CDS can mutually benefit from each other by allowing CDS to identify ways of promoting more inclusive conditions for participation in public discourses, and by allowing public sphere conceptualisations to draw from CDS insights on the socio-political effects of knowledge/power (KhosraviNik, 2015, p. 58), I seek to show that the diverse forms and materialisations of article genres can influence the inclusion and exclusion of users, but that they also structure the discourse on the content level through their purposes. The genres of news articles thus represent a further contextual and content-related element in constellations of gendered and postcolonial governmentality, as they regulate the conduct of article authors and users through technologies of rule that are situated at the intersection of political and media conventions (fields of action, genre features) as well as "mentalities of government" (Adebanwi, 2017, p. 66) (purposes).

7.3.1 (Online) News Genres and Political Fields of Action

I see the manifestation of these article genres and their techniques of control as one means of (media) governmentality that regulates the access and conduct of journalists and users to a part of the Malian-diasporic digital public. As outlined in Section 5.5.2, I draw from van Leeuwen who uses genres in the linguistic and discourse analysis tradition as "characterizing texts and communicative events in terms of the way they embody particular types of interaction that come with particular relationships between the interactants (...) and with particular communicative functions " (Leeuwen, 2008, p. 345). He thus argues that analysing genres means to explore how people interact through texts and how these interactions influence "specific relationships" (Leeuwen, 2008, p. 346). In the sense of this subsection, this understanding of genres suggests illustrating how the different forms of articles in the discourse analysis corpus pursue their communicative function or their purposes in formal linguistic terms and which kind of relationships this creates not only between the writers and readers, but also between readers in different social locations.

In doing so, I do not consider these genres as specific to online news but assess them for their inherent specificities, thereby following Herring and Androutsopoulos (2015, p. 129) who stated: "Some genres that at first blush appear unique to CMC can also be classified in familiar terms (...). For example, the blog (sub)genres of filter blog and personal journal recall the offline genres of journalistic commentary and diary, respectively". However, I acknowledge that the online circulation and especially commenting of these classical genres can lead to new forms of political discourse, as emphasised by Adam Hodge (2015) in reference to Norman Fairclough:

Fairclough (1992, 1995) illustrates this point through his discussion of what he terms the 'conversationalization' of news programs, where formal, public forms of address have mixed with more private, conversational ones. Fairclough (1992) claims that this is 'part of the major restructuring of the boundaries between the public and private domains' (204). (p. 46)¹⁸⁸

In that regard, online news offer new ways of combining the private and the public, the personal and the political.

In general, all articles in the corpus for the detailed discourse analysis can be attributed to the genre of the online news article. They were all published on the Maliweb portal (or through its social media accounts as Facebook posts or Tweets, but even then being linked to the Maliweb portal), and all have the same basic visual text of a headline, mostly a picture, and a text with the mention of the article author at the end. Already here, however, internal difference of these online news articles and thereby the diversity of actors and conventions that contribute to the discourse become evident: For instance, the different article images are full size, half the page, or missing, they consist of one or more images, or they even make up the article in a form of a photo story, the images can be photos, maps, cartoons,¹⁸⁹ or social media contributions (mostly tweets). Moreover, the articles can have a bold, italic, or no introductory paragraph, sometimes uploaded documents are inserted in the text, the text sometimes has only one paragraph and sometimes multiple paragraphs, sometimes it has bold sub-headings, or lists with bullet points, or a bold or italic conclusion at its end, and the author reference at the end of the text is sometimes just inserted, or it contains a contact address of the author, or a link to the original article if it was originally published on another portal, or the link to the

¹⁸⁸ Laura Filardo-Lkamas and Michael Boyd (2018, p. 316) make a similar argument in relation to blogs: "An example of the 'fluid and shifting character' of (mediatised) political genres (Cap and Okulska 2013: 6) can be found in blogs. In her study of Polish and UK official political blogs, Kopytowska (2013: 381) sees such mediatised blogs as an emerging genre in PD that breaks down 'the ontological divisions between the public and the private.'"

¹⁸⁹ Cartoons sometimes appeared as illustrations in my observations, often in connection to sensitive issues like child marriage. However, none of the article in the corpus for the topic and more detailed discourse analysis was illustrated by a cartoon.

social media presence of the article authors. Already these different visual texts suggest that "the" online news article published on Maliweb is not a uniform sort of article.

Looking at the articles themselves, I identified four different genres that were published as part of the discourse analysis corpus, including news(paper) articles, government press releases, a UN project report, and a civil society association press release. Especially for the news articles, they can still be assigned to a number of sub-genres.¹⁹⁰ These include press releases on news action stories, reports, opinion pieces (including editorials),¹⁹¹ background or analysis pieces, interviews, and a political speech by the Malian president IBK. Also, the government press releases show a mixture of sub-genres, including two reports on the president's travels, and one government statement on the situation of African migrants in Libya.

In addition, these sub-genres of news articles (and government press releases) are connected to further genres of the field of political action, as they report on or analysed them. As Figure 22 shows, these include as diverse connected genres as press conferences, travels of government officials, demonstrations, interviews, official reports, an election program, a TV debate, and social media activities of political and media actors. In terms of the inclusion or exclusion through genres, I argue that this connection to further political genres unveils an inclusionary characteristic of these articles because they allow readers to get access to events and form an – admittedly filtered – opinion on issues they would otherwise not have access to.

¹⁹⁰ Van Leeuwen outlines as types of genres magazine feature genres, news action stories, human interest stories, and lifestories that combine news and advice (Leeuwen, 2008, p. 357ff).

¹⁹¹ Editorials are especially built for persuading readers with "the typical features of this media genre, such as its characteristic overall organisation, its (political) topics or the argumentative or rhetorical strategies employed to persuasively present this 'view' to the readers" (T. van Dijk, 2018, p. 27).

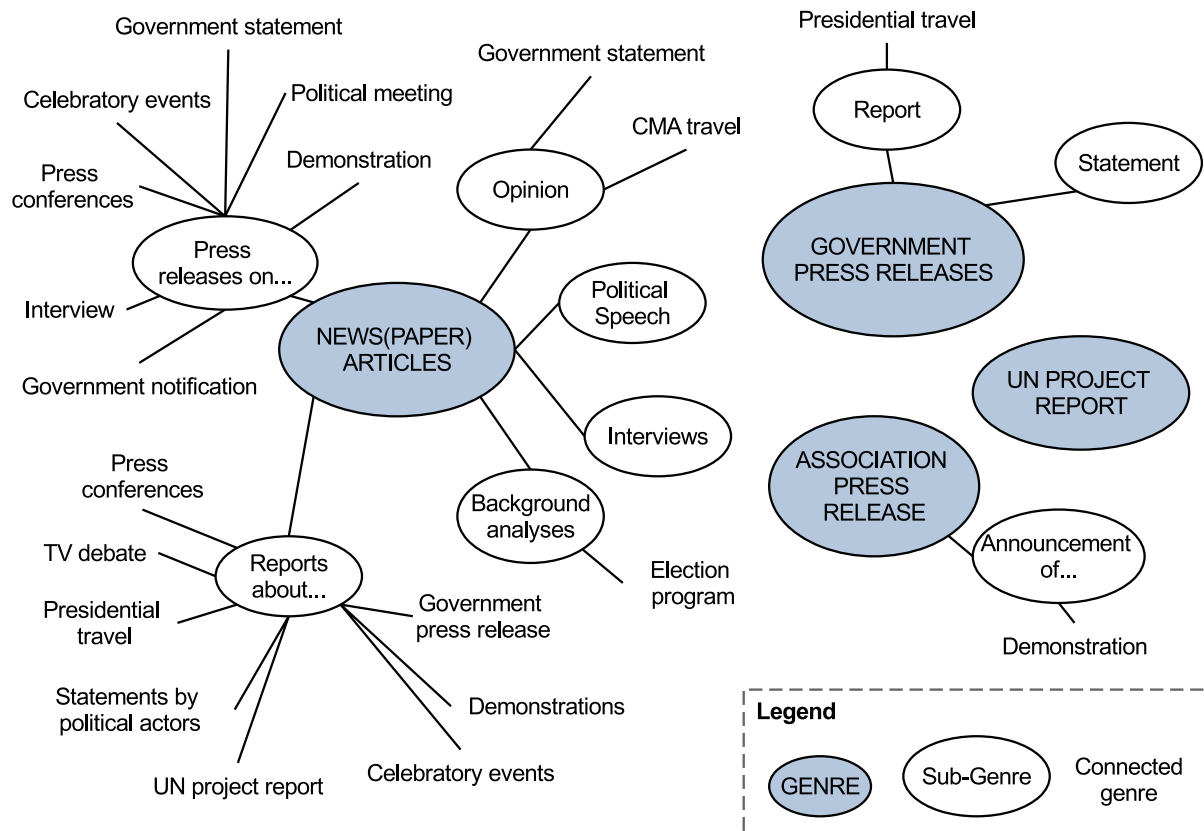


Figure 22: Genres, sub-genres, and connected (political) genres in the corpus for discourse analysis (own visualisation)

Following Lamb (2013: 338), the media discourse I analysed is thus situated in the field of action "(media) formation of public opinion" which *inter alia* includes press releases, interviews and newspaper articles and produces an overlapping sphere between the state and civil society. In this line of thought, the connected genres, then, show the relation with further genres of this field of action (like press conferences, speeches, protest marches) but also with further fields of action like the political executive (through, for instance, an expulsion notification). Together, this combination of genres suggests that the circulation of online news can work in an inclusionary way, as they facilitate the participation of Malian-diasporic users in the public political discourse through various formats. In their realisation, however, the same genres also produce hierarchies and exclusions.

7.3.2 Hierarchies and Exclusion through Genre Features

In a second move, I illustrate the different relations that are created through these genres, following van Leeuwen's call for a critical approach to genres that studies them in relation to discourses and style "with an eye for its social impact and its uses in social control" (Leeuwen, 2008, p. 360). I argue that this social control implies the conduct of who gets to mobilise narratives in which ways and with which authority. This section outlines how such forms of control manifest in relations between authors and readers that articles create, and in linguistic features that regulate the inclusion and exclusion of potential readers.

On the one hand, article genres create relations between the authors and the readers, supporting techniques of social control by the authors. In principle, most authors either more neutrally *inform* readers on certain issues (e.g. in press releases by news agencies) or they *explain* their view to readers (e.g. in editorials), which has a more persuasive direction. Sometimes, however, authors also *inform* on others' opinions (e.g. in reports about events), such as, for instance, of the Beninese activist Kemi Seba (see Diallo, 18.07.2017) or the Burkinabe researcher Jean-François Kobiané (see Jeune Afrique, 15.07.2017), and thereby let others do the persuasion for them. So whereas the act of persuading others seems to imply a more hierarchical relation, also the seemingly neutral informing – especially by powerful actors – can have hierarchical implications. For instance, when the Malian government (e.g. Gouvernement de la République du Mali, 18.11.2017) or the United Nations Security Council (e.g. Conseil de Sécurité des Nations Unies, 15.06.2017) inform readers, this information is also an authoritative statement on their version of socio-political reality in Mali. In addition, the informing on others' views also points to a form of perspectivisation that implies neutrality on the part of the journalists while at the same time producing involvement of readers through direct quotations and thus persuading in a more subtle, but not necessarily less effective way (see Reisigl & Wodak, 2001, p. 83). Only one article genre, the association protest announcement (Coulibaly, 04.05.2017), promotes a more participatory relation between authors and readers, as it invites readers to join an upcoming demonstration. However, this case as well shows some hierarchical relations, as the organisers, for instance, still articulate their own rationale for demonstrating against the international interventions in Mali. In addition, they prescribe what to wear and which signs to use during the protest, thereby extending their (discursive) authority to the upcoming event and its related interpretations of Malian transnational relations.

On the other hand, these different genres have implications for the access of users, i.e. through the language itself, and thus create hierarchical relationships between users in different social locations that are added to inequalities in access to online communication and platforms. The features I consider as most important here are lexis, syntax, and norms of interpretation (for more on genre features, see Section 5.5.2).

For the lexis, apart from the UN report (Conseil de Sécurité des Nations Unies, 15.06.2017) and the expulsion notification (Maliweb/Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, 23.10.2017) that are written in a more diplomatic language, most of the articles are composed in a written common language. In that regard, they are rather accessible to all potential users because most of them do not use any form of language that is difficult to understand per se. Where the lexis becomes more exclusionary, however, is in the terms that are used in the articles. These terms refer to the fields of diplomacy, International Relations, social conflict, military, religion, justice, discrimination, politics, economy, colonialism, violence, human rights, security, "development", population, racism, agriculture, and trade. Despite this diversity, I identified a dominance of terms from the fields of military, politics, economy, and security (see e.g. Coulibaly, 31.05.2017; O.D., 12.05.2017; Traoré, T., 22.05.2017) that reproduces a dominance of issues in which mostly elite male Malian and Western actors are involved.

In addition, the syntax of the different articles makes them easier or more difficult to understand. Generally, many articles use short sentences or main and subordinate sentences, which make them easier to understand (e.g. Correspondance particulière de Le Démocrate, 05.04.2017; Sissoko, 10.04.2017). This also applies to the fact that several articles use lists as a way of structuring their information (e.g. Sy, 11.01.2018). But some articles also include features that make them more difficult to understand. Especially the UN report, for instance, employs more complex sentence structures, together with features like passive voices and noun phrases (Conseil de Sécurité des Nations Unies, 15.06.2017). But also other articles have more complex sentences and are thus not as accessible and potentially exclude users from understanding or even reading them (e.g. AFP, 27.10.2017). Moreover, some articles mix features that render them more or less accessible, thereby negotiating their inclusivity (e.g. Sogoba, 04.08.2017). In the case of syntax, exclusion thus mostly works on the level of class and especially education.

As a third feature that can exclude certain readers, I explored the norms of interpretation that are necessary to know for understanding the different articles.¹⁹² In this context, I mainly refer to the prior knowledge that potential readers should have in order to understand and assess the issues explained in the articles. In the discourse analysis corpus, these article-required norms include knowledge about Malian history and current affairs, such as the 2017 constitutional reform debate (e.g. Fatogoma, 04.08.2017; Keita, I.B., 22.09.2017), Malian international relations, often with France (e.g. Coulibaly, 31.05.2017), the Malian conflict (e.g. Cissé, 19.09.2017), the Malian economy, including the agriculture and food market (e.g. Traoré, C.M., 20.11.2017), international interventions in Mali, including the French one (e.g. francetvinfo.fr, 11.01.2018), the economic, monetary, and historical/colonial relations between France and Africa (e.g. Bagayoko and Koné, 30.11.2017), and French politics and colonial history (e.g. Thera, 27.04.2017). On a more general level, few articles require prior knowledge about postcolonial "development" and population debates (e.g. Jeune Afrique, 15.07.2017), the Catalanian conflict and the Catalanian and Kosovo history (e.g. La Rédaction de Le Sursaut, 23.10.2017), and the Libya slavery crisis and historical slave trade (e.g. Gouvernement de la République du Mali, 18.11.2017), and the history of Israel and Palestine with the role of Jerusalem (e.g. Fofana, 14.12.2017). Apart from these often globally circulated news, however, most of the articles require some background knowledge on Mali, its history, current affairs, and transnational relations, thus privileging Malian-diasporic users and making it easier for them to engage in debates in comparison to persons without Malian background knowledge.

7.3.3 Purpose as the Core of Genres: Consolidating or Transforming Power Relations

Further differentiating these articles according to their "political and ideological orientation" (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001, p. 41), I outline the purposes I identified in course of this genre analysis, as an indication of consolidating and transforming functions within the discourse on Malian transnational relations. According to van Leeuwen, these are the "communicative functions" of the respective articles that point to overarching (socio-political) purposes and purposes on the article level. I argue that these purposes give first insights into the "mentali-

¹⁹² Teun van Dijk (2018, p. 35) has outlined this for the editorial: "More specifically, the journalist of the editorial presupposes specific political knowledge, and formulates a personal or institutional opinion, based on underlying conservative attitudes on immigration and general conservative ideologies against foreigners, on the one hand, and against Labour, on the other hand. These underlying context models, event models – and their specification in terms of opinions – control the evaluative (appraisal) expressions in the editorial. On the other hand, editorials are a persuasive, argumentative genre, and hence the discursive knowledge of the journalist of that genre controls the argumentative structures of the editorial (see also Le 2010)."

ties of government" (Adebanwi, 2017, p. 66) that article authors and users articulate when mobilising narratives. Table 3 illustrates that the articles articulate (sometimes multiple) consolidating and transforming purposes on the national as well as on the international government level:

Table 3: Political positions, socio-political purposes, and article purposes as identified in article genres related to the discourse on Malian transnational relations 04/2017–01/2018

Socio-political purpose	Articles' purposes
Internationally transforming	
Defending Malian unity/delegitimising secessionist movements	- Delegitimising the territory "Azawad" as (post)colonial construct (Correspondance particulière de Le Démocrate, 05.04.2017) - Unveiling the paradox European and French stance on independencies (La Rédaction de Le Sursaut, 23.10.2017); Informing about Puigdemont charging (AFP, 27.10.2017) - Showing international alignments of different conflict parties (government, rebels) in reaction to the CMA travel to New York (RFI, 13.01.2018); Portraying the CMA travel controversy as result of bad Malian diplomacy (Diarra, 17.01.2018)
Criticising (and unveiling) French (postcolonial and further international) interventions in Malian affairs	- Unveiling French interest in the "Azawad" issue (Correspondance particulière de Le Démocrate, 05.04.2017); Unveiling the paradox European and French stance on independencies (La Rédaction de Le Sursaut, 23.10.2017) - Unveiling French interference in the Malian anti-terrorism approach (Sow, 08.04.2017) - Inviting readers to join a protest against the international interventions (Coulibaly, Diocolo, 04.05.2017); Showing problematic elements of the French intervention and the Malian conflict (francetvinfo.fr, 11.01.2017) - Explaining why Macron's visit was problematic (Koné, B., 22.05.2017) - Unveiling the involvement of France in terrorism in Mali (Cissé, 19.09.2017)
Criticising and unveiling French postcolonial relations with Africa	- Pointing to persisting inequalities between Africa and France (elections) (Touré, 26.04.2017) - Pointing to racist elements in Macron's speech (ouest-france.fr, 11.07.2017); Delegitimising Macron's statement on African women's fertility (Jeune Afrique, 15.07.2017) - Unveiling the persisting dependence of Africa and the influence of France, calling the African youth to action (Diallo, 18.07.2017) - Unveiling the detrimental effect and colonial legacy of the Franc CFA, delegitimising French and current African elites' rule (Bagayoko and Koné, 30.11.2017)
Criticising further (Western) international interventions	Showing the Muslim community's indignation and action in relation to the Jerusalem decision (RFI, 14.12.2017); Showing the Muslim community's

	indignation and action and delegitimising the Trump decision (Fofana, 14.12.2017) • Inviting readers to join a protest against the international interventions (Coulibaly, Diocolo, 04.05.2017) • Unveiling the paradox European and French stance on independencies (La Rédaction de Le Sursaut, 23.10.2017)
Fathoming alternative international relations	• Emphasising the Russian support to Mali (bbc Afrique, 29.09.2017); Evaluating a potential cooperation with Russia (Sogoba, 04.10.2017)
Pointing to local/national/diasporic options for Malian/African self-sufficiency	• Informing about the attempt of the rice producers' platform to foster local rice (politically) (Traoré, A., 16.05.2017) • Unveiling the persisting dependence of Africa and the influence of France, calling the African youth to action (Diallo, 18.07.2017); Evaluating the legitimacy of Kemi Seba's claims (Jeune Afrique, 12.09.2017) • Showing non-government actors' indignation and actions on the Libya slavery scandal (Gouvernement de la République du Mali, 18.11.2017) • Legitimising the role and importance of Ras Bath (Fatogoma, 04.08.2017); Delegitimising Ras Bath's condemnation, legitimising his political vision (Fatogoma, 04.08.2017) • Showing the Muslim community's indignation and action in relation to the Jerusalem decision (RFI, 14.12.2017); Showing the Muslim community's indignation and action, delegitimising the Trump decision (Fofana, 14.12.2017)
Nationally transforming	
Criticising/delegitimising the Malian political elite	• Comparing Malian politicians to (the early) Emmanuel Macron and showing their non-fitting for succession (Sissoko, 10.04.2017) • Explaining why Moussa Mara can/should become president (by comparing his fate to Macron) (Keita, I., 11.05.2017) • Informing about IBK's "double discourse" (RFI, 24.05.2017) • Unveiling government shortcomings in the constitutional reform (Nations Unies, 18.06.2017) • Delegitimising IBK's international travels (Sissoko, 24.07.2017) • Delegitimising Ras Bath's condemnation, legitimising his political vision (Sogoba, 04.08.2017) • Unveiling the detrimental effect and colonial legacy of the Franc CFA, delegitimising French and current African elites' rule (Bagayoko and Koné, 30.11.2017) • Suggesting relations between France and the Malian government (Rédaction de Maliweb, 10.01.2018) • Portraying the CMA travel controversy as a result of bad Malian diplomacy (Diarra, 17.01.2018)
Nationally consolidating	
Legitimising the Malian	• Legitimising the presidency of IBK (through his achievements) (Keita, I.B.,

political elite and especially the Malian president IBK (and also his relations with France) as caring for the Malian people internally and externally	22.09.2017); Legitimising the presidency of IBK (as governing the army) (Morba, 25.09.2017) • Legitimising economic government policies through an IMF assessment (Traoré, C.M., 20.11.2017); Informing about the (mostly positive) IMF perspective on the Malian economy (O.D., 12.05.2017) • Informing about IBK (and other presidents') presence at a Muslim cultural event in Paris (Adohoun, 14.04.2017) • Informing about IBK deepening relations with Saudi Arabia (Présidence de la République du Mali, 17.04.2017) • Showing the government's indignation and action on the Libya slavery scandal (Gouvernement de la République du Mali, 18.11.2017); Showing IBK's indignation and action on the Libya slavery scandal (Présidence de la République du Mali, 18.11.2017; Koné, M.D., 21.11.2017) • Showing the government's indignation with the Jerusalem decision and its alignment with UN resolutions on that issue (AD/od/APA, 08.12.2017) • Legitimising the governments' decision (on French teacher expulsion + executing the governments' decision through the notification) (Mali-web/Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, 23.10.2017)
Internationally consolidating	
Legitimising the relations between Mali and France	• Informing about IBK's encounter with Macron (Présidence de la République du Mali, 19.05.2017) • Informing about IBK and Macron's visions/opinions and further responsible persons' views, supporting Macron's visit (Traoré, T., 22.05.2017) • Informing about Decors' idea of Mali-France relations (Coulibaly, Diango, 31.05.2017) • Showing the limited mobilising effect of critical voices against the French intervention (Sy, 11.01.2018)
Legitimising international interventions	• Informing about the progress of the Algiers Agreement by the different parties and the (facilitating) role of the UN, legitimising the MINUSMA ideologically and financially (Conseil de Sécurité des Nations Unies, 15.06.2017) • Informing about the (mostly positive) IMF perspective on the Malian economy (O.D., 12.05.2017)
Legitimising Macron as potential president of France	• Informing about Le Pen's election program (Belga, 23.04.2017) • Explaining why a republican votes for Macron instead of for Le Pen (Thera, 27.04.2017)

In that vein, these article purposes also relate to the topics outlined in the previous subchapter as well as to subjectifications we will explore in the following subchapter. What they show, however, is that different articles are related to different socio-political purposes that are in turn connected to core conflicts in Malian-diasporic society at the time, including national political conflicts, postcolonial relations, and especially the international interventions in Mali

(see Subchapters 2.3 and 2.4). These purposes thus point to struggles over mentalities of national and international government that manifest in the governing of the public on the article genre level.

Together, this exploration of the article genres in the discourse has shown that the genres produce a complex web of inclusionary and exclusionary factors that structure mobilising narratives as one element of "cultural technologies of rule" (Adebanwi, 2017, p. 66). On the one hand, their relation to a field of action that connects citizens and political actors can be a way of including readers in the political discourse. On the other hand, the features of these different genres structure the access to this discourse on diverse levels. First, more linguistic features like the lexis and syntax rather regulate the access to certain genres based on class and especially education, at times with a gendered connotation. Secondly, the norms of interpretation work inclusively mostly for readers who have a certain knowledge of Malian and (West) African history and politics. Together, these features thus favour the participation in the political discourse of a (male) educated, Malian(-diasporic) public. And thirdly, the purposes of the articles structure the access to the discourse through readers' political positions that, however, can either appeal to readers with the same positions to elaborate on them, or motivate readers with different positions to critically engage with the articles. Especially the simultaneous appearance of consolidating and transforming purposes with relation to national and international politics in the discourse analysis corpus and thus also on the Maliweb portal can have inclusive and exclusive effects for readers affiliated to both positions. These diverse aspects show that governing (access to) the public through article genres by media sector conventions as well as by article authors is another level on which the intersectional governmentality of mobilising narratives unfolds.

7.4 Postcolonial and Gendered Subjectifications through Narrative Identities and Belongings in Articles and Comments on Malian Transnational Relations

After delineating the discourse on Malian transnational relations and the participatory and exclusive functions of genres, we turn to the subjectifications that emerge in this discourse fragment in terms of the construction of narrative identities and belongings. Based on the Foucauldian understanding of subjectification I outlined in Subchapter 4.2, I demonstrate how mobilising narratives contribute to the "struggles against the privileges of knowledge" that question "the way in which knowledge circulates and functions, its relations to power" (Foucault, 1982, p. 781). Moreover, this perspective on subjectifications unveils their embeddedness in relations of gendered and postcolonial governmentality, as their mobilisation opens possibilities for feminist emancipation through alternative self-consciousness (see e.g. D. Taylor, 2013, p. 403f) and for "the construction of social and political consciousness in the context of relations of [postcolonial, S.H.] domination" (Adebanwi, 2016, p. 17). In that vein, the affordances outlined in Section 6.2.3 showed that the circulation of online news allows for constructing and negotiating individual and collective identities in narrative (news articles, comments), performative (user profiles, comments), and dialogical (interactions) ways as information circulates. Whereas Section 7.1.2 dealt with the dialogical element, this section focuses on the construction of identities in narrative and performative terms through the selected news articles and comments.

Therefore, I explore how online news articles that were published by Maliweb construct identities and belongings through discursive strategies like nominations and predications.¹⁹³ Through these strategies, the articles confer certain social groups as well as individual agents with positive, negative, and neutral attributes. According to Nira Yuval-Davis (2010, p. 267ff), this construction of identities has a narrative component through which "people tell themselves and others who they are, who they are not and who/how they would like to/should be" (Yuval-Davis, 2010, p. 279). On the one hand, this means that articles construct in-groups and out-groups, especially through relations to collective identifications. On the other hand, Nira Yuval-Davis stresses that this narrative form of identification has a temporal component that links past, present, and future. In that sense, we can also see how articles use this temporal dimension to negotiate postcolonial elements in Malian transnational relations.

¹⁹³ In this subchapter and in Subchapter 7.5, my analysis is based on the articles and comment threads that my interview partners had written or contributed to (for more on this selection process, see Section 5.4.3 and the introduction of Subchapter 5.5).

In addition to postcolonial elements in subjectifications through articles and comments, I also outline their entanglement with gender relations and constructions of masculinity and femininity. Therefore, I follow Natalya Vince and colleagues (2007, p. 6), who highlight the entanglement of colonial and gendered subjectifications and argue for an engagement with the resulting ambiguities that could transform geopolitical and social power relations. This ties in with the diverse body of work on gender relations in Mali that has described the multiple influences that produced, for instance, differentiating ideals for hegemonic masculinities, including mobility (also as initiation) (Jónsson, 2008, pp. 27, 37), being able to provide for one's family (Gaibazzi, 2013, p. 264), the transmission of "Western modernity" (Dougnon, 2016, p. 76ff) or of colonial (forced labour) work ethics (Rodet, 2014), or controlling women in relation to either Muslim or secularist engagements (Schulz & Diallo, 2016, pp. 234–239). Moreover, as outlined in Section 4.1.3, these hegemonic masculinities further draw from pre-colonial imaginations of Mande (warrior) heroes (Whitehouse, 2012b, p. 96ff) and militarisation during French colonialism (Schmitt, 2020, p. 218).

In addition to these identities and belongings that are articulated in the selected news articles, user engagements can show how these discursive strategies can be used in a performative way. In accordance with Butler (2007, p. 198f), this can show agency in repetition. As outline for the topics above, but more elaborately on the following comment level, users take up constructions from articles and act on them, either supporting or contesting them. In the following, I first explore these questions for the nomination strategies in articles and comments to outline which actors appear in this discourse, before I illustrate the consolidating and transforming characterisations of the most important social actor groups.

7.4.1 Nomination Strategies: Who Is Appearing and Being Talked about?

As a first element of subjectifications, I show which actors and actor groups appear in the articles and comments. In that vein, this section explores which social actors are mentioned – textually and visually – in the articles and comments, whereas the next sections on predication focuses only on those that are characterised more prominently. In the following, I thus outline which social actors and social actor groups appear in the articles on Malian transnational relations, how they relate to article pictures and comments, and which intersectional structurations emerge on this level of (not) mentioning certain social actors and social actor groups. Considering the classification of nominations according to van Leeuwen (2008, pp.

35–47), this shows who is foregrounded and who is marginalised in or even excluded from the discourse fragment on Malian transnational relations.

Nominations in Articles

After grouping all the social actors mentioned in articles according to their location and field of action, the following social actors and social actor groups became evident (the terms in square brackets did not appear but are mentioned here to facilitate orientation).

Mali	Mali [nation, society, country], Malian state
	Politics: Malian political class, Malian government, Malian National Assembly (+ spokesperson for the Mali-Palestine unity Mamadou Lamine Djiginé), • Parties: Adema, RPM, YELEMA • Former presidents: Alpha Oumar Konaré, Amadou Toumani Touré, Modibo Keita, Moussa Traoré, • Current politicians: oppositional elected counsellor Boubacary Dicko, president IBK, Minister of External Affairs, oppositional politician Moussa Mara, oppositional politician Sy Kadiatou Sow
	Internal conflict participants: Amadou Koufa, Iyad ag Ghali, armed groups in the Centre, jihadists, terrorists
	Civil society: Bamako protestors against Trump decision, Collective of Muslim Associations in Mali (Collectif des Associations Musulmanes du Mali, CAMM, + president Mohamed Kimbiri), National Platform of Rice Producers in Mali (Plateforme Nationale des Producteurs de Riz au Mali, PNPR), Faliry Bolly (president of the PNPR), Mme Fofana Aïssata Djiteye (inter-profession treasury of PNPR and trader), Seydou Keita (national coordinator of PNPR), Ras Bath (political activist)
	Economy: Malian intermediary traders, Malian rice importers, Malian rice producers
	Military: Malian Armed Forces (FAMA)
	Social/ethnic: Tuareg
	Media: Journalist Union for the Promotion of Diplomacy in Mali (Union des Journalistes pour la Promotion de la Diplomatie au Mali, Ujdm; honorary president Sory Kemesso and president Amadou Mahamane Sangho)
	External: Mali Ko Yere Ko (USA-based diasporic association, + coordinator Diocolo Coulibaly), Malians in the US, Malians in France
	Events: Conference of National Understanding (Conférence d'Entente Nationale, CEN)

	Spatial entities: • Cities: Mopti • Quarters: Commune IV (Bamako)
France	(colonial) France, French colonisers, French state, Banque de France, Barkahane, French media, French precarious groups, Paris Institute of the Arab World, [scholars] (René Dumont) Politicians: French government, Charles de Gaulle, Eduard Balladour, Emmanuel Macron, François Hollande, Jacques Chirac, Jacques Soustelle, Marine Le Pen, Nicolas Sarkozy, René Pleven External: Evelyne Decorps (French ambassador in Mali), French embassy in Mali, French businesses in Mali, French teacher Liberté A
Further countries	African: Algeria, Benin, Burkina Faso (president Roch Christian Marc Kaboré), Cameroon, Central African Republic, Comoros, Congo Brazzaville, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Ivory Coast (scholar Nicolas Agbonhou), [Libya] (government, human traffickers), Mauritania (president Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz), Morocco, Niger, Nigeria (Nigerian rice producers), Senegal, Tchad, Togo, Tunisia USA (president Donald Trump, US media) European: Germany Middle Eastern: Israel, Palestine • Cities: Jerusalem Asian: China, Russia
Africa(n)	continent/ society, (political) elites, artists, central banks, migrants (in France, Libya), Muslims, presidents, scholars (Abdoulaye Coulibaly + Françoise Vergès, Frantz Fanon), African Union, women, youth, [activists] (Kemi Seba)
Regions	Sub-Saharan Africa, Central Africa, West Africa, Francophone Africa, Maghreb, Middle East, European Union, the West Regional associations/organisations: • African: Communauté Economique et Monétaire de l'Afrique Centrale (CEMAC), FCFA countries, UEMOA • Supranational entities: International Monetary Fund (IMF), international forces (in Mali), United Nations (MINUSMA, UN security council), World Bank
Transnational social group-ings	global Muslim society, Southern women
Media	• AJ+, international media, "we" (article authors)

	• Internet users • Readers
Unspecific	abroad, human beings, the whole world, you

Generally, most of these social actors and social actor groups relate to Mali, in that Malian actors are most elaborately and diversely nominated, capturing not only government actors but also those relating to diverse fields like politics, the economy, the internal conflict, and civil society. In postcolonial terms, while the articles often focus on France and relations between Mali or Africa and the West, they mention many African countries and only few non-African countries. This is also interesting in terms of national identifications, as many actors are constructed in national terms. In that regard, the nominations in some ways reproduce the focus of the topics mentioned above, i.e. a focus on postcolonial relations between Mali and France, but also the UN and US or "the West" more generally. On the other hand, these social actor groups point to the importance of Pan-African or transnational African relations, with the mention of African social actor groups but also with the dominance or quantitative importance of African nations in relation to countries from other continents.

