**Universiteit Leiden**

The Decision of Rebels in West Africa to resort to

Sub-National Terrorism against Civilians

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# Rebels in West-Africa

On April 14, 2014, the rebel group Boko Haram used two bombs to blow up a bus station in the Nigerian capital of Abuja. The terror attack killed over 80 people and wounded another 200. However, this turned out to be only a secondary story in the national newspapers. That same day, hundreds of girls, aged between 16 and 18, were abducted from a boarding school in Chibok, in northeast Nigeria. Some of them were released and others managed to escape, but it never became clear exactly how many girls were taken, and how many of them might still be in the hands of the attackers.

Terrorist acts of this kind are not unusual in Africa. They have the ability to ensure immense damage, especially in regions of deep poverty. Therefore, the topic of terrorism is a particularly meaningful issue in the case of West Africa, where development has been slow to progress (Asongu et al. 2017, 1932). As such, while West Africa remains an area that is largely neglected in conversations on terrorism and counterterrorism, it is a significant problem for the area, especially now as the continent of Africa is facing an increasing number of terrorist challenges (Mair 2003, 107).

Furthermore, sub-national acts of terrorism are a substantial threat for the countries in West Africa because they are already dealing with other challenges such as resource competition and ethnic fractionalization (Chuku et al. 2019, 549). The states in this particular region often do not have the means to defend themselves against terrorists, which makes the people vulnerable and causes terrorist attacks to have long-term consequences for the entire region (Chuku et al. 2019, 549). Sub-national terrorism challenges both the individual states and the region in its entirety. Factors as economic marginalization, corruption, exclusion, insecurity, and conflict worsen the political and economic environment to an extent that the civilian population is considered to be an easy target.

Subsequently, the threat of terrorism is always present in Western Africa due to the lack of defense mechanisms and an inefficiency to confront defectors of the state. The regional communities

across the West African territory together make up a power hierarchy, in which some groups have more power than other groups (Raleigh 2014, 92). Within this hierarchy, rebel organizations arise out of discontent about their position and seek to change this. Some rebels would even resort to the use of violence to achieve this. The contemporary rebel organizations in West Africa often engage in the employment of acts of violence to resist authority from the state (Suleiman 2020, 119).

But what exactly causes the rebel movements in West Africa to resort to acts of sub-national terrorism? To answer this question, three different theories are discussed that, according to the academic literature, lead to violence against civilians. By exploring those theories and applying them to different rebel movements in West Africa, this research is able to test whether such theories are enough to explain the use of sub-national terrorism, as a severe form of violence against civilians. The three rebel movements discussed in this thesis that wish to gain power in the region of West Africa are Boko Haram, the Movement of Democratic Forces in the Casamance (MFDC) and the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA). This thesis seeks to explain the phenomenon of sub-national terrorism against civilians. It does so by giving meaning to the use of violence against civilians across West Africa. In that way, this work aims to discover what exactly leads rebel organizations towards employing methods of sub-national terrorism.

## Sub-National Terrorism

For the purpose of this paper, terrorism, in this context, refers to "the use or threatened use of violence by non-state actors to incite fear amongst a larger population to further a political or social objective" (Hansen, Nemeth and Mauslein, 2020, 281). Since most academic literature has focused on the concept of international terrorism, research on domestic and regional terrorism has lacked (Napps and Enders 2015, 133). The bulk of studies that focus on the concept of terrorism, are written about its transnational importance (Neethling 2014, 342). Therefore, this paper attempts to identify the specific domestic causes of sub-national terrorism against civilians. As international terrorism is

generally caused by international circumstances, domestic terrorism can be seen as the result of domestic incidents (Napps and Enders 2015, 134). Moreover, it is significant to look at sub-national terrorism because it explains the regional differences in behavior amongst terrorist organizations based on their culture, ethnicity, beliefs, status, or objectives (Napps and Enders 2015, 135).

Just as domestic terrorism is different from international fundamentalism, African terrorism can differentiate from South American terrorism or from Southeast Asian terrorism (Napps and Enders 2015, 135). Examples of sub-national terrorism on the continent of Africa range from religious organizations that want to assume more power for their belief system, for instance Boko Haram in Nigeria, to smaller groups of rebels who fight each other over resources in civil wars, comparable to what happened in the DRC (Neethling 2014, 342). Rebel organizations that employ measures of sub-national terrorism against civilians usually lack the resources to attack internationally, which is why they target the local civilians (Hansen, Nemeth and Mauslein 2020, 283). The national factors causing terrorism often vary from region to region.

