

The ambiguity of EU Policy Papers: Republic of Mali Tracing the Change through Constructivism

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Abstract

This paper will deal with the changing nature of the policy papers and released documents of the European Union regarding the Republic of Mali. Starting in 2013, the beginning of the European Union Military Training Mission in Mali, it is the scope to trace the changing argumentation of the legitimization of military presence in the country. The main argument will be that after the beginning of the military intervention and the defeat of the ASAWAD-State, security and migration were on the main agenda of the EU and led to a changing perception of Mali, which can be found in almost all policy papers.

The theory used will be constructivism by Wendt with a methodological framework of Critical Discourse Analysis by Fairclough (1995), using the three step approach 'Describe-Interpret-Explain' to visualize the consistent change within official released policy papers.

Keywords: Mali, European Union, Military Intervention, Policy Change

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Approach

The topic of this paper will aim in how a supranational organization – the European Union – articulates and shapes a counterpart –in this case the Republic of Mali located in the Sahel Region – and presents it towards a special target audience – the citizens of the Union. It will be asked in how far the articulation has changed over a specific timeframe (in this case, from 2013 to 2018), and if there had been a shift in the argumentation and legitimization of military presence. In doing so, a closer look in the public representation of the specific mission (EUTM) and its representation towards the public audience will be taken². The additional argument combining the transition is that special discourses are used when the Union talks with, and about, a counterpart from the African continent in order to make it look unpredictable and unstable. This is not done due to a feeling of superiority, nor is it an act of bad behavior. The creation of a “sphere of instability and unpredictability” in the near neighborhood follows a specific logic which can be used to argue that several actions and measures have to be taken into account to stabilize such a hotspot³. Further, the Union uses military forces as first approach to deal with such issues, giving it a wider arrange of possibilities in exercising power and protecting its own interests. Most of the military interventions and raids are not being noticed by the European public, and this is exactly the reason why this research was started to investigate and think more about this issue. As the Union in itself has no military power or forces, it has to convince its member states, or the respective public of the member states, that sending troops abroad is a necessary evil. Only by projecting military power to such zones of insecurity can a safer and secure European environment be ensured. Otherwise the act of intervening would be heavily criticized and publically contested. But in creating an atmosphere that allows only one logic thought (troops make it safe again), the Union avoids resistance of media or public counter-expressions.

² The results of this paper are taken from my dissertation, in which in total 215 policy papers had been analyzed.

³ The diffuse nature of Africa that is perceived in Europe – and especially in the military sphere – is in itself a construct, a manipulation with artificial reference-spheres of arbitrary constructed groups (see Melber 2011).

It is therefore asked, how the ambiguity and the changing content of released policy papers can be mitigated through the wider public audience.

This case example, Mali, was chosen for several reasons. First, the author was personally involved in the planning process for EUTM Mali between April and June 2018. Second, it was chosen due to the possibility of getting material from the mission and even a close insight into the mission, even if not directly participating in it. Third, Mali is recently the most important country for military missions, counter-terrorism actions and economic support for the EU.