Nominations through Article Images

In additions to these actors who appear in the articles, when looking at the visualised social actors, we can see the following actors being displayed in the images appearing with the selected articles:

Mali	Politics: group of election observers, oppositional political leader Moussa Mara, IBK, Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdoulaye Diop
	Civil society: Pro-Palestine protestors in Bamako
	Conflict: person in "nomadic" attire + "Azawad" flag
Mali-France	Hollande + IBK, Evelyn Decorps (French ambassador in Mali) + Malian co-speakers at press conference (Ujdm members)
Mali-USA	Group of Malian-diasporic demonstrators (with Mali and US flag in the upper left corner)
France	Politicians: Emmanuel Macron

Non-human	Map of Mali-"Azawad", pile of sacks full of rice, FCFA bills + coins, FCFA bills

These visual nominations reinforce the focus on Mali and France, the conflict, and on Malian political actors. Most of the identifiable persons are Malian politicians (the oppositional presidential candidate Moussa Mara, the president IBK, the minister of foreign affairs Abdoulaye Diop) and French politicians or diplomats (former president François Hollande, current president Emmanuel Macron, and the French ambassador in Mali, Evelyn Decors). The more collectivised actors, on the other hand, are election observers, pro-Palestine protestors in Bamako, and Malian-diasporic demonstrators. Moreover, some images portray non-human content that refers to postcolonial relations between (West) Africa and France (FCFA images), more general trade relations of Mali (sacks of rice), and the conflict (map of Mali-"Azawad"). While these images do not portray social actors per se, I want to highlight that they show the backgrounding of actors mentioned in the articles as, for instance, the Tuareg, the members of the National Platform of Malian Rice Producers PNP, the Pan-African activist Kemi Seba, or actors involved in the FCFA system. While we have to keep in mind that this selection of images could be due to a lack of journal(ist) resources (for more, see Section 6.1.4 on the Malian news sector), this pattern still has an effect of discursive backgrounding (see Van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 142), thereby reinforcing the dominance of some (political elite) social actors and the exclusion of other (Pan-African, Northern Malian, working class) social actors in the discourse on Malian transnational relations.

Nominations in Comments

As a last element of nominations in the discourse fragment on Malian transnational relations, we turn to the social actors that are nominated in the comments in reaction to the selected articles. Here, we can identify the following groups:

Mali	Patriots, women, youth
	Politics: government, opposition, political class, presidential majority, state • Politicians: future Malian president, IBK, Moussa Mara, Moussa Mara's wife, • Parties: YELEMA
	Civil society: Bamako protestors against Trump decision, union leaders, Moussa Mara

	supporters, Ras Bath History: Sogolon Diata (mother of pre-colonial king Soundiata Keita) Military: Malian army (Forces Armées Maliennes, FAMA) Conflict: "Azawad", jihadists, separatist groups Media: radio station Kledu (with Kasim Traoré), Maliweb External: US-based diasporic association <i>Mali Ko Yere Ko</i> Spatialised social groups: • Regions: Malians in the North of Mali • Cities: Bamako residents
Other African countries	[Senegal] (Abdoulaye Wade, Cheick Anta Diop, students), Ghana, [Ivory Coast] (Ivorian youth), [Libya] (Libyan human traffickers), Nigeria
Africa(n)	continent/ society, (political) elites, children, families, men, migrants in Libya, presidents, soldiers, women, youth, Africans in Arab countries, [activists] (Kemi Seba)
France	French children, French women Politics: Brigitte Macron, Emmanuel Macron, François Hollande, Nicolas Sarkozy, Sibeth Ndiaye (Macron's communication advisor) Military: Barkahane, Général Charles Mangin Culture: French theorists Externals: French embassy in Mali, French <i>Liberté A</i> teacher
Other countries	Brazil, China (Chinese men, Chinese women), USA (Donald Trump, men, women), Germany (Hegel, Hitler), India, Israel(is) (Israeli Muslims, Jerusalem), Palestine(ns), [Great Britain] (Robert Malthus)
Regions	African regions: Anglophone Africa, Francophone Africa, West Africa Middle East, Arab countries (Arab monarchs) Europe(-an Union) The West: "The others" or "allies" Supranational entities: international forces, United Nations (MINUSMA), World Bank
Transnational social group-ings	global Christian society, global Muslim society (Sunni youth), global Jewish society, global religious society, <i>white</i> women

God	God
Unspecific	every country, every government, human beings, the enemies, the whole world

At first sight, the comments show a focus on some actors and actor groups, including Malian and French politicians and oppositional civil society actors. In addition, the comments contribute to the extension of the discourse by further mentioning social actors and social actor groups on the African levels, belonging to further (African and non-African) states, as well as supranational and transnational groupings. The mention of Anglophone and Francophone Africa additionally points to the importance of postcolonial relations as these regions signify two parts of the African continent with two different (post)colonial systems and power relations.

Intersectional Inclusions and Exclusions through Nominations

Looking at all three of these patterns of nominations together unveils intersectional discursive exclusions and their negotiation on diverse levels, including gender, class, ethnicity, location, and scale.

First, there is a gendered dimension to these nominations (see Table 4) that reproduces the exclusion of women from the Malian public (and political) sphere as observed by, for instance, Rosa de Jorio (2009, p. 106f) or Lackenbauer and colleagues (2015, p. 30f) – an exclusionary pattern that, however, has also been identified more generally in feminist work on public spheres (see Section 4.3.1). Whereas many social actors identified in the articles do not have a gendered position per se (countries, organisations, collectivised protestors), among those individual actors who are individualised gendered persons, the articles mention male actors much more frequently (35) than female actors (5). On the group level, on the other hand, only women are mentioned per se in the articles, e.g. "African women" and "Third World women", whereas the role of men is rather normalised as being present in all groups like "African migrants" or "African artists" (for more on linguistic gendered exclusion, see Lazar, 2008, p. 93ff). Only in two instances, article authors do not reproduce this linguistic pattern, once when arguing that African societies would need to elect "integer men and women" in the future, and once calling "all men and women dedicated to peace and justice" to

join the protest against the US Jerusalem decision.¹⁹⁴ Although these single instances rather confirm than disrupt the generic masculine in the articles, they show that sometimes article authors address female and male actors in a mobilising way.

Table 4: *Distribution of explicitly (textually and visually) gendered social actors and actor groups in the articles, images, and comments selected for the detailed discourse analysis*

	Male actors/ actor groups (more than 1)	Female actors/ actor groups	Mixed actor groups
Articles	35	5/2	0
Images	5/2	0	3
Comments	16/3	4/6	0

In addition to the article texts, their images reinforce the discursive domination of male politicians and political actors. The only identifiable individual female actor portrayed in article images is the French ambassador in Mali, which – as equally outlined above – unveils an additional postcolonial layer to these gendered visual nominations. In addition, although all female persons are portrayed as publicly engaged (Evelyn Decorps during a press conference, Malian-diasporic protestors and pro-Palestine Bamako protestors during a demonstration), they only appear together with male persons, with no female person being portrayed as acting autonomously. In the two collective visual representations of protesting female actors, however, this visual inclusion still counters the complete exclusion of female actors on the textual level that is constructed through the use of the generic masculine.

The comments, at first sight, seem to mention female actors and especially actor groups more frequently. In line with the article pictures, however, especially identifiable female actors are often mentioned only in relation to male actors as, for instance, with the wives of Moussa Mara and Emmanuel Macron. Male actors, on the other hand, appear much more individualised and in more influential and (historically) important positions like politicians, activists, and academics. In this regard, the nominations of individualised male actors are used to (re)produce and challenge Eurocentric worldviews, for instance, when they include powerful Western actors such as Hegel, Hitler, or Malthus. They appear as reference points for emphasising post-colonial interdependencies in terms of Malian support for France (fight against

¹⁹⁴ I still did not categorise the respective social actor groups ("African presidents" and "the whole world") as of mixed gender because these were very marginal disruptions of an otherwise consistent generic masculinum.

Hitler) and longstanding discursive discrimination of African society (statement by Hegel), on the one hand, and in terms of Western knowledge transfer (Malthusian development theory), on the other hand. One tendency, however, points to a more inclusive gendered pattern in the comments. In some instances, users disrupt the generic masculine that is prevalent here as well. In relation to the represented social actor groups, this happens in the two comment threads that react to articles with pictures including collectivised female protestors. In the other instances, users employ female forms to speak to other users who have female user names and/or profile pictures. These observations suggest that online news not only offer opportunities for a more gender-inclusive discourse by allowing female users to participate (and, eventually, organise for socio-political change), but – through their multimodality – also by transforming the discourse on a linguistic level.

In addition to the gendered dimension, most of the persons that are constructed as individual social actors are – mostly Malian and French – politicians. And they are contrasted to collective actors from the civil society, who are portrayed as politically active. But on the civil society level as well, the articles mention many individual actors. Social actor groups that are completely genericised and thereby distanced from the readers (see Van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 35f) are socially marginalised groups like African women or African migrants, or conflict-related groups like the Tuareg or terrorists. In addition, I noticed that "the Tuareg" are the only ethnic group that is mentioned in the selected articles. This could be a way of highlighting them as a deviant or sectarian ethnic group, or that their ethnicity has become a synonym for a – separatist – political designation that, however, (re)produces a poorly founded generalisation.

Moreover, the nominations of social actors and social actor groups unveil a diversity of geographically situated actors in different places and on different scales, which not only further extends the article focus, but also has nationalist and postcolonial implications. Generally, these nominations show an extension of the focus on Malian transnational relations on the topics level, which focuses on relations between Mali/Africa and France, the US, Russia, and the UN. The social actor groups that are mentioned in the articles and comments show that the articles go beyond this and include dozens of other African countries as well as some countries in Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. In terms of scale, many actors and groups are constructed in national terms. However, other spatial levels of nominations appear as well, including the city level (Mopti, Jerusalem), the regional level (West Africa, Middle East, Francophone Africa), the continental level (Africa), or even an unspecific level that includes all human beings or the whole world. In terms of organisations, they extend to the

global level as with the United Nations. On the one hand, the weighing of these geographical locations reproduces a postcolonial focus on France and Western actors. On the other hand, their geographic diversity also points to possibilities for diversifying these postcolonial relations.

Together, these nomination patterns point toward consolidating and transforming effects in the discourse on Malian transnational relations. They show that the circulation of articles from diverse sources as well as in their circulation through the interaction of users with them can, on the one hand, support cultural mobilisation as they increase and thereby emphasise the diversity of social actors engaged in Malian transnational relations, for instance through the inclusion of diverse African countries and more female actor (groups). On the other hand, we also saw consolidating moments in this circulation, as nominations across articles, images, and comments, for instance, reproduce a focus on Malian and French/Western political elites, while they generalise and collectivise Malian and African civil societies. These nominations thus give first insights into subjectifications that consolidate or transform gendered and postcolonial mentalities of government as articulated in the discourse on Malian transnational relations. In order to assess these subjectifications in more detail, we now turn to the predicational strategies that article authors and users employed in the selected discourse fragment.

7.4.2 Predicational Strategies: Intersectional Subjectifications through Consolidating and Transforming Identity Constructions

In addition to the nominations explored above, predications, i.e. the characterisation of social actors, play a crucial role in the construction of narrative identities and related subjectivities. Moreover, we will see that these identifications are also related to constructions of belonging, especially through the identification of selves and others. In the analysed discourse fragment on Malian transnational relations, the identity constructions of social actors and social actor groups in articles and comments support transforming as well as consolidating subject positions in relation to the postcolonial status quo that, in turn, relate to "mentalities of government" (Adebanwi, 2017, p. 66) in their national and international manifestations.

As we will see in more detail below, article authors and users support a consolidating position on the international level when positively evaluate the existing relations between France and Mali or Africa and argue for their sustainment, mostly in relation to international interventions in Mali. In addition, these voices justify the interventions of external actors in Malian or African affairs by characterising them as beneficial or even necessary for the respective

societies. Some arguments in the consolidating position thus appear to be transforming such as the fact that military interventions work towards peace and security in Mali and would thereby transform a negative status quo. However, their embeddedness in existing postcolonial power relations makes this positive interpretation unfitting for the transforming discourse. On the national level, authors and users who support the consolidating position seek to legitimise the rule of current political elites by positively evaluating their governance.

On the other hand, article authors and users who support the transforming position seek to change the status quo. In terms of African and Malian transnational relations, they emphasise the unjust hierarchies in persistent and newly emerging postcolonial dependencies and argue for more emancipated relations. On the internal level, authors and users who support the transforming position mostly criticise the ruling political elites and call for political change. These voices also articulate the entanglement of postcolonial powers and national elites as a core reason for Malian and African socioeconomic hardships and thus as an important motivation for a socio-political transformation.

An overarching or cross-cutting issue that supporters of both positions mobilise is the debate on Malian national unity as one that seeks to re-establish and maintain a prior status quo that for some is lost, and for others "only" threatened. In this discourse strand, national politicians and international forces, for instance, appear either as saviours or as causes of the problem, depending on the respective position of article authors and users. This issue, however, is special because in this case, both positions aim for Malian national unity as a common objective and mobilise it for their causes.

As we will see, however, many subjectifications in both positions also work with gendered hierarchies and exclusions. As this reproduces colonial approaches to gender relations and diversity in African societies, these subjectifications thus preclude a unified decolonial feminist subjectification as outlined by Tamale (2020, p. 63). Rather, these subjectifications contribute to postcolonial gendered governmentality by reproducing the twofold gendered violence bemoaned by Aminata Dramane Traoré, as Malian and African women are hurt by neoliberal and postcolonial socioeconomic exploitation as well as by the negation of their own voices and opinions in public discourses (Aminata D. Traoré in Traoré & M'Dela-Mounier, 2012, p. 7ff).

Consolidating Identities and Belongings

In the following, I will first demonstrate how article and comment identifications construct social actors and social actor groups to support the consolidating position. As mentioned above, the consolidating position supports the current ruling position of France and further Western countries as well as of Malian national political elites. In addition, hegemonic – both colonial and neoliberal – constructions of masculinity and femininity contribute to the functioning of this discourse and further social divisions in the face of political domination. Considering the importance of transnational relations for the discourse fragment under examination, I will start with the role of France as the most prominent foreign social actor appearing in this consolidating position.

France, French Businesses, a Teacher, and International Forces

The positive evaluation of diverse French actors mainly emerges through two sources: an article that was published by the Malian journal *Le Reporter* on a press conference of the French ambassador in Mali, Evelyn Decorps (Coulibaly, Diango, 31.05.2017), and an official statement of the French embassy in Mali that was uploaded by one of the users instead of as a written comment.¹⁹⁵ These official French positions appeared in reaction to reproaches that the engagement of French actors would either be motivated by the extraction of resources or by an interest in dividing the Malian nation. In response to these reproaches, both documents portray French actors as engaged in Mali for the good of Malian society and in support of Malian territorial integrity. The article reports on Evelyn Decorps as emphasising the historically benevolent involvement of France in Mali, while conveniently omitting any reference to colonialism – an omission that is further reproduced by the article reporting on her discourse. More specifically, Decorps positively portrays French businesses that would, for instance, contribute to the Malian economy by paying taxes and had never been active in resource extraction.¹⁹⁶ Thereby, the ambassador denies any suspected relation between the French military intervention and resource extraction mentioned above.

¹⁹⁵ The fact that this document was uploaded without any comment by the user highlights how contingent such (online) interactions sometimes are, in this case because it is not evident from the comment thread if this user wanted to contribute this official French position to the debate such as formulation of his own argument or as another evidence for the assumed obscurity of French interests. Considering that this comment in fact only represents the official position of the French embassy and is seen like this by the other commenting users, I evaluated this as contribution of a French argument to the debate.

¹⁹⁶ For more on ways of (not) dealing with its colonial history in French society, see, for instance, Stoler's chapter on "colonial aphasia" (Stoler, 2016, pp. 122–170).

At the outset, the French ambassador in Mali, Evelyne Decorps, briefly reminded of the historicity of the relations between France and Mali. According to her, the relations between France and Mali are long-lasting bilateral relations that go back to the end of the 19th century. (...)

In addition, according to Evelyn Decorps, there are more than 120 French enterprises that employ more than 4,000 persons and that are equally sources for considerable tax revenue.

'People often reproach us of being in Mali for exploiting mineral resources. But none of the French enterprises is in the mining sector. Until this day, there is no French enterprise that exploits gold in Mali. For those who equally think that we are in the North of Mali for exploiting oil, I remind you that there is not operation for exploiting oil in the North of Mali by France', declared the ambassador of France in Mali. [Coulibaly, Diango, 31.05.2017]¹⁹⁷

Through this construction of French subject positions, Decorps, on the one hand, portrays a feminised picture of France as a nation that seeks a relationship of care with Malian society, in contrast to masculinised ideas of France as either defending or penetrating and exploiting Malian territory (see below). On the other hand, however, the fact that the French ambassador interprets relations between Mali and France with such an authority also has a paternalistic connotation.

The embassy document, on the other hand, was created in reaction to a controversial homework assignment given by a French teacher at the Bamako-based French *Lycée Liberté A*. This homework had referred to "Azawad" as one of the regions in Mali, which produced public turmoil as some parents and the media interpreted the assignment as an undermining of Malian territorial integrity that ultimately led to the expulsion of the teacher. The embassy document was uploaded by one user in reaction to an article informing of said expulsion and in it, the French embassy articulates an apology for the teacher's action – at the same time excusing it with his ignorance – and stresses the French commitment to Malian territorial integrity.

The French Embassy seeks to present its apologies to the minister of foreign Affairs and international cooperation for this incident. It especially regrets the inaccuracies and the shortcuts this homework could contain, on an issue that is currently debated in Mali. It nevertheless

¹⁹⁷ D'entrée de jeu, l'ambassadrice de France au Mali, Evelyne Decorps, a fait un bref rappel de l'historique des relations entre la France et le Mali. Selon elle, la relation entre la France et le Mali est une relation bilatérale ancienne qui remonte à la fin du 19^{ème} siècle. (...) En outre, aux dires d'Evelyne Decorps, il y a plus de 120 entreprises françaises qui emploient plus de 4.000 personnes et qui sont également sources de revenus non négligeables en terme de fiscalité. «On nous reproche souvent d'être au Mali pour l'exploitation des ressources minières. Mais aucune des entreprises françaises n'est dans le domaine minier. À ce jour, il n'y a aucune entreprise française qui exploite de l'or au Mali. Pour ceux qui pensent également que nous sommes dans le Nord du Mali pour exploiter le pétrole, je vous rappelle qu'il n'y a aucune opération d'exploitation de pétrole dans le Nord du Mali par la France», a déclaré l'ambassadrice de France au Mali. [Coulibaly, Diango, 31.05.2017]

seeks to clarify that there was no malicious intention on the side of the teacher who edited the homework, but who had not assessed the political significance of the term Azawad.

It ascertains, in the utmost clear way, that France has always defended, and will continue to defend, the respect of the territorial integrity of Mali [French Embassy in Mali, uploaded in reaction to a Facebook post featuring Maliweb/Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, 23.10.2017]¹⁹⁸

In a similar line of thought that used interdiscursive references and thereby contributed to this (post)colonial depiction of France (and further Western powers) as committed to protecting the Malian territory, one commenting user reacted to an article on a demonstration against the Jerusalem decision by Donald Trump. This comment, in turn, critiques the orientation of protestors towards the Middle East instead of a more nationalist approach. In this context, the user also values the contribution of international forces for the security of the Malian nation.

Instead of marching and being ready to die for the Palestine and the mosque...one needs to die for the defence of the Malian territory.. these are ungrateful persons who don't think of the Malian and international soldiers who die so that they can live peacefully in Bamako. [Comment in reaction to a Facebook post featuring Fofana, 14.12.2017]¹⁹⁹

This focus on a life-sacrificing notion of national attachments in the sense of "being ready to die for the Malian territory" points to a militarised and masculinised image of nationalism we can find throughout diverse discursive positions (see also Yuval-Davis, 2010, p. 267). As outlined in the introduction to this section, we can see in this quotation how ideas of traditional heroic masculinities intersect with imperially militarised masculinities that are extended to international forces here, thus consolidating postcolonial interdependencies. Whereas the soldiers mentioned in the comment are addressed in the generic masculine, the fact that this comment was written by a female user, however, also speaks to bell hook's (2015, p. 94) critical note that we should not assume that female actors are by nature less politically militant.

Together, these constructions of France in relation to different French actors and international forces portray the former colonial force as a beneficial actor in Malian and – by extension – African transnational relations and national conflict lines while at the same time omitting any

¹⁹⁸ L'Ambassade de France tient à présenter ses excuses au ministère des Affaires étrangères et de la coopération internationale pour cet incident. Elle regrette notamment les inexactitudes et les raccourcis que pouvait contenir ce pouvoir, sur un sujet qui fait actuellement débat au Mali. Elle tient néanmoins à préciser qu'il n'y avait aucune intention malveillante de la part du professeur qui a rédigé le devoir, mais qui n'avait pas mesuré la portée politique du terme Azawad. Elle confirme, de la façon plus claire, que la France a toujours défendu, et continuera à défendre, le respect de l'intégrité territoriale du Mali. [French Embassy in Mali, uploaded in reaction to a Facebook post featuring Maliweb/Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, 23.10.2017]

¹⁹⁹ Au lieu de marcher et être prêt à mourir pour la Palestine et la mosquée...il faut mourir pour la défense du territoire malien.. voilà des personnes ingrates qui ne pensent pas aux soldats maliens et étrangers qui meurent pour que eux vivent tranquille à Bamako. [Comment in reaction to a Facebook post featuring Fofana, 14.12.2017]

references to the postcoloniality of the situation. This is further supported by the strategic use of gendered (caring vs. fighting) subjectifications of French actors. The mobilisation of such narratives, then, contributes to postcolonial governmentality as it justifies the ongoing involvement of France in Malian affairs.

Malian Ruling Political Elites

Continuing this positive evaluation of postcolonial interdependencies, the same article on the press conference of Evelyn Decorps supports the (inter)nationally consolidating discourse as it positively evaluates certain Malian presidents because of their work for the persistence of good of relations between Mali and France. These presidents are contrasted with negative evaluations of presidents who rather disrupted the relations between the two countries and even oriented towards other powers like the then USSR.²⁰⁰ In that vein, this article reproduces an imperative of entanglements between France and Mali or Africa that is most prominently captured by the term *Françafrique*.²⁰¹

According to her, these relations were interrupted in the 1960s with the fragmentation of the Mali-Senegal federation when the president Modibo Keita connected mainly to the UdSSR and China.

After the seizure of power by Moussa Traoré, the speaker Evelyne Decorps has observed an upturn in the relations between the two countries before they were a little weakened from 1995 on by the decision of president Alpha Oumar Konaré to not travel to Dakar to follow the invitation by the French president, Jacques Chirac, to celebrate the centenary of the AOF.²⁰² [Coulibaly, Diango, 31.05.2017]²⁰³

This evaluation of Malian presidents by the French ambassador appears misplaced in the Malian context, considering the negative evaluation of Modibo Keita, who features as a "father" of the Malian nation for many Malians (De Jorio, 2003, p. 228), and the positive

²⁰⁰ In this context, the article also quotes Decorps as delegitimising the opinions of "some" ("certains") who suspected that the engagement of French military forces was related to resource interests.

²⁰¹ Introduced by François-Xavier Verschave, Jean Carbonare and the organization *Survie* in 1994, *Françafrique* describes the "political and institutional system as well as all the networks that allow France to sustain the control over its former colonies" (Survie, 2016). Although some criticize this concept for inadequately describing the current relations between France and the African continent (see e.g. Péan, 2012, p. 117f), I use it to denote the ongoing French influence on African countries that, in the Malian case, are even more debated since the French military intervention.

²⁰² French West Africa / Afrique Occidentale Française

²⁰³ À l'en croire, cette relation s'est interrompue dans les années 1960 avec l'éclatement de la fédération Mali-Sénégal où le président Modibo Keita s'est rapproché largement de l'URSS et de la Chine. Après la prise du pouvoir de Moussa Traoré, la conférencière Evelyne Decorps a noté une embellie dans les relations entre les deux pays avant qu'elles ne soient à partir de 1995 un peu distendues par la décision du président Alpha Oumar Konaré de ne pas se rendre à Dakar à l'invitation du président français, Jacques Chirac, pour célébrer le centenaire de l'AOF. [Coulibaly, Diango, 31.05.2017]

evaluation of the former dictator Moussa Mara, whose impeachment has been seen as a founding moment for Malian democracy for decades (Gavelle et al., 2013, p. 29f; Whitehouse, 2013, p. 36). In addition to the privileged position of the ambassador, these subjectifications are further legitimised when the article introduces the Malian journalist association Ujdm as co-organising the press conference in their capacity as the Malian voice for explaining the role of foreign powers in Mali. Another legitimising factor was the fact that the ambassador's explanations were reproduced by a Malian journalist in a Malian journal.

In addition to this external perspective on (historical) Malian political actors, the ruling actors themselves support a consolidating position, aiming to consolidate the(ir) status quo, especially through government communications and press releases. Here, particularly the Malian government and the president IBK are portrayed as caring for Malian society and especially Malian unity and territorial integrity. This caring, however, is shown through a strong hand in handling the affair, an identification that evokes connotations of a militarised-masculinised presentation and a "desire to appear 'manly'" (Enloe, 2004, p. 123) of political elites that use (regulative) force instead of softer (negotiating, asking for an apology) measures in order to protect the Malian territory. This also ties in with Baudais' (2015: 511) observation that IBK's image as a "strong man" was important for his election as Malian president in 2013.

The Malian higher authorities took their responsibilities by urging the French teacher, initiator of the homework assignment on the 'Presentation of Mali – Comprehensive Question', a homework assignment with questions that concerned Azawad, to leave Mali within 72 hours.

Despite the apologies of the French embassy in Mali, with this decision the Malian higher authorities show once more that it cannot be in question to tolerate any ambiguities on its [Mali's] sovereignty. [Maliweb/Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, 23.10.2017]²⁰⁴

In addition to these official documents, this positive valuation of IBK and the Malian government is a notion that is also supported by some of the commenting users.

Thank you IBK [Comment in reaction to the Facebook post featuring Maliweb/Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, 23.10.2017]²⁰⁵

²⁰⁴ Les hautes autorités maliennes viennent de prendre leur responsabilité en exhortant le professeur de Français initiateur du devoir à domicile sur la « Présentation du Mali-Question de compréhension », devoir dont les questions portaient sur l' Azawad de quitter le Mali d'ici 72 h. Malgré les excuses de l' ambassade de France au Mali, les hautes autorités maliennes à travers cette décision montrent une nouvelle fois qu' il ne peut aucunement être question de tolérer les équivoques sur sa souveraineté. [Maliweb/Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, 23.10.2017]

²⁰⁵ Merci IBK [Comment in reaction to the Facebook post featuring Maliweb/Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, 23.10.2017]

It is never too late to do the good thing. I support my government [Comment in reaction to the Facebook post featuring Maliweb/Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, 23.10.2017]²⁰⁶

Beyond this national dimension, the Malian government – in reaction to the Libya slavery scandal and the Jerusalem issue – also portrays itself as caring for African migrants and the global Muslim society, especially by defending their human rights against racist interventions.

The Government of the Republic of Mali is deeply concerned and outraged by the information on the inhumane and degrading treatment directed at migrants coming from African countries in Libya. [Gouvernement de la République du Mali, 18.11.2017]²⁰⁷

Whereas this latter dimension is not taken up by users – which could also feed into a more general idea on the users' part that their government should care more for Mali (see below) – these constructions of the ruling Malian political actors employ "manly" identity constructions that follow heroic and militarised ideals of political masculinity in their subjectification as indispensable for the Malian nation. Especially the first part of these constructions, however, rather focuses on their (expected) support for continuing relations between Mali and France, thereby unveiling the dilemma for Malian political elites in this consolidating discourse, as they have to comply with postcolonial relations externally and portray themselves as independent from these relations internally at the same time.

Cooperative Malian and African Privileged Actors vs. Self-Inflicted Hardships

In addition to these prominent actors, some characterisations of further Malian and African social actors also support the consolidating discourse, mainly in postcolonial terms. On the one hand, the *Le Reporter* article on the Evelyne Decorps press conference (Coulibaly, Diango, 31.05.2017) as well as an article published by the Malian journal *L'Observatoire* on the visit of IBK at the inauguration of an exhibition on Islam in Paris (Adohoun, 14.04.2017) positively construct cooperative privileged actors. In the report on the Evelyne Decorps press conference, the ambassador is quoted as emphasising the political and developmental contributions of the Malian diaspora in France, implicitly also highlighting the crucial contribution of the French state to this potential through the naturalisation of said Malians. Whereas this seems to be a valorisation of their presence at first sight, this mention feeds into the discourse

²⁰⁶ Il n'est jamais trop tard pour bien faire. Je soutiens mon gouvernement [Comment in reaction to the Facebook post featuring Maliweb/Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, 23.10.2017]

²⁰⁷ Le Gouvernement de la République du Mali est profondément préoccupé et indigné par les informations faisant état de traitement inhumain et dégradant réservé aux migrants ressortissants des pays africains en Libye. [Gouvernement de la République du Mali, 18.11.2017]

on beneficial relations between Mali and France, insinuating that only through their presence in France could these Malians contribute to the – probably Eurocentrically connoted – political and economic "development" of Mali.

Speaking about the Malian nationals in France, the ambassador makes known that they are today around 76,000 in a regular situation. She underlined that 4,500 resident permits were delivered for Malian nationals of all years, out of which 1,500 for purposes of regularisation. 'We do not only send migrants back, we also regularise them', declared Evelyne Decorps. Before adding that the Malian diaspora in France is an important element in the relation on the political level and in terms of development. [Coulibaly, Diango, 31.05.2017]²⁰⁸

In addition, the *L'Observatoire* article on the inauguration of the Paris exhibition mentions at the end a number of African presidents visiting the event as well, which has a national political and postcolonial performative consolidating effect. On the one hand, mentioning IBK alongside the other presidents legitimises him as a presidential figure. On the other hand, all these African presidents visiting the inauguration together with the French president consolidates the picture of positive relations between the French government and African states.

Visiting the French capital since last Wednesday 12 April, the President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita participates, today, Friday 14 April 2017, at the inauguration of the 'Exhibitions Treasures of Islam in Africa: From Timbuktu to Zanzibar'. (...)

Apart from ours, Your Excellence Ibrahim Boubacar Keita, other Heads of State like the French François Hollande; the Burkinabe Roch Christian Marc Kaboré; the Mauritanian Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz are expected at the official inauguration ceremony. [Adohoun, 14.04.2017]²⁰⁹

In addition to these elite subject positions, some Facebook and Twitter comments especially contribute to a Eurocentric, developmentalist identification of Malian and African societies. Most importantly, these societies are portrayed as suffering from socioeconomic hardships because of their own cultural beliefs and behaviours, thus reproducing a modernist Eurocentric notion of "development" that places the burden of change on the Global South itself (for

²⁰⁸ Parlant des ressortissants du Mali en France, l'ambassadrice a fait savoir qu'ils sont aujourd'hui environ 76.000 en situation régulière. Elle a souligné que 4500 titres de séjour sont délivrés pour les ressortissants maliens de tous les ans, dont 1500 au titre de régularisation. «Nous ne faisons pas que renvoyer des migrants, nous les régularisons aussi», a déclaré Evelyne Decorps. Avant d'ajouter que la diaspora malienne en France est un élément important de la relation au niveau politique et en matière de développement. [Coulibaly, Diango, 31.05.2017]

²⁰⁹ En séjour dans la capitale française depuis le mercredi 12 avril dernier, le Président Ibrahim Boubacar Kéïta prend part, aujourd'hui, vendredi 14 avril 2017, à l'inauguration des "Expositions Trésors de l'Islam en Afrique : De Tombouctou à Zanzibar ". (...) Outre le nôtre, Son Excellence Ibrahim Boubacar Kéïta, d'autres Chefs d'Etat comme le Français François Hollande ; le Burkinabé Roch Christian Marc Kaboré; le Mauritanien Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz sont attendus à la cérémonie d'inauguration officielle. [Adohoun, 14.04.2017]

an extensive outline of such problematic development-related ideologies in another African context, see Eriksson-Baaz, 2005).