To fully comprehend sub-national terrorism, it is essential to also distinguish this concept from the concept of civil war. Both have disastrous consequences for the civilians of that region, however, terrorism is employed by rebel organizations for the specific purpose to inflict immense terror and to challenge the state without having the resources to do so in a more conventional war, such as a civil war (Danzell, Yehb and Pfannenstielc 2019, 537). Terrorism can therefore be chosen as a lower cost tactic during a civil war (Danzell, Yehb and Pfannenstielc 2019, 537). It is a method that rebel movements can use against civilians to reach their own goals by spreading fear and intimidation among a large crowd of people (Enders, Hoover and Sandler 2016, 197). In this way, sub-national terrorism is able to persuade the civilian population into compliance (Danzell, Yehb and Pfannenstielc 2019, 537). This thesis focusses on the reasons behind sub-national terrorism, which is therefore distinguished from the literature on civil war violence.

# Literature review: Different Theories for Violence Against Civilians

## Economic Deprivation

In the existing literature, a prominent topic of investigation is the connection between poverty and terrorism. Poverty leads to an overall more hostile environment (Abadie 2006, 50). According to Shinn (2016), poverty causes a feeling of desperation, which makes people more likely to find support or companionship in rebel organizations who rally against the state. In such a way, economic deprivation may explain certain manifestations of terrorism (Abadie 2006, 50).

An argument related to poverty but more applicable in the specific situation of West Africa is economic horizontal inequality. The wealth in the West African region is often unequally divided. This means that certain communities are excluded from access to public goods, information, and other resources simply because of their status. Poverty and inequality could thus be considered as the cause of violence against civilians because a communal sense of injustice and suffering generates anger (Sen 2008, 7).

Furthermore, due to a lack of resources, economically deprived rebel organizations largely depend on civilian support for their survival, as they rely on civilians to provide them with food, shelter, labor and information (Weinstein 2006, 163). According to Wood (2010), economically deprived rebel groups are not able to create a broad support basis for themselves because it is impossible for them to provide protection or other selective benefits to their supporters. Not having a broad support basis means that it is difficult to mobilize the resources, such as shelter, food and recruitment. Rebel groups who do not have access to enough resources and recruitment, cannot be seen as an equal party for the enemy, which is usually the state.

For this reason, poor rebel organizations often target civilians just because they need to scare the population into supporting them to access the necessary resources (Wood 2010, 601). Therefore the communities in West Africa who suffer the most from economic horizontal inequality

are likely to use means of violence against civilians. They are the ones who experience resource problems and are therefore not able to provide incentives that are competitive with the incentives offered by the government of that country. The rebel groups would then resort to violence against civilians to force the population to comply because they aim to create a support basis for themselves. This is the only way for economically deprived rebels to get support and resources.

The rebel organizations that do not have access to the necessary resources more often opt for selective violence against civilians (Weinstein 2007, 7). Selective violence targets only specific groups of people. The rebel organizations thus decide who to attack and who not. The rebels recognize the importance of civilian support because they are dependent on it to get access to material resources and manpower. They therefore target their enemies and those supporting their enemy specifically, while leaving out the people who support their rebel organization already.

In this situation, civilians have the power because they can make the ultimate choice to either provide or withhold the resources and the information to this rebel group, or to support the enemy (Weinstein 2007, 203). Economically deprived rebel organizations cannot afford to use violence against all civilians because it will only diminish their real support, on which their entire war-waging capacity is built. Overall, the use of selective force is effective because it only targets the enemy or sympathizers of the enemy. By employing violence selectively, the rebel organizations offer safety to their supports and spread fear among their enemy and the supporters of the enemy (Weinstein 2007, 204).

Political Exclusion

The theory of political horizontal inequality claims that shared feelings of exclusion and injustice play an important part in the decision of politically marginalized groups towards the employment of violence against civilians. Danzell et al. (2019) argued that rebel groups often justify their use of violence on the premise that they fight inequality and discrimination. This communal feeling of

injustice due to inequality, motivates rebel organizations to use violence, even against civilians, in their pursuit of justice (Sen 2008, 8).