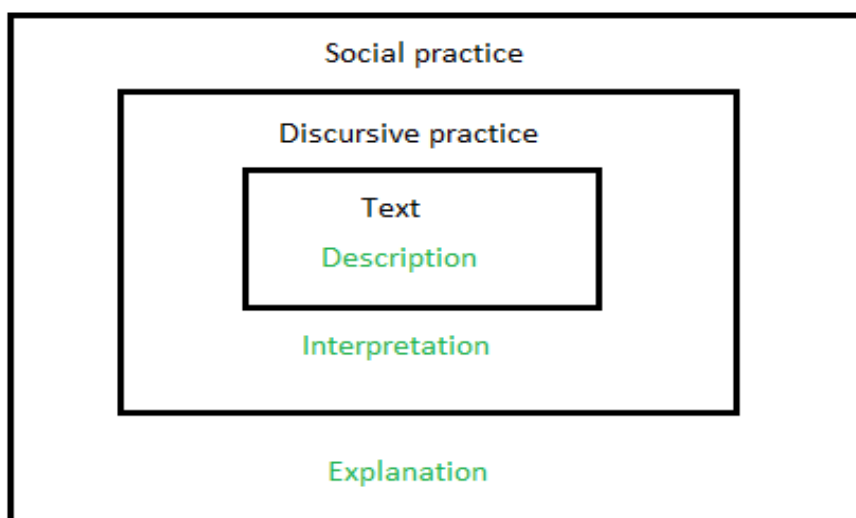
At last, European Union Forces are not conducted in a non-social sphere; they have to be legitimated by the respective participating countries. The author is aware that EUTM is present in Mali due to the invitation of the Malian government. The question of legality won't be tangled in this paper, as it is obviously easy to answer this specific aspect. But still, it has to be kept in mind that there are asymmetries in the relationship between the European Union and Mali, and that the EU itself doesn't have any soldiers to deploy. They have to be recruited by the single member state with all its agendas and interests that are not openly communicated. Therefore it has to be asked how the legitimization process works, which narratives are used to send troops abroad and which frameworks established as "*[l]egitimization refers to the process by which speakers accredit or license a type of social behavior.*" (Reyes 2011: 782) The specific social behavior - sending troops abroad - has to be accredited by the respective members of the society (the military policy planners). But in addition to the formal accreditation the behavior has to withstand a public discussion. The contest can be seen between the social action of the EU military planning staff and its respective audience - the voters that support or delegitimize such actions. One can think about the possibility that speech acts from the planning staff have to be prepared in order to license their actions in such a way that most of the participating audience (which is spread over the whole EU) can understand their intentions and accept the action as legitimate. The discursive practices, events and texts therefore have to be shaped in such a way that they fit into an EU-wide social and cultural context. Therefore it is possible to ask in how does the planning staff shape their object (Africa) and successfully transform it into a subject that needs help by a coordinated military intervention.

Method of analyzing the material

In using Constructivism (Wendt 1992), which is understood as the idea that social norms are constructed in the interaction between social elements, consistency changes can be traced. As the outcomes of social interactions can be norms, rules or written agreements, they heavily rely on the mutual consent of all actors involved. A Constructivist approach allows hence focusing on the issue of rethinking and reshaping Africa as a subject, with all the ideas that are interconnected with it. In this sense the Constructivist approach is narrowed down in a matter that socially constructed ideas are given materiality in a mutual enactment (see Weber 2014, p. 520) that directly influences the political view and position towards military interventions. By doing so, it is taken into response that not only states are actors, but additionally non-government actors too shape reality due to their interaction with states and their representatives. Further, the Constructivist approach can be a useful way in looking on one single social act (in this paper the reshaping and transformation of an argument for military interventions) and reconstruct its origin's and changes over time.

The methodological framework of this paper will be the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) from Norman Fairclough, who described it as aiming *"to systematically explore often opaque relationships of causality and determinations between (a) discursive practices, events and texts and (b) wider social and cultural structures, relations and processes; to investigate how such practices, events and texts arise out of and are ideologically shaped by relations of power and struggles over power."* (Fairclough 1995, p. 132) By aiming at these relationships,

Fig 1: 3D Model of CDA



Source: By Author

a CDA can be the best tool to show how speech acts from the EU military council transform into policy papers like Global Strategy and lead to further actions such as military interventions. It will be the aim to look at the logical link regarding the time of the speech act and its direct as well as indirect outcomes regarding military policy papers as well as the legitimization of military campaigns. Figure 1 shows the three-staged approach of the CDA-framework, based on Fairclough (1995: 97), whereas black represents the researched object and green the methodological step. Due to the limited space, the main focus of this paper will be in presenting the interpretative aspect of policy papers, as they allow a deeper insight into the hidden speech acts behind published policies. *"Legitimization refers to the process by which speakers accredit or license a type of social behavior."* (Reyes 2011, p. 782) The specific social behavior - sending troops abroad - has to be accredited by the respective members of the society from the military policy planners. But in addition to the formal accreditation the behavior has to withstand a public discussion. The contest can be seen between the social action of the EU military planning staff and its respective audience - the voters that support or delegitimize such actions. It is possible to draw the conclusion that speech acts from the planning staff have to be prepared in order to license their actions in such a way that most of the participating audience - which is spread over the whole EU - can understand their intentions and accept the action as legitimate. The discursive practices, events and texts therefore have to be shaped in such a way that they fit into an EU-wide social and cultural context. Therefore one can ask in how does the planning staff shape their object 'Africa' and successfully transform it into a subject that needs help by military intervention.