Is it not time to assume our responsibilities? [Comment in reaction to the Facebook post featuring ouest-france.fr, 11.07.2017]²¹⁰

This became especially pertinent in a debate on African birth rates and "development" that emerged in reaction to Macron's denigrating statement on the fertility of African women (ouest-france.fr, 11.07.2017). During this debate, an – according to her profile picture, *white* – user emphasises how African families struggle with their many children, thus siding with those in the debate who have identified practices of having many children as one reason for the "underdevelopment" of African societies and implicitly constructing those who argue against controlling African birth rates as ignorant.

One needs to share the everyday life with poor African populations to observe the suffering of 'numerous' families !!! [Comment in reaction to the Facebook post featuring ouest-france.fr 11.07.2017]²¹¹

In the Malian case, for instance, in reaction to the call for a demonstration against the international interventions by the US-based Malian diaspora association *Mali Ko Yere Ko* (Coulibaly, Diocolo, 04.05.2017), some users portray Malian society as dependent on international support and even on the hotly debated international interventions. While this seems to merely be stating the facts, this also contributes to consolidating a postcolonial, racialised discourse on Western nations as *white* beneficiaries that sustain imperial formations (as, for instance, described by Stoler, 2008, pp. 191, 193).²¹² In this line of thought, one user reacted to the aforementioned article that critiques the international interventions and rather defends them as necessary for security in Mali.

When a war is asymmetric, it is complicated. Leave the international forces alone to avoid further problems. The enemy is big and our country alone will not be able to face it. [Comment in reaction to the Facebook post featuring Coulibaly, Diocolo, 04.05.2017]²¹³

²¹⁰ N'est il pas temps d'assumer nos responsabilités ? [Comment in reaction to the Facebook post featuring ouest-france.fr, 11.07.2017]

²¹¹ Il faut être au quotidien parmi les populations pauvres africaines pour observer la souffrance des familles "nombreuses " !!! [Comment in reaction to the Facebook post featuring ouest-france.fr 11.07.2017]

²¹² In the Malian context, however, further subjectifications of the intervening French exist, including them as fulfilling a post-colonial duty as well as them intervening in favour of Tuareg separatist groups (Bergamaschi & Diawara, 2014, pp. 144–148).

²¹³ Quand une guerre est asymétrique elle est compliquée. Laissons les forces internationales pour éviter autres problèmes. L'ennemi est de taille et notre pays seul ne pourra pas faire face. [Comment in reaction to the Facebook post featuring Coulibaly, Diocolo, 04.05.2017]

This part of the consolidating discourse, then, employs a subjectification of postcolonial African (privileged) subjects as following Eurocentric ideas of "development" and knowledge production, on the one hand. On the other hand, this discourse fragment contrasts such privileged positions with struggling subjects who are identified as struggling because of their non-Eurocentric ways of life and could potentially be saved by Western (military) interventions.

In summary, the consolidating identifications and belongings constructed in this discourse fragment work in a normalising way, as they legitimise the rule of national and international postcolonial elites. An important element in these subjectifications is the de-politicised construction of narrative identities that obscure the colonial past of Malian transnational relations. In addition, these consolidating subject positions have a gendered dimension as they either exclude Malian/African female actors as active subjects, or as they make strategic use of gendered ideas by constructing feminised caring or masculinised protecting elite postcolonial subject positions to further legitimise existing power relations.

Transforming Identities and Belongings

In contrast to these consolidating subjectifications, the articles and comments also mobilise narratives for transforming identity constructions that challenge the domination by Western forces and ruling political actors. In that regard, I understand transforming subjectifications as emerging among the parts of African publics described by Ekeh (1975, p. 106f) and Adebani (2017, p. 70) that seek to not be governed that way and to resist (post)colonial mentalities of government such as the ones described above. As we will see, however, these transforming positions often build on further exclusions along the lines of class, gender, and ethnicity. Considering these transforming identity constructions as subjectifications that emerge from a mostly Malian-diasporic point of view on Malian transnational relations, the following depiction of – narrative and performative – identity constructions starts with the portrayal of Malian-diasporic society, including its internal selves and others. Next, I explore constructions of African societies and social actor groups as closely related to Malian-diasporic constructions of a beyond-national, relational self. In contrast, the transforming position in this discourse fragment rather constructs French actors and especially Emmanuel Macron as external others, although we will see that here as well, differentiations exist. In addition to these primary postcolonial relations between Mali, Africa, and France that are at the centre of the articles examined here, I also introduce further Western and beyond-Western

social actor groups as well as religiously delineated groups as alternative partners for transnational relations.

Malian-Diasporic (Civil) Society: Ambivalent Internal Selves

Articles and comments that contribute to the subjectification of Malian society show a variety of different identity constructions that cannot easily be divided along lines such as internal self versus others (for an exemplary analysis of internal selves, internal others, and external others, see e.g. KhosraviNik & Zia, 2014, pp. 766–773). The multiplicity of voices that emerge through the circulation of these narratives rather unveil the extent – and limits – of contingency in the construction of Malian society. A somewhat overarching argument in the transforming position, however, contrasts the culturalist arguments articulated above, in that articles and comments rather portray Malian-diasporic society as negatively affected by postcolonial structures of inequality, in addition to resisting its discrimination.

Articles in the discourse fragment portray Malian society in general not only as under pressure in postcolonial terms (this is even more prominent in relation to Africa, see below), but especially in terms of its national unity. This manifests in articles on the expulsion of the French *Liberté A* teacher (Maliweb/Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, 23.10.2017) and the call to the *Mali Ko Yere Ko* demonstration against the international interventions that argues that Malian society is under threat but in light of non-beneficial international support, has to find its own ways of dealing with these threats (Coulibaly, Diocolo, 04.05.2017). In that regard, however, the articles rather mention Malian society collaterally and mostly focus on political institutions and the Malian-diasporic civil society (see below). References to "Mali" as society or a nation appear mostly on the margins as, for instance, in the (obligatory) closing statement of the *Mali Ko Yere Ko* announcement.

Long live the One and Indivisible Mali. [Coulibaly, Diocolo, 04.05.2017]²¹⁴

The comments, on the other hand, relate Malian society more explicitly to postcolonial or neocolonial oppression. The fact that the following comment emerged in an interdiscursive reaction to the article on Macron's statement on the fertility of African women shows the awareness for cross-cutting forms of postcolonial dominance through moving objects and ideas, here money and population politics.

²¹⁴ Vive le Mali Un et Indivisible. [Coulibaly, Diocolo, 04.05.2017]

In the financial system, 50 Malian f cfa [West African currency connected to the French Franc, now the Euro, S.H.] account for 3 for the Malians and 7 for the colonising countries. [Comment in reaction to the Facebook post featuring ouest-france.fr, 11.07.2017]²¹⁵

Moreover, the comments engage in a more mobilising subjectification of Malian-diasporic society, especially considering its youth. The following comment that was written in reaction to the US-based *Mali Ko Yere Ko* invitation to a protest against international interventions in Mali emphasises the strong hope that Malian-diasporic users have in Malian youth for changing Malian postcolonial relations.

Let the Malian youth have the courage to protest against France if not nothing will change [Comment in reaction to the Facebook post featuring Coulibaly, Diocolo, 04.05.2017]²¹⁶

While the articles do not use any negative characterisations of Malian society for the transforming position, the users often engage in critique of Malian society as impeding the sought-after transformation of Malian transnational relations and politics. This critique is, however, often connected to participants of demonstrations organised by Malian civil society and will be treated together with them below.

In a different way, the selected articles are more elaborate on the transforming potential of Malian-diasporic civil society. On the article level, reports on demonstrations and meetings relating to controversial mobilities of persons, objects, and ideas, i.e. the enslavement of African migrants (Koné, M.D., 21.11.2017), importation of rice (Traoré, A., 16.05.2017), and the Jerusalem decision by Donald Trump (Fofana, 14.12.2017), characterise civil society actors as critics of unequal Malian transnational relations and at the same time as those who provide solutions.

Mrs Forana Aissata Djiteye, inter-professional treasury and trader added that they wished that the state would give them [the National Platform of Malian Rice Producers, S.H.] at least nine months to sell their stocks before letting the imported rice enter the country. Because according to her, they could cover the Malian need for rice during these months.

'There are all sorts of unknown rice that enter our country and that severely harm health', she reported. [Traoré, A., 16.05.2017]²¹⁷

²¹⁵ Dans le système financier, 50 f cfa du mali constituent 3 f pour les maliens et 7 f pour le pays colonisateur. [Comment in reaction to the Facebook post featuring ouest-france.fr, 11.07.2017]

²¹⁶ Que la jeunesse malienne aye le courage de manifester contre la France sinon rien ne bougera [Comment in reaction to the Facebook post featuring Coulibaly, Diocolo, 04.05.2017]

²¹⁷ Mme Fofana Aïssata Djiteye, trésorière de l'interprofession et commerçante ajoutera que leur volonté est que l'Etat leur donne au moins neuf mois pour vendre leurs stocks avant de laisser entrer le riz importé. Car selon

Whereas these solutions already often have a nationalist connotation, the question of nationalism becomes even more prominent in user comments that characterise the Malian-diasporic civil society. In general, they stand for two ways of going forward with transnational relations, either in a more nationally confined way, or in a more internationally connected way. Most elaborately, these debates unfold in reaction to the announcement of a demonstration against international interventions in the Malian conflict, organised by the US-based association *Mali Ko Yere Ko* (Coulibaly, Diocolo, 04.05.2017) and in reaction to the article on the Bamako protest for Palestine and against the Trump decision on Jerusalem as the de-facto capital of Israel (Fofana, 14.12.2017). Reading these two examples together unveils a tendency towards the construction of militarised and masculinised national Malian identities – as will be shown in the following.

For the first example, commenters construct *Mali Ko Yere Ko* positively as patriotic, fighting the good fight for the Malian nation, and deserving of respect and thanks from the Malian people. Although these comments also contain one of the few gender inclusive nominations that refers to "brothers and sisters" (see above for more on nominations), especially by using the French generic masculine, they mostly present a masculinised version of (heroic) diasporic protest and engagement for the Malian nation. In addition, these comments even evoke a sense of self-denigration, presenting the diasporic actors as more nationalist than Malians in Mali (the following quotations present a selection of those positively evaluating the *Mali Ko Yere Ko* members and future protestors, all being in reaction to the Facebook post featuring Coulibaly, Diocolo, 04.05.2017).

Here we see the worthy sons of Mali who care about the future of this country.

Courage, if we who are inside [of Mali, S.H.] would do so, many problems would end.

Yes, it's normal that it has to be done thank you my brothers.

Hang in there my brothers and sisters God shall help us to emerge from this crisis

Hats off to the Malians in the USA that's patriotism²¹⁸

One user, however, also constructs these members of the US-based Malian civil society as not legitimately speaking for the Malian people because of their distance from actual happenings.

elle, ils peuvent couvrir pendant ces mois les besoins du Mali en riz. « Il y a toutes sortes de riz inconnus qui entrent chez nous et qui nuisent gravement à la santé », a-t-elle signalé. [Traoré, A., 16.05.2017]

²¹⁸ Voilà des signes fils du Mali qui ont souci de l'avenir de ce pays. – Courage si nous qui sont en l'entier fait comme ça beaucoup des probleme finira. – Oui c'est normal que il faut merci mes frères. – Bon courage mes frères et soeurs que dieu nous aider à sortir dans cette crise – Coup de chapeau aux maliens des USA c'est ça le patriotisme [Comments in reaction to the Facebook post featuring Coulibaly, Diocolo, 04.05.2017]

Do these Malians know the reality on the ground otherwise they would not say this [Comment in reaction to the Facebook post featuring Coulibaly, Diocolo, 04.05.2017]²¹⁹

In contrast to this mostly positive evaluation of the protest for Malian sovereignty, the comments that were posted in reaction to the article on a protest march for Palestine after Trump's decision on Jerusalem in December 2017 mostly criticise these protestors as not patriotic enough as they would prioritise the needs of another people that they did not even "know" over the needs – and especially the problems – of the Malian nation.

Are you sure that this is in Bamako? We have really seen everything!! Instead of demonstrating for better politics and an end to the security-related disorder...the people care for a conflict that is far away...that's serious deh [Comment in reaction to the Facebook post featuring Fofana, 14.12.2017]²²⁰

This critical view of Malian-diasporic civil society could emerge from mistrust due to and common knowledge of the political instrumentalisation of civil society associations in Mali (see Section 2.3.4). Moreover, this critique of the protestors as lacking in nationalist attachment has two gendered dimensions. On the one hand, this characterisation of Malian-diasporic civil society takes on a sexist connotation when users accuse the protestors, and Malian-diasporic civil society in general, of showing support for Palestine because they had been manipulated by religious leaders or Arab rulers. This has a gendered connotation when we consider the background of Malian gender discourses that construct women as lacking in morality when it comes to money (see e.g. Schulz, 2012b, pp. 66–69).

One could think that Mali is a woman that sells her charms to everyone..from the government to the ordinary Malian. Patriotism does not exist anymore. Terrible [Comment in reaction to the Facebook post featuring Fofana, 14.12.2017]²²¹

The fact that this comment was written by a female Malian-diasporic user underlines the importance of women's self-presentation as moral for Malian(-diasporic) nationalism. Moreover, considering the conflictive interactions experienced by female diasporic users (see Section 7.1.2), this social context could also increase the pressure for moralising gendered subjectifications.

²¹⁹ Esque ses maliennes connesse la réalité du terrains si non il n est diront pas cella [Comment in reaction to the Facebook post featuring Coulibaly, Diocolo, 04.05.2017]

²²⁰ Vous êtes sûr que c'est Bamako ? Vraiment on aura tout vu!! Au lieu de marcher pour une meilleure Politique et la fin du désordre sécuritaire...les gens s'occupent d'un conflit lointain.... c'est grave deh [Comment in reaction to the Facebook post featuring Fofana, 14.12.2017]

²²¹ On dirait que le Mali est une femme qui vend ses charmes à tous..du gouvernement au malien lambda. Le patriotisme n'existe plus. Terrible [Comment in reaction to the Facebook post featuring Fofana, 14.12.2017]

On the other hand, we can see a masculinised form of national identity in these calls for prioritising the Malian nation instead of Palestine or Arab countries. These calls represent a quest for autonomy that is contrasted with caring across nations, being reminiscent of contrasting ideas of masculinist, rationalist relations of autonomy versus feminist relations of care (Yuval-Davis, 2011b, p. 181f). However, especially by voicing their disappointment with Palestine or Arab ignorance of Malian or African problems (see the construction of Palestine and Arab identifications below), users implicitly also articulate a yearning for different international relations that would revolve more around common concerns and mutual respect.

In addition, both debates also contribute to a masculinised version of Malian nationalism by emphasising its militarised dimension, for instance, through the importance of the Malian armed forces.

Take heart, that's a duty for all the patriots we have enough down with France down with the MINUSMA long live the republican army and long live the nation [Comment in reaction to the Facebook post featuring Coulibaly, Diocolo, 04.05.2017]²²²

Considering the contested nature of the military coup that was one of the starting points for the current political crisis in Mali, as well as the anticolonial connotations related to the Malian army (see e.g. G. Mann, 2015, p. 85f),²²³ this valorisation of the Malian army directs us towards the question of political legitimacy that is crucially related to questions of Malian postcolonial relations and masculinities, a question we will assess with the identity constructions of the Malian political class below.

In summary, these subjectifications of Malian (civil) society construct a temporal narrative with a colonial past, a neocolonial or postcolonial presence, and a hope for a decolonial future. Considering the differing presentation among articles and comments, on the one hand, shows that a contingency emerges from the circulation of consensual or two-sided constructions in articles and unveils further complexities in the construction of Malian transnational relations. Moreover, gendered dimensions further contribute to these complexities as the exclusion of female actors as well as the construction of masculinised nationalist subject positions lead to the consolidation of gendered power relations within a transforming position on relations of postcolonial governmentality.

²²² Courage c'est un devoir pour tous les patriotes on en a marre à bas la France à bas la munisma vive l'armée républicaine et vive la nation [Comment in reaction to the Facebook post featuring Coulibaly, Diocolo, 04.05.2017]

²²³ These connotations emerge from current struggles of the Malian army with external military forces as well as from historic notions of the Malian army that expelled the French colonising forces as celebrated in the national day for the Malian armed forces (Info-Matin, 2020).

Malian Political Actors: Internal Others and Their Exceptions

Whereas the discursive construction of Malian-diasporic (civil) society mostly revolves around the image of an internal self, constructions of Malian political actors and Northern separatist groups in the transforming position can be seen as internal others to this self. These characterisations aim towards internal political changes as well as alternative forms of Malian transnational relations.

As a third important social actor group that appears as a transforming subjectification, articles and comments thus characterise the Malian political class. This class is mostly evaluated by its contribution to internal and external political change. The dominant discourse fragment portrays them rather negatively, as contributing to Malian economic problems, the Malian conflict, and postcolonial Malian international relations. As one example, we will see how the ambivalent figure of the oppositional politician Moussa Mara is portrayed either positively, as someone who will change these politics, or negatively as someone who will just perpetuate them, as he is already too involved. A small fraction of the discourse fragment, however, also portrays certain members of the Malian political class as important actors for national unity, political change, and decolonial resistance.

The article authors mainly voice critique towards the Malian political class on three occasions, i.e. the *Le Point* article on the upcoming presidential elections and potential political change (Keita, I., 11.05.2017), the *RFI* article on the French influence on IBK's antiterrorism approach (RFI, 24.05.2017), and the *Tjikan* article on the problems of Malian rice producers (Traoré, A., 16.05.2017).

The *Le Point* article, on the one hand, mainly constructs the Malian political elites as a gerontocratic class that has been ruling for too long and needs to be replaced by a younger generation of politicians. In postcolonial terms, it is, however, interesting to note that in April and the beginning of May 2017, Emmanuel Macron is still perceived as a role model for the Malian political class (for more on this, see the characterisation of Macron below).

The ageing of the Malian political class remains a topical issue considering that the majority of leaders were active before democracy arrived in Mali [Keita, I., 11.05.2017]²²⁴

The other two articles, on the other hand, characterise the Malian political class and president IBK negatively because of their lack of engagement on behalf of the interests of Malian

²²⁴ Le vieillissement de la classe politique malienne actuelle reste aussi d'actualité vu que la majorité des leaders sont actifs bien avant l'arrivée de la démocratie au Mali. [Keita, I., 11.05.2017]

citizens, be it in relation to international trade or the fight against international terrorism that is, in this case, seen in contrast with the fight for national unity. As the following quotations show, both characterisations also question the credibility of the Malian political class.

The head of State claimed in two turns, one of them via RFI, that the dialogue with jihadists never was part of the recommendations of the Conference for national understanding that took place at the end of March [RFI, 24.05.2017]²²⁵

'The government made efforts to help the production but somehow, sometimes they forget the other side. After the production, how to manage the rest...?', explained the president [of the PNPR, S.H.] [Traoré, A., 16.05.2017]²²⁶

In addition to the articles, the comments as well characterise the Malian political class as in need of change and as lacking commitment to their nation. In the comments, however, the suspected complicities of Malian politicians are articulated more clearly. On the one hand, they are accused of being complicit with external enemies of Mali that could be Western as well as non-Western powers. In this line of thought, the fact that comments do not value political actors for their support of African or Muslim issues can be seen as an indication for the critique of not enough national concern on the side of the political elites, as in the following reaction to a government communication that criticised the decision by the US president on Jerusalem.

Tieeee IBK and his government, deal with our multiple problems first. [Comment in reaction to the Tweet featuring AD/od/APA, 08.12.2017]²²⁷

On the other hand, Malian political actors are portrayed as being complicit with the separatist groups that are posing an internal threat to Malian unity, territorial integrity, and the Malian nation.

In my opinion...the government has already accepted the term 'Azawad' and does not want to acknowledge it. [Comment in reaction to the Facebook post featuring Maliweb/Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, 23.10.2017]²²⁸

²²⁵ Le chef de l'Etat a affirmé à deux reprises, dont une fois sur RFI, que jamais le dialogue avec les jihadistes n'avait fait partie des recommandations de la Conférence d'entente nationale qui a eu lieu fin mars [RFI, 24.05.2017]

²²⁶ 'Le gouvernement a fait des efforts pour aider la production mais quelque part, des fois on oublie l'autre camp. Après la production comment gérer le reste...?', a expliqué le président. [Traoré, A., 16.05.2017]

²²⁷ Tieeee IBK et son gouvernement, occupez vous de nos multiples problèmes d'abord. [Comment in reaction to the Tweet featuring AD/od/APA, 08.12.2017]

²²⁸ À mon avis...le gouvernement a déjà entériné le terme azawad et ne veut pas l'assumer. [Comment in reaction to the Facebook post featuring Maliweb/Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, 23.10.2017]

And on a more general level, one commenting user also criticises the Malian opposition for being complicit with the ruling party, thereby questioning the legitimacy of the entire Malian political class. In line with these characterisations, users construct the Malian political class as responsible for Malian socioeconomic and political problems and in one case even frame them as the "real enemies of the Malian people."

But who are the real enemies of Mali. It's the ruling powers with an opposition about which they shout every day that they are good with the media they all work together. [Comment in reaction to the Facebook post featuring Coulibaly, Diocolo, 04.05.2017]²²⁹

In contrast to these negatively connoted subjectifications, some – mostly oppositional²³⁰ – Malian political actors, however, are also portrayed as engaged in political change, national unity, and changing transnational relations. In relation to the French influence on IBK's antiterrorism approach, for instance, the president of the oppositional party Adema, Sy Kadiatou Sow, is quoted in an *RFI* article as defending the recommendations actually produced during the CEN and questioning IBK's denial of his former consent to these recommendations for national unity.

What Sy Kadiatou Sow does not understand: 'Really, I do not dare to think that that's hypocrisy or bad faith. I can understand that he would be reserved about this question. As I said, it's quite controversial. But we, we say, from that moment on when we have reunited diverse parts of the Malian nation through a Conference for national understanding, that he cannot sweep aside such an important recommendation.' [Sy Kadiatou Sow in *RFI*, 24.05.2017]²³¹

At first sight, this example of a female politician who is challenging postcolonial national politics points to possibilities for feminist decolonial transforming subjectifications. However, we will see that the majority of positively evaluated political subject positions in the transforming position rather follow a heteronormative norm, especially in their negotiation of postcolonial persistencies. Most elaborately, the importance that political change has for users becomes visible in their characterisation of the oppositional politician Moussa Mara, who is seen as a possible presidential candidate for the 2018 elections. As the following quotations

²²⁹ Mais qui sont les vrais ennemis du Mali .ce sont les pouvoirs en place avec l'opposition que on crie chaque jour qu'il sont bon avec les media eux tous travail ensemble. [Comment in reaction to the Facebook post featuring Coulibaly, Diocolo, 04.05.2017]

²³⁰ Positive self-presentations of the ruling political actors are located in the consolidating position since I consider its main objective to be the legitimisation of their political power.

²³¹ Ce que ne comprend pas Sy Kadiatou Sow : « Vraiment, je n'ose pas penser que c'est de l'hypocrisie ou de la mauvaise foi. Je peux comprendre qu'il soit réservé sur cette question. Comme je l'ai dit, elle est assez controversée. Mais nous, nous disons, à partir du moment où on a réuni différentes composantes de la nation malienne au cours d'une Conférence d'entente nationale, qu'il ne peut pas balayer du revers de la main une recommandation aussi importante ». [Sy Kadiatou Sow in *RFI*, 24.05.2017]

show, users portray Moussa Mara both positively and negatively, but in both instances related to his (missing) potential for bringing genuine political change to the Malian people (the following quotations are user comments in reaction to the Facebook post of Keita, I., 11.05.2017).

Either way, we wish him the victory so that change will finally arrive²³²

It's all the same moussa mara is a lying politician²³³

In addition, this idea of political change intersects with the postcolonial dimension in complex ways as users either reproduce the idea of a "Malian Macron", criticise this Eurocentric comparison, or even mock it by arguing that in order to become president, Moussa Mara would have to marry an equally aged woman as Macron has done with Brigitte Macron.

My president Mara is the future macron of mali, in order to progress, we need to turn the page.²³⁴

On Kledu with Kasim Traoré a militant of YELEMA expressed himself about this and said that Mara had the possibility to be mayor, Candidate for the presidential elections, minister and prime minister in contrast to Emmanuel the new one of the french republic so according to him mara does not take inspiration from macron it's macron who needs to take inspiration from moussa mara²³⁵

And especially he needs to take a new wife of at least 60 years even if it's not necessarily his former teacher. One never knows.²³⁶

On the national level, the temporal dimension of narrative identity constructions thus involves a rejected political present that is compared to a – depending on the period – positively or negatively evaluated political past and a positively envisioned political future. Here again, we can see the prominence of masculinised portrayals of the political class, whose positive traits mainly revolve around being strong in relation to internal and external enemies. In addition, especially users' comments unveil a sexist and heteronormative ideal that is constructed in a nationalist differentiation from France. This becomes especially clear when users differentiate between Mara and Macron by denigrating Macron's non-normative relationship with Brigitte

²³² En tout cas ont lui souhaite la reussite pour enfin le changemnt arrive

²³³ Tout pareille moussa mara SS une politicien menteur

²³⁴ Mon président Mara est le future macron du mali , pour avancer il faut tourner la page.

²³⁵ Sur Kledu avec Kasim Traoré un militant de YELEMA s est exprimé sur ce propos en disant que Mara a eu la chance d'être maire, Candidat aux présidentiels, ministre et premier ministre contrairement a Emanuel le nouveau de la république française donc selon lui mara ne s'inspire pas a macron c'est macron qui doit s'inspirer a moussa mara

²³⁶ Et surtout qu'il se prenne une nouvelle épouse d'au moins 60 ans meme si ce n'est pas nécessairement son ancienne institutrice. On ne sait jamais.

Macron because of her advanced age. As we will see below, many degrade this constellation as precluding the Macron couple from having children and thereby contrast Macron with potency-related ideals of Malian masculinity (see e.g. Broqua, 2012, p. 117ff). At the same time, however, we have to consider that the focus on such family-oriented masculinities (see e.g. Rodet, 2014, p. 116) was reinforced in resistance to colonially induced forced labour-related masculinities, thereby unveiling the historical complexities in mobilising gender against (post)colonial mentalities of government (for more on this, see the subjectifications of France and Macron below).

Malian Northern and Separatist Ethnicised Groups: Internal Others Blended Together

The second important internal other that is constructed in articles and comments are Malian separatist groups. What these characterisations show is that the notions of separatist groups, terrorist, and even the Tuareg ethnic groups often converge, as also observed in other contexts by, for instance, Susanna Wing (2016, p. 67f). In terms of the transforming position, the main objective of these characterisations is to delegitimise any claim for an independent "Azawad" that is perceived as a product of a (post)colonial conspiracy.

The articles rarely mention the separatist groups. In the *Mali Ko Yere Ko* demonstration announcement (Coulibaly, Diocolo, 04.05.2017), they are introduced as terrorists in a denigrating way and criticised for their rule of Northern Mali. As the following quote shows, this also has a postcolonial connotation as the authors of the communication could either see the separatist rule as existing *despite* or *because of* the presence of the international forces, thus either questioning the efficiency or the intentions of the international interventions.

It is inadmissible that with the presence of Barkahane and the Minusma that this small group of terrorists continues to reign as masters of the place. [Comment in reaction to the Facebook post featuring Coulibaly, Diocolo, 04.05.2017]²³⁷

Moreover, in the *Le Démocrate* article on "Azawad" as a French invention for getting access to Malian resources, the author more generally stresses the illegitimacy of the claim to an independent territory by Tuareg populations, mainly by emphasising that these mobile ethnic groups were never sedentary in any nation, not subjected to the same form of colonial domi-

²³⁷ C'est inadmissible qu'avec la présence de Barkhane et de la Minusma que ce groupuscule de terroristes continuent de régner en maître des lieux. [Comment in reaction to the Facebook post featuring Coulibaly, Diocolo, 04.05.2017]

nation as the sedentary Malian ethnic groups, and therefore not entitled to the same right to a territory of their own.

If the Tuareg are in Mali today, tomorrow they will be in Niger; the day after, they will be in Libya, afterwards in Algeria, then in Mauritania and in Burkina Faso. It's like this that they have always lived for centuries and the French colonisers could never follow them in this permanent displacement. These Tuareg have never paid a penny as taxes to the French colonisers. They were never recruited to the French army for defending the French colonial 'mother Homeland'. (...) This story of Azawad thus is a pure invention of France for having control over the oil reservoir that lies in the Malian sub-soil. [Correspondance particulière Le Démocrate, 05.04.2017]²³⁸

Whereas this argumentation follows a Eurocentric sedentary bias applied to many African societies (Bakewell, 2007; Verne & Doevenspeck, 2012), it is more critical of international involvement, implicitly arguing that since claims for "Azawad" are not legitimate, its emergence must have had other reasons such as French resource interests. This is further supported by the notion that the Tuareg have benefitted from preferential treatment during colonialism and now would reciprocate by supporting French resource interests through their separatist movement. This integrates a temporal dimension in the characterisation of Northern and separatist groups with a recursion to Malian history and the (separated) Tuareg history, the conflicts with the Tuareg, and their implications for the current handling of the conflict and its potential solution in the future.

The comments also address the separatist groups in a surprisingly marginal way. Although this can also be seen as a way of backgrounding them in the debate, they are mostly debated in relation to transnational relations as actors on the sidelines who are used by external forces to justify their claims. What the comments that are characterising separatist groups seek to do as well, however, is to delegitimise any separatist attempts, for instance, by referring to the existing peace agreements in reaction to the controversial "Azawad" homework assignment (the following quotations are all comments in reaction to the Facebook post featuring Mali-web/Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, 23.10.2017).

²³⁸ Si les Touaregs sont au Mali aujourd'hui, demain ils seront au Niger ; le lendemain, ils seront en Libye, ensuite en Algérie, puis en Mauritanie et au Burkina Faso. C'est ainsi qu'ils ont toujours vécu au fil des siècles et les colons français n'ont jamais pu les suivre dans ce déplacement permanent. Ces Touareg n'ont jamais payé un centime de franc comme impôt aux colons français. Ils n'ont jamais été recrutés dans l'armée française pour aller défendre la «mère Patrie» coloniale française. (...) Cette histoire de l'Azawad est donc une pure invention de la France pour avoir la mainmise sur les gisements de pétrole se trouvant dans le sous-sol malien. [Correspondance particulière Le Démocrate, 05.04.2017]

Otherwise why do these people persist despite the agreements?²³⁹

In this regard, user comments also stress the inferiority of separatist groups in relation to the Malian state or even more broadly, to non-separatist groups of Malian society, sometimes using rather denigrating language (or – as in some of my observed interactions – pictures).

down with the dog long live the owner²⁴⁰

Together, these constructions of Northern separatist groups rather contrast the unionising ideas articulated in the valuation of the inclusive CEN above (see RFI, 24.05.2017). In an interdiscursive move, however, one (female) user reacted to the demonstration for Palestine by repeatedly emphasising the need to protect the social groups living in the North of Mali. As she introduces a differentiation between those who fight for an independent "Azawad" in the North of Mali and those who are affected by this fight, this user thus contrasts otherwise generalising subjectifications of citizens in the North of Mali.

We have our problems in the North. How many Malians have been outraged and rose for marching in the direction of Kidal? In the North as well, there is an apartheid that does not say its name.²⁴¹

While the North of Mali is waiting that someone dies for liberating it.. these are also Muslims and the Palestinians are no more Muslims than our relatives in the North of Mali.²⁴²

Whereas this last comment supports the nationalist orientation outlined above, it also points to the fact that Northern Mali is not just a territory that needs to be ruled and defended from insurgent groups – a connotation that contributes to a militarised and masculinised engagement – but that contains a whole part of the Malian population that is in distress and that other Malians need to care for. In addition, this counters an often Bamako- or Southern Malian-centred debate.