Moreover, according to Hansen et al. (2020), the use of violence, even against civilians, significantly increases in the context of intergroup competition. This is especially the case in West Africa, because its political system clearly distinguishes between the different communities based on for example ethnicity or religion (Raleigh 2014, 95). This political hierarchy of power can create African communities to feel insignificant and to desire support for their particular beliefs.

In this line of thought, groups of civilians are thus targeted by rebel movements because of where they live, what they believe, or what groups they are a member of. This phenomenon is called "collective targeting" by Fjelde and Hultman (2014, 1235), which means that rebel organizations attack the civilians who are likely to sympathize with the enemy. There are two distinguished mechanisms through which the collective targeting of specific groups can weaken the capacity of the enemy. Firstly, mechanisms of sub-national terrorism against civilians are used to damage civilian property and thereby weaken their ability to provide the enemy with material resources (Fjelde and Hultman 2014, 1236). This means that, by targeting groups of civilians, the rebel organization aims to reduce the ability of the civilian population to support rival organizations. The community cannot support the rival group with material support anymore, such as shelter, wartime taxes, and recruits, which reduces their war-waging capacity.

Secondly, the rebel organizations attack the civilians because they want to show that the enemy or ruling elite is unable to protect their supporters (Fjelde and Hultman 2014, 1236). By attacking the supporters of the enemy, the rebels aim to show that the enemy organization is not strong enough to defend themselves and their constituencies. This can lower the level of support for the enemy organization because civilians are concerned about their own survival. Then, if the civilians solely pick a side based on their own survival, the rebel organization increases their support

base. In this way, violence against civilians is a method for the rebels to discredit the enemy and gain more civilian support.

The theory of political exclusion also leads to a form of more selective violence. Politically marginalized rebel groups specifically target political groups who are likely to have opposite beliefs and values. The rebels use the tactic of violence against civilians to weaken the civilian community and to discredit their enemy. They aim at destroying the enemy's resource capacity while also showing the enemy's incompetency to protect their constituencies.

Essentially, this means that the rebel organizations who experienced any form or perceived form of exclusion and discrimination target civilians who are likely to be a sympathizer of an enemy rebel group or of the state (Fjelde and Hultman 2014, 1235). They resort to this option because it is difficult to implement solely the tactic of selective violence. Rebel organizations often have to rely on the civilians to tell them who their supporters are and who are not (Weinstein 2007, 204). Based on such information, politically excluded rebel organizations decide for themselves who to attack for supporting the enemy or who to punish for denunciating, without having access to all information.

## Regime Weakness

This leads to a third and final theory for the decision of rebel organizations to employ tactics of sub-national terrorism: the weakness of the national regime. This is especially the case in some regions in West Africa, where the government only exercises a weak control over their territory. The African political system has suffered from a lack of development due to colonialism and its aftermath (Botha 2008, 35). After decades of closed, and even repressive regimes, a political environment has been created in which coercive violence is often still seen as the answer (Ejiogu and Mosley 2017, 11). This causes rebel movements to challenge and even capture state power (Neethling 2014, 343). If a regime is unable to secure an area of control, it is easier for rebel organizations to settle there and operate from that territory (Davis 2010, 134–135).

However, then how does this lead to the decision of such an organization to resort to violence against civilians? According to Botha (2008), this is because the rebel groups seek to gain and keep territorial power, often without recognizing the responsibilities that come with such status. In the case of a weak regime control over their territories, rebel movements often assume a greater degree of territorial control. The organizations that then face resistance from the state are more likely to use violence against civilians (Weinstein 2007, 209). Rebel groups want to ensure that the civilians would support them instead of the enemy.

Accordingly, Kalyvas (2008) argued that the level of violence rebel groups use against civilians is related to the degree of control that this rebel group exercises in that particular area. Rebels that enjoy unrivaled power in a region do not have to use as much force as rebels that are battling with other groups for power. In case of the latter, civilians would be targeted more regularly to force them into compliance. Violence and threats are thus used to ensure support of the civilians.

Rebel organizations need to be well informed about who could potential betray them. This means that in areas where control is contested by groups who exercise a similar control of power, more violence is likely to be used against civilians because it is nearly impossible for the rebel organizations to know exactly who is on their side and who is not (Kalyvas 2008, 203). In such a scenario, the violence would be more brutal and ruthless in character. On the contrary, in areas where one organization is relatively stronger than the other, less severe violence is used in a more effective manner because the rebels have more control and thus more access to information (Weinstein 2007, 210).