From humanitarian intervention to counter terrorism

In 2013, Mali was represented as passive object, which was taken over by radical forces (Behr et al. 2013), unable to help itself out of a desperate situation. The EU has to intervene, because it *"is a cause of concern for the EU."* (ibid 2013: 37) The Union, as opposite to Mali, functions as mirror, an active player that has the ability to sustain and maintain even the strongest crisis and still has enough resources to think about its neighbors, giving concern an altruistic touch. Also, the high level of Human rights and the protection of Civilians stand at forerunners for a military intervention and being the primary argument for sending a training-mission to the country.

An ambivalent situation occurred, as Mali was perceived as twofold: A potential partner (located in the southern part) and a volatile, aggressive North, which has to be regained under state-control. This duality, projected from the beginning inside the country, continued in references outside the country as well. Mali was used in the documents as prime example of instability, a mirror to the peaceful region of the European Union (Missiroli et al. 2013). ‘Instability’, right in the backyard of the European Union, was another main discursive narrative that found its way into the publications, and all of a sudden, it was taken for granted that this instability poses a threat. But at this time, the threat was primarily against Malian, as most documents in 2013 dealt with human right violations in the country. To counter them, the PRED (Plan for the Sustainable Recovery of Mali) was brought into life, being the first high-level approach of the EU to be more active in the country. A single paragraph at the beginning unveiled its true nature: *“The conference is based on the principle that there is no development without security but also no security without development.”* (Barroso et al. 2013: 2) Security was referred at this time as outside driven, as stabilizing Europe’s neighbors and taking care of their problems (with European methods). An example may clarify the importance of it: The fear of spreading Mali’s issues was bigger than Mali’s issues itself, as in 2013 the Islamic state evolved and distributed its network all over the world.

And as soon as the danger of such a zone of instability was articulated, several Institutions of the Union promoted a huge convolute that dealt with the possible outcomes (Monquiet 2013). The focus switched from the single volatile actor (Mali) - seen as an object, unprepared to deal with the current situation - towards the bigger Sahel picture that was painted in the midst of 2013 and finalized with the connection of Mali to AQIM and other groups (Koeopf 2013). In this framework, a military intervention seemed usefully than ever to every decision maker in charge and a possibility for a deeper European military cooperation (Van Caelenberge 2013).

2014 presented a slightly different relation between the subject and the object. When talking about Mali, it is now not only seen as a passive object, but as a mere case example for failed EU internally coordination (Veclani et al. 2014). It was the weakness of the Union, its own failure, not to engage much faster, respond much harder and with a common voice towards every threat in its reach. The ‘zone of instability’ got intertwined with the term ‘sub-Saharan Africa’ and also slowly with insecurity, creating with Mali a last outpost, a more or less limited safe haven that has to be hold in every circumstance (Tardy 2014a). Humanitarian needs and

development assistance were the main drivers, the prime argument for intervening in Mali, but now, after the intervention, they lose their strength in arguing for a further and deeper integration of EU forces in Africa.

The threat to the inside of Mali vanished more and more, and in 2014, the main argument was the threat to the outside of the country that drove the discourse over Mali (European Council 2014). A switch of roles can be estimated, as the Union saw itself now to be put under pressure of outside events that are eventually going out of her control. So the EU Comprehensive Approach was reframed, where the Union “... [s]tresses that in such a geopolitical climate, the EU must preserve and promote its values, interests and stability on the global stage, as well as protect the security and prosperity of its citizens” (European Parliament 2014: 2). To project its interest, an additional mission was implemented, EUCAP Sahel (Council of the European Union 2014a), which was active in Mali and Niger, to promote state authority and a law-and-order policy. The need for such a mission can be found in the addition of fear as a new leitmotif in 2014 (Bastagli and Toulmin 2014), creating the perception of a situation still on the brink of collapse, where every effort is needed to protect European interests.