Together, these differentiated constructions of Malian-diasporic selves and others unveil diverse subjectivities, including those who are seen as responsible for national and international discriminations and conflicts, and those who are seen as resisting these tendencies. However, this argument for emancipation also unveils further conflict lines, for instance, between secular and religious affiliations, between Southern and Northern Malian citizens,

²³⁹ Sinon pourquoi les gens là malgré les accords persistent ?

²⁴⁰ abas le chien vive le propriétaire

²⁴¹ Nous avons nos problèmes au Nord. Combien de Maliens se sont indignés et soulevés pour marcher en direction de Kidal ? Au nord aussi il y a un apartheid qui ne dit pas son nom.

²⁴² En attendant le nord du Mali attend qu'on meurt pour le libérer.. ce sont aussi des musulmans et les palestiniens ne sont pas plus musulmans que nos parents au Nord du Mali.

and between male and female actors. In addition, it points to an ideal of militarised masculinity for Malian political actors, in their perceived accomplishment in or lack of showing a strong hand towards internal and external enemies. In contrast, only some (female) voices that appear in the articles and comments challenge this perspective and articulate the need for a more relational – although still nationalist – approach to Malian politics. These diverse entanglements thus unveil the complexities that await attempts at transforming relations of gendered and postcolonial governmentality.

In addition to these constructions of Malian society actors in the realm of Malian transnational relations, the selected discourse fragment also introduces important non-Malian actors. Here as well, articles and comments differentiate between external selves and others that mainly appear as allies or enemies in the fight for a transformation of Malian (and African) postcolonial international and national rule.

(Pan-)African Societies: Hopes and Resistances in Relational Selves

Closely related to many transforming (decolonial or anticolonial) resistant subjectifications in this discourse fragment are identity constructions of African societies. In some instances, this has a Pan-African dimension, also in the sense of a Pan-African renaissance that stands for a new African self-consciousness and emancipation that, however, mostly excludes feminist voices (an exclusionary pattern that has also been identified for Pan-Africanism more generally, see e.g. Tamale, 2020, p. 343f). In other references, the characterisation of African societies draws on examples of specific countries that either support or counteract the sought-after transformation.

The dominant discourse on African societies thus constructs them as constituting an exploited but strong continent that is on its way to real independence (with unclear implications for its other transnational relations, though). On the article level, the references to African societies produce a cross-cutting importance of African identifications in this debate as they refer to a myriad of mobile objects, persons, and ideas, including, for instance, the West African currency FCFA (Bagayoko and Koné, 30.11.2017), African migration (Gouvernement de la République du Mali, 18.11.2017), and ideas of the fertility of African women (ouest-france.fr, 11.07.2017). On the one hand, the articles construct African societies as disadvantaged by postcolonial relations, in the case of Francophone Africa, mainly the relations with France. This confluence of material exploitation and discursive discrimination is, for instance, outlined by the political scholar Abdoulaye Coulibaly. He is quoted in a *Le Démocrate* article

that quasi-ironically asks about the reasons for the lack of African election observers during the French elections.

'In the meantime, let's take our trouble with patience', he suggested. Before adding: 'the disillusionment of the African is included. But we are the fruits of a colonisation of multiple centuries. Our constitutions are those of France. Our democracy was imposed by France. We use the leftovers that France dumps. All our social models were imposed on us in one way or another' (...)

'Africa is a resource-rich continent. The colonisers exploit it that's all', he explains. In addition to this, which historical value does the African have? asks Mr. Coulibaly. Before concluding: 'It's a cursed continent and everything it produces will benefit elsewhere, not the Africans.' [Coulibaly in Touré, 26.04.2017]²⁴³

In most cases, this characterisation works in a generalising way, thereby emphasising the collective affectedness of African societies. Only in some instances, these articles take a more differentiating stance, as with the African migrants sold in Libya (Gouvernement de la République du Mali, 18.11.2017) or with the African women criticised by Macron for having too many children (ouest-france.fr, 11.07.2017). Whereas these marginalised groups, however, are either portrayed as passive victims (African migrants) or rather vanished in exchange for a focus on their perpetrators (African women), one article quotes the political scholar Françoise Vergès, who emphasises connections between the discrimination of women and colonial or imperial transnational relations.

'They make the women of the Third World responsible for underdevelopment. In reality, they inverse the causality: The majority of studies have proven today that it's underdevelopment that leads to overpopulation', she explains before adding: 'The theory of overpopulation also avoids asking about the role of colonialism and imperialism in poverty.' [Françoise Vergès in ouest-france.fr, 11.07.2017]²⁴⁴

In addition to this characterisation as being dominated through postcolonial relations, the articles also characterise African societies as having the possibility of emancipating themselves from these relations. On the one hand, they do so by referring to countries who have

²⁴³ « En attendant, prenons notre mal en patience », a-t-il indiqué. Avant d'ajouter : « la déception de l'africain est comprise. Mais nous sommes les fruits d'une colonisation de plusieurs siècles. Nos constitutions sont celles de la France. Notre démocratie nous a été imposée par la France. Nous utilisons les friperies que la France jette. Tous nos modèles de société nous sont imposés d'une manière ou d'une autre ». (...) 'L'Afrique est un continent riche en sous-sol. Les colons l'exploitent c'est tout », explique-t-il. En dehors de cela quelle valeur historique l'africain a ? s'interroge M.Coulibaly. Avant de conclure : « C'est un continent maudit et tout ce qu'il produit profitera à ailleurs, pas aux africains. Qui est aussi miséreux que l'Africain ». [Coulibaly in Touré, 26.04.2017]

²⁴⁴ « On rend les femmes du tiers-monde responsables du sous-développement. En réalité, on inverse la causalité : la plupart des études prouvent aujourd'hui que c'est le sous-développement qui entraîne la surpopulation », explique-t-elle avant d'ajouter : « La théorie de la surpopulation évite aussi de questionner le rôle du colonialisme et de l'impérialisme dans la pauvreté. » [Françoise Vergès in ouest-france.fr, 11.07.2017]

taken action against postcolonial dependencies, such as countries like Algeria, Morocco or Tunisia who have left the Franc CFA monetary system (see Bagayoko and Koné, 30.11.2017). On the other hand, this is more directed to the future, for instance, with a reference to sensitisation activities by the Beninese-French activist Kemi Seba or by a more general hope he projected to future emancipation through the African youth in a *Le Républicain* article that reported on a press conference held by the activist.

Kemi Seba is known for his candid language and his burning desire for the autonomisation of Africa of which certain countries still vegetate in misery despite the fictive independencies. [Diallo, 18.07.2017]²⁴⁵

The African youth needs to take its destiny in its own hands, it needs to become the main actor for the construction of its future and this will be accomplished through the political, economic and military independence of Africa. [Kemi Seba in Diallo, 18.07.2017]²⁴⁶

As the following quote in the *L'Aube* article on the postcolonial dimensions of the FCFA currency system shows, these visions are strongly connected to a construction of future African societies as Pan-African collective.

The African renaissance will necessarily happen through one and only one way: Pan-Africanism. [Bagayoko and Koné, 30.11.2017]²⁴⁷

In the comments, some contributions to the construction of an African self emerge in reaction to the article comparing Emmanuel Macron and Moussa Mara (Keita, I., 11.05.2017) and in reaction to the article on the demonstration for Palestine (Fofana, 14.12.2017). In reaction to the article on the Kemi Seba press conference mentioned above, users, for instance, also construct this engagement of the activist, African youth more generally as endemic solution to problems of African societies (the following comments being in reaction to the Tweet featuring Diallo, 18.07.2017).

The youth needs to take over to save our mother Africa²⁴⁸

I would like to get in touch with @KemiSeba1...Strongly...It's my wish that he [is, S.H.] in Ivory Coast for sensitising the youth²⁴⁹

²⁴⁵ Kemi Seba est connu pour son franc parlé et son ardent désir pour l'autonomisation de l'Afrique dont certains pays végètent toujours dans la misère malgré des indépendances fictives. [Diallo, 18.07.2017]

²⁴⁶ « La jeunesse africaine doit prendre sa destinée en main, il faut qu'elle devienne acteur principal pour la construction de son devenir et cela passe par l'indépendance politique, économique et militaire de l'Afrique. [Kemi Seba in Diallo, 18.07.2017]

²⁴⁷ La renaissance africaine passe nécessairement par une voie et seulement une voie : le panafricanisme. [Bagayoko and Koné, 30.11.2017]

²⁴⁸ La jeunesse doit prendre la relève pour sauver notre mère Afrique

Most of the identity constructions of African societies, however, were posted in reaction to the French president Emmanuel Macron's negative evaluation of the fertility of African women that he mentioned during a press conference of the 2017 G20 summit in Hamburg. In order to contextualise the following resistant subjectifications, I first provide a transcript of this statement that Macron articulated after being asked by an Ivorian journalist if plans for a Marshall plan for Africa had been discussed during the summit (the highlighted part being that which was reproduced in the article published via Maliweb):

And finally, there is a shared responsibility. The Marshall Plan that you want for Africa, that's also a plan that will be carried by the African governments and the regional organisations. That's through a more rigorous governance, the fight against corruption, a fight for good governance, a successful demographic transition – *as long as countries today still have seven to eight children per woman, you can decide to spend millions of Euros there, you will not stabilise anything.* [Emmanuel Macron, transcribed from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SM_fihMNwNA/ vox.com, own italics]²⁵⁰

In reaction to this statement, some users point to alternative reasons for socioeconomic problems of African societies, presenting these societies as negatively affected by external exploitation as well as internal bad governance, and thus speaking to the inversion of causality mentioned by Vergès above (the following quotations are comments in reaction to the Facebook post featuring ouest-france.fr, 11.07.2017).

No, it's precisely not the birth rate that explains the lack of development of Africa but rather the bad governance of our rulers, the exploitation of African natural resources by the West.²⁵¹

Most user comments, however, engage in a construction of African societies as strong and resourceful in opposition to Macron's portrayal as inherently flawed. Whereas some users point to the abundance of natural resources that would allow for feeding many children, others point to the past usefulness of these African children for France, especially through their support of the French army during World War I and II.

²⁴⁹ J'aimerais rentré en contact avec @KemiSeba1... Vivement.... C'est mon souhaite qu'il en côte d'ivoire pour sensibiliser la jeunesse

²⁵⁰ Et ensuite, il y a une responsabilité partagée. Le Plan Marshall, que vous voulez pour L'Afrique, c'est aussi un plan qui sera porté par les gouvernements Africains et les organisations régionales. C'est par le billet d'une gouvernance plus rigoureuse, de la lutte contre la corruption, d'une lutte pour la bonne gouvernance, d'une transition démographique réussi – *quand des pays ont encore aujourd'hui sept à huit enfants par femme, pouvez di-, décider d'y dépenser des milliards d'euros, vous ne stabiliserez rien.* [Emmanuel Macron, transcribed from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SM_fihMNwNA/ vox.com, own italics]

²⁵¹ Non, justement c'est pas la natalité qui explique le manque de développement de l'Afrique mais plutôt la mal gouvernance de nos dirigeants, l'exploitation des ressources naturelles africaines par les occidentaux.

thanks to its numerous family children, Africa could liberate France in the war of Verdun in 1914-1918 against the Nazi Germany 1945 against Hitler because France had a problem of effective people (...) for recruiting a Black force²⁵²

In addition, many commenting users stress the cultural value of children for African societies, highlighting their affection for children as well as the latter's contribution to the wealth of African societies.

We LOVE the kids and we make as many as we can.²⁵³

The birth rate, is a richness because in twenty or thirty years, there will be more active young people in Africa than in Europe whose societies will mostly have an ageing population. Soon, they will come to get their workforce in Africa.²⁵⁴

Finally, several (male and female) users affirm that they and African societies by extension would not obey Macron and rather continue to have many children, thereby constructing an image of future African societies with high birth rates that resist modernist, Eurocentric mentalities of government.

We will make many children pian pian [affirming expression, S.H.]²⁵⁵

Whereas this portrayal of African strength again mostly excludes the African women themselves from the discourse and rather implicitly constructs them as "bearers of the [Pan-African, S.H.] community's future generations" (Enloe, 1990, p. 63), this is again also reminiscent of the resistant family-oriented masculinities that Rodet (2014, p. 108) observed as being constructed in opposition to (forced-labour-supporting) work-related masculinities in the colonial French Sudan. In that regard, this subjectification unveils the struggle between two discourses: a Malthusian discourse on overpopulation as reason for "underdevelopment" that concludes the need for less children and a discourse on postcolonial exploitation that sees less children as a consequence of socioeconomic emancipation. This struggle further manifests in the profile pictures of users that oscillate between a modernist portrayal of individuals in contexts related to work, urbanity, and wealth, on the one hand, and a family-oriented portrayal of individuals with or of their families, relatives, and friends.

²⁵² grace a ses nombreuses famille enfant, l'Afrique a pu liberer de la France dans la guerre de Verdun en 1914-1918 contre l'Allemagne nazisme 1945 contre Hitler par ce que la France avait un probleme deffectif de peuple (...) pour recruter une force noire

²⁵³ Nous on les AIME les gosses et on en fait tant qu'on peut.

²⁵⁴ La natalité, est une richesse car dans vingt ou trente ans, il y aura plus de jeunes actifs en Afrique qu'en Europe qui a plutôt une population vieillissante. Sous peu, ils viendront chercher la main d'œuvre en Afrique.

²⁵⁵ Nous allons faire beaucoup d'enfants pian pian.

In summary, the differences between these mostly positive African identifications and more ambivalent Malian identifications unveil a more complex relation to the Malian nation. Considering the internal others connected to and the everyday experiences of postcolonial domination, this could result from an implicit internalisation of consolidating discourses about former colonised societies as not mature enough for being full-fledged citizens (see e.g. Fanon, 1980, p. 61f). However, considering the entangled mobilities of persons, objects, and ideas that already connect and affect African societies, this could also entail a transnational identification that challenges (failing) nation projects. In that sense, the identification of African or Pan-African subjects can allow for looking beyond one's own national ambivalences and engage in more utopic or idealistic identity constructions. However, these characterisations still lack female voices and a comprehensive idea for social emancipation that needs to go with the imagined decolonial emancipation. In that regard, it risks neglecting one of the components that needs to be addressed to overcome current postcolonial, patriarchal, and capitalist inequalities (as also outlined by Tamale, 2020, p. 63).

African Elite Actors: Relational Others Hindering the African Renaissance

In contrast to these positive characterisations of African societies and activists, African elite actors are mostly portrayed as hindrances to an African renaissance, although on a continuum between not fulfilling their potential to actively engaging in postcolonial persistencies.

On the article level, for instance, Bagayoko and Koné construct the African Central Banks and the governments of countries related to the FCFA mostly in a sympathetic way as dominated by French monetary institutions. However, the authors also emphasise the lacking initiative on the side of the African Central Banks as they have not yet left the FCFA monetary system to support African emancipation.

The African leaders and the governors of the Central Banks need to assume their generational responsibilities by opening a debate on leaving the Franc CFA: 'CFA-exit'. [Bagayoko and Koné, 30.11.2017]²⁵⁶

In addition to this mild portrayal, especially the *Le Démocrate* article on the likelihood of the lack of African election observers in France (Touré, 26.04.2017), the *Le Républicain* article on the Kemi Seba press conference (Diallo, 18.07.2017), and also the *L'Aube* analysis of the Franc CFA monetary system (Bagayoko and Koné, 30.11.2017) additionally portray African

²⁵⁶ Les dirigeants africains et les gouverneurs des banques centrales doivent prendre leurs responsabilités de génération en ouvrant le débat pour abandonner le Franc CFA : « CFA-exit ». [Bagayoko and Koné, 30.11.2017]

political elites and especially African presidents negatively as, on the one hand, actively exploiting and hindering the advancement of their societies, and, on the other hand, as doing so by following French orders.

It [the African electoral system, S.H.] embodies a staged and distorted democracy. With the massive fraud, the freedom and the power of the People are confiscated by an oligarchy that will never attempt to arrive at being democratic. [Touré, 26.04.2017]²⁵⁷

A new and alienated elite under the French sold and most often held in power in the Sub-Saharan countries are the instrument of the former colonial power for unscrupulously taking African resources into their possession. [Bagayoko and Koné, 30.11.2017]²⁵⁸

This characterisation of African presidents is further supported by nominations such as "the French marionettes" or "the pseudo heads of state" that were used by Kemi Seba during his press conference in Bamako (Kemi Seba in Diallo, 18.07.2017).

As already indicated above, the commenting users recontextualise such arguments in, for instance, the debate on the fertility of African women, and as well construct African elites, and especially African presidents, as exploiting African societies in their compliance and even collaboration with the former and current (neo)colonial force France.

so the demographic problem is not a sign for underdevelopment of Africa, but France and its foreign friends and the old bourgeois African traitors, you have doomed Africa since the slave trade to colonisation and the neo-colonialism. [Comment in reaction to the Facebook post featuring ouest-france.fr, 11.07.2017]²⁵⁹

In general, this characterisation of African elite actors as hindering African "development" could be consolidating if it only reproduced notions about corrupt Africans being at the root of African problems. In this case, however, it has a transforming dimension since it is combined with the idea that African elite actors are connected to (neo-)colonial powers and thus indicates that postcolonial relations are still at work and have to change. Even more, this idea of African elites and its historic collaboration with the former colonial powers (from slave trade through colonisation to current relations) points to a narrative identity construction that emphasises the entanglement of colonising and colonised elite positionalities in the sense of

²⁵⁷ Il incarne une démocratie de façade ou faussée. Avec la fraude massive, la liberté et le pouvoir du Peuple sont confisqués par une oligarchie qui tente sans jamais le réussir d'être démocrate. [Touré, 26.04.2017]

²⁵⁸ Une élite nocive et aliénée à la solde de France et le plus souvent maintenue au pouvoir dans les pays au sud du Sahara est l'instrument de l'ex-puissance coloniale pour prendre possession sans scrupule des richesses des africains. [Bagayoko and Koné, 30.11.2017]

²⁵⁹ „donc le problème démographique n'est une indice de développement de l'Afrique, mais la France et ses amis de l'extérieur et traîtres vieux bourgeois africains, vous avez foutu l'Afrique depuis la traite négrière, à la colonisation, et au néocolonialisme. [Comment in reaction to the Facebook post featuring ouest-france.fr, 11.07.2017]

Ekeh's (1975) two publics (for examples of complicities of authorities with colonisers in Mali, see e.g. Baudais, 2015, pp. 104–108; Rodet, 2014, p. 116). Implicitly, however, this construction as well contributes to a masculinised idea of African political elites by (linguistically) omitting female African leaders as well as examples or visions for alternatives to masculinised characteristics of autonomously functioning and not transnationally caring governments.

The French Nation, Its Military, and Politicians: Domination, Hidden Dependencies, and Some (Lost) Exceptions

In addition to the Malian-diasporic and African social actor groups that transforming identity constructions mostly evaluate positively in relation to an internal or external relational self, transforming articles and comments identify most French social actors and social actor groups as others and evaluate them negatively. In that sense, these subjectifications of French actors counter the consolidating discourse of France as a country that is beneficially engaged in Mali and Africa and rather point to the underlying hierarchies and interests that necessitate a transformation of relations between France and African countries, including Mali.

In relation to African societies, French political and economic elites are portrayed as dominating with negative economic, political, and social impacts. In that regard, however, these elites are often equated with the French nation. Articles that engage in this portrayal were the *Le Démocrate* article on African election observers for the French presidential elections (Touré, 26.04.2017), the *Le Républicain* article on the Kemi Seba press conference in Bamako (Diallo, 18.07.2017), and the *L'Aube* article on the Franc CFA monetary system (Bagayoko and Koné, 30.11.2017). In economic terms, these articles characterise French elites as exploiting African resources, African societies through the Franc CFA monetary system, and further, using gains from this exploitation for their own socioeconomic development. In political terms, they stress that French elites also influence African politics by financing elections, manipulating African leaders through monetary politics, and even by enforcing domestic policy changes through international financial institutions like the IMF. Thereby, the articles emphasise that French elites would continue to be engaged in (post)colonial practices for their own gains and the continued domination of African societies.

Through these principles of servitude, France has a considerable influence on the African politics and economies resulting in an undeniable obstacle to their sovereignties and their possibilities for development. [Bagayoko and Koné, 30.11.2017]²⁶⁰

User comments also characterise France as continuously dominating African societies.²⁶¹ However, they contrast this more strongly with an image of France that has been dependent on African help during World War II (see above) and that continues to depend on African exploitation for its socioeconomic "development".

France has become the 5th [economic] power thanks to the exploitation of natural resources in Africa. [Comment in reaction to the Facebook post featuring ouest-france.fr, 11.07.2017]²⁶²

In some rare instances, articles and users also mention (groups of) the French society itself, equally characterising them mostly in a negative way. While acknowledging its suffering from exploitation by Nazi Germany, the *L'Aube* article authors construct French society – and especially precariously living groups – as benefitting from and therefore accepting postcolonial exploitation.

The colonial taxes of the PAZF [African countries in the Franc zone, S.H.] which is the Franc CFA serves to relieve the poor people in France but aggravates the living conditions of all African populations. [Bagayoko and Koné, 30.11.2017]²⁶³

The comments, on the other hand, focus less on emphasising the dominant role of French social groups, but – in reaction to the fertility debate – rather stress the French failure in their own population policies. Users, for instance, portray "French women" as both having too many or not enough children. Thereby, they challenge the othering of African women but at the same time contribute to a discourse that, as indicated by Françoise Vergès above, casts blame on women alone.

The women without children have not allowed for stabilising anything in France, otherwise Macron would not have become president, Hollande knows something about that!!! [Comment in reaction to the Facebook post featuring ouest-france.fr, 11.07.2017]²⁶⁴

²⁶⁰ A travers ces principes de servitudes, la France a une influence considérable sur les politiques et les économies africaines aboutissant à une entrave manifeste de leurs souverainetés et leurs possibilités de développement. [Bagayoko and Koné, 30.11.2017]

²⁶¹ Most of these comments are reactions to the Macron statement on the fertility of African women. This, however, is also due to my selection process (see 5.5 introduction) due to which I did not, for instance, analyse the comment threads of the FCFA article or the Kemi Seba article.

²⁶² La France est devenu 5^{eme} puissance grâce au pillage de ressources naturelles en Afrique. [Comment in reaction to the Facebook post featuring ouest-france.fr, 11.07.2017]

²⁶³ L'impôt colonial sur les PAZF qui est le franc CFA sert à soulager les pauvres en France mais aggrave les conditions de vie de toutes les populations africaines. [Bagayoko and Koné, 30.11.2017]

These constructions of French society and even of marginalised groups as complicit with French elites in the material and ideological domination of African societies is in contrast with African societies that are rather portrayed as in opposition to their elites, thereby pointing to the intersectional differentiations between precarious groups in different nations and precluding their common, transnational mobilisation against capitalist exploitation.

As another French subject position more specifically in relation to Mali, France, and especially its military forces are portrayed as illegitimately intervening in Malian sovereignty. The *Le Démocrate* article on "Azawad" as an invention of France (Correspondance particulière Le Démocrate, 05.04.2017) and the *La Sentinelle* publication of the *Mali Ko Yere KO* invitation to a protest against international interventions in the Malian conflict (Coulibaly, Diocolo, 04.05.2017) construct the French military operation Barkahane as a vehicle for French resource interests and even as occupying Malian territory.

France and its Barkahane mercenaries that are barricading the Kidal region. [Coulibaly, Diocolo, 04.05.2017]²⁶⁵

Transformation-oriented comments as well portray the French military intervention in Mali as a hindrance to Malian peace and as motivated by its own interests. In addition, users construct this as embedded in a more global pattern of orchestrating conflicts and using them as pre-text to establish a military presence in the respective countries.

All the current problems it's them (France, United States and allies) in Iraq, Libya and what's important in Mali, Syria, it's they who program, plot and execute and afterwards they come and play firefighter. I am sorry but these powers are terrorists. [Comment in reaction to the Facebook post featuring Coulibaly, Diocolo, 04.05.2017]²⁶⁶

This negative characterisation of the French military intervention is still reinforced by the person of the Mali-based French *Liberté A* teacher who caused a scandal with a homework assignment that was considered as legitimising "Azawad". Although Malian authorities expelled this person from Mali, articles and comments still suspect that he has been working

²⁶⁴ Des femmes sans aucun enfant n'a pas permis de stabiliser quoi que ce soit en France, sinon Macron ne serait pas devenu président, Hollande en sait quelque chose!!! [Comment in reaction to the Facebook post featuring ouest-france.fr, 11.07.2017]

²⁶⁵ La France et ses mercenaires de Barkhane qui barricadent la Région de Kidal. [Coulibaly, Diocolo, 04.05.2017]

²⁶⁶ Ts ls problemes actuels c'est eux (France Etats Unis et allies) en Irac, Lybie et qui c'est importe au Mali, la syrie, c'est eux qui programme, planifie et execute tt apres ils viennent jouer au sapeur pompier. G ss desole mais c'est des terrorites ses puissances. [Comment in reaction to the Facebook post featuring Coulibaly, Diocolo, 04.05.2017]

with or for others, thereby constructing the teacher as part of a bigger problem in relations between Mali and France (see Section 7.5.2).

The person that embodies these problematic relations most vividly, however, is the French president Emmanuel Macron. As outlined below, his characterisation, on the one hand, unveils a diachronic change in itself throughout 2017, from a political underdog that raised hopes for political change in Mali, to the French president who reproduces and even reinforces postcolonial inequalities. On the other hand, the identity constructions revolving around Macron show his intersectional situatedness, as articles and especially users constructed his personality along the lines of racism, class, age, sexuality, and gender relations in a discourse fragment that oscillates between supporting and denigrating.

On the positive side, the *Le Point* article and comments on Moussa Mara as potential "Malian Macron," i.e. candidate for the Malian presidential elections in 2018 (Keita, I., 11.05.2017), portray Macron as surprisingly taking power considering his youth and thereby being an inspiration for young Malian politicians. Especially the comments positively emphasise his honesty and his love for France, which they contrast with the dishonest and egoistic Moussa Mara. In that vein, this identity construction works in a consolidating way in postcolonial terms. In national terms, however, it has a transforming dimension as Macron and especially his youth is seen as a sign of hope for the possibility of political change by young politicians – a hope that also emerges in the discourse on African renaissance outlined above.

Strongly, Mali and the world shall be governed by the youth like Emmanuel Macron and I am sure that things will change for the Africans [Comment in reaction to the Facebook post featuring Keita, I., 11.05.2017]²⁶⁷

On the negative side, only the *ouest-france.fr* article on Macron's critique of the fertility of African women explicitly portrays him as negative, stressing the critique of his enunciation's racist connotation by several French and international media (*ouest-france.fr*, 11.07.2017). The comments on this article, on the other hand, paint a much more complex (and negative) picture of Macron. Several users stress Macron's engagement in racist and neo-colonialist ideologies, for instance, by employing narrative elements that connect his statement to Nicolas Sarkozy's infamous Dakar speech on Africa not having entered history.²⁶⁸ In addition, however, users portray the French president in a more complex way as privileged through his

²⁶⁷ Vivement le MALi et le monde à l'instar d'émanuel macron soit gouvernée par la jeunesse et je suis sur que les choses bougeront pour les africains [Comment in reaction to the Facebook post featuring Keita, I., 11.05.2017]

²⁶⁸ In addition to the comments, one of my interview partners also drew this connection during the interview.

education and using his power to further terrorism, on the one hand, and as politically inexperienced, incompetent, weak, and controlled by others,²⁶⁹ on the other hand.

Mister president, You are very young This proves that you have no knowledge about the history between France and Africa. [Comment in reaction to the Facebook post featuring ouest-france.fr, 11.07.2017]²⁷⁰

In addition to this characterisation as a political person, many users also address Macron's personal life and motivations. In that vein, some users construct him in xenophobic or racist terms: for instance, as not respecting African people and being afraid of migration. These constructions already contrast with ideals of honesty and courage that inform Malian political masculinities (see e.g. Whitehouse, 2012b, p. 96ff). Most users, however, use a heteronormative lens to delegitimise Macron's opinions on the fertility of African women as motivated by jealousy or ignorance due to his own marriage with Brigitte Macron²⁷¹ as an older woman that would prevent him from having children.

With a wife who has the age of his mother he cannot have children, it's clear that he talks like this about African women. He has no idea about a woman that can have children! [Comment in reaction to the Facebook post featuring ouest-france.fr, 11.07.2017]²⁷²

And some users also construct Macron negatively in relation to his sexuality, portraying him as homosexual, sexually deviant, or even a paedophile. At the most extreme, users combine Macron's neocolonial engagement and his sexual non-normativity to identify him as an "enemy of God" and argue that he should "go down" or even "go to hell". In summary, these identifications of the French president illustrate the dangers of using one form of social exclusion against another form, here a heteronormative and ageist form of exclusion against the postcolonial and racist one that further supports nationalist constructions of virile masculinity observed earlier in this work (for more on heteronormative social norms in, for instance, Bamako, see Broqua, 2012, p. 117ff).

²⁶⁹ Especially in comments on the Maliweb website, such argumentations sometimes also had an antisemitic connotation.

²⁷⁰ Monsieur le président. Vous êtes très jeune Ça prouve que vous n'avez au Cuné connaissance de l'histoire de France Afrique. [Comment in reaction to the Facebook post featuring ouest-france.fr, 11.07.2017]

²⁷¹ The figure of Brigitte Macron in this Malian-diasporic online news discourse is another interesting aspect when it comes to intersections of gender, age, nationality, and class (see e.g. L'Express.fr, 2017). In the selected corpus, however, Brigitte Macron was rather sidelined and only functioned as Macron's wife for his subjectification.

²⁷² Avec une épouse qui a l'âge de sa mère il ne peut avoir d'enfants, c'est normal qu'il parle ainsi de femmes africaines. Il n'a aucune notion d'une femme qui peut donner d'enfants ! [Comment in reaction to the Facebook post featuring ouest-france.fr, 11.07.2017]

In contrast to these mostly negative identifications of "France", on some rare occasions, single French social actors are portrayed positively in their acknowledgement or suspected ignorance of postcolonial inequalities. On the article level, for instance, Bagayoko and Koné quote the former French president Jacques Chirac as admitting the exploitation of Africa and the French responsibilities that come with it (Bagayoko and Koné, 30.11.2017). On the level of the comments, one user emphasises the African affiliation of Macron's communication advisor Sibeth Ndiaye, suggesting that she could not be involved in his assumed racist engagement with African societies.

Mister president, I would like to know first if your everyday companion Madame Sibeth Ndiaye is aware of your vision for her continent [Comment in reaction to the Facebook post featuring ouest-france.fr, 11.07.2017]²⁷³

Whereas this characterisation, on the one hand, reproduces ideas of belonging that fix persons to their "origin" (for more on this debate, see Brah, 1996, p. 191ff), in this case, it also questions the fixed connection and subversion of an African-diasporic female political actor to the French president by implicitly suggesting that she would or could act otherwise, and especially with the reference to "her continent", that she has the authority to do so. In that sense, however, this comment also presents an exception from the more prominent male-centred discourse in the previous constructions of French actors outlined here.

In summary, these characterisations of French social actors and social actor groups show a complex assemblage of subjectivities that unveil and resist the normalisation of Eurocentric and colonialist discourses on France and its relations with African societies. On the one hand, this works on the level of temporalities. Some narratives include changing subjectivities from, for instance, France as a victim of Nazi Germany and needing help from African and Malian soldiers during World War II, to using the same dominating measures to dominate Africa as (post)colonial power, or from Emmanuel Macron as French political outsider and hope for Malian young politicians to a politician at the centre of French postcolonial power. In contrast, other subjectivities emphasise the absence of real change, especially constructions that draw a line from the slave trade to colonialism and current imperial or neo-colonial relations and thereby rather highlight the persistence of French – or Western – domination of African societies.

²⁷³ Monsieur le président. J'aimerais d'abord savoir si votre compagnon de tous les jours madame sibeth ndiaye a pris connaissance de votre vision pour son continent [Comment in reaction to the Facebook post featuring ouest-france.fr, 11.07.2017]

Within this transforming position, however, articles and users also construct subjectivities that reproduce intersectional hierarchies and exclusions, most prominently outlined here along the lines of gender and sexuality, but as we saw, classist notions play a role as well. In that regard, most powerful actors are portrayed as elites with nationalist and imperialist traits that contribute to the construction of hegemonic militarised masculinities and are in contrast to collectivised and victimised marginal social groups. Especially in the identity construction of Emmanuel Macron, when users also articulate alternative – e.g. more family-oriented – forms of masculinity (see the identifications of African societies above), this is further complicated by a heteronormative view on Macron's intimate relations.