The theory of weak regime control revolves around the idea that the rebel organization is in a battle over territorial control. In such a situation, when rebel groups are in a struggle over control with each other or with the state, they often employ the tactic of violence against civilians to gain or maintain support. The threat of violence is enough to persuade the civilians into compliance because

it raises the costs of betrayal to the individuals who seek survival (Weinstein 2007, 203). The rebels need to be ensured that all the civilian support would go to their organization, instead of to that of the enemy.

Therefore, in a situation with contested sovereignty and where both movements are equally powerful, it is hard to know exactly who is on your side and who is not. This rivalry between rebel groups, or between a rebel group and the state, creates a high level of indiscriminate violence. This means that the organization will target any civilian, without basing this decision on who they support or on their ethnicity, religion, demography, political beliefs or economic situation. Rebel organizations that have the natural resources, or the support to supply them with those resources, are more likely to employ violence against all civilians (Weinstein 2007, 7).

## Research Design

This thesis attempts to explain the reasoning behind the use of sub-national terrorism against civilians in West Africa. The research problem addressed here is why some rebel organizations in Africa resort to the use of sub-national terrorism, while others would not. In the literature review above, three different processes are described that would lead to the use of violence against civilians. Each theory causes a different type of violence, which defines the different observable implications. The main observable implication is thus whether the nature of violence against civilians is more selective or indiscriminate. The type of violence that is used by the rebel organizations in West Africa can be determined by the case study analysis. This research thus establishes whether one of the theories explains the decision of rebels to use sub-national terrorism as a method in the case of West Africa.

The three rebel organizations of Boko Haram, the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) and the Movement of Democratic Forces in the Casamance (MFDC) are examined. Boko Haram is a known Islamist terrorist organization that deliberately targets civilians mainly in the

region of northern Nigeria. The rebels came together because of their political beliefs and religious ideology. While they started out as an economically deprived group, Boko Haram currently has the economic resources to challenge the Nigerian government. They have been known to use force and violence against civilians to scare them into supporting them instead of the Nigerian state. By using the tactic of sub-national terrorism, they have managed to claim territory in the north of the country.

The MFDC started out as a movement of the Jola people to enforce the independence of the excluded Casamance region. The people of the Casamance felt economically and politically marginalized by the Senegalese government. They supported the Jola and together they formed an organization to establish their own nation. Although it is not a terrorist organization, they do use violence against civilians. They have expressed to only use this violence, to the extent of sub-national terrorist attacks, because the government would not listen to them. Their support has decreased over the years, but the MFDC is still targeting people in the hopes of one day getting their own state.

Lastly, the MNLA is a political marginalized ethnic group that has settled in Mali. They operate in the north of the country, which is an area with only a weak regime control from the Malian government. Together with Islamist rebel organizations, they even captured control in this area for a moment. Their objective was to establish an independent state where everyone would be treated equally and with justice. While having used violence for this cause, the organization has not been known to use acts of sub-national terrorism against civilians.

All three movements are still operational as a rebel organization up until this day. Boko Haram, the MFDC and the MNLA are particularly chosen because of their similarities and their underlying differences. The three organizations are founded based on a communal belief and have at one point been in a battle over territorial control with a regime. But most importantly, the organizations specifically differ in their economic capacity, political position and rival government. It should however be noted that neither of the above theories can be taken in exclusion from all other

factors as corruption, insecurity, and conflict which makes the entire region of West Africa even more complex to understand and deal with.

For the purpose of this research, the thesis uses the method of process tracing. This method allows the research to take a theory and compare it to certain aspects of a real-life case. The theories of economic deprivation, political exclusion and regime weakness explain the decision of rebel organizations to resort to violence against civilians. The case studies of the three rebel groups Boko Haram, the MFDC and the MNLA provide an overview of the organization and its use of violence. The method of process tracing is chosen for this study because it evaluates the causal mechanisms of the academic theories to observe whether the case study on sub-national terrorism matches certain components of the theories on civilian violence. It does so through a method of comparison that draws from qualitative review of the rebel organizations.