At the end of the year, several attempts had been made to invest in the country (namely in the south) to further exploit its natural resources. The focus of the EU to create ‘negative peace’ (see Galtung 2015) led to a focus on southern Malian issues only, which (at this time) could be solved by financial means only (Council of the European Union 2014b). The northern, still volatile part, remained untouched and was a primary target for security operations and military interventions. Especially the military part experienced a huge discussion in terms of a new CSDP-approach (Tardy 2014b), bringing rouge states back in line to participate in the common EU mission (as Switzerland finally joined it too) (European Union 2014).

From containing terror to containing migrants

2015 was the ‘year of containment’. As the financial crisis had hit Europe’s treasuries, an attempt to outsource security related topics to the African continent, especially in creating proxy armies, was taken (Tardy 2015), as Europe’s military expenditures had gone on an all-time low level (Missiroli 2015). The next big shift happened in the discourse in this year. First, we had a humanitarian approach that was initiated to stabilize, counter war crimes and protect human basic rights. Then, the argumentation shifted towards a security centered approach that

predicted that only through a developed state, in which law and order as well as good trained soldiers and policemen patrol, stability could be reached. From now on – the first quarter of 2015 – the discourse tended to argue that problems could only be solved on the spot and that this will raise security in Europe; not in Africa (Council of the European Union 2015). The transition of the purpose has finally changed, as from now on the main goal was to strengthen the security situation in Europe, not in Africa. A new ‘security culture’ emerged, making it possible to label any form of migration as potential threat. It was also the year where migration entered the discursive field and became an argument for almost all speech acts that dealt with the country. The crisis, over the past years projected in the ‘zone of instability’ has now taken shape in the migrant, it materializes and is visible. Not only a potential threat on another continent, this threat has now marched or shipped to Europe, taking the instability with it: It is a concept which transfers problem through peoples (European Union 2015). To answer the ‘moving threat’ a new CSDP was introduced (European Parliament 2015) which saw any terrorist threat in Africa as a direct threat to the security of the European Union. Also, the projection of a potential threat through migration made the concepts of external and internal security more blurred, leading to an intertwined nature of both. Migrants were now putted in a nexus that differs less between a terrorist and an asylum seeker. So, from now on, it was possible to pose the chance that beneath the surface of each migrant a potential terrorist was hidden (as the ‘zone of instability’ was continuously moving), making it possible to introduce a general suspicion beyond each refugee and its motives to move to Europe (European Commission 2015). And in questioning the motives, the term ‘illegal migrant’ officially entered the field. Not only is the illegal migrant marked as a threat for the society, it is also assumed that he travelled to the Union only in search for a better live or, as the Union called it “... *asylum seekers who seek to "asylum shop" ...*” (ibid 2015: 12). Europe has a duty to protect, first and for all its own citizens, and the best way to do so was to enforce the law.

Humanitarian and economic reasons were fairly underrepresented in the discourse that shaped the year 2016. The migrant has changed its nature – from an active agent that willingly wanted to cross borders, exposed to unbelievable dangers and the elements itself – to an object which seems unaware of the dangers that lie inherently in the nature of the journey itself (EUETF 2016a and 2016b). Documents pictured an unaware, mostly male, African migrant who travels to Europe for a better live (FRONTEX 2016).