Further Western and Beyond-Western Actors: Between Persistencies of and Alternatives to Postcolonial Relations

In addition to the core actors in the analysed discourse that include Malian, African, and French social actor groups, articles and users also construct subjectifications of further Western actors as well as beyond-Western actors like China, Arab countries, or more religiously delineated groups as potential alternative partners in Malian and African transnational relations. These discursive constructions of social actor groups work for the transforming position as they produce resistant subjectivities to Eurocentric and postcolonial discourses in multiple ways. First, they counter the idea of Western or Global Northern actors as the only legitimate and beneficial partners and idols of African societies. Secondly, they challenge generalising subjectifications of Global Southern societies by pointing to internal heterogeneities and hierarchies. And thirdly, they introduce religious communities and even God as potential alternatives to national(ist) partnerships. Interestingly, the articles in the corpus selected for detailed discourse analysis only engage in identity constructions of Western actors – although Russia and China feature in the more general discourse analysis corpus. However, additional relations with China, Arab States, and religious transnational communities are still introduced by the commenting users. Especially through these comments, we can thus observe a performative agency against Eurocentrism in the discourse on Malian transnational relations that creates resistant subjectivities against Eurocentric mentalities of government that, in turn, feed into relations of postcolonial governmentality.

The identity constructions of Western or Global Northern actors beyond France question their role as legitimate and beneficial partners and idols of African societies. On the one hand, Western and Global Northern actors are portrayed as furthering postcolonial inequalities and

bringing more problems than solutions to African societies. In that vein, the articles construct a European Union that ignores African exploitation and finances African elections (e.g. Bagayoko and Koné, 30.11.2017), a US president Donald Trump who takes a unilateral decision on the Jerusalem issue, thereby affronting the Muslim community and endangering the peace process in the Middle East (e.g. AD/od/APA, 08.12.2017), and a United Nations mission that lacks any justification for being involved in the Malian conflict (e.g. Coulibaly, Diocolo, 04.05.2017). These articles thereby construct Western actors as illegitimately involved in African issues and as doing harm through this involvement.

The United Nations and their famous Mission of Destabilisation of Mali²⁷⁴ has really no raison d'être. [Coulibaly, Diocolo, 04.05.2017]²⁷⁵

'We seize the same occasion for alerting the American President towards the severe consequences of such an irresponsible and unjustified decision, susceptible to understanding the peace dynamic initiated by his predecessors, and of provoking the anger of millions of Muslims around the globe'. [Mohamed Kimbiri in Fofana, 14.12.2017]²⁷⁶

The comments that engage in the identification of Western actors follow these negative constructions. In addition, they call more explicitly for an end to these relations, thereby calling Western actors to stop their engagement in Mali and Africa more generally.

The MINUSMA has to leave, down with the United Nations [Comment in reaction to the Facebook post featuring Coulibaly, Diocolo, 04.05.2017]²⁷⁷

In addition, users who engaged in the debate on the fertility of African women characterise Europe, USA, and China as imperfect in themselves, be it in economic or social terms. Therein, they construct a counternarrative to Eurocentric ideas of Western superiority. This can have two manifestations: On the one hand, such a negative characterisation can be in opposition to Malian or African actors, supporting the latter's positive Southern self-presentation. On the other hand, such negative characterisations can function in addition to the same problematic tendencies in Malian or African societies to point to a dimension other

²⁷⁴ In this case, the nomination of the MINUSMA as a mission of "destabilisation" reinforces their delegitimisation on the linguistic level and points to their harmful effects on Malian society.

²⁷⁵ Les Nations-Unies et leur fameuse Mission de Déstabilisation du Mali n'a vraiment pas sa raison d'être. [Coulibaly, Diocolo, 04.05.2017]

²⁷⁶ 'Nous saisissons la même occasion pour mettre en garde le Président américain contre les graves conséquences d'une telle décision irresponsable et injustifiée, susceptible de comprendre la dynamique de paix enclenchée par ses prédécesseurs, et de provoquer les colères des millions de musulmans à travers le monde'. [Mohamed Kimbiri in Fofana, 14.12.2017]

²⁷⁷ La minisma doit quite aba la nation unis [Comment in reaction to the Facebook post featuring Coulibaly, Diocolo, 04.05.2017]

than nationality or location for their explanation. In this context, whereas Europe is mainly portrayed as lacking in economic terms, i.e. being on the way to having a workforce problem due to their ageing populations, the USA and China are portrayed negatively in social terms. Users identify them as societies who – despite their non-existent overpopulation – have problems in their gender relations that manifest in a surplus of men and resulting violence against women.

The latest examples, there are approximately 60 000 000 single men in China, this situation results in the kidnapping of thousands of women every year, physical aggressions against women, etc... [Comment in reaction to the Facebook post featuring ouest-france.fr, 11.07.2017]²⁷⁸

I am in the USA, there are aggressions against women every day. [Comment in reaction to the Facebook post featuring ouest-france.fr, 11.07.2017]²⁷⁹

These characterisations, then, contribute to a deconstruction of an automatic association of Southern societies with gendered violence in opposition to emancipated Northern societies. But even in their anti-Eurocentric constructions, these article and user contributions still (also) contribute to reinforcing gendered hierarchies as they contrast violent masculinities with victimised femininities (on such generalising oppositional constructions in conflict situations, see e.g. Enloe, 2004, p. 104).

In addition to the portrayal of further Western actors, users also challenge generalising and homogenising subjectifications of Global Southern societies by pointing to internal hierarchies and lack of reciprocity. On a more general level, users construct Arab countries as ignorant of African problems and even as creating them, in this case, through their engagement in slave trade with African citizens.

We need to stop supporting the Arabs because they do not support us when we have a problem, we the Africans. During the march against slavery in Libya that took place in Paris they did not support us [Comment in reaction to the Facebook post featuring Fofana, 14.12.2017]²⁸⁰

I consider this identification as transforming because – in contrast to Western discourses about "racist" Arab countries – Malian-diasporic users do not speak from a position of deflecting own responsibilities for racist exploitation (especially as the next comment even

²⁷⁸ Derniers exemples en date, il y a environ 60 000 000 d'hommes célibataires en Chine, cette situation a comme conséquence l'enlèvement de milliers de femmes par an, les agressions physiques envers les femmes, etc... [Comment in reaction to the Facebook post featuring ouest-france.fr, 11.07.2017]

²⁷⁹ Je suis aux USA il y a des agressions contre les femmes chaque jour. [Comment in reaction to the Facebook post featuring ouest-france.fr, 11.07.2017]

²⁸⁰ Il faut arreter de soutenir les arabes car ils nous soutiennent pas quand on a un probleme .nous les noirs .dans la marche contre l esclavage en lybie qui se passait a paris ils sont pas nous soutenir [Comment in reaction to the Facebook post featuring Fofana, 14.12.2017]

alludes to racialised structures in Malian society). Considering that these identifications emerge in contrast to Malians protesting for the Arab country Palestine, they rather reflect on ideas of international partnership and solidarity and, through these negative portrayals, articulate their quest for more egalitarian transnational relations.²⁸¹

In the same context, users also construct the Palestinian society as not mutually supporting Malian or African societies and thus unworthy of their support. Especially one user, however, repeatedly emphasises the need to consider and care for Palestine as an oppressed people, thereby constructing Palestinian society as in need of humanitarian care from the side of Malian or African societies.

From those who say that this is not our problem I would like to know if the misery of a people that is subjected to apartheid by another people does not deserve our indignation? [Comment in reaction to the Facebook post featuring Fofana, 14.12.2017]²⁸²

Especially the reference to the South African apartheid regime in this comment furthermore points to the possibility of a transnational solidarity between Palestine and African societies that emerges from common experiences of oppression and a common interest in liberation.

Finally, users construct transnational religious communities and even God as potential alternatives for partnerships and relationalities in Malian and African transnational relations. Identity constructions of the global Muslim, global Christian, and global Jewish societies as well emerge in the comment thread of the Facebook post that reports on the Bamako demonstration for Palestine (Fofana, 14.12.2017). In the context of the conflict between Israel and Palestine, several users construct all three communities as having a right to Jerusalem but with none having the exclusive right. Where these identifications differ is in feelings associated towards the Muslim and Jewish community, which are constructed as selves and others, respectively. Whereas some users portray the global Muslim society as an object of solidarity that could even be more important than national affiliations, one user additionally identifies the global Jewish society as an object of hatred.

There are no Malian or other peoples there are the Muslims so we Muslims want our mosque and that's all so you can say what you want and you will die one day

²⁸¹ In this context, article authors and users embed the Libya slavery scandal in the Western migration regime, as IBK, for instance, employs references to the transatlantic slave trade (see Gouvernement de la République du Mali, 18.11.2017).

²⁸² A ceux qui disent que ce n'est pas notre problème je voudrais savoir le malheur d'un peuple qui subit l'apartheid d'un autre peuple ne mérite pas notre indignation ? [Comment in reaction to the Facebook post featuring Fofana, 14.12.2017]

Those who are against this are Jewish and you will return on the final day being Jewish that's for sure and you will have big problems inshallah [Comment in reaction to the Facebook post featuring Fofana, 14.12.2017]²⁸³

In addition to the religious communities, users more frequently refers to God as an almighty being that would restore justice in the world and help, in this case, the Malian people to escape their crises. Whereas God cannot be seen as a usual social actor but rather as indicating users' socio-political value systems, it is important to consider the references to God as an additional party in the geopolitical power relations that have emerged in this discourse fragment. Considering the lack of external support from beyond-African actors, God appears as an additional force that is characterised as intervening in the favour of oppressed African societies.

Let's be wise, if it's for defending a religion, I think that God is sufficiently powerful to defend their people. God does not need a human being to defend themselves. We are, Muslims, Christians, Animists, Buddhists, ... creatures of God. Who is more just than God? If there is an injustice in the world, against an individual or a state, it's God who can defend the right of the latter. [Comment in reaction to the Facebook post featuring Fofana, 14.12.2017]²⁸⁴

At first sight, this argumentation has a rather demobilising connotation as it seems to deflect responsibilities for individual action. However, this comment also has to be seen as a contribution to repeated calls for separating religion and politics in this comment thread. And together with the wish for God's help that is also articulated, for instance, in relation to the Malian presidential elections (see comments in response to Keita, I., 11.05.2017) or the protest against international interventions (see comments in response to Coulibaly, Diocolo, 04.05.2017), I would rather see this construction of God as an intervening force that does not need help from human actors in another light: as a distinction between being manipulated with religious arguments for political objectives, and between calling for divine support to rectify unequal postcolonial and national political relations. Considering the Malian proverb that advises to "do your part and God will give the rest" (encountered during personal conversations in Mali), this subjectification of divine support does not call for passivity but merely assures those engaged for alternative power relations a fair share of help.

²⁸³ Ils ya pas de peuple malien ni autre peuple ils ya des musulmans donc nous les musulmans veut notre mosque et ce tou donc dit ce que vous voulez et vous a le mourir l'jour Ce qui son contre ce son juif et vous ale retourner le dernier jour en tant que juif sa ce sur et vous ale avoir des gro problem inchaallah [Comment in reaction to the Facebook post featuring Fofana, 14.12.2017]

²⁸⁴ Soyons sages, si c'est pour défendre une religion, je pense que Dieu est suffisamment puissant pour défendre son peuple. Dieu n'a pas besoin d'un humain pour se défendre. Nous sommes, musulmans, chrétiens, animistes, bouddhistes, ... créatures de Dieu. Qui est plus juste que Dieu? S'il y a injustice dans le monde, contre un individu ou un État, c'est Dieu qui peut défendre le droit de ce dernier. [Comment in reaction to the Facebook post featuring Fofana, 14.12.2017]

In summary, these multiple identity constructions show that the discursive fragments that circulate through Maliweb, Facebook, and Twitter contribute to a variety of subjectifications. On the one hand, the emerging subjectifications can consolidate (post)colonial power relations as they construct a hierarchy between benevolent French subjects and Malian/African (elite) subjects. In this context, the Malian and African elite subjects are either positively evaluated because of their compliance with French guidance or they are portrayed as responsible for socioeconomic hardships because of their non-compliance. The consolidating discourse fragment thereby contributes to postcolonial governance through a subjectification of dependent African subjects.

On the other hand, the majority of subjectifications that emerge from the discourse fragment on Malian transnational relations can also transform such postcolonial power relations in their international and national manifestations. They do so by constructing African, Malian, French, and Western elites as illegitimately superior and ruling subjects that are in opposition to self-sufficient African and Malian subjects that have the potential to overcome existing dependencies. In addition, further actor groups like Arab countries are subjectified as potential partners, with their partnership being dependent on its beneficence for Malian or African societies.

However, whereas subjectifications that aim at transforming postcolonial relations are more prominent in the corpus we explored here, the majority of the identity constructions in this corpus still shows signs of either the exclusion of women or of (hegemonic) masculinist subjectifications that reproduce colonial-imperial, militarist ideas of gender relations and masculinity. In addition, in instances when these forms of masculinity are challenged with, for instance, more family-oriented ideas of masculinity, these intersect with a heteronormative normalisation. In that regard, decolonial transformations in these constructions of subjects are undermined by the complexities of (post)colonial gendered subjectifications.

In the following subchapter, we will explore a final layer in this discourse, asking how such intersecting subjectifications relate to forms of and resistances to postcolonial gendered governmentality through the mobilisation of emotions.

7.5 (Dis-)Confirming Postcolonial Gendered Governmentality through the Mobilisation of Emotions

Asking about the mobilising effect of the subjectifications outlined above, I depart from Siméant's observation of constructing we- and they-groups as a form of moral critique in a context of street protests, uprisings, and socio-political critique in Southern Mali (Siméant, 2014, p. 90). In the following, I outline how such morality-related differentiations between "us" and "them" emerge in the online realm of Malian-diasporic online news. In that vein, I also build on Chantal Mouffe's idea of political identities as constructions of we- and they-groups that can further be mobilised through passions (Mouffe, 2014, p. 155).²⁸⁵

However, within this analysis of emotional political identity constructions, I argue that gendered and postcolonial formations and hierarchies are at work as well. In that regard, I follow Brigitte Bargetz and Birgit Sauer's critique of Mouffe's notion of passions as insufficiently analysing the modalities of domination in affects when exploring their potential for de-/mobilising the political – although they still acknowledge Mouffe's take on passions as an instrument for mobilisation through identity politics and for democratic goals (Bargetz & Sauer, 2015, p. 96f,99ff). In the present thesis, I thus further draw from Sara Ahmed (2014) and Ann Stoler (2016), whose works allow for an intersectional perspective on the employment and effects of emotions in the construction of political identities within a regime of gendered and postcolonial governmentality.

As outlined more extensively in Section 4.2.3 (on affective governmentality), Section 4.4.4 (on mobilising emotions), and in Section 5.5.5 (on analysing emotions), Ahmed's sociality of emotions provides a helpful conceptualisation of how emotions emerge from the circulation of objects of emotions, as objects of emotions are identified as either beneficial or harmful and thereby produce different emotions that either move people closer together or further apart (Ahmed, 2014, pp. 4–8). I consider the narratives that circulate through Maliweb, Facebook, and Twitter as such objects of emotions that also produce emotions on two levels: on the article level, when the authors encounter – either physically or imaginatively – the contents they write about; or on the comment level, when users encounter these articles and their contents. On both levels, authors and users articulate through their articles and com-

²⁸⁵ Whereas Mouffe, however, distinguishes between emotions as individual and passions as collective movements, I take one step back and follow Sara Ahmed (2014, p. 10) in her understanding of emotions as simultaneously affecting individuals and bringing collectivities into being.

ments whether they consider the circulating objects of emotions as beneficial or harmful and which emotions emerge through their interactions, either moving them closer together as we-groups or moving them apart as they-groups.

These emotions thus have their own intersectional implications for consolidating or transforming socio-political power relations. In the context of Malian transnational relations, I explore these power relations by drawing inspiration from Koschut, who connects emotions to hierarchies in international relations and within states through Norbert Elias' matrix of status-confirming emotions (pride and shame) that reproduce inequalities between states, and status-disconfirming emotions (fear and resentment) that challenge the status quo (Koschut, 2018, p. 506ff). For capturing the (post)colonial mobilisations of emotions in this context, I further consider Stoler's (2016, p. 220) highlighting of ambiguous moments during colonial rule that required an affective management of security. I argue that in a situation where the French presence in Mali and the legitimacy of (complicit) political elites were increasingly controversially debated, those French and Malian elites engage as well in the management of feelings. In the contemporary (online news) context, this management does not only address the management of the affects of colonial administrators anymore, but also equally the affects of postcolonial Malian citizens. As in Stoler's (2016, p. 230ff) example, security was an important instrument in these affective governing attempts, considering the focus on the threats of, for instance, jihadist violence and economic despair. In addition to this use of emotions for postcolonial discursive governmentality, I also see possibilities of resistance in the mobilising of emotions, as Stoler (2016, p. 20) also acknowledges with reference to Foucault that narratives of imperial formations "can be mobilized for different projects".

In that regard, positively and negatively connoted feelings also cut across consolidating and transforming emotional mobilisations, as already affirmed by Ahmed:

Indeed, feeling better for some might involve expressing feelings of anger, rage and shame as feelings in the present about a past that persists in the present. (...) The emotional struggles against injustice are not about finding good or bad feelings, and then expressing them. Rather, they are about how we are moved by feelings into a different relation to the norms that we wish to contest, or the wounds we wish to heal. (Ahmed, 2014, p. 201)

In order to identify these emotional mobilisations within postcolonial governmentality, I build on Kleres' narrative analysis of emotions (Kleres, 2010, pp. 190–195) and Reinke de Buitrago's approach to emotions in international relations (Reinke de Buitrago, 2018, p. 309), and illustrate how the predications of social actor groups contribute to the construction of we- and they-groups in specific articles as well as their roles in the overall discourse for analysing the

– often indirect – articulations of emotions through narrative structure and agency in identity constructions. As I will show in the following, Malian-diasporic online news portals and their social media accounts unveil an emotional mobilisation that is reminiscent of affective governance in Malian postcolonial relations. However, considering the intersections of postcolonial relations, national politics, and social (especially gendered, ethnicised, and classed) power relations, I argue that these emotions work on diverse levels and further unveil the complexities of the postcolonial relations and the possibilities for a transforming mobilisation that circulate between consolidating and transforming hierarchies. This becomes especially eminent in the gendered moments of emotional mobilisation that may evoke gendered hierarchies in the ascription of emotional attachments and vulnerabilities as well as open possibilities for feminist and intersectional transformations (Ahmed, 2014, pp. 2f, 170f). Within these postcolonial complexities, I second Sara Ahmed's reflection on feminist attachments that emotions "may be crucial to showing us why transformations are so difficult (we remain invested in what we critique), but also how they are possible (our investments move as we move)" (Ahmed, 2014, p. 172).

7.5.1 Consolidating Emotions: Governing through a Security Regime

The first group of emotions that are articulated through the articles and comments I address here are consolidating emotions. These work to stabilise existing political hierarchies between Mali and other states as well as within Malian society. As I will outline below, they do so, on the one hand, by using a security regime that produces additional authority through the exchange of protection for obedience (see e.g. Stoler, 2016, p. 231) and, on the other hand, also by reproducing a colonial gendered differentiation between masculinised strong and impeccable elite actors and feminised submissive marginal others or even an exclusion of female actors altogether. Whereas Stoler introduces a broad range of emotions, she uses fear²⁸⁶ to exemplify the working of security regimes that "play off generic fears that are widely shared and then concentrate and direct those fears to particular sites and situations" (Stoler, 2016, p. 236). This ties in with Vergès' (2021, p. 8) remark that "[f]ear is one of the state's favorite weapons to produce conformity and consent" in postcolonial situations. In the following, I will show how such fears – emerging in reaction to Islamist and separatist threats as well as socioeconomic insecurities – are in some instances directed towards the self-

²⁸⁶ While I introduce fear as articulation of unease with postcolonial inequalities in the next section, I rather see the emotions articulated in this section as a manifestation of the consolidating effect of fear used by postcolonial elites.

righteousness of, sympathy for, and gratitude to dominant actors as well as towards shame on the side of inferiorised marginal actors.

Pride Disguised in Self-Righteousness

As a first emotion that emerges as consolidating for international and national political relations, I look at pride, which Simon Koschut describes as "an expression of a group's valued past as well as its confidence in the future" with an implied superiority in relation to marginalised groups (Koschut, 2018, p. 507). Since none of the postcolonial and national political elites in the analysed corpus engage in such overtly superior self-presentations, I rather consider the emotion they articulated as self-righteousness, i.e. as an assertion that they have done the right thing and, through their actions, are legitimate in their superior and ruling position.

One actor that expresses self-righteousness on the side of French elites is, for instance, the French embassy that, in a letter one user uploaded in reaction to the scandal about a homework assignment that was suspected to legitimise "Azawad", constructs a we-group of French actors (France and the concerned teacher) that support Malian territorial integrity, on the one hand, and are misunderstood as not doing so, on the other hand.

It [the French embassy, S.H.] nevertheless seeks to clarify that there was no malicious intention on the side of the teacher who edited the homework, but who had not assessed the political significance of the term Azawad.

It ascertains, in the utmost clear way, that France has always defended, and will continue to defend, the respect of the territorial integrity of Mali [French Embassy in Mali, uploaded in reaction to a Facebook post featuring Maliweb/Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, 23.10.2017]²⁸⁷

Indirectly, this display of self-righteousness thus even leads to a mitigated and implicit expression of pride in the ongoing French support for Malian national integrity despite being misunderstood.

On the level of national politics, the Malian government uses international controversies, namely the Libya slavery scandal and the decision of the US president Trump to move the US embassy to Jerusalem, to express their indignation. By judging the actions of other heads of

²⁸⁷ Elle tient néanmoins à préciser qu'il n'y avait aucune intention malveillante de la part du professeur qui a rédigé le devoir, mais qui n'avait pas mesuré la portée politique du terme Azawad. Elle confirme, de la façon plus claire, que la France a toujours défendu, et continuera à défendre, le respect de l'intégrité territoriale du Mali. [French Embassy in Mali, uploaded in reaction to a Facebook post featuring Maliweb/Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, 23.10.2017]

state, they present themselves as morally superior to those who threaten the dignity of African migrants and the peace process in the Middle East.

The Government of the Republic of Mali observes with concern the announcement by the United States to recognise Jerusalem as capital of the State of Israel. The Government regrets this unilateral decision that does not contribute to peace efforts in the region. [AD/od/APA, 08.12.2017]²⁸⁸

As this quote shows, emotions often appear in an entangled way, as with this expression of self-righteousness that works in combination with an expression of concern or anxiety. Considering the legitimising function of this government communication in relation to Malian-diasporic readers, however, I privilege the focus on a positive self-assertion in the form of self-righteousness in this case.

These emotions of self-righteousness, then, have a consolidating effect as they justify the actions and position of elite actors who present themselves as "doing the right thing." In addition, they also mitigate their expression of care and relationality through its combination with a notion of superiority, thereby reproducing masculinised notions of infallibility and paternalistic care.

Sympathy for the Dominant

A similar effect can be observed with expressions of sympathy for dominant actors. These are – although rather rarely – expressed by single users in reaction to critique voiced towards these actors and, by articulating understanding, they mitigate or even delegitimise said critique. These emotional mobilisations happen on the international as well as the national level. On the international level, one Twitter user articulates feelings of sympathy for Donald Trump by defending his Jerusalem decision due to a lack of options, thereby even indirectly pitying the US president because of the critique Trump has been receiving due to his decision, also in the quoted article.

@realdonaldtrump had no choice [Comment in reaction to the Tweet featuring AD/od/APA, 08.12.2017]²⁸⁹

²⁸⁸ Le Gouvernement de la République du Mali note avec préoccupation l'annonce faite par les États-Unis de reconnaître Jérusalem comme capitale de l'Etat d'Israël. Le Gouvernement regrette cette décision unilatérale qui ne contribue pas aux efforts de paix dans la région [AD/od/APA, 08.12.2017]

²⁸⁹ @realdonaldtrump n'avais pas de choix [Comment in reaction to the Tweet featuring AD/od/APA, 08.12.2017]

On the national level, some users defend the ruling political class, even against unjust treatment by Malian society itself, by stressing the impossibility of pleasing the latter.

One does not know what to do or say. If the leaders don't go to Kidal, they [Malians, S.H.] say what..... If they go as well like Mara they say What does the Malian even want ?
[Comment in reaction to the Facebook post featuring Keita, I., 11.05.2017]²⁹⁰

These expressions of sympathy work in a consolidating way as they delegitimise political critique and sediment social inequalities. As this sympathy revolves around the wrongful accusation of political actors, such expressions work through affective relationality to restore this political strength and thereby reproduce masculinised, infallible identities of political elites in contrast to the flawed citizens that criticise them. Moreover, as the latter quotation shows, defending national and international political elites can even lead to a denigrating portrayal of more marginalised groups like – in this case – Malian society. In that sense, it is also important to explore which emotions are attached to marginalised groups by political identity constructions.

Gratitude to External Saviours

One of these emotions is gratitude. Ahmed highlights the hierarchies that are involved in gratitude, especially in situations of already-existing inequalities: "The position of indebtedness is the position of gratitude (Hochschild 2003): the other must be grateful for being saved or being brought into civil society" (Ahmed, 2014, p. 193). Although to a lesser extent, some users articulate gratitude to elite actors in some of the comments analysed. On the one hand, they thank the Malian political elites for expelling the French *Liberté A* teacher (see comments in reaction to Maliweb/Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, 23.10.2017), a gratitude that, however, oscillates between consolidating the position of ruling political elites and resisting the Malian subjection and helplessness in relation to French actions or even interventions in Malian sovereignty (for more examples of transforming gratitude in a sense of decolonial hope, see below).

Where the consolidating function of gratitude becomes more evident, however, is in the gratitude that some users express towards international military forces or even the French president Macron. In reaction to the *Le Républicain* article on the march for Palestine, for

²⁹⁰ Ont ne sait quoi faire ou dire. Si les dirigeants ne Vont pas à kidal on dit quoi..... S'ils vont aussi comme mara on dit..... Que veux le malien même ? [Comment in reaction to the Facebook post featuring Keita, I., 11.05.2017]

instance, one user discourse not only constructs the international forces – together with the Malian army – as a positively evaluated we-group (as outlined in 7.4.2),²⁹¹ but also demands gratitude towards them for trying to establish peace in Mali by denigrating the protestors.

these are ungrateful persons who do not think about the Malian and foreign soldiers that die so that they can live peacefully in Bamako. [Comment in reaction to the Facebook post featuring Fofana, 14.12.2017]²⁹²

In the comments that reacted to the *ouest-france.fr* article on Macron's statement about the fertility of African women, this gratitude is more indirect. In this context, some users agree with the French president as "saying the truth" by naming what they agreed was an important reason for their socioeconomic problems. In that vein, they implicitly express their gratitude for Macron's attempt at "bringing [them] into civil society," a desired society of low birth rates and high "development", and for saving them from their current situation.

But he is right, Robert Malthus talked about this from the 15th century on in his work 'Theory of the Population'... Every government that has not applied this latest lesson inevitably has a catastrophe...[Comment in reaction to the Facebook post featuring *ouest-france.fr*, 11.07.2017]²⁹³

These feelings of gratitude and the related "position of indebtedness," then, work in a consolidating way as they prevent those who are experiencing these feelings from arguing or acting against those they feel indebted to.

Shame for Being (at Fault for Being) Marginalised

A last consolidating feeling I identified in the selected discourse fragment is the feeling of shame, that is also mentioned by Simon Koschut as the emotion Norbert Elias' had identified as confirming the marginal status of groups in international relations. Shame, in this sense, works through a "collective identity of social inferiority among members of the marginalised group" as it "signals the presence of a moral trespass and self-blame" and "indicates dissatisfaction with one's own impression in the eyes of others" (Koschut, 2018, p. 507). For the postcolonial situation, this racialised feeling of inferiority has been most prominently outlined by Frantz Fanon (1980). In this context, my approach to shame thus differs from Ahmed's

²⁹¹ Some of the quotations I present here already appeared in Section 7.4.2 and thus show how emotional mobilisation adds another layer of meaning to these subjectifications.

²⁹² voilà des personnes ingrates qui ne pensent pas aux soldats maliens et étrangers qui meurent pour que eux vivent tranquille à Bamako. [Comment in reaction to the Facebook post featuring Fofana, 14.12.2017]

²⁹³ Mais il a raison, Robert Malthus en a parlé des XV siècle dans son ouvrage "Théorie de la Population"... Tout gouvernement qui n'a pas la mise sur cette dernière cours inévitablement à une catastrophe... [Comment in reaction to the Facebook post featuring *ouest-france.fr*, 11.07.2017]

understanding of shame as relating to the past of dominant nations and as an emotion that "becomes crucial to the process of reconciliation or the healing of past wounds" (Ahmed, 2014, p. 101). Although I still draw from Ahmed's idea on the general workings of shame, I do not understand shame here as relating to the past but rather as an effect of ongoing post-colonial relations and (internalised) discrimination that reproduce inferiorised Southern (African and Malian) identities. Thereby, feelings of shame do not only suggest that marginal actors are not in the current position to question the position of dominant actors – as with feelings of gratitude above – but shame rather negates any right to a transformation because of their inferior being in itself. This is even reinforced by the relational and public experience of shame since this "feeling of negation, which is taken on by the subject as a sign of its own failure, is usually experienced before another" (Ahmed, 2014, p. 103).

In the analysed discourse fragment on Malian transnational relations, users articulate feelings of collective shame due to ideas of failure and subsequent inferiority in the fields of economic rank, domestic politics, and national attachments. In that regard, feelings of shame are also connected to a failure to reproduce masculinist ideals of national(ist) and neoliberal strength (see e.g. R. Connell, 2016, p. 311; Enloe, 1990, p. 56f; but also Whitehouse, 2012b, p. 96).

Feelings of shame that relate to economic performance, for instance, appear in the discussion thread of the *ouest-france.fr* article on Macron's statement about the harmful fertility of African women (*ouest-france.fr*, 11.07.2017). In this context, users construct political identities through the mobilisation of shame as they contrast economically superior nations with a portrayal of inferior Malian, African, or even Southern societies that are failing because of their not being as ideally strong economically and geopolitically. Moreover, following Macron's statement, users construct these societies as failing due to their own mismanagement of fertility rates, thereby combining the acknowledgment of wrongdoing and its public display, and thus ultimately encouraging techniques of self-governance towards better socio-economic performance.

Is it not time to assume our responsibilities? Sir, don't you think that what slows down the development here is too many mouths for one income? If having a big population was the solution, why is Germany ahead of countries like Nigeria, India, Brazil? Or why can Israel alone force the countries of the Middle East to their knees? [Comment in reaction to the Facebook post featuring *ouest-france.fr*, 11.07.2017]²⁹⁴

²⁹⁴ N'est il pas temps d'assumer nos responsabilités ? Monsieur ne pensez vous pas que ce qui ralenti le développement ici serait trop de bouche pour un seul revenu ? Si avoir beaucoup de population était la solution, pourquoi l'Allemagne est devant des pays comme le Nigeria, l'Inde, le Brésil ? Ou pourquoi Israël seul met à

In terms of domestic politics, users articulate feelings of shame in reaction to the *Le Point* article on Moussa Mara as potential "Malian Macron" in the 2018 Malian presidential elections (Keita, I., 11.05.2017). Even though users do not necessarily value Macron, some articulate their admiration for the French people who have managed to induce political change, in contrast to Malian society that they see as not politically strong and determined enough to effect valuable political change.

Macron is not strong but it's the French who are and who know what they want. But unfortunately the Malians don't know what they want. That's a shame. [Comment in reaction to the Facebook post featuring Keita, I., 11.05.2017]²⁹⁵

As a third manifestation, users articulate shame for their collective lack of nationalist attachment, most prominently in the debate of the *Le Républicain* article on the Bamako-based march for Palestine (Fofana, 14.12.2017). Users construct they-groups that include Malian political elites, Malian society, and the Bamako protestors as groups that do not care enough about Malian issues, especially the Malians in the North, in contrast to seemingly more self-caring Palestinian or Arab societies. Moreover, users emphasise the "moral trespass and self-blame" in this neglect as these internal others would conflate religion and politics, and let themselves be instrumentalised or manipulated by Arab rulers. As mentioned for the ambivalent subjectification of Malian civil society above (see Section 7.4.2), this reproach in itself has a gendered connotation, considering the background of Malian gender discourses that construct women as lacking in morale and loyalty when it comes to money (Schulz, 2012b, pp. 66–69). As I have shown above, one (female diasporic) user even articulates this connotation more explicitly when comparing Malian citizens – even together with Malian political elites – with a disloyal opportunist woman. In doing so, I argue that this user further highlights the gendered hierarchies in this articulation of shame.