Furthermore, this thesis employs the method of an in-depth case study to narrow down the scope of this broad field of research. The qualitative case study method is useful in the research of this thesis because it tests whether a specific academic theory that explains violence against civilians, can be applied to the phenomenon of sub-national terrorism. This qualitative method is used to gather in-depth insights into the three different rebel organizations of Boko Haram, the MFDC and the MNLA to really compare all aspects of the different organizations to each other. This allows the research to see whether one theory or one component of a theory explains sub-national terrorism against civilians as a method of rebel groups.

Previous research on the phenomenon of sub-national terrorism has been weak and therefore has not been able to identify one main cause for the use of this type of violence against civilians. Hence, this thesis examines the rebel organizations that differ from each other in key aspects, in order to find the main explanation behind sub-national terrorism against civilians. By examining the rebel organizations of Boko Haram, the National Movement for the Liberation of

Azawad and the Movement of Democratic Forces in the Casamance, and comparing the findings to the literature on civilian violence, this thesis identifies what leads rebel organizations in West Africa to employ acts of violence against civilians. Ultimately, this thesis aims to provide an answer to the research question: what causes rebel movements to resort to sub-national terrorism against civilians?

## Case Studies

### Boko Haram

The Jihadist organization of Boko Haram was founded by Muhammed Yusuf as a public mass-preaching movement in the early 2000s. It operated mainly in Nigeria but also in the surrounding countries of Cameroon, Chad and Niger. The name Boko Haram can be loosely translated to "to forbid everything western and western education" (Adegbulu 2013, 266). In 2009, the organization decisively resorted to the tactic of terrorism as an attempt to enforce their religious ideology upon the civilians (Adesoji 2010, 96). Their first big attack immediately led to the killing of Muhammed Yusuf. Since then, under the new leadership of Abubakar Shekau, Boko Haram often resorted to tactics of guerrilla war through the bombings of police stations, and through regular killings, raids, and kidnappings of state officials (Thurston 2017, 2). With the leadership of Shekau, Boko Haram became known as a sub-national terrorist movement in the West African region. The rebel organization even tried to officially align itself with Al-Qaeda (Maiangwa et al. 2012, 48).

From around 2010 to 2013, Boko Haram actively pursuit the role of a terrorist group. They began to challenge the Nigerian government because they wanted to destroy the state in order to establish a caliphate (Anyadike 2017). The organization used bombs, attacks and other forms of violence against state officials, police officers or any civilian who would not show support to them. In this period of time, threats and violence were predominantly used to guarantee civilian support and recruitment (Thurston 2017, 193). The organization wanted to show that their own constituencies

would not be in any danger, but the people who dared to go against them would be punished. Boko Haram thus resorted to acts of sub-national terrorism against civilians to draw support and gain resources, but also to impose Jihadism on the civilians. At the time, their attacks were still predominantly focused on police headquarters, military targets, state officials and any person suspected of disagreeing with the organization (Maiangwa et al. 2012, 47).

However, from 2013, Boko Haram became more violent against all civilians. Members of the terrorist organization started to attack villages and gain territorial control (Thurston 2017, 198). Boko Haram was already using violence against defectors and non-supporters but became increasingly violent towards more civilians as the state turned against them completely (Dowd and Drury 2017, 143). By this time, the terrorist organization was causing massive security crises for the region, which caused a state of emergency to be declared by the Nigerian military (Thurston 2017, 198).

The organization became more powerful and started to control territory in the northeast of the country. A clear shift in tactics was noticeable. Instead of focused attacks on supporters of the Nigerian state, Boko Haram started to attack all civilians in an attempt to gain more power and more control (Dowd and Drury 2017, 144). The rebel organization now had the resources and the manpower to challenge the government in order to achieve their goal of overpowering the state. They used violence to create a general fear among the civilians to prevent them from colluding with the state (Dowd and Drury 2017, 144).

From this time onwards, Boko Haram gave all the people in and around this region the choice to either accept Jihadism as religious ideology and join the organization, or to face the consequences of beatings and even death (Thurston 2017, 2). Since then, Boko Haram became one of the deadliest organizations in West Africa. They wanted to create a support base throughout Nigeria and its surroundings through intimidation and fear of assassination (Thurston 2017, 196). The members of Boko Haram started to attack, torture and even kill people randomly (Anyadike 2017). They started

to do whatever they wanted, and they were able to do so as their organization grew stronger. Boko Haram had developed into a resourceful and powerful terrorist organization, and the number of followers drastically increased. They began to exercise their new position of power. Up until today, this rebellion is resulting in death, displacement and starvation, targeting millions of African people (Anyadike 2017).