Being disenchanted and to a certain level frustrated about the (from a European perspective) slow progress in securing the Sahel and Northern Mali, voices that were openly criticizing the EU-African partnership came to the surface (Tardy 2016a). Suddenly, policy makers realized that outsourcing security issues wasn't the right answer to their problems. All in all, European observers attested a general "... frequent lack of professionalism of African armies" (Chuter and Gaub 2016: 16) which made them a 'difficult' partner to count on, especially when it comes to such vital European interests, such as security, migration, and vital raw materials. But as the EU wanted a stable, predictable partner, African armed forces seemed to getting more and more unattractive, and a direct, European supervision of strategic important places was the preferred new way. Mali was therefore sold as leading prime example of an efficient, European-led military intervention which prevented the country from totally collapsing (Carbone and Furness 2016). As the regional partners were not able to defend Europe, the EU must take actions by itself! Introduced in the previous years, fear and illegal migration had taken the burden of the speech acts to replace the initial regional conflict in Mali and substitute it with a bigger, European-African problem: "*The region is consequently similar to the EU, but more as a negative mirror image.*" (Gaub 2016: 4)

By arguing that a continuously insecure space between Brussels, Berlin, Timbuktu and Sirte was in tangible proximity, a view was promoted that the EU could lose itself when it continued to act lazy in the merging conflicts evolving in the MENA region and Africa (Kepel and Rougier 2016). Europe can only be safe when its neighborhood is pacified, but as the discourse has shown, the neighborhood cannot pacify itself with own means. In order to safeguard European citizens, Africa has to pay the price (coming in form of military missions to foster law and order, cruisers patrolling the Mediterranean Sea ignoring national sovereignty, anti-migration laws neglecting every international agreement) and has to sustain European military presence in its realm (Tardy 2016b).

As with 2017 the first effects of closing the Balkan route were visible in Europe and so Africa got more and more into the crosshair of policymakers. The migration discourse now fully unfolded its potential, as everyone, who moved from Africa to Europe wasn't seen as an individual which was in need of help or protection, but instead those persons got objectified and where articulated as problems. Gladly, the 'irregular migrant' had already entered the field, and this concept perfectly fitted the discourse and was implemented especially towards African

migrants: *“The geographic distribution clearly reveals that a majority of irregular migrants rescued in the Central Mediterranean are most likely not refugees in the sense of the Geneva Convention, given that some 70 % come from countries or regions not suffering from violent conflicts or oppressive regimes. [...] As a result, the asylum system is overloaded with claims of people who are not seeking protection but rather an improvement of their – often dire – living conditions.”* (European Commission 2017: 5; bold in original quotation)

To counter the flow of persons from the African continent, a new approach was tested, namely the militarization of civilian EU missions (Andersson 2017; Tardy 2017), as one argument was that it was purely necessary to tame the problem (Lintern 2017). In doing so, the militarization should also encompass the section of border control on the African continent. Here, (Gaub and Pauwels 2017: 10) some claimed that every project related to border control should have a counter-terrorist approach too, as there was no more difference in trafficking people, arms or drugs.

The role of the African migrant, which was during the year fully labeled as economic migrant, was used in a way that either suited the dominant discourse: As soon as someone decided to leave towards Europe, he became a problem.

But 2017 wasn't only the year of problems, it offered also solutions: PESCO, being the most prominent one. It aimed in deeper military cooperation among European countries, changed the nature of military missions abroad and fostered the awareness of EU citizens for a 'defense culture', first and for all rising military expenditures to a common 2% GDP-standard all over the Union (European Parliament 2017). In doing so, it perpetuates the fact that was promoted over the last years: Europe is under attack, and it finally has to take measures to defend itself. By the end of the year the complete new 'Joint Africa-EU-Strategy' was released by the Directorate General for External Policies (see Pirozzi et al. 2017), with the main efforts in security sector reform, CSDP missions, countering terrorism and radicalization as well as maritime security; a so-called 'people-centered approach'.

Final reframing of the situation

2018 was the most structured one in terms of discursive speech acts, as most documents had been released under the umbrella of the European Commission.