One could think that Mali is a woman that sells her charms to everyone..from the government to the ordinary Malian. Patriotism does not exist anymore. Terrible [Comment in reaction to the Facebook post featuring Fofana, 14.12.2017]²⁹⁶

In this context, feelings of shame sediment the status quo in Malian transnational but also social hierarchies by not only articulating inequalities but also by even justifying them with

genou les pays du moyen orient ? [Comment in reaction to the Facebook post featuring ouest-france.fr, 11.07.2017]

²⁹⁵ Macron n'est pas fort mais c'est les français qui le sont et savent ce qu'ils veulent. Mais malheureusement les maliens ne savent pas ce qu'ils veulent. Dommage. [Comment in reaction to the Facebook post featuring Keita, I., 11.05.2017]

²⁹⁶ On dirait que le Mali est une femme qui vend ses charmes à tous..du gouvernement au malien lambda. Le patriotisme n'existe plus. Terrible [Comment in reaction to the Facebook post featuring Fofana, 14.12.2017]

Malian, African, or Southern (feminised) inferiority. Together with gratitude, sympathy, and self-righteousness, these feelings consolidate the Eurocentric or Western-centric status quo as they govern through a sense of (socio-political and economic) security in the established masculinised rule of powerful elites.

7.5.2 Sticky Emotions through Postcolonial Pain and Mistrust

In addition to these consolidating emotions, I argue that the circulation of narratives about Malian and African transnational relations also produces emotions that contest the status quo but are stuck in an articulation of postcolonial contempt rather than moving toward decolonial futures. This is reminiscent of Ahmed's account of the ambivalent relationship between emotions and movement, since "[w]hat moves us, what makes us feel, is also which holds us in place, or gives us a dwelling place" (Ahmed, 2014, p. 11). In that vein, I draw from the considerations of Ursula Degener and Andrea Zimmermann, who emphasise the entanglement of affects with racism, capitalism, and colonialism and cite work that, for instance, connects depression to colonialist and racist experiences (Degener & Zimmermann, 2014, p. 13f).

More specifically, I have identified fear, disgust, and hate as "sticky" emotions that I consider particularly relevant for the postcolonial situation explored here, as they exemplify the emotional distress that emerges from the entanglement of imperial formations and colonial memories. I consider these sticky emotions as in-between consolidating and transforming emotions as they do not (yet) relate to a way forward but mostly function as a means to critique the (post)colonial present and "colonial presence" (Stoler, 2016, p. 33), and thereby are also indicative of the complex temporalities involved in postcolonial situation as described by Ann Stoler (2016, pp. 25–30). Considering the gendered implications of these feelings, especially the feeling of fear, could lead to a more feminised, vulnerable articulation of political identities. As I will show, however, in most of its expressions, fear is closely entangled with disgust and hate as "strong" violence-related emotions that reproduce imperially militarised political masculinities. For reasons of clarity, however, I still explain the materialisations of fear, disgust, and hate separately in the following sections.

Fear of Being "Taken in" by Postcolonial Complicities

...fear works by establishing others as fearsome insofar as they *threaten to take the self in*. Such fantasies construct the other as a danger not only to one's self as self, but to one's very

life, to one's very existence as a separate being with a life of its own." (Ahmed, 2014, p. 64, italics in the original)

In line with this explanation of fear by Ahmed, in the discourse on Malian transnational relations, this self that is feared to be taken in appears as the Malian and, by extension, African sovereign nation(s) that are threatened by postcolonial dependencies and interventions. I argue that these feelings of fear are further exacerbated by unspoken intentions in post-colonial international relations in which political actors use diplomatic language to present themselves as acting in their common interest *and* that of their international partners. This ties in with Ahmed's explanation that "the object of fear is over-determined" (Ahmed, 2014, p. 62) but also in some way pre-structured as it "opens up past histories of association" (Ahmed, 2014, p. 63). This applies especially within a "history of colonization, imperialism [that] is a record of betrayal, of lies, and deceits" (hooks, 2015, p. 3). Therefore, in contrast to Ahmed's examples that attribute fear to postcolonial others such as Fanon's "negro", or post-9/11 terrorists (Ahmed, 2014, pp. 62f, 72–80), and to Koschut's explanations of fear as a reaction of dominant groups to a potential loss of their superiority (Koschut, 2018, p. 508), I understand the workings of fear in the context of transnational Malian relations as connected to colonial histories and the resulting mistrust against French involvements and their potential cooperation with internal (elite) groups that could always have multiple ulterior motives.

The most prominent expressions of fear that continue to reappear across the analysed articles and comments mainly relate to the suspected cooperation of three social actor groups: the international intervening forces with a focus on France as the former colonial force, separatist groups in the North of Mali, and the Malian political elites with a focus on the Malian government and president IBK. This produces an especially tense environment, since objects of fear and related threats to national sovereignty arise from external actors, from Mali's own ruling actors, and from within the society. Parallel to Ahmed's case of a differentiation of bodies combined with a feeling that "the terrorists 'could be' anyone or everywhere" (Ahmed, 2014, p. 15), this suspicion expresses a similar fear in relation to neocolonial exploitation, that old and new exploiters could be everywhere and appear in diverse forms. Whereas the articles and users did not express feelings of fear explicitly, I still argue that they become visible in the expression of overdetermined situations and mistrust against the intentions of the actor groups mentioned above.

Since the core of these fears points to a fear of postcolonial persistence, we first explore fears articulated in relation to France and the international forces. Fears in relation to this social actor group are, for instance, articulated in the *Maliweb* publication of a government commu-

nication and the related comment thread on the expulsion of the French *Liberté A* teacher because of a homework assignment that was seen as affirming the existence of an independent state of "Azawad" (Maliweb/Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, 23.10.2017). In this article and comments, the French teacher is created as a they-group, but in some instances he was also suspected of not having worked alone, which adds further hidden elements to this they-group. Consequently, the article and comments express feelings of fear that come from the overdetermined interpretation of the teacher's homework that, in some ways only is a homework assignment and, in other ways, is seen as a threat to Malian territorial integrity and even suspected of being orchestrated by a bigger group of actors. The actors suspected as being complicit are France, Malian separatists, "Azawad" supporters, and further international allies.

Robin Guiovanopoulos is held as the only one responsible in this story even if this seems difficult to believe. [Maliweb/Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, 23.10.2017]²⁹⁷

Personally, I believe that there are many persons behind this teacher. [Comment in reaction to the Facebook post featuring Maliweb/Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, 23.10.2017]²⁹⁸

This suspected connection becomes even more prominent in the *Le Démocrate* article on "Azawad" being invented by French elites in order to obtain access to Malian natural resources (Correspondance particulière Le Démocrate, 05.04.2017). As outlined in Section 7.4.2, most of this article focuses on the history of the Tuareg ethnic group, their lack of sedentariness, and their preferential treatment by the French colonial administration. In that sense, the Tuareg are constructed as an internal they-group with the intention to show that they have no legitimate claim to their own land, and in their claim for "Azawad" they rather claim a piece of land that France is portrayed as being interested in for its resource needs. These references to connections between the Tuareg and (the currently military intervention by) France additionally mobilise fears of losing Malian territorial integrity and national sovereignty.

In the history of Mali, the Tuareg (Tamasheq) have never had their own history, never. (...) The Tuareg have always practiced a life of transhumance from country to country, following the seasons. That's why the French colonisers always called them: 'the nomadic populations of our colonies'. (...) This story of Azawad thus is a pure invention of France for having control over

²⁹⁷ Robin Guiovanopoulos est tenu comme seul responsable dans cette histoire même si ceci semble difficile à croire. [Maliweb/Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, 23.10.2017]

²⁹⁸ Personnellement, je pense qu'il y a beaucoup de personne derrière ce professeur. [Comment in reaction to the Facebook post featuring Maliweb/Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, 23.10.2017]

the oil reservoir that lies in the Malian sub-soil. [Correspondance particulière Le Démocrate, 05.04.2017]²⁹⁹

Especially together with generalisations of nomadic Tuareg as separatists and the labelling of separatist groups as terrorists in another article (Coulibaly, Diocolo, 04.05.2017) as well as in broader Malian political discourse (see e.g. Wing, 2016, p. 67f), this is reminiscent of Ahmed's account of refugees being labelled as terrorists in an "economy of fear" that emerged after September 11, 2001: "This violent slide between the figure of the asylum seeker and the international terrorist works to construct those who are 'without home' as sources of 'our fear'" (Ahmed, 2014, p. 80). In discursively separating the Tuareg from a given territory, however, it also becomes clear that the fear of losing Northern Mali is not necessarily related to the (separatist) populations living in this area, which can create internal obstacles to Malian unity.

The third social actor group that provokes feelings of fear is the Malian political class, including the government and president IBK themselves, but also extended to African political elites in their relation to France. I argue that the official cooperation between the Malian/African and French governments produces an overdetermination in the actual sovereignty of Malian or African governments and thereby threatens the independencies of their societies. The following comment in reaction to a Facebook post of the *ouest-france.fr* article on Macron's statement about the fertility of African women highlights the uncertainty involved in this cooperation, considering that these are the ruling Malian or African elites who should care for their citizens.

France and its foreign friends and the old bourgeois African traitors, you have doomed Africa since the slave trade to colonisation and the neo-colonialism. [Comment in reaction to the Facebook post featuring *ouest-france.fr*, 11.07.2017]³⁰⁰

As these examples show, fear creates mistrust against internal and external others whose intentions could lead Malian and African societies back into colonial submission. Therefore, I argue that in contrast to Ahmed's example in which fear "allows the white body to be constructed as apart from the black body in the present" (Ahmed, 2014, p. 63), fear in this context

²⁹⁹ Dans l'histoire du Mali, les Touaregs (Tamasheq) n'ont jamais eu une histoire propre à eux-mêmes, jamais. (...) Les Touaregs ont toujours pratiqué une vie de transhumance de pays en pays, selon les saisons. C'est pourquoi les colons français les ont toujours appelés : «les populations nomades de nos colonies». (...) Cette histoire de l'Azawad est donc une pure invention de la France pour avoir la mainmise sur les gisements de pétrole se trouvant dans le sous-sol malien. [Correspondance particulière Le Démocrate, 05.04.2017]

³⁰⁰ la france et ses amis de l'exterieur et traitres vieux bourgeois africains,vous avez fouttu lafrigue depuis la traître negriere, a ,a colonisation,et aj neocolonialisme. [Comment in reaction to the Facebook post featuring *ouest-france.fr*, 11.07.2017]

of postcolonial trauma challenges the postcolonial entanglement of Malian/African and French/Western nations and highlights the *necessity* for them being apart.

In addition, whereas I second Ahmed's quote of Ulrich Beck suggesting that this perception of a postcolonial danger may even be beneficial in creating national solidarities in the face of a common threat (Ahmed, 2014, p. 72), I also argue that these expressions of fear have reproduced social hierarchies as "narratives of crisis work to secure social norms in the present" (Ahmed, 2014, p. 64). As we have seen, this works in ethnicised terms as feelings of fear are used to discriminate against Tuareg ethnic groups, but also in gendered terms as the focus on multiple threats reproduces a focus on violence and strength as ideal characteristics of political masculinities. As I will show in the following, such fear and mistrust are further joined with or translate into disgust, not only in relation to internal others, but also in more global imaginations of political elites.

Disgust: Ambivalences between Closeness and Distance, Yearning and Rejection

In addition to the overdetermination that leads to fear, I argue that the ambivalent role of social actor groups also produces disgust that is oriented towards "bad objects," objects that are constructed in the process of defining them as bad (Ahmed, 2014, p. 82). Considering, for instance, the ambivalent relation to objects of disgust and their historical embeddedness, Ahmed speaks of an "intensification of movement" as these "objects seem to have us 'in their grip', and to be moving towards us in how they impress upon us, an impression that requires us to pull away, with an urgency that can be undoing" (Ahmed, 2014, p. 84). In that vein, I argue that the movements of persons, objects, and ideas in Malian and African transnational relations that (try to) influence these relations, can result in disgust-related rejection that is, moreover, reinforced by postcolonial and neo-colonial interpretations of the respective situations.

These interpretations, then, highlight postcolonial entanglements and dependencies, which is why this "contact is felt as an unpleasant intensity: (...) the proximity of the object to the body is felt as offensive" (Ahmed, 2014, p. 85). On one level, article authors and commenting users express this offensive proximity in resistance to influences from postcolonial powers. These influences manifest, for instance, on the military level through international interventions (see e.g. Coulibaly, Diocolo, 04.05.2017), on the monetary level through the dominance of the West African Franc CFA monetary system (see e.g. Diallo, 18.07.2017), and on the

ideological level through Eurocentric ideas about economic and social "development" as articulated by Macron's evaluation of African birth rates (see e.g. ouest-france.fr, 11.07.2017). Especially the latter ideological intervention illustrates suitably how this offensive proximity to Malian or African matters can produce feelings of disgust in a postcolonial situation. On the one hand, this can be seen in media and users' interpretation of Macron's statement as racist and neo-colonial (ouest-france.fr, 11.07.2017). On the other hand, especially users engage in identifying Macron as a "bad object" as they portray him as powerful but wrongfully so due to his incompetence when it comes to his experiences in terms of fertility (see also Section 7.4.2). Users thereby construct Macron's statement as "indigestible" due to his political inexperience, but especially due to his otherness in terms of reproduction-oriented ideals of masculinity, i.e. his (lacking) corporeal experiences in relation to fertility. The following quotation furthermore highlights the corporeality of feelings of disgust by pathologising Macron's family status, i.e. his being married to an older woman.

Since he preferred to live with his old carcass without wanting to have children, he wants the people to have the same sickness as he has. [Comment in reaction to the Facebook post featuring ouest-france.fr, 11.07.2017]³⁰¹

This aims to justify Macron's ejection from the imagined community of powerful – masculinised – global decision makers (see e.g. R. Connell, 2016, p. 311) and, more importantly, from the position as an expert or legitimately intervening force in African societies. Whereas the focus on his corporeal experience of having kids is also reminiscent of resistant ideas of (West African) family-oriented masculinity (see e.g. Rodet, 2014, p. 116), they, however, at the same time also reproduce social norms about heteronormative family relations (see e.g. Broqua, 2012, p. 117ff).

On a second level, this disgust also extends to anything "which has had contact with disgusting things" (Ahmed, 2014, p. 87) and thereby also to those social actor groups, who are seen as in collaboration with postcolonial, imperial, or neo-colonial forces. This, however, produces further ambivalences, as disgust can also describe the simultaneous yearning for and rejection of connections to such groups. Ahmed describes this as disgust being "deeply ambivalent, involving desire for, or an attraction towards, the very objects that are felt to be repellent" (Ahmed, 2014, p. 84). In that sense, an internal relation of disgust manifests in the selected discourse fragment, on the one hand, in relation to the political elites who are desired

³⁰¹ Comme il a préféré vivre avec sa vieille carcasse sans vouloir avoir d'enfants, il veut que les gens aient la même maladie que lui. [Comment in reaction to the Facebook post featuring ouest-france.fr, 11.07.2017]

as carers for their citizens but are suspected of rather following French orders and interests, and, on the other hand, towards the Tuareg, who are desired as part of the Malian nation but at the same time despised for their preferential treatment by the French colonisers and the suspected complicity of their separatist goals with French intervening forces.

Externally, such an ambivalent expression of disgust becomes evident in relation to the Palestine and Arab states that are desired as Southern or Muslim partners but still appear as disgusting through their contact with the disgusting practice of (modern) slave trade, even if this contact is only perceived as very peripheral through their silence on the issue. In terms of movements, this leads some users to refrain from articulating solidarity with Palestine and Arab societies in the aftermath of Trump's decision on Jerusalem as capital of Israel.

We need to stop supporting the Arabs because they do not support us when we have a problem, we the Africans. During the march against slavery in Libya that took place in Paris they did not support us these dirty Arabs [Comment in reaction to the Facebook post featuring Fofana, 14.12.2017]³⁰²

In terms of postcolonial governmentality, such articulations of disgust among article authors, users, and their imagined fellow Malian and African citizens can be a first step towards collective critique or even action, as disgust "creates a community of those who are bound together through the shared condemnation of a disgusting object or event" (Ahmed, 2014, p. 94). In addition, these feelings of disgust have an effect of distancing as "to designate something as disgusting is also to create a distance from the thing" (Ahmed, 2014, p. 94). Considering Malian postcolonial relations, this (internal) distance can lead to emancipation from imperial formations. However, as the feelings expressed towards the Tuareg or Arab countries indicate, it can equally hinder national and transnational alternative connectivities and unions in this fight.

In addition, since Ahmed argues that such feelings of disgust produce power relations by differentiating between and separating superior and inferior bodies (Ahmed, 2014, p. 88f), in the cases described above, disgust has a twofold effect. On the one hand, it can challenge existing national and international political hierarchies by downgrading ruling elites. On the other hand, however, it also sediments existing social hierarchies, for instance, between Southern and Northern, sedentarist and nomadic Malians, or between the "normative conflu-

³⁰² Il faut arreter de soutenir les arabes car ils nous soutiennent pas quand on a un probleme .nous les noirs .dans la marche contre l esclavage en lybie qui se passait a paris ils sont pas nous soutenir ces sales arabes [Comment in reaction to the Facebook post featuring Fofana, 14.12.2017]

tion of hetero-sex with reproduction" (Ahmed, 2014, p. 128) and Macron as private person that does not fulfil this ideal.

Hate as Imprisoning Contestation in Historicised Generalisations

As the last "sticky" emotion related to postcolonial governmentality, I explore the workings of hate as an emotion that shows "how feelings of injury get converted into hatred for others, who become read as causing 'our injury'" and "transforming them into a common threat" (Ahmed, 2014, p. 15). Ahmed departs from racist discourses that show how hateful "narratives work by generating a subject that is endangered by imagined others whose proximity threatens not only to take something away from the subject (jobs, security, wealth), but to take the place of the subject. The presence of this other is imagined as a threat to the object of love" (Ahmed, 2014, p. 43). I suggest that in the Malian postcolonial situation, and especially in a context of external military interventions where a renewed proximity exists, such narratives are not only directed to the future but also feed from experiences in the past. This would relate to Ahmed's observation that the "bodies of others are hence transformed into 'the hated' through a discourse of pain. They are assumed to 'cause' injury (...) such that their proximity is read as the origin of bad feeling," (Ahmed, 2014, p. 43f) with the injury being the reactualisation of colonial dominance and the threat to the sovereignty of the Malian nation.

In addition, Ahmed follows Aristoteles' differentiation between anger as directed at individuals for particular actions and hate as directed at groups or individuals that are seen as standing for a certain group (Ahmed, 2014, p. 49). In that vein, I argue that article authors and users identify certain social actors or social actor groups as hateful because they, for them, represent colonial or neo-colonial oppression per se. This is further aggravated by the fact that "particular histories of association are reopened in each encounter, such that some bodies are already encountered as more hateful than other bodies" (Ahmed, 2014, p. 54).

In the discourse fragment on Malian transnational relations, especially Western actors as well as Malian or African political elites are constructed as hated objects. They appear as hateful because of the current injuries they are seen as causing Malian and African societies as well as because of their connection to the colonial oppression of these societies. On the one hand, African political elites are defined as hateful because of the injuries Malian and African citizens have experienced due to bad governance and postcolonial complicity. As the following excerpt of the *Le Républicain* article on the Kemi Seba press conference in Bamako illustrates, this view of African presidents – which can be criticised as generalising in itself –

also contributes to an oppositional construction between these presidents and their peoples due to the formers' alignment with the formal colonial power, thereby further moving them apart.

Kemi Seba performed an autopsy of the alarming consequences of the employment of the Franc CFA by the African countries inviting them all to create their own currency in order to acquire their economic independencies and to profit from the advantages that would be attached to this. 'This brave decision will never come from the pseudo heads of State that deserve more the title of governor than head of State considering the actions they set day in day out instead of contributing to the rise of their people', he laments. [Diallo, 18.07.2017]³⁰³

On the other hand, article authors and especially commenting users construct international intervening forces as hateful objects based on two historical associations: The first is their colonial intervention in Malian and African societies, and the second their engagement across the world that is seen as orchestrating conflicts in order to justify their interventions. Accordingly, Western intervening forces and especially France are accused of perpetuating the injury of political instability in the "object of love" (Ahmed, 2014, p. 43) that is incorporated by the Malian nation. They are suspected of doing so, for instance, by working with separatist groups and against the Malian army that should guarantee this stability, which exemplifies the conflict around sovereignty between the former colonisers and the formerly colonised.

Take heart that's a duty for all the patriots we have enough down with France down with the minusma long live the republican army and long live the nation [Comment in reaction to the Facebook post featuring Coulibaly, Diocolo, 04.05.2017]³⁰⁴

Considering the potential of feelings of hate for consolidating or transforming power relations, such hate furthers the disentanglement from hated (post- and neo-colonial) objects as it "involves a turning away from others that is lived as a turning towards the self" (Ahmed, 2014, p. 51). In that sense, Ahmed further identifies hate as a mobilising and uniting force that emerges from the insight that others in the nation experience the same hate: "Because we love, we hate, and this hate is what brings us together" (Ahmed, 2014, p. 43). This could, then, also explain resentments against France and French military forces that not only are voiced online but also manifest in offline demonstrations. However, I argue that the violent

³⁰³ Kemi Seba a fait l'autopsie des conséquences alarmantes de l'utilisation du franc CFA par les pays africains tout les conviant à créer leur propre monnaie afin d'acquérir leurs indépendances économique et de jouir des avantages qui s'y attachent. 'Cette décision courageuse ne viendra jamais des pseudos chefs d'Etats qui méritent plus le titre de gouverneur que de chef d'Etat vu les actes qu'ils posent à longueur de journée au lieu de contribuer à l'essor de leur peuple', déplore-t-il. [Diallo, 18.07.2017]

³⁰⁴ Courage c'est un devoir pour tous les patriotes on en a marre à bas la France à bas la munisma vive l'armée républicaine et vive la nation [Comment in reaction to the Facebook post featuring Coulibaly, Diocolo, 04.05.2017]

nature of hate further reproduces imperially militarised masculinities that – together with the generalising focus of hate on those that are constructed as threatening – derails the view of a peaceful solution to the internal and external crises in Malian and African societies.

7.5.3 Emotions with Transforming Aspirations: Politicising Subjects through Critique of the Status Quo and Visions for Other Futures

In addition to these consolidating and "sticky" emotions, article authors and users also articulate emotions that have a transforming potential. In this sense, Simon Koschut mentions, for instance, resentment as a status-disconfirming emotion on the side of marginalised groups:

Resentment describes the emotional appraisal of an imbalanced or asymmetric power relationship and the ensuing realisation of an unjustified lower social status (Barbalet 2001: 126). While shame invites subordination and the denial of rights by the established group, resentment, on the contrary, empowers a marginalised group to reassert their basic rights and to correct the status gap in order to restore self-confidence and elevate social standing. (Koschut, 2018, p. 508)

As I will show for the selected discourse fragment on Malian and African transnational relations, the transforming acknowledgment of unjust hierarchies and the emancipatory moments that emerge from this acknowledgement materialise through anger, love, and hope as ambivalent emotions. However, while these emotions often foster postcolonial transforming forces, they at the same time consolidate social hierarchies that have been produced in their current form *inter alia* through colonial and capitalist domination.

Anger That Mobilises a Painful Past for Other Futures

One important emotion that combines such an acknowledgement of unjust hierarchies and emancipatory moments is anger. Ahmed describes anger as "an interpretation that this pain is wrong, that it is an outrage, and that something must be done about it" (Ahmed, 2014, p. 174). In the context of online discourses and exchange about a postcolonial situation, this situation can relate to the idea of feminist anger. Feminist anger, in turn, is connected to politics of pain that come from feminist experiences of violence and discrimination, while at the same time emphasising the need to stay connected to the collective historical experience in order to avoid the individualisation of oppressions that become fetishised or turned into an identity in themselves (Ahmed, 2014, p. 172f). In postcolonial situations as well, anger can thus be a way of dealing with a collective painful colonial experience.

On the one hand, I discovered an articulation of anger rooted in the pain of being second, i.e. of Malian and African societies not being the priorities of their (post)colonial rulers. This manifests in irritation and suspicion that emerge, for instance, in user comments in reaction to the government communication that critiques Trump's Jerusalem decision (AD/od/APA, 08.12.2017). One user, together with many others who voice their critique in light of the related demonstration for Palestine in Bamako, for instance, reproaches the Malian government for not taking care of Malian problems but caring for those of others, thereby opposing the pain of not being the primary interest of their own government.

Tieee [expression of disbelief] IBK and his government, deal with our multiple problems first.
[Comment in reaction to the Tweet featuring AD/od/APA, 08.12.2017]³⁰⁵

On the other hand, users – and article authors – articulate anger against the misrepresentation of Malian and African societies by Western social actors. Such misrepresentations, most vividly experienced in the analysed material through Emmanuel Macron's critique of the fertility of African women as destabilising (ouest-france.fr, 11.07.2017), build on painful memories of colonial as well as post-colonial denigrations of African societies by Western actors. One user, for instance, articulates this connection to the (post)colonial pain of being denigrated in the more recent past with a reference to a highly controversial speech by the then French president Nicolas Sarkozy at the University of Dakar in 2007, thereby objecting to Macron's enunciation as "pain that is wrong".

when the cat is gone the mouse is dancing, same disrespectful discourse against the African people 26 July 2007 sarkozy at the university of cheick anta diop in front of the Senegalese president Abdoulaye wade and the Senegalese students did not cut his word by saying: that Africa has not entered into history [Comment in reaction to the Facebook post featuring ouest-france.fr, 11.07.2017]³⁰⁶

In terms of postcolonial relations, such expressions of anger not only voice critique of historicised relations of injury or pain since "anger is not simply defined in relationship to a past, but as opening the future" (Ahmed, 2014, p. 175). In the examples described above, such a future would be more aware of African possibilities and achievements, but also allowing for Malian

³⁰⁵ Tieee IBK et son gouvernement, occupez vous de nos multiples problèmes d'abord. [Comment in reaction to the Tweet featuring AD/od/APA, 08.12.2017]

³⁰⁶ si le chat nest pas la souris dense,meme discours de mepris contre le peuple africain 26 juillet 2007 sarkozi a luniversite' de checik anta diop devant le president senegalais Abdoulaye wade et les etudiants senegalais na pas mznque' son mot en disant: que lafrique na pas entre' dans lhistoire [Comment in reaction to the Facebook post featuring ouest-france.fr, 11.07.2017]

and African politics that are driven by more self-interest, as also requested in constructions of Malian and African subjectification (see Section 7.4.2).

However, Ahmed further warns that feminist anger is often delegitimised by those addressed with this anger, who contrast it with reason (Ahmed, 2014, p. 177). As postcolonial female and male subjects often face similar conditions when expressing anger, the direct socio-political effectiveness of anger articulated in (reaction to) Malian-diasporic online news is difficult to grasp. Nevertheless, I argue that feelings of anger can still mobilise as they construct an awareness of collective anger and, thereby, might also mobilise further individual and collective action. Moreover, the expression of such anger online can also result from an engagement for decolonised transnational relations that users try to collectivise through their comments (for more, see also Subchapter 7.6 below).

Considering expressions of anger from a feminist point of view, however, Ahmed also emphasises that expressions of anger should relate "the object of anger and broader patterns or structures" of domination and thereby also multiple intersecting power relations (Ahmed, 2014, p. 167). As the examples above illustrate, however, this anger is mostly articulated in a nationalist or Pan-Africanist way and neglects further structurations of inequality along lines such as gender, class, or ethnicised relations.

Love: Defending the Existence and Value of Objects of Love

In addition to anger, I identified love as a transforming emotion in this postcolonial situation as love "is crucial to how individuals become aligned with collectives through their identification with an ideal, an alignment that relies on the existence of others who have failed that ideal" (Ahmed, 2014, p. 124). Based on the aforementioned emotions that rather circle around the negative impact of others sustaining postcolonial domination, I illustrate in this section that within the discourse fragment on Malian and African transnational relations, love is articulated as an opposing emotion that seeks to delegitimise this domination. In the analysed material, two relations to objects of love become most prominent, first a valorisation of objects of love, defending them against denigrating discourses; and secondly, a (claim for) protecting objects of love against external threats. In addition, these objects of love manifest on diverse levels, from the subnational, via the national and continental, to a transnational dimension.

As a first manifestation of love, article authors and users engage in constructing the Malian nation or African societies more generally as ideal national or continental bodies. In that

sense, they implicitly challenge denigrating subjectifications of African or Malian societies. In the analysed material, this becomes most evident in reaction to Macron's critique of the fertility of African women. In order to challenge the implied discourse of Eurocentric superiority, several users engage in constructing African societies as objects of idealising love.

the answer would be if Africa has no history, this means that France has no history, here in Africa it's the cradle of humanity and 'the civilising force of humanity' in its entirety cheik anta: the Negro nation and culture [Comment in reaction to the Facebook post featuring ouest-france.fr, 11.07.2017]³⁰⁷

In this manifestation, love further relates to Ahmed's notion of feminist wonder that describes "a departure from ordinary experience" (in this case colonial representations of Africa) that allows for a new experience of African histories in which "the object that appears before the subject is encountered for the first time, or *as if* for the first time" (Ahmed, 2014, p. 179).

As a second manifestation of this love, article authors and users construct these objects of love as objects that need to be protected. Especially in relation to the (perceived) threats to Malian territorial integrity, this object of love that is in need of protection frequently manifests as the Malian nation. For instance, this occurs in reaction to the expulsion notice of the French *Liberté A* teacher who gave a homework assignment that was seen as consolidating the independent status of "Azawad."

Yes that's it... we don't want these types of persons here because they have no respect whatsoever for our Maliba [affective name for Mali, meaning 'big Mali' in Bambara, in reference to the medieval empire of Mali, S.H.]...it is necessary that the authorities assume [their responsibilities, S.H.]...that's it... [Comment in reaction to the Facebook post featuring Maliweb/Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, 23.10.2017]³⁰⁸

This need for protection, however, (re-)produces a rather (Southern) Malian nationalist ideal that mostly excludes internal and external others from that love. In the comment threads, for instance, only one user articulates concern for the populations in the North of Mali that are in need of protection. Moreover, in terms of love for a (Pan-)African society, news articles on the Libya slavery scandal quickly died down soon after it became clear that no Malians were

³⁰⁷ la repose etait si lafrigue na pas dhistoire cest que la france na pas dhistoire,ici en afrique cest le berceau de l'humanite'et civilisateur de l'humanite' tout entier cheik anta :la nation negre et culture [Comment in reaction to the Facebook post featuring ouest-france.fr, 11.07.2017]

³⁰⁸ Oui c'est ça... ces genres de personne nous n'en voulons pas chez nous car ils n'ont aucun respect pour notre maliba...il faut que les autorités s'assument...c'est ça.... [Comment in reaction to the Facebook post featuring Maliweb/Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, 23.10.2017]

involved in the documented slave auctions towards the end of 2017.³⁰⁹ Considering these internal and external groups as having lost their security and dignity, this lack of consideration points to intersectional hierarchies in this relation, as love "has an intimate relation to grief not only through how the subject responds to the lost object, but also by what losses get admitted as losses in the first place" (Ahmed, 2014, p. 130).

That the construction of – especially transnational – objects of love are also contested, became especially evident in the different positionings towards Palestine in the aftermath of Trump's Jerusalem decision. This is exemplified by the following article and user quotations that contrast an affective alignment with and a complete dismissal of the Palestinian case.

Like this, adds the president of the collective [the Collective of Muslim Associations of Mali, S.H.], we reaffirm our ongoing support to the [Palestinian, S.H.] people in its fight for the establishment of an independent and sovereign state on its national territory with Jerusalem as indivisible and eternal capital. [Mohamed Kimbiri in Fofana, 14.12.2017]³¹⁰

They [Palestine and Israel] should just kill each other that's their problem. [Comment in reaction to the Facebook post featuring Fofana, 14.12.2017]³¹¹

It is only in the very marginal comments that users evoke feelings of love in the sense of solidarity for the Palestinian people as an oppressed people that need to be considered in the name of humanity (as outlined in Section 7.4.2).