## Movement of Democratic Forces in the Casamance

The separatist organization of the Movement of Democratic Forces in the Casamance (MFDC) was founded in 1982. The movement mostly constituted of Jola people, an agrarian ethnic civilization that is scattered throughout the Casamance and neighboring regions. The MFDC was created to protect the inhabitants in this southern region of Senegal (Lambert 1998, 591). Because this region is isolated from the rest of the country, it experiences cultural, economic, and political differences with other regions in Senegal. The people living in the Casamance therefore found that the government of Senegal had failed to acknowledge the specific needs of this area (de Jong and Gasser 2005, 214).

After the initial peaceful protests of the MFDC were shut down by the Senegalese military, more supporters of the movement joined the military group of the MFDC, also called Atika (Clark 2011, 156). The organization was no longer solely looking for economic development and political recognition of the region, but for complete independence. The Atika gained experience and grew to become a strong military organization (Lambert 1998, 585). The Senegalese regime did not agree that the southern part of the country should be independent, however they did not manage to suppress the revolts of the MFDC (Clark 2011, 157).

In 1990, the MFDC rebels turned more and more violent. They stated that they saw no other solution than armed conflict to make the government listen to them (de Jong and Gasser 2005, 214). This radicalization of the MFDC caused violence to increase against the military of Senegal (Theobald 2015, 185). Violence was still used selectively against the state and the supporters of the state. The

MFDC truly believed that they were justified for using violence because of past discriminations from the Senegalese government (Clark 2011, 155). The members of the organization felt the obligation to protect the Casamance and its inhabitants and blamed their use of violence on the state (Theobald 2015, 187). At this time, the civilians living in the Casamance region often supported the movement, mostly out of a sense of community and a shared hatred towards the government (d'Orsi 2015, 35).

The military campaign of the MFDC has been going on for nearly three decades without any real progress. The MFDC claimed that they saw no other way to resolve this conflict than to fight even harder (Theobald 2015, 193). Attacks of sub-national terrorism became a strategy of the Atika, both against state institutions and against villages (Lambert 1998, 585). The inhabitants of the Casamance lived in fear of the attacks, robberies, and other abuses from the MFDC rebels (de Jong and Gasser 2005, 214). The region of Casamance was transformed into a battle area over territorial control between two rival competitors. Hereby, the economy, infrastructure and political position of the region have suffered greatly (de Jong and Gasser 2005, 214). But the biggest consequence for the organization was that it lost its credibility and that the civilian support started to diminish (Theobald 2015, 193). This only caused the MFDC to use more violence to try to get ahold over the territory.

The battle over the question whether the Casamance should be an independent region from Senegalese control, was ultimately a battle over justice. The rebels of the MFDC employed the method of violence to actively force the civilian population to support them in their battle (Lambert 1998, 586). Moreover, they have reportedly resorted to the use of torture or killings to gain control over a certain region. The MFDC is set on the idea that the Casamance region deserves its independence, and no longer should be economically and politically distorted by the government of Senegal (Lambert 1998, 596). They want to be independent from the north of the country because they see it as their right. Especially now that it is losing constituencies, the MFDC uses sub-national terrorism, but also beatings and violent raids to scare the population into supporting them.

National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad

The armed movement of the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) emerged in

2011, when different Tuareg rebel groups came together to form one organization in order to

establish their own sovereign state called Azawad. The Tuareg population constitutes of about 10

percent of the total population in Mali (Cline 2013, 617). Their nomadic lifestyle, common ethnicity

and primordial hatred brought the different groups together in the rough and secluded northern

regions of the country (Webb and Romaniuk 2016, 135). The MNLA wanted to create their own state

where all people can live freely, and where the rules are based on the objectives of justice and

dignity (Cline 2013, 622).

In 2012, the organization launched its first offensive against a Malian military unit. Even

though smaller attacks already happened before the establishment of the MNLA, the rebellion now

increased in size and began to form a significant problem for the Malian state and for the

surrounding states (Zounmenou 2013, 167). The MNLA used violence selectively by only targeting the

Malian government, army bases and other military targets. They also claimed that their weaponry

was locally acquired, usually by raiding military bases (Cline 2013, 622).