The first narrative, from which the other two arguments derive, was that in Mali no real conflict was present (European Commission 2018a). Relating to the Sahel, only ‘post-conflict’ (ibid 2018a: 127) scenarios are addressed, leading to the assumption that the worst part is over and the civil society could be restored at every moment. In doing so, a speech act was created which delegitimizes those who flee from exactly those ‘soft’ or ‘past’ conflicts (INFORM 2018) from the Sahel to Europe. In the shed light of such a changing security environment and the discursive displacement of conflicts to other geospatial regions of the world, notable not Africa, the Union was in need to revisit its security architecture. One of the main outcomes of this need assessment was “... *that the EU must become more self-interested in its assertion as a security actor.*” (Tardy 2018: 2) The new self-centered approach called for an assessment of all external activities and their possible contribution to European security (European Commission 2018b).

The second big narrative in 2018 was the uncontested speech act that everyone from the Sahel (as Northern Africa was excluded from the discourse) and Mali in special is and has to be an economic migrant, as obviously there is no conflict present. But the military presence of EUTM Mali was unchanged, as it still contributes to Europe’s security architecture. And it has to remain there, as the economic migrant men, aiming in extracting as much as possible out of the European welfare system, was finally officially introduced on a semi-scientific approach in the discourse around migration from Western Africa. By introducing such a narrative, the discourse in 2018 had reached a stage which made it unquestionable that there is or ever was a conflict in the Sahel zone, sub-Saharan Africa or Mali because the speech act does not allow such thinking or even the possibility of such explanations for irregular migration and exclude the option of viewing those people as refugees. The third and last big speech act of 2018 works on the assumption that even if there is no conflict in Mali present, it can still arise in the future, predicting therefore an unstable outlook (being a logical excuse for further presence of European soldiers in the region). With introduced speech acts that allowed interpretations in every direction, a re-colonialization of the country was de facto possible without any resistance. As the situation, contrary to previous attempts, was still assessed as pending between collapse and anarchy, a securitization of the framework and the mission got finally accepted by the target audience and policy makers as well.

Summary

There are three main discourses which are present in legitimizing military campaigns in Africa. First, the initial speech act is centered on humanitarian issues as well as the protection of civilians. Then, after a period of one year (like in our case example Mali), this discursive field vanishes more and more and makes place for an argumentation line which emphasis around an external security issue that has to be solved by means of the EU. Then, the third speech act intermingles into the field, bringing internal security (with the main driver of migration) onto the tablet and intertwines with external security issues. Therefore, the last two discourses connect themselves into the security-development-nexus and enable the EU to argue through it for further military presence, most prominent with the slogan ‘no development without security’.

Whereas malnutrition and massacres among civilians had led to the military intervention, the humanitarian aspect vanished over the years and was replaced by the fought against terrorism, jihadism and human traffickers. Especially the migration crisis worked as vehicle for combining the fight against terror with the fight against refugees, as the chance was articulated that people used the uncontrolled flow of men to Europe to conduct terror attacks under the cloak of seeking asylum. The only disparity found in the investigated publications was the internal division of the EU in 2014, where a short dispute occurred about the weak and slow response towards the migration crisis and the failure to address the Malian crisis as African problem. Otherwise, the discourse about the security-development-nexus as well as the approach to migration has proven to be very stable and consistent.

At the beginning of the implementation of EUTM Mali, the country as well as its Army has been perceived as possible partner to operate against armed groups in the North of the country. Arrangements were made still in favor of the Union, but the counterpart was articulated as potential candidate to work with. Due to the military failures and the declining security situation as well as the involvement of other terror groups like AQIM or the IS, a break in the ties between the two partners was possible to retrace. The first approach was to outsource European security issues more during the year 2015. Especially the creation of proxy armies, which should pay the higher blood toll in more dangerous scenarios, was seen as possibility to save European lives, even at the risk of higher monetary costs. But within one year, African Armies, including

the Malian as well, were perceived as inferior or unable to counter the threat by themselves, and a further investment in them wasn't a topic any more. Due to the aftermath of the financial crisis, the EU led several attempts to closer cooperate together, be it in military terms of development (through the single European Defense Market) or through structured cooperation in the field (through the launch of PESCO), leading to a militarization of civilian CSDP-missions as well as a higher emphasis on counter-terrorism, border control and law-and-order policy.

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