In relation to love for Malian and African societies, we could interpret this as love in the sense of Ahmed in that "love becomes a way of bonding with others in relation to an ideal, which takes shape as an effect of such bonding" (Ahmed, 2014, p. 124). As much as this ideal can be uniting, however, we have seen that love can also become exclusive when it fails to acknowledge the need to protect marginalised groups and in its defence of social majority groups, reproduces gendered, classed, and ethnicised socioeconomic hierarchies. This is also because love is often connected to a "process of idealisation, which elevates some subjects over others" (Ahmed, 2014, p. 131).

³⁰⁹ User references to the issue and profile picture frames, however persisted and thereby raise questions about differing emotional regimes between article authors, media agents, and users.

³¹⁰ Ainsi, ajoute le président du collectif, nous réaffirmons notre soutien indéfectible au peuple dans sa lutte pour l'édification d'un état indépendant et souverain sur son sol national avec Jérusalem comme capitale indivisible et éternelle. [Mohamed Kimbiri in Fofana, 14.12.2017]

³¹¹ Ils n'ont qu'à se tuer entre eux c'est leurs problèmes. [Comment in reaction to the Facebook post featuring Fofana, 14.12.2017]

Hope for (Only) Decolonial Malian and African Futures

Lastly, the emotion that is most directed at transforming Malian and African transnational relations is hope, i.e. an expression of hope for challenging African postcolonial dependencies and for creating emancipated, decolonial African futures. Ahmed postulates a necessity for political action from such hope, which supports the argument that transforming emotions contribute to political mobilisation in a sense that goes beyond the construction of political identities:

My own relationship to feminism has always been imbued with hope, a hope that things can be different, and that the world can take different forms. Politics without hope is impossible, and hope without politics is a reification of possibility (and becomes merely religious). Indeed, it is hope that makes involvement in direct forms of political activism enjoyable: the sense that 'gathering together' is about opening up the world, claiming space through 'affective bonds' (Roseneil 1995: 99). Hope is crucial to the act of protest: hope is what allows us to feel that what angers us is not inevitable, even if transformation can sometimes feel impossible. (...) But hope is not simply about the possibilities of the future implicit in the failure of repetition (...). The moment of hope is when the 'not yet' impresses upon us in the present, such that we must act, politically, to make it our future. (Ahmed, 2014, p. 184)

This outline of Ahmed's understanding of *feminist* hope emphasises how feminist and decolonial thoughts can mutually enrich each other by combining their forces and approaches. As we will see, however, the feminist position in this discourse on decolonial hope remains rather marginal. In the analysed material, article authors and users articulate hope for political change and/or an end to the conflict in Mali as well as an African renaissance through emancipation from postcolonial dependencies. However, these different hopes are also connected with different, mostly elite and male, social actors and actor groups.

In relation to Malian political change, hope is mostly expressed in relation to Moussa Mara as potential new president of Mali, a hope that is based on Mara's recent political successes as well as on Macron's success as a young politician who is seen as having set an example.

If for the moment, it's about the District of Bamako, the alternation is also discussed at the head of the State. And the president of YELEMA (Change [in Bambara, S.H.]) embodies this political reconfiguration with the cases of the youth. Emmanuel Macron is two years younger than him and it's he who just took over the power in one of the biggest economic and diplomatic powers of the world. [Keita, I., 11.05.2017]³¹²

³¹² Si pour l'heure, il est question du District de Bamako, l'alternance est aussi évoquée au sommet de l'Etat. Et le président de YELEMA (Changement) incarne cette recomposition politique avec les jeunes aux affaires.

Whereas Macron, in this case, is still an object of emotion that hope is attributed to, he rather becomes a social actor that hope seeks to overcome in the debate on the political conflict around Malian unity. In this context, article authors and users articulate hope for (a) a reunification of Malian society through the peace process that began with the CEN and that was defended by the oppositional politician Sy Kadiatou Sow (RFI, 24.05.2017), and for (b) more sovereignty of the Malian state in its military provision of security. In that regard, users attach hope for another Malian (military) future to the *Mali Ko Yere Ko* protesters as actors who are engaged in this future.

My compatriots in the United States may God bless you for your actions oh how noble, patriotic and worthy Without the option that you defend, the future of Mali will be very insecure. Endless thanks. [Comment in reaction to the Facebook post featuring Coulibaly, Diocolo, 04.05.2017]³¹³

In addition to these more Mali-related hopes, article authors and users, furthermore, express hope for an African renaissance and emancipation. Whereas several actors appear in this context, in the analysed material most prominently the Beninese-French activist Kemi Seba, this hope is often connected to Pan-Africanism and, more specifically, the African youth.

We need to breathe a new breath in this Africa that has bled so much. The solution is in the hands of the African youth and she needs to take her destiny into her hands. [Kemi Seba Diallo, 18.07.2017]³¹⁴

The youth needs to take over to save our mother Africa [Comment in reaction to the Tweet featuring Diallo, 18.07.2017]³¹⁵

This hope for the Pan-African youth produces a mobilising moment – as do the hopes connected to national political opposition and diasporic civil society – but at the same time, this mobilisation for transforming transnational relations is also imbued with hindrances and internal contradictions. On the one hand, whereas Ahmed observes the formation of a collective "we" that is formed through a common attachment to hope (Ahmed, 2014, p. 188), she also voices concern about notions of hope that neglect the conditions of their realisation: "Being hopeful may be necessary or something to stay possible, but it is not sufficient

Emmanuel Macron a moins de deux ans que lui et c'est lui qui vient de prendre les rênes de l'une des plus grandes puissances économiques et diplomatiques du monde. [Keita, I., 11.05.2017]

³¹³ Mes compatriotes des États-Unis que dieu vous bénisse pour vos actions oh combien nobles , patriotiques et dignes Sans l'option que vous defender , l'avenir du mali sera très incertain . Merci infini . [Comment in reaction to the Facebook post featuring Coulibaly, Diocolo, 04.05.2017]

³¹⁴ Il faut insuffler un nouveau souffle en cette Afrique qui a tant saigné. La solution est entre les mains de la jeunesse africaine et elle doit rendre sa destinée en main. [Kemi Seba Diallo, 18.07.2017]

³¹⁵ La jeunesse doit prendre la relève pour sauver notre mère afrique [Comment in reaction to the Tweet featuring Diallo, 18.07.2017]

grounds for the determination of the future" (Ahmed, 2014, p. 185). This is especially true for the African youth who have important potential for political mobilisation but who are also constrained by socioeconomic and political uncertainties (see Section 2.2.3).

On the other hand, Ahmed also highlights that "the 'we' of feminism is shaped by some bodies more than others" (Ahmed, 2014, p. 189). Following this line of thought, decolonial hope also seems to be attached more to some – strong, young, charismatic, masculine – leaders than to other parts of the Malian and African societies. In addition, although the nomination "mother Africa" could be a sign of respect in the context of the gerontocratic Malian society (see Section 2.2.3), these constellations still create a hierarchical relation between masculinised leaders and a feminised body of the Malian nation/African continent that need to be protected from external and internal penetrations, thereby reproducing (post)colonial differentiations between male and female, active and passive political subject positions.

Together, these considerations of anger, love, and hope – also mentioned by Sara Ahmed as three feminist attachments – have shown that these emotions have a mobilising potential toward transforming transnational and especially postcolonial relations. However, they equally unveiled that this transformation is often based on or in silent complicity with forms of (post)colonial gendered and ethnicised governance of selves and others within Malian and African societies.

In summary, this subchapter has illustrated how mobilising emotions through narrative constructions of political identities interrelate in multiple ways with gendered and postcolonial governmentality. First, consolidating emotions work within a security regime in order to consolidate the postcolonial status quo. They do so by governing others in a context of multiple threats through masculinised self-righteousness of and sympathy for ruling elites, on the one hand, and through (feminised) gratitude and shame on the side of marginalised groups, on the other hand. Secondly, we have seen that fear, disgust, and hate work as sticky emotions that criticise the postcolonial status quo but, *inter alia* due to violence-related constructions of political masculinities, stay rooted in this status quo instead of mobilising for decolonial futures. The latter are most likely achieved by the third set of emotions we explored, i.e. the transformative emotions anger, love, and hope that, as outlined above, use negative experiences as a motivation for claiming and building better futures. Although these emotions show a decolonial potential, I also suggest that this potential is still undermined by

(post)colonial gendered (and ethnicised) hierarchies that limit the resistant potential within relations of gendered and postcolonial governmentality.

7.6 When the Curtain is Closing ... Relations between Online Discourses and Offline Socio-Political Relations behind the Virtual Scenes

After having outlined these discursive dimensions of postcolonial and gendered governmentality through online news articles and comments, this inevitably begs the question ... so what? Which effects do these subjectifications have in "real life?" How can they actually contribute to effective forms of political mobilisation? And how does this relate to formal politics? Although these questions about the physically materialised socio-political effects of circulating online news discourses was not the central concern of this work, I want to still provide some possible answers to these questions by giving the word back to my interview partners. Because during our conversations, they also shared their own experiences and hopes about the effects of their and others' online engagement on broader social power relations. In doing so, my interview partners outlined a diverse range of possible relations between the online and the offline, two spheres that have become increasingly entangled over the past several years (for more such entanglements in African societies, see e.g. Cole, 2017; Vergès, 2017).

Building on the idea of circulating narratives as mobilising emotions, for instance, users also articulate how such emotions that emerge in mundane situations of news consumption could translate into socio-political action and change.³¹⁶ This is reminiscent of Birgit Sauer's notion of affective political mobilisation through which she argues that the increasing reach of affects into every part of everyday lives can lead to a "biopolitics from below" that sees affects and the related experiences of one's own and others' vulnerabilities as starting points for political action beyond the formal political space (Sauer, 2016, p. 157f, translation from German, S.H.). In this line of thought, one user, for instance, describes how the information she had received through social media fuelled her motivation for becoming politically active.

Despite all this [Gabonese government troops letting corpses of assassinated protestors disappear, S.H.], one could (...) see the pictures, you will see them on, euh, on Google, you, if you want to, I will send them to you, so, (...) they had killed. (The mothers). They lost all their children, if you only had two who went to the festivities, they never came back. (...) And it's like this

³¹⁶ However, one user also points to the danger of online media propaganda as spreading hate: "Social media that are not controlled can inflame relations between nations through hateful propaganda." [Email conversation with Arouna Togola, retired male headmaster in his 60s, located in a small town in the South of Bamako]

that I have entered, the street, into the fight. [Phone interview with Aurore Eyoémana, female entrepreneur and political activist in her twenties in Malta]³¹⁷

In that regard, narratives that circulate through social media become objects of emotion that lead to a further affective drawing together or solidarity that, however, does not stay purely as a feeling of solidarity but also translates into (online) forms of activism.

For another user, his online engagement is a way of opening such opportunities for shared experiences of vulnerability to more privileged actors. By circulating his suffering to these actors, he thus hopes to provoke solidarities through shared knowledge and feelings and thereby projects potential political action as a desired future.

(...) for example, when it wasn't for social media, we would not have the means to express the things we suffer from here (...) There are sincere and honest European citizens who want sincere international relations but who do not know what their governments do here so social media allow us to inform these honest citizens [WhatsApp message from Victoire Sanogo, male teacher of over 50 years old in Bamako]³¹⁸

In addition to Sauer's notion of biopolitics from below, this is further reminiscent of Fraser's claim of making private issues political through (counter-)public engagement that leads to an "inclusion, of interests and issues that bourgeois masculinist ideology labels 'private' and treats as inadmissible" (Fraser, 1995, p. 295). As we have seen, in the context of postcolonial Malian and African transnational relations, this exclusion of concern works on the national and international political level as well as on the social level. In this line of thought, one user further articulates the value of online news media for making the suffering of subaltern groups public, a suffering that had previously been silenced by those in power.

For me, in all this, what makes me a little afraid because, in Africa, particularly, especially in Mali, euh, there is, the corruption has made that, the corruption has made that the population is not aware of anything, because they always manage, be it by giving money to authorities, for making the issue disappear, be it by trying to intimidate the victims. So now, thanks to Overture Média [Bamako based communication agency, S.H.], there are many things that begin to improve. Walla. (...) There are many things that make that the people who cannot cope, even if they try to, even when they have a victim in their family, and someone manages to give them some banknotes, they will be silent. But there are always people of good will who denounce

³¹⁷ Malgré tout, on a pu (...) voir des photos, vous irais les voir sur euh, sur Google, vous, si vous voulez, je vous enverrai, alors, (...) on a tué. (Des mamans). Ils perdaient tous leurs enfants, si tu n'avais que deux qui sont parti à la fête, ils sont jamais revenus. (...) Et c'est comme ça que je suis rentrée, dans la rue, dans la lutte. [Phone interview with Aurore Eyoémana, female entrepreneur and political activist in her twenties in Malta]

³¹⁸ (...) par exemple si c'est pas grâce à ces réseaux on n'avait pas de moyen pour exprimer ceux dont nous souffrons ici (...) Il y a des citoyens européens sincères honnêtes qui veulent des relations internationales sincères mais qui ignorent ce que leurs gouvernants font ici donc les réseaux nous permettent d'informer ces citoyens honnêtes [WhatsApp message from Victoire Sanogo, male teacher of over 50 years old in Bamako]

these issues. Walla. Not only do these poor people not manage to eat three times a day, so if something happens to them and they give them a little money, they stay silent. They don't complain. So there are always the people at their side who say no, this is not working like that! Walla. [WhatsApp voice message from Bintou Maiga, female employee in her fifties in Paris]³¹⁹

This user thus experiences the distribution of online news as working in a formal public sphere way of controlling political and social elites. However, it does so by mobilising narratives for subaltern groups that do not have the necessary resources and positionalities to do so themselves. This idea, then, reminds us that mobilising narratives do not only or even primarily have to bridge the gap between online and offline engagement. Rather, as we repeatedly saw in this work, those who seek to mobilise (through) narratives for socio-political transformation have to find ways for including the voices and interests of those who are most marginalised by the status quo.

Once again, this emphasises the need for a collective mobilising of and through narratives that bridges digital divides and connects groups that are marginalised through diverse postcolonial, gendered, and classed hierarchisations. As Nathalie M'Dela-Mounier (in Traoré & M'Dela-Mounier, 2012, p. 60) hopefully exclaims when reflecting on the possibilities for more social justice for women and men in the Global South: "And as long as we are together, nothing will stop us." But if not ... On that note, I want to close these brief reflections on entanglements between the online and the offline by voicing my concern about the fact that – for the aforementioned mobilisations to become truly transforming – they need to overcome not only postcolonial and political inequalities, but also their gendered, classed, and ethnified companions.

³¹⁹ Moi, dans tout ça, ce qui me fait un peu peur parce que, en Afrique, surtout, en particulier le Mali, euh, il y a, la corruption a fait que, la corruption a fait que la population n'est au courant de rien, parce que on arrive toujours à, soit à donner de l'argent aux autorités, pour étouffer l'affaire, soit ils essaient d'intimider les victimes quoi. Donc maintenant, grâce à Ouverture Média, il y a beaucoup des choses qui commencent à s'améliorer quoi. Walla. (...) Il y a beaucoup des choses qui font que, les gens qui n'arrivent pas à s'en sortir, même si on essaie de, même si ils ont un victime dans leur famille, et qu'on [récu] à leur donner quelques billets, ils vont garder le silence quoi. Mais il y a toujours des gens de bonne volonté qui dénonce toutes ces choses là quoi. Walla. Non seulement ces pauvres, ils arrivent pas à manger trois fois par jour, donc si quelque chose leur arrive, et qu'on leur donne un peu d'argent, ils gardent le silence quoi. Ils se plaignent pas. Donc, il y a toujours des gens à côté qui disent non, que ça se passe pas comme ça! Walla. [WhatsApp voice message from Bintou Maiga, female employee in her fifties in Paris]

8 Conclusion: Mobilising Narratives in a Digital Postcolonial Setting

Decolonial feminists study the way in which the complex of racism/ sexism/ ethnocentrism pervades all relations of domination, even when the regimes associated with these phenomena have disappeared.
(Vergès, 2021, p. 15)

At the beginning of this thesis, I set out to explore how the circulation of online news could lead to political mobilisation in a postcolonial context. Using the example of mobilising narratives in and through Malian-diasporic online news, I approached this question from two angles: First, I asked how narratives are mobilised in the Malian-diasporic online news environment, i.e. which actors put which resources into motion for making certain narratives circulate between certain actors and online platforms. Secondly, I explored mobilising narratives in their discursive dimension, asking which topics and identity constructions their circulations mobilise and how they mobilise through the emergence of emotions inherent in said discursive fragments. In addition, I asked about strategic moments in these mobilisations that would lead to consolidating or transforming intersectional power relations, with a focus on their embeddedness in gendered and postcolonial governmentality.

In answer to these research questions, I found that gendered and postcolonial power relations are at work on diverse levels of mobilising narratives. First, the gendered and postcolonial governmentality in, of, and through Malian-diasporic online news materialises in the access to online communication that encompasses the distribution of online communication infrastructure, its socioeconomic implications in terms of digital divides, and national as well as international socio-political influences on the access to and use of online communication (Subchapter 6.1). Secondly, I demonstrated that mobilisations through neoliberal governmentality function on the level of the digital platform interfaces of the Maliweb website, Facebook, and Twitter as differentially situated institutional actors that affectively govern the access to these specific platforms and the interactions on them. In addition, I showed that this platform governance works in relation to compliant or resistant user (inter)actions that are embedded in their own (gendered and postcolonial) hierarchies (Subchapter 6.2). Third, we have seen how mobilising narratives are embedded in gendered and postcolonial power

relations that materialise through affective labour in the social positions of and interactions among users and journalists (Subchapter 7.1). Fourth, the delineation of the discourse on Malian and African relations as well as its materialisation through diverse online (news) genres unveils gendered and postcolonial inclusions and exclusions from political discourses on the level of article authors and the (online) news sector (Subchapters 7.2 and 7.3). Fifth, on the level of articles and comments, the narrative and performative constructions of gendered and postcolonial subjectifications illustrate the intersectional complexities in consolidating and transforming identity constructions of Malian, (Pan-)Africa, French, and further (inter)national social actor groups (Subchapter 7.4). And sixth, we encountered emotions that (were) mobilised (through) these political identity constructions as an element in gendered and postcolonial governmentality that could confirm or disconfirm existing power inequalities (Subchapter 7.5).

The crosscutting emergence of intersectional power relations throughout these different levels of mobilisation that structure the present thesis connect, overlap, and inform, but sometimes also contrast and undermine each other. This becomes especially visible when I showed that the mobilisation in mobilising narratives may materialise as an instrument for governing by the state, (digital) corporations, or dominant social groups, but equally as an instrument for resisting against the governance by these entities, a notion of mobilisation that, for instance, Siméant has described in the context of forms of mobilisation and protest in Bamako (Siméant, 2013, p. 138). On the discourse level, for instance, we have seen that the circulation of Malian-diasporic online news through Maliweb, on the one hand, reproduces a consolidating discourse on Malian transnational relations and national politics. While this discourse is rather marginal, at least in the analysed discourse fragment, the same circulation has also enabled the emergence of a more dominant discourse that aims at the transformation of the enduring political power relations. On the context level, this thesis, however, also accounts for the specificities of the digital environment of mobilising narratives. For instance, the engagement with platforms through affordances has shown that mobilising narratives in a digital environment operate on diverse levels, based on the entanglement of social actors, legal regulations, and technological features. In addition, this points to the complexities in the notion of mobilisation: On the one hand, narratives can be used by users to mobilise (inter)national socio-political critique. On the other hand, user interactions can contribute to the mobilisation of monetisable content that reproduces or performs gendered postcolonial structures as entangled with neoliberal governmentality on the platform level, serving a "digital economy that is racialized, capitalist, environmentally destructive and gendered" (Vergès, 2017, p. 45).

In addition, I have shown that both consolidating and transforming mobilisations in the context of postcolonial governmentality, i.e. technologies of rule and self-governance as well as resistant practices, often build on gendered hierarchies, intersecting with sexualised, classed, ethnicised, and location-bound forms of marginalisation. On the one hand, we saw how these intersectional power relations often build on and feed back into postcolonial forms of domination (as argued, for instance, by R. Connell, 2016; Enloe, 1990; hooks, 2015; Lugones, 2010; Tamale, 2020), be it on the level of access to online communication, online interactions, or (political) identity constructions. On the other hand, this intersectional perspective also shows how – in a sense of situated intersectionality that "should be applied to all people and not just to marginalised and racialised women" (Yuval-Davis, 2015, p. 93) – moments in which power relations unfold often combine seemingly contradictory positionalities. In that sense, for instance, when users join nationalist subjectifications with diasporic positionings, female social locations with sexually denigrating articulations, or secular profile information with references to God as intervening power, we can see that intersectional power relations work in a very context-specific way that also leads to intersections of marginalised and privileged positionalities.

In that vein, the present thesis unveils the workings of intersectionality on diverse levels. On an analytical level, it shows how certain groups are marginalised through intersecting and mutually constitutive power relations on multiple levels. On an activist level, I have outlined that intersectionality scholars also seek to use this perspective to challenge existing power relations. In this sense, this thesis emphasises the necessity for thinking intersectionally when mobilising narratives, arguing that even when marginalised groups stress one form of marginalisation, they should still be aware of its entanglement with other forms or avoid to even induce further marginalisation in the process. In that regard, I follow Avtar Brah's considerations of the politics of primacy in which she argues that which differentiation "we prioritise in a specific context is contingent, but whatever has been prioritised, be it gender, racism or class, it cannot be understood as if it were an autonomous category" (Brah, 1996, p. 246). As we have seen, this dilemma poses important challenges for mobilising narratives within intersectional relations of governmentality.

8.1 Reflections on the Research Process

In contrast to these – admittedly complex – presentations of answers to pre-established questions, the acquainted reader will already have suspected that the process of getting there was not as smooth as this presentation, aiming for coherence, suggests. Throughout the research process, this manifested in quarrels about theoretical and methodological approaches that cannot be solved (anymore) but on which I still want to reflect in light of the results outlined above.

8.1.1 South, West, North, East – Locating Research in Academic Power Relations

In order to answer the research questions of this thesis, I theorised processes of political mobilisation through the idea of mobilising narratives that connects the notion of narratives to the social workings of diverse im/mobilities and intersectional power relations, especially along the lines of postcoloniality and gender, but also including further categorisations like location, class, sexuality, ethnicity, or age. As a way of capturing this relation between mobilisation and power relations, i.e. the strategic moments in making and becoming mobile, I looked at mobilising narratives through the lens of governmentality, seeing the socio-geographic and cultural mobilising of and through narratives as techniques of governing others and the self, but also as potential for resistance to such techniques. To further concretise these phenomena, I conceptualised mobilising narratives as taking place in a digital, postcolonial, and affective public sphere. Considering that such a public sphere perspective poses questions about the access to, deliberation through, and effects of media discourses, I employed the Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) that allows for connecting the workings of discourses to multiple context levels.

Whereas the theoretical approaches of this work thus circle around questions of power/knowledge in a gendered and postcolonial context, my selection of these – often Western/Global Northern – approaches in several ways also reproduces the dominance of Eurocentric knowledge production (as does my own positioning as a Western researcher). However, in other ways, the combination of theoretical approaches from *white* (often male) scholars in Western institutions, of Black (feminist) scholars in Western institutions, and of Black (feminist) scholars in Southern institutions also had its value for this thesis. First, it allowed me to destabilise Eurocentric theories by confronting them with different contexts. In that regard, my theoretical framework integrated the transforming work on the content level of this

dissertation into the theoretical level. Secondly, this combination also acknowledged the entanglement of Eurocentric discourses and contexts with Southern discourses and contexts, looking at consolidating and transforming power relations on diverse levels of mobilising narratives in digital postcolonial settings through theoretical lenses from both "sides." Thirdly, however, this combination in some ways also reflects my own positioning and academic socialisation in this research process. In that sense, it mirrors my own "journey" from a postcolonial, critical discourse, and mobility studies perspective that only at a later point came to include theories of governmentality, intersectionality, and affect as connecting dots. They allowed me to give names to phenomena I have been observing in my research and that I felt were central to the questions of mobilising narratives in a postcolonial context, but that I could not explain sufficiently with the (theoretical) language I had prior to this endeavour.

In addition to combining theoretical perspectives from the Global South and the Global North, however, I also combined perspectives from different disciplines and fields of studies in this thesis, including approaches from political science, media and communication studies, and mobility studies. Although I still want to show the value this interdisciplinary approach had for my work and understanding of mobilising narratives in the last part of this conclusion, I want to acknowledge at this point that looking at my research objects through this combination of lenses and levels sometimes was to the detriment of theoretical and methodological depth in this work.

8.1.2 Back into the Armchair? Immobile Online Research between Limitations and Possibilities

In methodological terms, this thesis combined the analytical framework of the DHA with an online ethnographic approach to data collection. In line with the results and theoretical approaches outlined above, the DHA proved very useful in defining and analysing diverse levels for the workings of gendered and postcolonial governmentality through mobilising narratives, especially due to its definition of context levels, but also through its analytical steps of analysing genres, topics, and strategies in discourses.

As already mentioned by Reisigl and Wodak (2016, p. 34), however, this comprehensive approach of the DHA fits best for research teams in large-scale projects and thus presents challenges for single researchers. This was further complicated by my research field that – building on translocal and transnational media interactions and environments – encompassed a wide range of local and national contexts and actors. I dealt with these difficulties mainly by

downsizing the material used for the different analytical steps. On the context level, I mainly focused on the Malian context, alluding to Malian-diasporic and further international influences where possible. In some instances, like the in-depth assessment of the access to online communication, however, this limited the focus to one, albeit central, part of the research field. On the discourse level, I downsized the material with increasing depth of analysis (for more, see Section 5.4.3 and introduction to Subchapter 5.5). In that vein, some connections like those between overall topics and in-depth strategies and their related actors could not be explored simultaneously. However, this selection allowed me to still capture diverse levels on which mobilising narratives unfold. What I seek to mention in terms of representative assumptions, however, is that I cannot claim to represent *the* discourse on Malian transnational relations in this thesis, but show in a concise way through which diverse dimensions this discourse can lead to forms of mobilisation in relation to gendered and postcolonial governmentality.

Moreover, I drew from online ethnographic approaches (see introduction of Subchapter 5.4) in order to collect diverse data for the diverse levels of (the DHA and) mobilising narratives. In deciding on an online ethnographic approach, I at times struggled with the fast development of this upcoming methodological field, be it with the (re-emerging) focus on non-media-centric online ethnography (see e.g. Hine, 2017; Miller et al., 2016; Pink et al., 2016), or be it with ethical requirements that developed, for instance, in relation to data protection. Despite my (in this sense) "outdated" media-centric online ethnography, however, I still argue that this approach provided interesting insights on the specific question at work in this thesis, i.e. the mobilising narratives in the context of one discursive practice and discourse fragment among many in Malian-diasporic users' lives.

Another issue that emerged with regard to my theoretical approach and which is connected to the preponderance of non-media centric online ethnography is the question concerning the physical immobility of my own person in this research on multiple im/mobilities. This also raises questions in relation to the – meanwhile contested – idea of the "armchair anthropologist" (Sera-Shriar, 2014, p. 28), i.e. the practice of 19th century ethnographers who based their research solely on the accounts of others without leaving their desk, a practice the famous Bronislaw Malinowski is said to have reversed by actually doing field research in far-away places. Is media-centric online ethnography a movement back into the armchair then, especially when it is even combined with mediated interviews as in my case? At first sight, it is, considering that I did not have to leave my desk for data collection and lacked the actual embodied experiences of my research partners' physical environments. The notion that this

form of research lacked "actual fieldwork" was still reinforced by my own past experiences of doing translocal and transnational field research that had shown me the value of corporeal and contextualised experiences (see e.g. Hasenöhl, 2016, p. 15.20) and that contrasted with my frequent feelings of being disconnected in the present project.

At a second glance, however, I would like to argue that this physically immobile approach provided unique insights into my research questions on opportunities for political mobilisation through online news for five reasons. First, online research made it possible in the first place to perform a (doctoral) research project on Malian-diasporic online news and Malian transnational relations and thereby contribute to keeping this urgent topic at the centre of (my) academic attention. Considering that I had planned to interact with Malian-diasporic actors who were located in diverse geographic locations that would encompass diverse countries and continents, it would not have been possible to engage in on-site ethnographic fieldwork in such diverse locations for practical reasons alone – including time, money, and, finally, a pandemic. Secondly, considering that Mali was the primary focus of this project, it would have been difficult to effectively plan an on-site research project due to security-related reasons, including travel restrictions because of terrorist threats or the political tensions more generally. Thirdly, and most importantly, I experienced deep and meaningful relations through my long-term observations and especially through the interactions with research participants. And although these interactions manifested in very diverse depths (see Section 5.4.4), some of them still allowed me to experience moments of (imagined) co-presence and meaningful social relations. Fourth, to some extent my not being in place enabled me to experience not the being there, but rather the *not being there*, allowing me to reflect on the possibilities and limitations of consuming online news in diasporic and translocal situations while at the same time drawing from my own past experiences in some of the locations from which news circulated and where journalists and users were located. And lastly, applying questions of mobility justice (see Sheller, 2018) to the research process, doing online research in transnational research settings can also be a future-oriented practice, as it speaks to urgent questions of climate change and academic mobility regimes that reproduce unequal access to movement – of *white* privileged researchers from the Global North that travel around the world to do research in the Global South – that has started to unsettle the academic community.

By pointing to the values of online-only ethnography, I, however, do not aim to argue for replacing ethnographic field research with it, but for complementing diverse research practices, and for collaborating when research questions allow for it in order to continue doing

research in a world that cannot continue being ever more mobile only for researchers from the Global North.

8.2 Contributions...

In contrast to the preceding pages that outlined results of this thesis and my reflections on the research process, the following will turn our attention outwards. I would like to use this opportunity to speak to some of the literature bodies, theoretical work, and research problems that have informed this work and suggest what this thesis could offer to them in return.

8.2.1 ... to the Literature on Digital Colonialism and Intersectionality in African Online Media

In Chapter 3, I outlined central arguments in the literature that connect digital media with African postcolonial relations, gender relations, and mobilities as a way of explicating processes of mobilisation. The present thesis contributes to these bodies of research by emphasising the need to combine their perspectives, as I have shown that an approach to digital mobilisation in a transnational African setting needs to account for connections of digital media and multiple levels of postcolonialism as well as for the connections of postcolonial relations with national political and intersectional social relations.

More specifically, this thesis seeks a dialogue with the multi-level and intersectional work that is currently emerging in research about digital colonialism in Africa by explicating the workings of mobilities and power in digital political mobilisation. I approached this endeavour through a theoretical perspective that uses the theory of governmentality as a way of uncovering the workings of consolidating and transforming forms of mobilisation on their diverse levels. This work has shown that even such a concise phenomenon like online news is embedded in diverse facets of digital colonialism that work on the levels of infrastructures, platform governance, discursive identifications, and emotional regimes. Furthermore, my approach has shown that on all these levels, forms of governance and resistance to it can be found and thereby help to evaluate research on instances of digital colonialism by situating it in its broader context. In that vein, this thesis has also identified different opportunities for governance and resistance on the different levels of mobilising narratives, as, for instance, users have more power over the political identities they construct than over the circulation of their discursive contributions through social networking sites. This thesis thus adds to the

body of literature that evaluates the postcolonial implications of narratives that circulate and transform through Southern online media (see e.g. Braun, 2015; Serwornoo, 2018) by outlining the different facets of mobilisation and the diverse levels on which postcolonial relations influence them.

In addition, I contributed an intersectional perspective that emphasises the value of combining the literature on digital colonialism (see e.g. Kwet, 2019) with research on gendered and sexualised power inequalities (see e.g. Iwilade, 2015; Strand, 2019) and national politics (see e.g. de Bruijn, 2017; Omanga, 2019) that unfold in and through online media in African contexts. Bringing these diverse negotiations of power relations together can be beneficial to all of these research bodies, as this thesis has shown how postcolonial, gendered, and national political relations intersect and mutually constitute each other. In doing so, these insights can be of further value for literature that explores possibilities for decolonisation in the digital era (see e.g. in Arora, 2019; Kwet, 2019; M. Mann & Daly, 2019), because it points out how attempts at decolonisation can be undermined by further intersectional power relations and their related (discursive) exclusions.

8.2.2 ... to Theories: Governmentality, Intersectionality, and Mobility Studies in Political Science

By theorising online political mobilisation in a West African or Malian-diasporic context, this work did not seek to apply Western theories of political mobilisation but rather to create a space for thinking about mobilisation as political from an intersectional governmentality perspective. Being aware of the ambiguities in the combination of Eurocentric and Southern approaches in this work (see Section 8.1.1 above), I identified three theoretical contributions of this thesis, i.e. its contributing to connections of the DHA and Foucauldian macro-theorisation, to furthering intersectional and especially postcolonial political science, and to unveiling values of (critical) mobility studies in this field.