The MNLA rebels did not feel the need to target civilians for weaponry or for recruitment

because they started to cooperate with other armed groups in the north of Mali (Lecocq and Klute

2013, 430). Their military alliance with organizations such as al-Qaeda in the Islamic Mahgreb, Ansar

al-Dine and the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa, gave the MNLA the extra manpower

they needed (Webb and Romaniuk 2016, 139).

After about two months of fighting insurgencies in the northern regions of Mali, the MNLA

leaders declared that most of the area was in their possession (Cline 2013, 626). Shortly after their

territorial claim, they formally introduced the state of Azawad as a sovereign nation (Cline 2013,

626). Now the MNLA had reached their goal of establishing an independent state that was separated

from the Malian government. Azawad was created to improve the region's political and economic marginalized status (Webb and Romaniuk 2016, 135).

However, the state of Azawad did not exist for long. The MNLA wanted a state for everybody to be free, but their Islamic allies did not agree with that. They were looking to establish a purely Islamist state. Since their allies were now turning against them, the members of the MNLA had to fight new battles. The MNLA rebels got more and more violent, even towards civilians. The organization became more desperate and frustrated with the loss of territory and used violence to hold on to their control over some villages.

While the rebels started to commit human right abuses, they never resorted to planned attacks of sub-national terrorism. The MNLA quickly lost support in their areas of control, mostly because they did not have the capacity to protect the inhabitants from the violence of the other rebels (Lecocq and Klute 2013, 431). The internal rivalry between the rebel organizations in the region of north Mali caused for the MNLA to lose their control over the region to the Islamist rebels in the Battle of Gao.

## Analysis: Why do Rebels resort to Sub-National Terrorism?

From the case studies, it can be concluded that the theory of economic deprivation is not enough to explain why rebel organization resort to the use of sub-national terrorism against civilians. In all three cases, when the rebel organizations were established, they were economically deprived and therefore not yet strong enough to battle the state. The theory of economic deprivation demonstrated that a state of poverty would lead the rebels to raid villages and military bases to gain the needed resources. Also, because the groups lack the resources to create a civilian support basis, they would be unable to provide their supporters with protection or other benefits. Therefore, they often rely on violence to get support through fear. Accordingly, the rebels of Boko Haram started to attack civilians to make sure they were scared enough to not turn against them. Although, while

Boko Haram pursued the role of a terrorist organization, the MFDC and the MNLA only used violence against the enemy and their supporters. Their economic position did not encourage them to use violence in the form of sub-national terrorist attacks because they only wanted to focus on specific targets.

Similarly, the theory of political exclusion, while explaining the reasons behind rebel organizations to resort to violence, does not explain sub-national terrorism against civilians. The organizations come from a communal sense of marginalization. The marginalization, often combined with perceived discrimination, causes rebels to target specific groups of civilians based on their religion, beliefs, demography or any other characteristic that can define them as a group. In the case of Boko Haram, exclusion based on religion caused the movement to quickly resort to the tactic of violence against civilians. Boko Haram used violence as a method to enforce the Islamist ideology upon as many people as they could. However, in both the case of the MFDC and the MNLA, marginalization is not a good enough explanation for the use of sub-national terrorism. The MFDC and the MNLA were both formed from a position of marginalization, both politically and economically. But the MFDC claimed that they started to use violence only when they saw no other option. This shows that violence was their tactic used out of desperation to make the government listen to them. Similarly, it seems that the MNLA used violence only against the enemy to push for independence. Therefore, political exclusion does not explain why rebel groups would resort to sub-national terrorism.

All rebel organizations that have been studied above have been in a struggle over territorial control either with the state or with other rebel organizations. In all three case studies, the level of violence increased during this struggle and became more indiscriminate in nature. There was always an opposite party, either the state or another rebel organization, which helped in the decision to resort to indiscriminate violence against civilians, and even to acts of sub-national terrorism. Both the movements of Boko Haram and the MFDC have employed the method of sub-national terrorism

when fighting over territorial control. Rebels of Boko Haram used sub-national terrorism to intimidate civilians and maintain control over the area. Similarly, the MFDC used sub-national terrorism to take over cities and areas in the Casamance. Nonetheless, the rebels of the MNLA would not use attacks of sub-national terrorism against civilians to intimidate them into compliance. This means that the theory of regime weakness can thus be employed as a component of the explanation for the use of sub-national terrorism against civilians. However, it does not mean that in any situation where there are two or more parties battling over control of the territory, there is always sub-national terrorism against civilians.

None of the three explanations completely explain the reason why some groups resort to sub-national terrorism and other groups do not. But two components of the explanations do help to answer this question. The first one is the component of justice. The case studies of the three rebel organizations did show that shared feelings of injustice among members of a group are important in the decision of the organization to resort to violence, and even sub-national terrorism. These feelings of inequality and injustice generate anger and desperation among the members of the rebel organization. Especially in the case of the MFDC, the perceived injustice done to the people of the Casamance region was the reason that the rebels felt justified to use violence. Similarly, Boko Haram and the MNLA expressed such feelings of suffering and used violence to be heard. This perceived injustice done to the rebels by the state, can provide enough motivation to resort to sub-national terrorism against the enemy.

The other important component to explain sub-national terrorism against civilians, expressed both in the literature review and the case studies, is that of power, especially in combination with a struggle. The rebels of the case studies used selective violence, especially in the earlier stages of their existence, to attack the enemy. When the organizations grew stronger and theoretically did not need to attack civilians for resources anymore, the case studies showed the rebels to become only more violent towards civilians. This illustrates that power is a big factor in the explanation of the use of

sub-national terrorism. When the organizations seized more power, increased in size, and thus became a threat to the state or the rival rebel organizations, it seems that they felt the need to use more violence, to get more people on their side and to grow even bigger as an organization. As shown, both the rebels of Boko Haram and the MFDC had gained the resources to be seen as powerful challengers of the state. However, in the case of the MNLA, they only managed to challenge the state when they were helped by other rebel organizations. When those rebel organizations turned against them, they were the much weaker party and therefore never resorted to sub-national terrorism. The Islamist organizations were too strong for the MNLA and therefore able to quickly destroy the military and take over the area.

## Conclusion

This thesis has contributed to the academic literature because it aimed to dive into the research problem of what exactly would lead a rebel organization to use acts of sub-national terrorism. Limited research has been done on the topic of sub-national terrorism, especially on the causes of it. This research demonstrated the importance of a power struggle between organizations of equal power, where the rebel organizations are convinced of their own right and therefore feel justified to use violence against civilians. The research was done by using the method of process tracing based on a qualitative analysis of three rebel organizations in West Africa. Existing academic theories that would lead rebel organizations to use violence against civilians were not enough to explain the decision to resort to sub-national terrorism, which can be seen as a severe form of violence against civilians. Therefore, this thesis highlighted the factors from the literature that were confirmed to be essential components of this decision in the case study analysis. This thesis thus provided new insights in the use of sub-national terrorism against civilians.

The research has identified the two factors of justice and power to be crucial in the decision of rebel organizations to resort to the method of sub-national terrorism. From the literature review,

the factors of exclusion and marginalization proved to bring a shared sense of injustice and suffering. This caused the marginalized groups to believe that they are justified to use violence to rebel against the state. Then from the case studies, it became clear that motivation to rebel, the necessary resources, and a shared feeling of justification among the members of a movement are significant in the decision of rebels in West Africa to resort to sub-national terrorism.

Once the rebel organizations had the perceived justification to use violence, they really started to resort to acts of sub-national terrorism when the struggle turned into a power battle between two sides. The literature review explained the tactic of sub-national terrorism to be a result of a battle between at least two sides. The rebel organizations began to use violence, and sub-national terrorism, as a method to weaken the military of the enemy and discredit their ability to protect their constituencies while it also generates fear among the civilians to prevent them from defecting and supporting the state. Furthermore, it has been proven by the case studies that the violence and the use of sub-national terrorism especially increased when the two sides were of equal power. They would use more attacks and use violence indiscriminately, often in the form of sub-national terrorist attacks, to try and establish control.

Two main limitations should be mentioned to determine future research recommendations. Firstly, because only three organizations were analyzed in this thesis, the results are still limited. For this reason, additional quantitative research is necessary in this field. Other rebel organizations and their decision either to use or not to use tactics of sub-national terrorism, should be researched. In this way, comparisons can then be drawn between rebels in West-Africa and rebels in other regions of the world. Secondly, another potential limitation of this specific thesis is the fact that it did not explain the possible variation in type and character of violence. To address this problem, further research is necessary to determine the precise causes of variation in violence against civilians by rebel organizations.

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