First, the present work has shown the value of combining the Habermasian idea of (media) discourse with a Foucauldian notion of power, as also suggested by KhosraviNik (2014, p. 290). The macro-theorisation of mobilising narratives, i.e. looking at the circulation of discourse fragments in a postcolonial digital public sphere through intersectional governmentality allowed me to explicate the moments of domination and resistance in more and less obvious phenomena and to illustrate into which parts of media consumers' lives governmentality by whom reaches. The micro theorisation, on the other hand, i.e. looking at the circula-

tion of discourse fragments in a postcolonial digital public sphere through a DHA conceptualisation of discourse and context, allowed me to explicate the diverse levels on which these negotiations of power unfold.

Secondly, with this thesis, I contribute to postcolonial political science in the sense of Aram Ziai (2016, pp. 25–42), who argues for postcolonial sensibilities to political phenomena as well as for systematic and empirically grounded research on postcolonial phenomena. Following this call, I, on the one hand, approached the question of online political mobilisation with a postcolonial perspective, especially through postcolonial engagements with the theory of governmentality (see Section 4.2.2) and through research on digital colonialism (see Section 3.1). On the other hand, I developed a theoretical framework for exploring the phenomenon of online mobilisation in a postcolonial setting that explicated the diverse levels of mobilisation of and through narratives for the case of Malian-diasporic online news. In doing so, this thesis also seeks to add to the research that combines this focus on digital colonialism with a gender-sensitive perspective. In that vein, I also followed Heike Mauer and Johanna Leinius who suggest using intersectional and postcolonial perspectives in order to develop "critical feminist perspectives on power and politics" (Mauer & Leinius, 2021, p. 16, translation from German, S.H.). I did so by emphasising the diverse entry points for gendered hierarchies in mobilising narratives, especially in intersection with postcolonial relations. Moreover, although different levels of mobilising narratives showed a preponderance of different parts of intersectional governmentality throughout the thesis, i.e. the dominance of gendered, postcolonial, or neoliberal governmentality, this feminist-intersectional perspective has still shown the importance of being alert to the co-constitutive functioning of these power relations.

And thirdly, this thesis contributes to research that aims at interdisciplinary exchange between political science and mobility studies. On the content level, we saw that critical – in the sense of controversial and socially constitutive – im/mobilities can be important phenomena for identifying urgencies in the sense of governmentality. Throughout our exploration of the discourse on Malian transnational relations, the emergence of subjectifications, political identities, and mobilising emotions in reaction to mobile persons, objects, and ideas, have shown that these objects move, raise contestations, and contribute to the explicit construction of subject positions. On the analytical level, my approach also contributed to mobilising theoretical ideas on online political mobilisation by making mobilities explicit in the process of Malian-diasporic online news and defamiliarising ready-made assumptions. These different facets of socio-geographic, cultural, and emotional mobilisation that I accessed through lenses

such as regimes of mobility and im/mobilities can show how im/mobilities in their geographic, symbolic, and political sense (as suggested by Sheller, 2014, p. 791) can connect and explicate (connections between) different dimensions of postcolonial and gendered governmentality.

But the theorisation of mobilisation I introduced through the governmentality perspective in this work can also contribute to research in mobility studies that seeks to explore in more depth the complex entanglements of mobility and immobility with consolidating and transforming power relations such as, for instance, in research on the role of governance and resistance through digital media in racialised and gendered mobility regimes. Because also in the context of postcolonial digital publics, we have seen that the trend towards becoming ever more mobile is not a natural effect that benefits society as a whole, but is a process driven by certain actors who make resources mobile with certain interests and with certain effects – that may either reproduce intersectional power relations or contest them. In that regard, I also want to underline with this thesis that work from political sciences can provide important concepts and insights for theorising intersectional endeavours in mobility studies.

8.2.3 to the Problem of Decolonial Feminist Mobilisation in Online Environments

These findings could be of interest to academics and activists who are engaged in the field of postcolonial relations since they speak to two socio-political problems: the implications of (post)colonial relations for African post-colonial states, and the possibilities for decolonial mobilisation through online media.

At the beginning of this thesis, I outlined how ambivalent attitudes towards the former colonial power France persisted in Malian society and further explored such persistencies through the articulation of online discourses and the negotiations of their contextual factors. Especially in light of the recent coup d'état in Mali, this thesis provides further insights on how such ambivalences also reach into the relations between states and their citizens in postcolonial situations, as already mentioned in Peter Ekeh's (1975, p. 111) emphasis on (post)colonial persistencies in post-colonial African politics. If postcolonial relations – as in the extreme case of military interventions in Mali – are among the points that a government is judged by and which undermine its legitimacy (see e.g. M. Sylla, 2019), how can (new) post-colonial governments sustain themselves if those postcolonial relations and interdependencies are seen as remaining in place? By unveiling these difficulties, the present work offers

arguments for different post-colonial relations between the Malian and French states as well as between other national and supra-national entities from the Global North.

The second problem this thesis speaks to is the question of decolonial emancipation through online media. Initially building on hopes for marginal voices that could mobilise their narratives through online media – as indicated on a national level by, for instance, Adebani (2004, p. 779) for the printed press in Nigeria – this thesis has shown multiple possibilities but also limitations in doing so in the online realm. As Mutsvairo and Ragnedda (2019b) argue:

Africans should thus realize that the availability of digital technologies will only benefit them if and when they accept that these digital technologies are not meant for them. It was technology in the first place that was used in colonizing Africa. If they want to use them, they need to fight against digital colonialism." (p. 359)

To those who seek to explore online media as potential means for decolonial activism, this work, on the one hand, identified diverse levels on which power relations in the context of online media are negotiated, thereby opening new fields for decolonial activist engagement. On the other hand, this thesis provided insights on the importance of addressing intersectional forms of discrimination that feed back into and reproduce (post)colonial power relations, thereby providing additional justifications for intersectional, and especially feminist, decolonial activism.

In line with these considerations, further research could address how broader emerging phenomena of Malian-diasporic online communication – for instance, the establishment of the African social networking site *Kingui Social* that was launched by young Malian innovators in December 2020 (Bulonza, 2021) or an emerging network of feminist and environmentalist (West) African Twitter users I encountered during my observations – relate to the intersectional forms of mobilisation and relations between citizens and their states as I outlined here for Malian-diasporic online news. Above all, however, further research might be conducted to explore the functioning of dedicated feminist *and* decolonial attempts at political mobilisation in online environments. And – as the combination of academia and activism in this final section suggests – researchers could do so in collaboration with activists. In this line of thought, I would like to quote Sylvia Tamale in her *Epilogue: Decolonizing Africa in the Age of Big Data*, wherein she focuses on feminist decolonisation in relation to digital colonialism, while arguing that her thoughts can be indicative for broader questions of political mobilisation in postcolonial digital environments as well:

The best visionaries are non-academics. They need to be brought on board for envisioning alternatives to the algorithmic order and totality. Africa sits at the tip of the geopolitical margins, which means that its worldview is like no other; marginalized groups within Africa such as women should provide useful insights about the affected landscape. How can we form and shape Afro-feminist alternatives to the Amazons and Facebooks of this era? How can data collection be utilized in more positive ways that enhance social justice and transformation? (Tama-le, 2020, p. 394)

I hope this thesis can inspire such forms of cooperation between feminist and decolonial research and activism by offering some analyses of, starting points from, and justifications through *mobilising narratives* in a Malian-diasporic online context for further engagement that includes the voices of those who are so often excluded.

Appendix

Abstracts

Abstract English

The dissertation "*Mobilising Narratives in a Postcolonial Setting*" explores opportunities for political mobilisation through the circulation of online news in a Malian-diasporic context. It departs from the postcolonial contestations and the increasing importance of digital media for information and communication in Malian-diasporic society. Approaching this context through the lens of mobilising narratives, it combines narratives, mobilities, and intersectional power relations. This thesis, then, investigates mobilising narratives through a theoretical framework that explicates the workings of gendered and postcolonial power relations in and through mobilising narratives by connecting Foucauldian governmentality, public sphere, and Critical Discourse Studies to intersectional approaches such as decolonial feminism.

Focussing on the circulation of news through the Malian-diasporic online news portal Mali-web and its social media accounts, this dissertation employs an online ethnographic approach that combines contextual data from official documents, observations of its digital platforms, the archiving of articles and user comments, and interviews with journalists and users. Analysing this material through the multiple levels of the Discourse-Historical Approach, this thesis highlights the complexities in the consolidating and transforming workings of mobilising narratives.

On the one hand, it sheds light on how narratives on Malian transnational relations are mobilised, as they circulate through different platforms and diverse actors interact with them and each other. On the other hand, the analysis unveils how narratives mobilise, as they contribute to a contingent discourse on Malian transnational relations, to gendered and postcolonial subjectifications through narrative and performative identity constructions, and to articulations of ambivalent emotions. The dissertation thus contributes to reflections on the merits and challenges of an intersectional mobility studies perspective that is applied throughout this work in connection with governmentality for a (re-)conceptualisation of political mobilisation in postcolonial digital contexts.

Abstract German

Die Dissertation "*Mobilising narratives in a postcolonial setting*" untersucht Möglichkeiten für politische Mobilisierung durch die Zirkulation von Online-Nachrichten in einem malisch-diasporischen Kontext. Sie geht von postkolonialen Auseinandersetzungen und der steigenden Bedeutung digitaler Medien für die Information und Kommunikation in der malisch-diasporischen Gesellschaft aus. Indem sich die Arbeit diesem Kontext über eine Perspektive auf mobilisierte/mobilisierende Narrative nähert, bringt sie Narrative, Mobilitäten und intersektionale Machtverhältnisse zusammen. Darauf aufbauend untersucht die Arbeit mobilisierte/mobilisierende Narrative mit Hilfe eines theoretischen Rahmens, der das Wirken vergeschlechtlichter und postkolonialer Machtverhältnisse in der Mobilisierung von und durch Narrative sichtbar macht. Dazu verbindet er Foucault'sche Gouvernementalität, Öffentlichkeit, und Kritische Diskursstudien mit intersektionalen Ansätzen wie einem dekolonialen Feminismus.

Diese Dissertation fokussiert auf die Zirkulation von Online-Nachrichten durch das malisch-diasporische Nachrichtenportal Maliweb und dessen Verbindung zu sozialen Medien. Sie bedient sich eines Ansatzes aus der Online-Ethnographie und verbindet Kontext-Daten aus offiziellen Dokumenten und Beobachtungen von digitalen Plattformen mit dem Archivieren von Artikeln und Kommentaren und Interviews mit Journalist*innen und Nutzer*innen. Indem die Arbeit dieses Material mit Hilfe der multiplen Ebenen des Diskurshistorischen Ansatzes analysiert, beleuchtet sie die Komplexitäten in dem bewahrenden wie transformierenden Wirken von mobilisierenden/mobilisierten Narrativen.

Einerseits zeigt die Dissertation, wie Narrative über malisch-transnationale Beziehungen mobilisiert werden, indem sie durch diverse Plattformen zirkulieren und diverse Akteur*innen mit ihnen und einander interagieren. Andererseits legt die Arbeit dar, wie Narrative mobilisieren, indem sie zu einem kontingenten Diskurs über malisch-transnationale Beziehungen beitragen, zu vergeschlechtlichten und postkolonialen Subjektivierungen durch narrative und performative Identitätskonstruktionen, und zu der Artikulation ambivalenter Emotionen. Die Dissertation leistet somit einen Beitrag zu Reflexionen über die Vorzüge und Herausforderungen einer intersektionalen Mobilitätsperspektive, die sich in Verbindung mit Gouvernementalität durch diese Arbeit zieht, um politische Mobilisierung in digitalen postkolonialen Kontexten zu (re-)konzeptualisieren.

Material

News Articles and Other Circulated Documents

The following lists shows the articles that I selected for the entry analysis (topics) in chronological order. Articles I selected for the detailed analysis (discursive strategies) are marked with *, articles I also selected for the comment analysis with **.

- ** Correspondance particulière Le Démocrate. (2017, April 5). AZAWAD : Une pure invention de la France pour s'appropriier le pétrole malien. *Le Démocrate*. <https://www.maliweb.net/la-situation-politique-et-securitaire-au-nord/azawad-pureinvention-de-france-sappropriier-petrole-malien-2161462.html>
- Sow, P. (2017, April 8). Lutte contre le terrorisme : Paris rappelle IBK, à l'ordre ! www.maliweb.net. <https://www.maliweb.net/insecurite/lutte-contre-terrorisme-paris-rappelle-ibk-alordre-2168802.html>
- Sissoko, Y. (2017, April 10). Entre Mara, Amion, Tieman, Dra, Koita, Karim, Racine et Etienne : Y a-t-il un Macron pour le changement générationnel en 2018 au Mali ? *Info@sept*. <https://www.maliweb.net/politique/entre-mara-amion-tieman-dra-koita-karim-racineetienne-y-a-t-macron-changement-generationnel-2018-mali-2171302.html>
- * Adohoun, C. (2017, April 14). IBK à Paris : Pour témoigner de la richesse artistique et culturelle de l'Islam en Afrique. *L'Observatoire*. <https://www.maliweb.net/nation/ibk-a-paris-temoigner-de-richeesse-artistiqueculturelle-de-lislam-afrique-2180182.html>
- Présidence de la République du Mali. (2017, April 17) Déplacement du Président de la République du Mali, S.E.M. Ibrahim Boubacar KEÏTA, en Arabie Saoudite. www.maliweb.net. <https://www.maliweb.net/communiquer/deplacement-president-de-republique-mali-se-m-ibrahim-boubacar-keita-arabie-saoudite-2183342.html>
- Belga. (2017, April 23). France: Le programme de Marine Le Pen en quelques points. www.maliweb.net. <https://www.maliweb.net/international/france-programme-de-marine-pen-quelquespoints-2197742.html>
- * Touré, A. (2017, April 26). Présidentielle française : Pourquoi l'UA n'envoie pas d'observateurs africains pour superviser l'élection ? *Le Démocrate*. <https://www.maliweb.net/union-africaine-oua/presidentielle-francaise-lua-nenvoiedobservateurs-africains-superviser-lelection-2204452.html>
- Thera, K. (2017, April 27). Jean Louis Arajol, chef de file des « Républicains » français au Mali : « Je voterai Macron au second tour, car la victoire Marine le Pen engendra le chaos en France et au Mali » www.maliweb.net. <https://www.maliweb.net/interview/jean-louis-arajol-chef-de-file-republicainsfrancais-2204452.html>

mali-votera-macron-second-tour-victoire-marine-pen-engendra-chaos-francemali-2208822.html

- ** Coulibaly, Diocolo. (2017, May 4). Les maliens des ETATS-UNIS (MALI KO - YERE – KO) manifestent : – Pour la Levée de l’Embargo sur les armements militaires ...- L’annulation des Accords de défense entre le Mali et la France et contre Barkhane – Le départ de la MINUSMA du Mali... *La Sentinelle*. <https://www.maliweb.net/maliens-de-lexterieur/maliens-etats-unis-mali-ko-yere-komanifestent-levee-de-lembargo-armements-militaires-lannulation-accords-de-defenseentre-mali-fr-2223002.html>
- ** Keita, I. (2017, May 11). Présidentielles de 2018 : Mara réussira-t-il comme Macron ? *Le Point*. <https://www.maliweb.net/politique/presidentielles-de-2018-mara-reussira-t-macron2237062.html>
- O.D. (2017, May 12). FMI : Le Mali parmi les bons élèves. *L'Indicateur du Renouveau*. <https://www.maliweb.net/economie/banque-mond-fmi/fmi-mali-parmi-bons-eleves2241782.html>
- * Traoré, A. (2017, May 16). Inondation du marché malien par du riz importé : Les producteurs locaux dénoncent la concurrence déloyale des importateurs. *Tjikan*. <https://www.maliweb.net/economie/inondation-marche-malien-riz-importeproducteurs-locaux-denoncent-concurrence-deloyale-importateurs-2250832.html>
- Présidence de la République du Mali. (2017, May 19). Les Présidents Keita et Macron ont passé en revue les troupes françaises et maliennes avant de saluer les officiels des deux États (en image l’arrivée des chefs d’Etat). www.maliweb.net. <https://www.maliweb.net/nation/president-keita-macron-passe-revue-troupesfrancaises-maliennes-de-saluer-officiels-deux-etats-2260742.html>
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Interview partners and guidelines

Journalist interview partners

- Harouna Kassambara: male journalist for a Malian weekly, interview via mobile phone, 2019

- Ousmane Traoré: male architect, writer, and oppositional politician, interview via mobile phone, 2020
- Gabriel Dossou: male journalist for a biweekly Malian newspaper, interview via questionnaire, 2020
- Abdoulaye Cissé: publications' director of a Malian weekly, interview via questionnaire, 2020
- Aminata Touré: female journalist for a biweekly Malian newspaper, interview via questionnaire, 2020

Journalist interview guiding questions

1) Histoire professionnelle

- a) Pourriez-vous me raconter quelque chose sur votre histoire professionnelle? Quelle était votre première profession et comment est-ce que ça c'est développé jusqu'à aujourd'hui?
- b) C'était toujours le journalisme? Ou êtes-vous engagée (de manière sociale, culturelle, économique, politique) dans des autres domaines aussi?
- c) Comment décririez-vous votre travail comme journaliste, par exemple vos conditions de travail? Est-ce que ces conditions ont changé beaucoup depuis que vous êtes entré dans le journalisme?
- d) Pouvez-vous me raconter un peu sur le journal [NOM DE JOURNAL]?
- e) Travaillez-vous seulement pour [NOM DE JOURNAL]?
- f) Quels sont les sujets sur lesquelles vous publiez le plus?
- g) Comme votre article que j'ai sélectionné traite [SUJET DE L'ARTICLE], c'est comment pour vous, informer sur des relations internationales du Mali comme ça?

2) Histoire et expériences avec Maliweb (comme ma recherche est concentrée sur des articles publiés sur Maliweb)

- a) Comment avez-vous appris sur Maliweb?
- b) Quand avez-vous utilisé Maliweb pour la première fois et comment ça s'est développé depuis?
- c) Vous pensez quoi de Maliweb?
- d) Publier sur Maliweb, ça marche comment? P.ex. vous devez faire quoi, échanger avec qui...?
- e) Quelle importance a Maliweb pour vous? Utilisez-vous des autres portails aussi pour distribuer vos articles?

3) Interactions avec des internautes

- a) C'est comment pour vous si les internautes commentent vos articles? Est-ce que vous suivez les discussions sur la site de Maliweb, Facebook ou Twitter? Qu'est-ce que vous en pensez?
- b) Est-ce que vous vous souvenez de l'article concerné? Cette discussion (en générale et dans les commentaires spécifiques) s'est développée comment à votre avis?

4) Informations personnelles:

-
- a) Comme vous êtes une personne engagée dans le débat que j'analyse, voulez-vous encore me raconter quelque chose sur vous? P.ex. vous êtes né et grandi où, vous habitez où actuellement, vous avez quel âge...
 - b) Les articles que j'ai sélectionnés pour ma recherche concernent les relations internationales du Mali en 2017 et début 2018. Qu'est-ce que vous en pensez aujourd'hui?

User interview partners (platform through which they interacted with the selected articles)

- Arona Thiaw (Twitter): male activist NGO worker in Dakar, interview via Twitter direct messages, 2019-2020
- Victoire Sanogo (Facebook): male teacher in Bamako, interview via WhatsApp messages, 2019
- Amadou Tamata (Twitter): male researcher in Bamako, interview via WhatsApp voice call, 2019
- Adama Diarra (Facebook): male pharmaceutical technician in a small town in the region of Koulikoro, interview via email, 2019
- Békaye Konaré (Facebook): male student at a Bamako university, email via Facebook messenger, 2019
- Bintou Maiga (Facebook): female administrative employee in Paris, interview via Facebook, WhatsApp messages, and WhatsApp voice messages, 2019-2020
- Jacob (Facebook): male teaching assistant in Sikasso, interview via WhatsApp messages, 2019
- Issa Kamara (Twitter): male electrician and construction worker in Bamako, interview via WhatsApp messages, 2019-2020
- Samalbane (Facebook): male NGO employee between Sikasso and Koutiala, interview via WhatsApp voice messages, 2019
- Arouna Togola (Facebook): male retired headmaster in a small town in the South of Bamako, interview via email, 2019
- Bakary (Twitter): male film producer in Bamako, interview via WhatsApp messages, 2020
- Sirani (Facebook): female company employee in Marseille, interview via WhatsApp voice call, 2020
- Aurore Eyoémana (Twitter): female entrepreneur and political activist in Malta, interview via WhatsApp voice call, 2020

User interview guiding questions

Clarifier avant l'interview:

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- Quel moyen est-ce que vous voulez utiliser? Skype, Twitter, WhatsApp...?
 - Est-ce que vous voulez qu'on s'écrit, téléphoner ou utiliser l'appel vidéo?
 - Préférez-vous écrire ou envoyer des messages vocaux?
 - Préférez-vous de prendre un rendez-vous virtuel et faire l'interview comme une communication active ou que je vous envoie les questions une à une et vous répondez quand vous trouvez le temps.
 - Envoyer information sur le projet
 - Informer sur le déroulement de l'interview:
 - Je vais vous envoyer environ six groupes de questions, mais peut-être aussi des questions supplémentaires, alors notre communication peut traîner plusieurs jours
 - Si vous voulez, je vous prie de prendre du temps pour répondre en détail pour que j'arrive mieux à comprendre votre situation...
 - Bien sûr, vous n'êtes pas obligé à répondre à mes questions, si vous ne voulez pas, juste dites-moi, et on va sauter à la prochaine question...
 - Et si vous avez des questions à moi, vous pouvez les poser à chaque moment...
 - Si je ne suis pas disponible pour quelque temps, c'est parce que je dois m'occuper de mes enfants et je vais retourner le plus vite possible
 - Comme j'ai dit, je vais garder votre anonymat et vous pouvez mettre fin à notre échange à tout moment...
 - Ça ira pour vous comme ça?
 - Envoyer la déclaration de confidentialité: Aussi, je vous envoie ici la déclaration sur la protection de vos données dans ma recherche. C'est une chose obligatoire maintenant si on fait une recherche et est basée dans l'Europe... Si vous avez trouvé le temps de la lire, je vous prie de m'informer si vous êtes d'accord avec ce traitement.
 - Avez-vous encore des questions avant on commence?

Données personnelles:

- D'abord, voulez-vous me raconter un peu sur vous mêmes?

Histoire personnelle avec Facebook/Twitter:

- Pouvez-vous me raconter comment vous avez commencé utiliser Facebook/Twitter?
- Comment ça a changé jusqu'à aujourd'hui?
- Quelles sont des sujets qui vous intéressent le plus?
- Pourquoi utilisez-vous (Maliweb sur) Facebook/Twitter?
- C'est comment pour vous, être/commenter sur Facebook/Twitter?
- C'est comment pour vous si vous ne pouvez pas accéder Facebook/Twitter? Est-ce que vous vous souvenez d'un événement quand c'était le cas?
- Comment est-ce que vous avez choisi votre image de profil?

Histoire personnelle avec Maliweb:

- Est-ce que vous pouvez me raconter votre histoire avec Maliweb?
- Est-ce que vous vous souvenez comment vous avez appris sur Maliweb?
- Quand est-ce que vous avez engagé/e avec les posts de Maliweb pour le premier fois?
- Comment est-ce que votre usage de Maliweb s'est développé depuis la première fois?
- Connaissances sur Maliweb
 - Comme je ne suis pas arrivée à contacter les opérateurs de Maliweb: Qu'est-ce que vous savez sur Maliweb?

-
- Et qu'est-ce que vous pensez sur Maliweb aujourd'hui?

Mode et expériences d'utiliser Facebook/Twitter

- Comme je m'intéresse aussi à des conditions d'utiliser Facebook/Twitter, pourriez-vous me raconter comment vous accédez Facebook/Twitter? Par exemple, vous vous connectez par quel appareil, quand, combien de temps, où....tous ce que vous trouvez important de connaître sera intéressant pour moi!

Relations avec des autres internautes sur Maliweb

- Vous connectez avec qui sur Facebook/Twitter?
- C'est comment pour vous, communiquer avec les autres internautes?
- Et si vous discutez, quelles sont vos expériences avec des gens qui ont une vue différente sur des sujets?
- Est-ce que vous connaissez des autres internautes personnellement?

Relation avec engagement au-delà de Maliweb

- Quelles autres médias est-ce que vous utilisez pour vous informer et échanger?
- Quelle importance a (Maliweb sur) Facebook/Twitter pour vous par rapport à ces autres médias?
- Les articles que j'ai sélectionné pour mon recherche concernent les relations entre Mali et des autres pays pendant 2017 et début 2018. Qu'est-ce que vous pensez sur ce sujet aujourd'hui?
- Est-ce que vous vous engagé/es (de manière sociale, politique, culturelle, etc.) sur les sujets qui vous intéressent aussi en dehors d'utiliser Facebook/Twitter et ces autres médias?

Merci beaucoup pour cela, c'étaient tous mes questions. Est-ce qu'il y a encore quelque chose que vous voulez ajouter ou me demander?

Pseudonymisation:

Maintenant, il y a juste encore quelques questions administratives que je dois vous poser pour des raisons éthiques:

1. D'abord, êtes-vous encore d'accord que j'utilise notre interview pour mon recherche? Si il y a quelque chose que vous ne voulez pas que j'utilise, vous pouvez le dire bien sur!
2. Aimerez-vous choisir un nom alias que j'utilise quand je parle de vous dans ma thèse? Alternativement, je peux choisir un nom alias pour vous ou je peux aussi utiliser votre nom réel si c'est ce que vous voulez...?
3. D'après le règlement Européen sur la protection des données que je vous ai aussi envoyé au début de l'interview, êtes-vous d'accord que j'enregistre votre nom et contact (numéro de téléphone, adresse email...) dans ma liste des contacts? Et aussi le lien à votre profil de Facebook/Twitter? Sinon, il faut juste me dire et je vais les effacer!
4. Si vous donnez votre accord ici, donnez-vous le volontairement, alors sans que je vous ai soumis à une pression de quelque façon?

Ok, merci beaucoup, aussi pour toute votre participation, c'était vraiment enrichissant!

Si il y a encore quelque chose que vous voulez ajouter ou me demander, je suis là et on peut rester en contact! Entre-temps, je souhaite toutes les bonnes choses à vous et votre famille.

Technological Genre Analysis

Levels of abstraction in the circulation of online news between Maliweb, Facebook, and Twitter (adapted from Dorostkar & Preisinger, 2017, p. 763)

Level of abstraction	Dimensions	(CMC) Parameters	Example from Dorostkar & Preisinger text	Application to circulating Maliweb-related online news
	technology		PC/internet technology	PC/ mobile phone/ internet technology
	medium		PC, monitor, internet	computer, smartphone, internet...
	platform		derStandard.at	1. maliweb.net 2. Facebook.com 3. Twitter.com
high	form of communication	general parameters	internet forum	1. news website (+ comments) 2. social networking site 3. social networking site
medium	design	design parameters	derStandard.at forum	1. Maliweb articles + comments 2. Facebook posts + comments 3. Tweets + comments
low	genre	genre parameters	reader commentary	1. articles + comment varieties 2. posts + reaction varieties 3. tweets + reaction varieties
	text		/text/	text, images, emoticons, etc.

General parameters of forms of communication on Maliweb, Facebook, and Twitter (adapted from Dorostkar & Preisinger, 2012, p. 11ff; Gruber, 2008, p. 364ff)

General parameters	Maliweb / online news portal (comments)	Facebook and Twitter / social networking sites
Conceptual communication mode	written, rarely spoken (written + spoken)	written + spoken
Semiotic communication mode	texts, images, audio, video (texts, emoticons)	texts, images, video, sometimes audio
Communication direction	monologue (dialogical > monological)	dialogical > monological
Message transmission / number of partners	1:n/ n:n (n:n)	n:n (1:1 possible)
Durability	archived	archived
Synchronicity	asynchronous	asynchronous (Fb: synchronous possible)

Design-specific parameters structuring circulating content on Maliweb, Facebook, and Twitter (adapted from Dorostkar & Preisinger, 2012, p. 14f; Herring, 2007)

Design-specific parameters	Maliweb article + discussion	Facebook thread	Twitter thread
Layout	Embedded in website layout, separate page for each article (comments below)	Embedded in the Facebook layout	Embedded in the Twitter layout
Representation	Headline – (picture) – text + tree structure in comments	Tree structure 'on demand' (only when clicking on 'responses')	Thread-with-knots structure
Moderation	Moderators' comments, deleting	According to Facebook terms, report button	According to Twitter terms, report button
Registration	Not necessary, but possible	Necessary for posting, partly for reading depending on privacy settings	Necessary for posting, partly for reading depending on privacy settings
Anonymity	Depending on user: user names, profile pictures	Depending on user and settings, but also regulated through terms of use: name, picture, profile information	Depending on user and settings: name, picture, profile information
Text length	Unlimited	Unlimited	140/ 280 characters (since November 2017)
Communication modes	Text, images, emoticons	Text, images, videos, emoticons	Text, images, videos, emoticons

Possibilities for influencing the design	When registered: display of own account	Limited to own display	Limited to own display
Code of conduct	General Terms of Use, Ethics Chart, user interactions	Terms of Service, Community Standards, user interactions	User Agreement, Twitter Rules, user interactions
Additional functions	User evaluation (until 2017)	User evaluation (liking and other emotions), sharing, subscribing	User evaluation (liking), retweeting, following

Advertisements and Liked Pages

The following are advertisements and liked pages I observed on the Maliweb website and Maliweb Facebook account between 22 May and 21 December 2017 (Maliweb, 2020b, own draft; Maliweb.net, 2020b)

Spatial level/ audience addressed	Maliweb website	Facebook liked pages
National	Mali • Doublement du Débit ADSL • États Généraux de l'Assurance au Mali • 3x3 Tournoi International de Basketball • Carre Fermier (food distributing business) • Fofy Industries • Malitel • Ministry of Territorial Administration • Ministry of Malians Abroad and African Integration • Primature – Social Conferences • Republic of Mali • www.rencontres-bamako.com Germany • brillen.de • Dating Thai Frauen • DHL • Hermes • Provinzial (car changing company) • steuererklaerung.de	Mali • Agence Malienne de la Normalisation et de la Promotion de la Qualité • American Baby [shop] • Malian National Assembly • CENOU Mali • Malian National Football Team "The Malian Eagles" • Proud to be Malian • HCC Mali (High Constitutional Council) • Ibrahim Boubacar KEITA • Karim Keita • Le Byblos Bamako • Le Zira – Maquis Amélioré • Luxurious Pagnes and Wood in Bamako • Mayor's office of district 5, Bamako municipality • Master Mamadou Ismaila Konaté • Mali • Mansa Prod • Malian National Parc

	- WeltSparen - wirkaufendeinauto.de (car trading company) Norway - BILTELMA Mauritania - Pasta Prima Qatar - QATAR Airways Senegal - Wari	- Parena (Party for National Renaissance) - Malian National Police - Malian Presidency - Salif Keita Official Fan Page - Soumaila Cissé (politician) - Spirit McCANN Bamako (communication and marketing company) Ivory Coast - ORIGINAL's 225 - RTI Officiel (public media services) - Soro Guillaume Kigbafori (politician) USA - Salif Sanogo (journalist) - Tuneln Radio
Bilateral	Mali – Italy Campaign "My Land, My Success" against rural exit	Mali-France - French Embassy in Mali - French Institute in Mali Mali – Congo - General Consulate of the Republic of Congo
Regional		West Africa - Caravan of young people WAEMU - La Consultation (Phoenix) European Union - European External Action Service EEAS
Transnational	Malian-diasporic - BDM Mali – international - International Forum for Investments in Mali	Malian-diasporic - Habib Sylla (President of the High Council of Malians Abroad) Mali – international / USA - Radisson Blu Hotel, Bamako Mali – Africa - Tiken Jah Fakoly Africa - UCESA (Union of Economic and Social Councils of Africa)
Transcontinental	West Africa – France Canal+	Swiss-Africa - AIF (African Investment Fond) Francophone region - Work for All

		• Entretemps Food France – West Africa • The Africa emission on TV5Monde UN – Haiti • MINUSTAH
Global	Globally operating • Bangood.com • INS • MONOQi • Newchic • TBDress • Tentlan (music)	Globally operating • 2Laye's Cup&Cakes • AFP • Fashion by Bog... • Funny pics • WordPress • YouTube

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